

12/09/2020, Memorial for Prisoners Infected by Corona Virus at State Capitol, Olympia, WA. Talk prepared by Peter Bohmer

### Some Good News but Not All Good News!

Let us breathe a sigh of relief Trump lost, but President elect Biden and the new Biden administration are pro-corporate and pro-military. They do little that is positive unless we organize and demand at the local, state and national level for economic, racial and environmental justice. This should include immediately releasing one-half or more of all prisoners, quality and free health care for all including all inmates and immigrants, a Green New Deal to deal with the climate crisis, and a universal basic income for all and a job for all beginning at \$20 an hour.

It is good news that vaccines for Coronavirus seem near at hand. The bad news is that the CDC has put prisoners at the back of the line in the priority list they have drawn up. Let us demand that prisoners be put at the front of the line together with people in nursing homes and health care workers. Prisoners are 3 and ½ times more likely than the general population to be infected with the Coronavirus and the number is even worse for Black, Latino and American Indian prisoners. This proposal to delay the vaccine for prisoners shows the devaluation of their life which we should never accept. Let us demand from the Governor and from the Federal government that prisoners are some of the first people to get the vaccine after it is approved. The vaccine should be made available for free, globally.

A truly impressive prisoner, Eugene Youngblood, is about to have his sentence commuted after 28 years in prison by Governor Inslee. The Clemency and Pardons board voted 3 to 0 in June 2019 to recommend his release. Eugene was convicted of a gang related murder when he was 18. He is president of the Concerned Lifer's Organization at the prison in Monroe where he is. He has worked to bring unity among all prisoners, especially between Black and Latino prisoners. Eugene is a deep thinker and an outstanding writer and human being. In prison he has led groups on toxic masculinity, political economy and sustainable farming. He is still in prison and will be a leader for justice and liberation when he is released. I would like to share an analysis Eugene Youngblood wrote from inside Monroe in November of this year, 2020.

### The Coronavirus Experience by Eugene Youngblood

“The COVID-19 virus has been running rampant throughout prisons across the nation, even a few here in the state of Washington have been hit hard including where I am, the Monroe Correctional Complex. At the minimum-security unit, which is outside the walls, there were over 100 people infected, prisoners and staff. I am housed inside the walls, and for us there were only a couple of cases. Nevertheless, the truth of the matter is that none of us have escaped the wrath of the Coronavirus. There is so much more to this pandemic than what it does to you physically. When you think of a virus the vast majority of us think about how it attacks you biologically - most viruses enter through

your nose, mouth, or breaks in the skin and then spreads from host to host. There is also another kind of virus to consider, a computer virus. A computer virus is a code or program written to disrupt the way a computer operates and is designed to spread from computer to computer. The Coronavirus has characteristics of both. It effects your body, and your brain (your body's computer) your physical health and your mental health. A computer virus can remain dormant on your computer, without showing any major signs or symptoms that it has been infected. Once it infects your computer, the virus can infect other computers on the same network. This sounds eerily similar to COVID-19 and how people can be asymptomatic (appear to be dormant) but everyone you come in contact with (on your network) are susceptible to becoming infected despite the fact you are not showing any actual symptoms yourself. COVID-19 has had a tremendous physical effect on people including death, but it has also affected how people think and behave - whether you have tested positive or not.

So while we have not experienced the positive tests here, the mental and emotional stress, strain, and frustration that is also symptomatic of COVID-19 permeates this prison. Just like society, there are a number of people here who are not working, not involved in positive programming and find their selves with an overabundance of idle time. Because of restrictions and social distancing we can barely engage with one another, let alone do the inside community building we once did. This has left the population feeling like we are surrounded by people and yet all alone. In a lot of ways COVID-19 has stripped many of us of our hope for the future, there is a lost sense of capability and responsibility due to the fact that we have been subjected to so many restrictions. And for those of us in prison that means we have been subjected to restrictions on top of restrictions. Before Covid, we had the unique ability here at Monroe, to engage with each other and engage with the community as well. Through groups like the Black Prisoner's Caucus {BPC} and the Concerned Lifer's Organization {CLO}. With no meetings being held now and no visitors, sponsors, or volunteers allowed inside the prison, there is a lack of community building from within, no positive programming where we can come together with each other or with anyone from the outside. This has done severe damage to our already weak sense of self-worth and belonging. It got to a point where I began to question whether I had the wherewithal to continue.

With Covid it has not been one big thing - it is actually the micro attacks on my head and heart. It has not been like waterboard torture, where you're strapped to a board and buckets of water are dumped on top of your head, it has been more like Chinese water torture... a slow process of one drop of water at a time, directly to your forehead over and over. In prison and in society we are all trying to navigate through the complexities of this pandemic. We all want so desperately to return to the time of BC "Before Covid" but the truth is we have to accept that we are in fact living in a brave new world, as Aldous Huxley told us about." by Eugene Youngblood

Eugene Youngblood has persevered and has grown as a human being, so can all of us. Let us work towards ending racial capitalism and creating a society that does not lock people up. As a start let us work in solidarity with prisoners to reduce and end their sentences and to support them in demands for a healthy environment inside and outside of prison.

Si Se Puede,  
Thank you, Peter