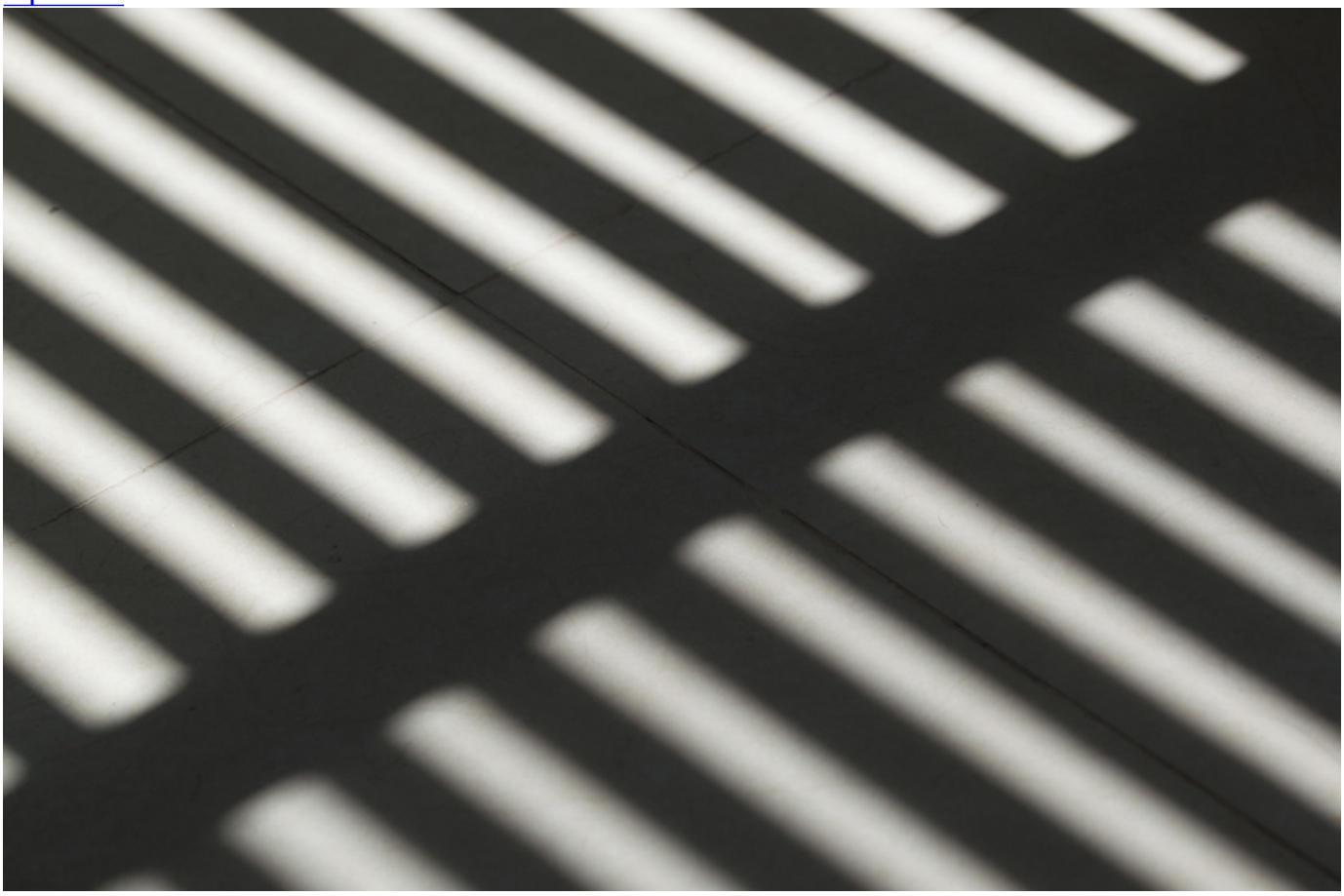
Opinion



(Unsplash/Uriel Soberanes)



by Mary Ann McGivern

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Prisoners have been striking since Aug. 21 in at least 10 states, and are anticipated in 17 at minimum. We don't hear news about the strike because prisoners have limited access to the media. But through Sept. 9, men and women are refusing to cook meals, clean bathrooms, wash laundry, repair furniture and more tasks that make prisons functional and yield products like refilled ink toner cartridges to corporations. Sept. 9 is the anniversary of the start of the state prison riot in Attica, New York.

Clare Coffey wrote a fine column Aug. 30 about the prison strike with lots of details about prison conditions and prisoner goals. I've been thinking about how dead set against solidarity the jailers are. Because they fear riots and prison breaks, wardens and corrections officers actively deter inmates' efforts to study together, form teams or develop a political analysis. Prisons have gangsters who prey on the weak, so shared resources can look like payments for protection. I understand that.

But some strike participants are being put into solitary confinement as payment for their call for justice.

The strikers have created the list of demands below:

1. Immediate improvements to the conditions of prisons and prison policies that recognize the humanity of imprisoned men and women.
2. An immediate end to prison slavery. All persons imprisoned in any place of detention under United States jurisdiction must be paid the prevailing wage in their state or territory for their labor.
3. The Prison Litigation Reform Act must be rescinded, allowing imprisoned humans a proper channel to address grievances and violations of their rights.
4. The Truth in Sentencing Act and the Sentencing Reform Act must be rescinded so that imprisoned humans have a possibility of rehabilitation and parole. No human shall be sentenced to Death by Incarceration or serve any sentence without the possibility of parole.
5. An immediate end to the racial overcharging, over-sentencing, and parole denials of Black and brown humans. Black humans shall no longer be denied parole because the victim of the crime was white, which is a particular problem in southern states.

6. An immediate end to racist gang enhancement laws targeting Black and brown humans.
7. No imprisoned human shall be denied access to rehabilitation programs at their place of detention because of their label as a violent offender.
8. State prisons must be funded specifically to offer more rehabilitation services.
9. Pell grants must be reinstated in all US states and territories.
10. The voting rights of all confined citizens serving prison sentences, pretrial detainees, and so-called "ex-felons" must be counted. Representation is demanded. All voices count!

Based on the demands, you will see that wardens don't have the power to offer fair wages or rescind laws and sentencing practices, much less grant voting rights. This strike is a national call. We all need to listen.

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