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OPINION

Fighting the Injustices of Mass Incarceration

Prison strikes and why they are happening

BY JANOS MARTON

Earlier this spring, violence broke out in the Lee Correctional Institution in South Carolina, resulting in seven deaths and many injuries. Incarcerated leaders in the prison system decided they had had enough. Brutal treatment from corrections officers, deteriorating prison conditions, and incredibly long, punitive sentences had led to a condition of hopelessness.

Leaders within the South Carolina prison system began reaching out to incarcerated allies across the country, including the Free Alabama Movement, who had led a prison strike in 2016. A decision was made: It was time to launch a national prison strike to raise awareness around the brutality of mass incarceration — from racist police practices to unjust sentencing laws to the lack of support people experience when they come home from prison.



These demands include significantly reducing the number of people in jail and prison, improving prison conditions, properly funding rehabilitation, and addressing racism throughout the criminal justice system.

None of the demands, taken individually, is new to the criminal justice movement. Many organizations, including the ACLU, have fought against the rise of mass incarceration and the horren-

ously imprisoned them.

The strike's organizers emphasized Demand #10, also known as the #Right2Vote campaign, a demand that all American citizens of voting age — including all people in jail, prison, or on parole — have the right to vote.

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of nonviolent disobedience within the prison system. This tactic is closely tied with a demand that prison labor be properly compensated, in contrast to what one of the organizers calls “slave labor,” referencing the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which abolished slavery but carved out an exception for people who

The ACLU supports the prisoner demands. We believe in lifting up the voices of those who are most directly impacted by the

formal role in the prison strikes that occurred this August and September, ACLU staff and members have fought for decades for many of these issues in the streets, state legislatures, and the courtroom.

Acts of civil disobedience inside of prisons come with serious risks for participants, including severe punishment. Corrections officials should not respond with unjust retaliation. Peaceful demonstrations challenging unjust conditions and practices do not merit placing participants into solitary confinement or adding time to their sentences. Incarcerated people and corrections staff deserve safety, dignity, and the ability to express themselves.

The American criminal justice system is broken. Our country is stronger when people more marginalized and directly impacted by unjust policies organize and raise their voices to demand a better future.

The courageous people who are bringing focused attention to America's system of mass incarceration deserve our admiration. The time to listen is now.

Janos Marton is the state campaigns manager for the ACLU Campaign for Smart Justice.

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dous conditions of American prisons. Yet this may be the first occasion in which incarcerated leaders have coordinated nationally to list their specific policy agenda to end the system that has

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The term “strike” itself referred to incarcerated people across the country engaging in various types

systems that oppress them. Those closest to the problem are closest to the solution, and nobody is closer than people living inside of America's jails and prisons.

And while the ACLU has no

Nike Makes Millions on Kaepernick's Message

That money should back the cause

BY JESSICAH PIERRE

Nike's latest “Just Do It” ad campaign includes a number of A-list athletes: LeBron James, Serena Williams, Odell Beckham Jr. — and most controversially, Colin Kaepernick.



In case you've been living under a rock, Kaepernick — who played quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers — famously knelt during the national anthem before NFL games to protest police brutality toward African Americans. The blowback from his protest led to him being blackballed from the NFL.

Kaepernick's activism was audaciously displayed on a larger platform in Nike's multi-national ad campaign, featuring a video and image of Kaepernick with the tagline: “Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything.”

Nike's bold move led to more uproar from Kaepernick's critics. Some white customers even ceremoniously burned their Nike apparel and called for a boycott of the company. But for Nike's core customers — millennials and young urban men — this ad sent a strong message of solidarity.

Consumers and celebrities alike are now supporting Nike for giving Kaepernick that platform. In less than 24 hours after announcing Kaepernick as the face of their new marketing campaign, the sportswear company received more than \$43 million worth of mostly positive media exposure, one report estimates.

Since then, that total has only

resistance! We need more corporate America to stand up also.”

According to Forbes, the company saw a 31 percent increase in sales just a few days after the ad became public. And while Nike's stock initially dipped following the promotion release, it not only recovered but surpassed all stock records for 2018, trading at an all-time high of \$83.90 a share.

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“What can I do that's meaningful?” asked Blackish star Jenifer Lewis as she donned a Nike sweater on the Emmys red carpet. “I'll wear Nike. I'll wear Nike to say thank you. Thank you for leading the

This has caused a number of people, including myself, to question Nike's motives. Guardian writer Arwa Mahdawi accused Nike of the latest capitalistic trend, “woke-washing” — that is, using “progressive values as a marketing ploy, appropri-

ating social activism as a form of advertising.”

This wouldn't be the first offense by a major corporation.

Not long ago Pepsi pulled a controversial ad they said was meant to “project a global message of unity, peace, and understanding” after it borrowed imagery from Black Lives Matter protests in Ferguson. (But unlike Nike, this ad received strong backlash from police brutality protesters who accused the ad of being tone deaf.)

Is it possible for a company to support racial justice without exploiting it for profit? Yes.

Actually, there's an easy way for Nike to prove that their latest ad isn't just a form of woke washing: It can give the revenue from their “Kaepernick bump” right back to the cause they're supposedly taking a stand for. The company can start by matching Colin Kaepernick's own pledge to donate \$1 million to organizations working in oppressed communities.

Let's applaud Nike for taking this very important stand. But we also need to challenge corporations who use progressive messages in their advertising to put their money where their mouth is.

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