

Build communities NOT prisons!

August the 10th 2008 is not only International Prisoners' Justice day this year http://www.prisonjustice.ca/politics/1014_history.html with its beginnings in 1971 with the death in his cell of Edward Nalon http://www.prisonjustice.ca/politics/1014_history.html#eddie in Ontario, (The first call to abolish prisons in Canada came in 1848) but also Prisoners' Sunday. In the UK Prisoner Sunday it is November 18th each year.

As we look around Australia we soon see that some jurisdiction have much lower arrest and subsequent incarceration rates than here in WA. It begs the question Why? Why are so many people in WA arrested and then locked up when other State use alternatives from the point of contact with the criminal justice system.

The various Churches in WA have made some very timely calls for Prison as the Last Resort and Prison: the Last Option. It is now time for the Churches, as significant community leaders, along with lawyers groups, victims groups, academics and other civic minded people to call for massive changes to be made in WA.

We are not getting any wiser or effective about compliance to the law and obedience to regulations. All we hear is tough talk. Tough talk is cheap talk. Speaking up for social justice and the structures that keep so many marginalised people in prison is much more difficult to do. Because it is Just!

As WA heads towards an election, PRGWA and other groups call for meaningful debate on the topic of the high number of arrests and subsequent incarceration rates. Many of our politicians just don't get it. Many departmental heads never have.

But we the ordinary people must constantly remind others that we want a highly effective, non-racial, response to crime and not an overcrowded and unsafe criminal justice system. Let's start to use ways to reduce crime, reduce arrests and reduce the use of prison as the first and most often used option. The people of WA are just not that bad. Look again, look around other States, look at Scandinavian justice systems, look to the many European nations. They find ways in which to assist people out of a lifestyle of crime, especially when it is underpinned by drug use.

WA government departments stand above most when it comes to locking people up, doing as little as possible about their rehabilitation and then doing nothing about their community living situation and return as civic minded citizens - except remind them that they are convicts first and foremost.

Make the election a time of change in thinking about why we continue this trend when other places do not.

Prisons are costly, ineffective and they create crime.

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From our Canadian friends - PRISONERS' JUSTICE DAY IS...

...August 10, the day prisoners have set aside as a day to fast and refuse to work in a show of solidarity to remember those who have died unnecessarily -- victims of murder, suicide and neglect.

...the day when organizations and individuals in the community hold demonstrations, vigils, worship services and other events in common resistance with prisoners.

...the day to raise issue with the fact that a very high rate of women are in prison for protecting themselves against their abusers. This makes it obvious that the legal system does not protect women who suffer violence at the hands of their partners.

...is the day to remember that there are a disproportionate number of Natives, African-Canadians and other minorities and marginalized people in prisons. Prisons are the ultimate form of oppression against struggles of recognition and self-determination.

...the day to raise public awareness of the demands made by prisoners to change the criminal justice system and the brutal and inhumane conditions that lead to so many prison deaths.

...the day to oppose prison violence, police violence, and violence against women and children.

...the day to publicize that, in their fight for freedom and equality, the actions of many political prisoners have been criminalized by government. As a result, there are false claims that there are no political prisoners in north american prisons.

...the day to raise public awareness of the economic and social costs of a system of criminal justice which punishes for revenge. If there is ever to be social justice, it will only come about using a model of healing justice, connecting people to the crimes and helping offenders take responsibility for their actions.

...the day to renew the struggle for HIV/AIDS education, prevention and treatment in prison.

...the day to remind people that the criminal justice system and the psychiatric system are mutually reinforcing methods that the state uses to control human beings. There is a lot of brutality by staff committed in the name of treatment. Moreover, many deaths in the psych-prisons remain uninvestigated.

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