

# Incarcerated workers strike across the United States on September 9th: Report from the prison strike's first month

By FW Mike L., *The Incarcerated Worker*

*"Prisoners are now realizing that by withholding their labor they have the power to shut down prisons and get the authorities, at the very least, to reevaluate the prison slave labor system. In essence, they are realizing that striking is a necessary stepping stone in changing the prison system and the dynamics of prison slave labor."*— Phillip Ruiz, former incarcerated worker and member of the IWW Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC), in "Why Prison Strikes Are Necessary: An Ex-Prisoner's Experience."

On the night before Sept. 9, 2016—the 45th anniversary of the Attica Prison uprising and the date set for a national prisoner labor strike—a riot erupted at Holmes Correctional Institution in Florida. More than 400 incarcerated workers rose up in rebellion, barricades were built, cameras were broken, fires were set, and all hell broke loose. Rapid response teams were called in from five different county prisons to put down the rebellion. No matter what, the seal had been broken at that point and the spirit of Attica was now in the air! The flames from this rebellion in Florida would light the torch for what would become the largest prisoner strike in U.S. history.

By the next morning, Free Alabama Movement (FAM), one of the main organizing groups for the strike and a building force for IWOC, sent out an immediate press release for the national strike. FAM also reported a full shut-down of Holman Correctional Institution, one of the most infamous prisons in Alabama and a key organizing site of FAM. A FAM committee from Holman reported: "Sept. 9, all prisoners at Holman Prison refused to report to their prison jobs without incident. With the rising of the sun came an eerie silence as the men at Holman laid on their racks reading or sleeping. Officers are performing all tasks."

The Carolinas flamed up with strike activity. North Carolina reported people refusing to go to work, but no major lockdown. South Carolina strikers released a list of demands drafted by Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, an allied group of IWOC. "End of prison slavery" was one of the core



Wobblies and supporters march through Oakland, protesting against prison industrial complex profiteers.

Photo: itsgoingdown.org

demands of the list released. South Carolina continues to grow as a major powerhouse of the strike. The Virginia branch of IWOC reported that the Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women joined the strike, and a women's prison in California went on hunger strike in solidarity. The infamous Merced County Jail in California also joined in the national strike via mass hunger strike. Political prisoner Chelsea Manning was on strike for her rights to gender reassignment surgery and inmates at Guantanamo Bay were also on strike, but both of these strikes may not be directly related to the national strike. However, Manning did win her rights to surgery.

Meanwhile, demonstrations all over the United States erupted. Nearly every major city had a noise demo outside of a jail or another site related to the prison industrial complex. One of the most charismatic demonstrations came from Oakland, Calif. Oakland had a demonstration with more than 300 people, and as the tension escalated, major damages were hit against prison profiteers such as Bank of America, which was torched. Comrades throughout the globe came out in support of the strike. Supporters in Spain, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Serbia and other locales held banner drops and demonstrations outside of U.S. embassies. Greek comrades had a demonstration outside of a women's

penitentiary, and cell blocks of radical Greek incarcerated workers from Korydallos sent a salute to the strike. On Oct. 1, the same blocks joined in the strike in solidarity by refusing work and kicking all the guards out of the blocks.

Back in the United States on Sept. 11, the strike expanded to other states, including a large uprising at one of the major detention centers in Michigan called the Kinross Correctional Facility. Approximately 400 incarcerated workers refused to work and started a protest march. The situation escalated into fires being set, barricades built, and several rapid response teams being brought in from other prisons throughout the state to end the rebellion. According to media sources, 1,200 incarcerated workers participated in the rebellion, and 150 of them were transferred as targeted agitators of the strike.

As the strike continued throughout the first month, several states such as Washington, Nebraska, Texas and others were reported to have strike activity. IWOC members on the outside called prisons to find out which ones were on lockdown and conducted other extensive research to accumulate the actual impact of the strike. Our initial research estimated approximately 27 different prisons with more than 27,000 prisoners affected by the strike, but this number later increased to be an estimate near 47,000 prisoners and 49 different facilities affected.



Graphic: IWOC

The strike at Holman in Alabama escalated when the prison guards went on strike. By the first week of October, no guards were on duty. The warden was left with the task of pulling out the food cart to the striking incarcerated workers. This is the first time in Alabama's history that prison guards have gone on strike, according to news site "It's Going Down," and it's even more stunning under the pretense of a national prisoner strike. South Carolina incarcerated workers continued their strike, earning their place as one of the longest work stoppages held by prisoners in the national strike, according to IWOC. Jailhouse Lawyers Speak members of the strike began sending out live Tweets from South Carolina prisons, giving updates on the strike. One of the most inspiring Tweets was a repost of incarcerated workers fighting back against guards who tried to break the strike with violence, as seen here:



On that note, it is of grave importance to shed light on the repression that these brave incarcerated workers faced. These brave souls risked life and death to bring this struggle to the ends of the Earth! One of the first instances of repression was when political prisoner, Lucasville Uprising veteran, and IWW incarcerated worker organizer Imam Hasan was sent to the hole and faced interrogation by both Ohio state authorities and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in regards to the strike. He faced Islamophobic accusations by the Ohio State Penitentiary that he encouraged a suicide bomb attack on Sept. 9. Imam Hasan and his Muslim brothers went on hunger strike when the prison authorities threatened to cut off their rights. He was later faced with more threats by the prison authorities for his communication with media outlets such as National Public Radio (NPR), in promotion of the prisoners' strike. Outside support of IWOC did play an important role in minimizing the repression. Prisoners from South Carolina to Alabama and beyond gave thanks for the phone zaps and call-ins. These efforts made sure prisoners could eat and shower, and they

even got some incarcerated worker organizers such as Michael Kimble, a gay anarchist supporter of FAM, released from solitary confinement. Though these may feel like liberal tactics, they are of utmost importance; they are like laying down covering fire for our incarcerated comrades in the trenches. We must keep in mind that in Waupun Correctional Institution in Wisconsin, an ongoing hunger strike called the "Dying to Live" strike, which was led by brave incarcerated workers like Caesar DeLeon, has been going on since June. These prisoners are facing intensive retaliation, including forced feedings.

So finally, it looks like the One Big Union is making a comeback by organizing not just wage slaves, but workers who are literally slaves by the U.S. Constitution. This strike has made history and its revolutionary momentum is still burning, but there is still a lot of work that needs to be done. We may not have dismantled the prison industrial complex or abolished prison slavery entirely, but the striking incarcerated workers along with the help of our union have accelerated us past a point of no return in the fight for abolition!



## Remembering **Berta Cáceres**

Honduras Indian Activists, Environmental Activists

Opponent of Junta

Murdered March 3, 2016

*Remembered by  
Raymond S. Solomon*

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#### In November We Remember

**Michael McLaughlin**  
(Donegal/Glasgow)

**Dave Paterson**  
(Renfrew/Stonehaven)

& **John Dickens**  
(Stonehaven)

**The Glasgow Singers Strikers,**  
105 years ago

**The Anti-Parliamentarians &  
syndicalists of the past**

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