

'They are really killing me in here'—Michigan women's prison under scrutiny



By Joel Wendland-Liu

Michigan's Huron Valley Women's Correctional Facility in Pittsfield Township near Ypsilanti, Mich. has approximately 60% of the state's COVID cases of incarcerated people. These dangerous health conditions and other ongoing human rights abuses led to a protest in mid-January by local anti-mass incarceration organizations. Witnesses in the prison described instances of rape as a form of retaliation and distribution of opioids by staff despite significant instances of addiction.

Incarcerated people at the prison, along with former Department of Corrections employees, described a culture of "rape punishment" at Huron Valley. Those employees were fired for exposing retaliatory violence at the prison, according to prisoners' rights lawyers who attended the protest.

Huron Valley has a terrible history. One blogger in 2019 described Huron Valley Prison as a "special hell" after an ACLU investigation of human rights atrocities first surfaced. Incarcerated people and staff reported incidents of "hog-tying" apparently mentally ill inmates in the nude. Witnesses also reported the denial of water as punishment for incarcerated persons. It has been at the center of several lawsuits demanding the protection of human rights.

The Michigan Department of Corrections has

admitted that in the three years before 2019, 146 women in prison reported sexual assaults.

Last November, a Prison Radio recording of Huron Valley inmate Krystal Clark indicated that abusive conditions had not stopped. "They are really killing me in here," she reported. "And no one here, [inaudible], I had so many people, I talked to so many people about this. It's like no one cares, like people talk about it one time and mention it one time and it's done."

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Days later, Clark and other inmates, through their lawyers, filed a lawsuit against the state for allowing "perilous" environmental and health conditions that violate human rights. Untreated mold, overcrowding, and abusive staff are just some of the dire conditions they raised.

The Huron Valley Women's Correctional Facility has been described as a "special hell" with a culture of "rape punishment" against inmates.

Over 1,000 incarcerated people at Huron Valley have tested positive for COVID since March 2020. Overcrowding denies the social distancing needed as a basic step to protect incarcerated people from the virus. The denial of medical attention is an ongoing and common problem in all of Michigan's prisons, as policies allow guards to deny care arbitrarily.

Some Democratic lawmakers in the state have responded to the complaints not by demanding a review of abusive conditions and human rights violations. Rather, they want to increase funding and staff for those toxic facilities. Such proposals offer little difference in outcome from the Republican Party-controlled state legislature's plan to criminalize and punish.

The Michigan Poor People's Campaign is promoting a 10-point plan for prison reform. While that plan does not call for prison abolition, it does demand several decarceration strategies, rehabilitative interventions prioritized over

punishment, and an emphasis on protecting human rights.

Decarceration strategies, according to the Michigan Collaborative to End Mass Incarceration, include reduction of sentences for non-violent offenses, protection of young people from imprisonment, and what are called "diversionary" steps.

Diversions seek other solutions to individual violations of laws or harms. Those strategies typically stress public or mental health solutions, such as treatment for drug or alcohol abuse rather than interactions with cops, courts, and prisons.

Kentucky Republicans again aim to ban teaching truth about racism

By **Berry Craig**

Here they go again—white Republicans trying to whitewash history.

Kentucky State Sens. Max Wise and Robby Mills have introduced SB 138, the "Teaching American Principles Act." Like HB 14 and HB 18, it's a censorship bill aimed at restricting the teaching of systemic racism.

SB 138 requires a teacher "to discuss current events or controversial topics" to "explore topics from diverse and contending perspectives without giving deference to a specific perspective."

"Does that mean that instruction cannot include the history that demonstrates that white institutions created slavery, Jim Crow oppression, and institutionalized racism?" asked Jim Johnson, a retired Louisville public school teacher. He wonders if the bill means teachers must present pro- and anti-slavery and pro- and anti-Jim Crow sides as morally equivalent.

The bill says slavery and post-Civil War Jim Crow racial discrimination, which included segregation, Black disenfranchisement, and lynchings, were bad "but that defining racial disparities solely on the legacy of [slavery and Jim Crow]...is destructive to the unification of our nation; The

future of America's success is dependent upon cooperation between members of all races."

Translation: A teacher mustn't make white students feel bad by telling the truth about whites enslaving Black people and whites making Black people second-class citizens.

SB 138 claims that "Personal agency and the understanding that, regardless of race, sex, or socioeconomic status, an American has the power to succeed when given sufficient opportunity and committed to seizing it through hard work, pursuit of education, and good citizenship."

The rich and their apologists in politics, press, and the pulpit have been running cons for years.

SB 138 "is more Orwellian double-talk," said Murray, Ky., State University historian Brian Clardy, who is a critic of HB 14 and HB 18. "How is shielding students from the brutal lessons of history going to benefit the intellectual or personal development of any student? The bill is lunacy."

Clardy said HB 14 and 18 and SB 138 might dissuade out-of-state students from enrolling at UK, Murray, or some other Bluegrass State college or university. "They won't want to come to a state where this kind of lunacy is celebrated."

The rich and their apologists in politics, the press, and the pulpit have been running the same con for years.

Mental health crisis worsens in Michigan and everywhere, but policies ignore real problems



By Andrew Wright

A recent article in Crain’s Detroit Business outlined the grim future of mental health care in Michigan—as instances of mental illnesses and mental health concerns increase, staffing has not kept pace. In fact, in several places, staffing has decreased. The mental health care industry is two-thirds women, many of which “left the workforce in 2020 to handle child care during the pandemic when school closures were most common.”

Michael Garrett, CEO of CNS Healthcare, a Michigan-based non-profit behavioral health clinic, said that the “organization is seeing fewer and fewer applicants, despite an increase in advertising for open positions as well as higher wages,” adding, “I’m not sure where all the workers have gone.”

The crisis of mental health care is coming to light, and even Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has proposed to “repay up to \$200,000 in student loan debt for those working in the nonprofit mental health sector.” The proposed loan-forgiveness is the centerpiece of her plan to “expand access” to mental health care and attract those who left to come back.

Robert Sheehan, executive director of the Community Mental Health Association of Michigan, said “the result of large [caseloads] is mental health care workers taking on double shifts and organizations reducing the length of treatment to move more people through the system.”

It’s not just that health care professionals are burn

ing out but that patients are not getting the same effect from psychological services and treatments.

Garrett also makes the argument that “the ultimate solution” requires more than just loan repayment. An increase in mental health “so patients can access more mental health services without breaking the bank” is also needed—more access implying better treatment. However, this skips over a couple of required components.

Only focusing on access and not availability or affordability plays into the idea that, in order for us to be healthy, we must have the time and money to spend on “self-care.” Likewise, addressing stigma as the boundary for why people don’t seek treatment not only ignores the same money and time requirements, but also posits it in terms of personal responsibility. This creates a superego-like gap where any and all “free time” not spent on “bettering” one’s health is a personal failure.

“There are a lot of different stressors going on in the world, from the pandemic to economic anxiety,” said Garrett. “This isolation and loneliness is the perfect storm on our mental health system.” Garrett is absolutely right, but these “stressors” (read as, antagonisms) have existed and been growing since well before the pandemic.

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Ukrainian president dismisses possibility of Russian invasion, accuses West of causing panic

By Steve Sweeney

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged the West to stop creating panic as he downplayed the threat of a Russian invasion of the country last Saturday.

“There are signals even from respected leaders of states, they just say that tomorrow there will be war,” he told a press conference in Kiev. But he said such claims are caremongering and have a negative impact on the Ukrainian economy.

Zelensky said the threat from Russia is no greater now than it was last spring as he accused the press of whipping up a frenzy. The Ukrainian leader was responding to claims of an imminent Russian invasion made by Britain and the U.S., amplified through compliant mainstream media.

President Biden claimed “a distinct possibility” that Moscow would launch an incursion next month. He promised a robust response of invasion with flooding Ukraine with weapons and increasing its troop presence to encircle Russia.

Russia insists that it has no plans for military action and has issued two treaties outlining security guarantees for discussion with NATO and the US. They include agreement to abide by the 2014 U.N.-brokered Minsk Accords which brought a fragile ceasefire to the Donbas region after Lugansk and Donetsk declared independence.

Russia also seeks assurances that the U.S. will not station nuclear weapons in Europe and that agreements over NATO’s eastward expansion and Ukrainian membership of the alliance will be adhered to.

Boric de Chile incluye a comunistas en gabinete de mayoría femenina

By Steve Sweeney

Tres comunistas han sido designados para puestos ministeriales en el gabinete del presidente electo de Chile, Gabriel Boric, que también incluye a Maya Fernández Allende, nieta del asesinado expresidente Salvador Allende.

Asumirá el cargo de ministra de defensa, poniéndola a cargo de las fuerzas armadas del país casi 50 años después de que su abuelo muriera en un golpe militar respaldado por Estados Unidos en 1973.

Camila Vallejo del Partido Comunista de Chile es la vocera del gobierno.

Los compañeros del partido Jeanette Jara y Flavio Andrés Salazar fueron designados ministros de bienestar y trabajo y ministro de ciencia y tecnología, respectivamente.

“Los comunistas seguiremos luchando por la dignidad del pueblo de Chile”, dijo el partido tras los nombramientos.

Catorce de los 24 nuevos ministros son mujeres, lo que le da a Chile un gabinete de mayoría femenina por primera vez en la historia del país.

La Sra. Vallejo calificó esto como “un salto histórico en la lucha por visibilizar y reivindicar el papel de la mujer en los procesos de transformación social y política.

“Estoy emocionada con este equipo de 14 mujeres diversas y tremendas”, dijo. “¡Feminismo y perspectiva de género al poder!”

La Sra. Jara se comprometió a fortalecer los derechos de los trabajadores, dignificar a los jubilados y promover la igualdad de género.

El Sr. Boric describió al nuevo gobierno como “un equipo de personas preparadas con conocimiento, con

experiencia y comprometidas con la agenda de cambios que necesita el país

“La misión del gabinete es sentar las bases de las grandes reformas que hemos propuesto en nuestro programa”, agregó.

Prometiéndole abordar las “desigualdades estructurales”, el exdirigente estudiantil explicó: “Estamos hablando de un crecimiento sostenible acompañado de una redistribución justa de la riqueza”.

El Sr. Boric ganó las elecciones presidenciales del mes pasado luego de un gran descontento social y protestas que recibieron una respuesta violenta de las fuerzas armadas.

Pero su coalición Frente Amplio solo tiene 37 de los 155 escaños en el Congreso, por lo que necesitará el apoyo de otros partidos de izquierda para aprobar la legislación.

El nombramiento de la Sra. Allende es visto por muchos como un momento decisivo. Ella tendrá la tarea de reformar el ejército que expulsó y asesinó a su abuelo.

Agradeció al señor Boric “por confiar en mí para ser parte del gabinete”, y agregó: “Ahora nos toca a todos trabajar para que la vida en nuestro país sea cada vez más justa”.

Sin embargo, se han levantado las cejas por el nombramiento de la exempleada de la Organización de los Estados Americanos, Antonia Urrejola, como ministra de Relaciones Exteriores.

La legisladora del Partido Socialista ha acusado al presidente de Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, de abusos contra los derechos humanos y ha sido muy crítico con el gobierno venezolano del presidente Nicolás Maduro.