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INTRODUCTION:

The Prison Issue

*Ain't it funny how the factory's doors close
Round the time that the school doors close
Round the time that the doors of the jail cells
Open up to greet you—like the reaper*

*Ain't it funny how the factory's doors close
Round the time that the school doors close
Round the time that a hundred thousand jail cells
Open up to greet you—like the reaper*

—Rage Against the Machine, "Ashes in the Fall"

One way to read this issue of *Workplace* is as something of an extended explication of Rage Against the Machine's grim not-quite-rhetorical not-quite-question from their 1999 album *The Battle of Los Angeles*. "The Prison Issue" features a variety of responses to the "greet[ing]" by the "hundred thousand jail cells" in "Ashes in the Fall"—and to their implicit invitation to consider the relations between jobs and jails and schools in the contemporary United States. From a range of disciplinary perspectives and institutional locations, our contributors make a strong case that the connections implied through Rage's synecdoches—between the workings of global(izing) capitalism, the increasing state (and corporate) investments in incarceration, and the future of public (higher) education—are no joke. And they show that Rage's simile linking prisons with (social) death is anything but an afterthought and far from fanciful.

But this issue of *Workplace* does more than provide a reading (of sorts) of Rage's rhetorical figures and their referential force. It also intervenes on the discourses, practices, and institutions that create, legitimate, maintain, and expand or intensify what has variously been called the race to incarcerate, the punishment industry, the prison-industrial complex, domestic militarization, the perpetual prisoner machine, and lockdown America. Our first three contributors both contextualize "the prison issue" and assign responsibility for its existence and evolution. H. Bruce Franklin puts the right-wing attack on open access to higher education and promotion of incarceration at the center of the infamous "culture wars" of the '80s and '90s; Joan Dayan calls attention to the Supreme Court's rhetorical subterfuges that have resulted in the evisceration of the Constitution's protections against "cruel and unusual punishment"; and Tony Samara assesses criminology's complicity in the prison boom while providing a comprehensive and provocative overview of the major issues and actors. Our concluding contributions represent the work of two organizations, the Justice Policy Institute and Teachers for a Democratic Culture, that have sought to

connect prisons and universities directly. Robert Gangi, Vincent Schiraldi, and Jason Zeidenberg update their 1998 study of the social consequences of the disinvestment in higher education and the meteoric rise in prison expenditures in New York state in recent decades. Nicole Meyenberg and Steve Parks make a case that the kinds of prison-related policies and consequences identified by the JPI should be of great concern to those who care about the future of higher education and explicitly address the question raised (and answered) by all our contributors: what is to be done?

As this sketch of the kinds of analyses and interventions featured in this issue of *Workplace* suggests, "The Prison Issue" is a call to action. Our contributors seek, among other things, to push academics to move on a too-often-ignored front in the culture wars (Franklin), shame legal scholars and judges into rejecting the circumlocutions that both hide and dignify violations of civil, citizenship, and human rights (Dayan), urge sociologists and political scientists to learn from the work of prison reform/abolition activists when crafting research projects and advising decision-makers (Samara), persuade legislators nation-wide to reassess the "war on drugs" and refocus social policy around education rather than incarceration (Gangi, Schiraldi, and Zeidenberg), and inspire teachers and students to build neighborhood and local coalitions aimed at ending the vicious cycle that results from the prioritizing of prisons over schools (Meyenberg and Parks). Taken together, then, our contributors show that those who work in colleges and universities, whether active in the academic labor movement or not, ignore "the prison issue" at their peril. They provide a primer on structural relations between prisons and universities. And they map out ways in which academics—through their research, their teaching, their campus and community service, their program building, their professional and disciplinary organizations, their unions—can move from awareness to activism.

"The Prison Issue," then, might finally be read as a sequel to recent issues of *Workplace*, in particular those that have focused on the state and social policy (November 1999) and the global economy (May 2000). Like our previous issues, this issue of *Workplace* seeks to connect the dots between the job crisis, the fiscal crisis, and the legitimization crisis in the U.S. higher education system with the role of states, corporations, and markets—and consider what academic unions and unionists can do with and about the picture that emerges.

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This issue of *Workplace* was originally modeled on Mark Wigley's special issue of the architectural journal *assemblage* that began from the juxtaposition of two simple words—"Violence/Space"—and ended with analyses, reflections, speculations, and meditations from dozens of the most interesting critical theorists, political philosophers, and cultural critics. My goal was to collect a similar range and variety of responses to the phrase "Prisons/Universities" from activists, journalists, musicians, policy-makers, and academics, in order to put a spotlight on an issue about which every campus constituency has good reason to care deeply: graduate students, adjuncts, tenure-track and tenured faculty, and others interested in their working conditions should understand that the rapidly expanding prison-industrial complex provides part of the reason for the imposition of "fiscal correctness," downsizing, casualization, and managerialism on academia; academic and professional unionists, particularly at public universities, should understand that their success in negotiating terms and conditions of employment is directly related to the strength of their lobbying of state and federal legislators to call off the race to incarcerate; undergraduate students and their parents should understand how the booming punishment industry affects the availability of financial aid, the level of tuition, and the quality of higher education; and administrators and trustees who care about the future of higher learning should understand that their interests lie in joining those in campus governance and academic or professional unions in their anti-domestic militarization lobbying and publicizing efforts. To that end, I distributed a call for papers this past summer to some four dozen people known for their scholarship and/or activism on criminal justice issues (see appendix, below). The call met with an overwhelming response (particularly on such short notice to such an overcommitted group)—both rapid

acceptances and welcome statements of support.

As submissions rolled in during the fall, though, a pattern emerged that led me to rename this special segment "The Prison Issue." Time and again, our contributors refused to treat prisons and universities simply as institutions competing for state support in a conceptual vacuum. Instead, they repeatedly pointed out the complicity of academic disciplines and institutions in the formation and development of the U.S. prison system and situated both prisons and universities within a larger political economy. As a group, our contributors show that "the prison issue" is not simply how to recognize the dangers posed by the nation's status as the world leader in incarceration to the accessibility, quality, and future of a higher education system often said to be the best in the world, but how best to intervene in both the investment in domestic militarization and the corporatist reengineering of the university in such a way as to effect serious social change. The point, our contributors might agree, is not simply to protect or defend the university or push policy-makers to choose education over incarceration, but to make changing university and prison systems part of a larger radical strategy.

"The Prison Issue" might thus be understood as raising—and providing a variety of (sometimes conflicting) answers to—an urgent series of questions: how does attention to the booming punishment industry force us to rethink our understanding of the contours and contexts of the crisis in higher education? higher education: for whom and what for? what can academic disciplines, organizations, and institutions do to end their complicity with the expansion of the prison-industrial complex? can colleges and universities be transformed to become engines of social change rather than social reproduction? how, and to what ends? These questions—and the varying answers presented in this special segment, in Leo Parascondola's interview with Barbara Foley, and in our book reviews—ought to be considered carefully by academic unionists, in particular. Will they understand the importance of making opposition to the "war on crime," the boom in prison expenditures, and domestic militarization a central mission of the academic labor movement and fundamental to the work academic unions do? What relations will unions for teachers have to, and with, unions for police officers and prison guards? What roles will academic unions play within the larger labor movement in the United States?

Questions like these may seem overly abstract, ambitious, or utopian to TAs and adjuncts struggling to pay the rent, stay well without health insurance, do their jobs well without office space or access to university voicemail and email accounts, deal with students, faculty, and administrators who fail to treat them with respect, get some writing done, find an academic job for the next semester or year, and keep work from taking over their lives—all on \$1500-\$2500 a course. They may seem overly politicized, insufficiently theorized, or barely relevant to professors on the tenure-track or with tenure who are dealing with what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney have called "the academic speed-up." But if the "The Prison Issue" has accomplished its goals, these questions will be both commonsensical and compelling. And answering them—in words and actions—will be a fundamental responsibility.

References

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APPENDIX: CALL FOR PAPERS

[Date] [Name] [Address]

Dear [Name]—

I am writing to follow up on my earlier invitation to participate in a special issue of the electronic journal *Workplace* that I am editing on the structural relations of prisons to universities. The issue will collect responses to two words:

PRISONS / UNIVERSITIES

40 or so people from very different circumstances are being invited to respond to the conjunction of these words. My goal for this special issue is not simply to reiterate the "Education, Not Incarceration" slogans with which we are all familiar (and support), but to build a case for making opposition to the "war on crime," the boom in prison expenditures, and domestic militarization a central mission of the academic labor movement and fundamental to the work academic unions do.

We are looking for several kinds of brief (typically no more than 10 pages), edgy essays:

- analyses that build on the kind of investigative pieces on state budget priorities and the way expenditures on prisons and disinvestment in education go hand in hand that can be found at sites like the Justice Policy Institute's "Education vs. Incarceration Clearinghouse" (www.cjcj.org/jpi/clearinghouse.html) or The Prison Activist Resource Center (www.prisonactivist.org);
- reflections on the relation between the academic labor and the prison reform/abolition movements or on why critical attention to prisons should matter to the academic labor movement and what it can do to support endeavors like The Sentencing Project (www.sentencingproject.org), The Prison Moratorium Project (nomoreprisons.org), Critical Resistance (www.criticalresistance.org), prison studies, and prisoner education;
- meditations on prisons and universities as institutions within a larger political economy—which might include responses to Althusser on repressive/ideological state institutions or Foucault on discipline, punishment, and surveillance, not to mention Corporate Watch's

"The Prison Industry: Capitalist Punishment"
(www.corpwatch.org/trac/feature/prisons/index.html).

Workplace is an independent journal that reports on, and advocates for, the academic labor movement. We believe it is essential that the academic labor movement contribute to, and actively seek coalitions with, larger social movements in the U.S. and elsewhere. Hence, our May 2000 issue features articles on "The WTO and After" and "Organizing Canada." Our focus on prisons/universities for the upcoming issue is our next step in this mission.

You can send a working title, together with a brief description of your proposed project, by September 30 to bruce.simon@fredonia.edu.