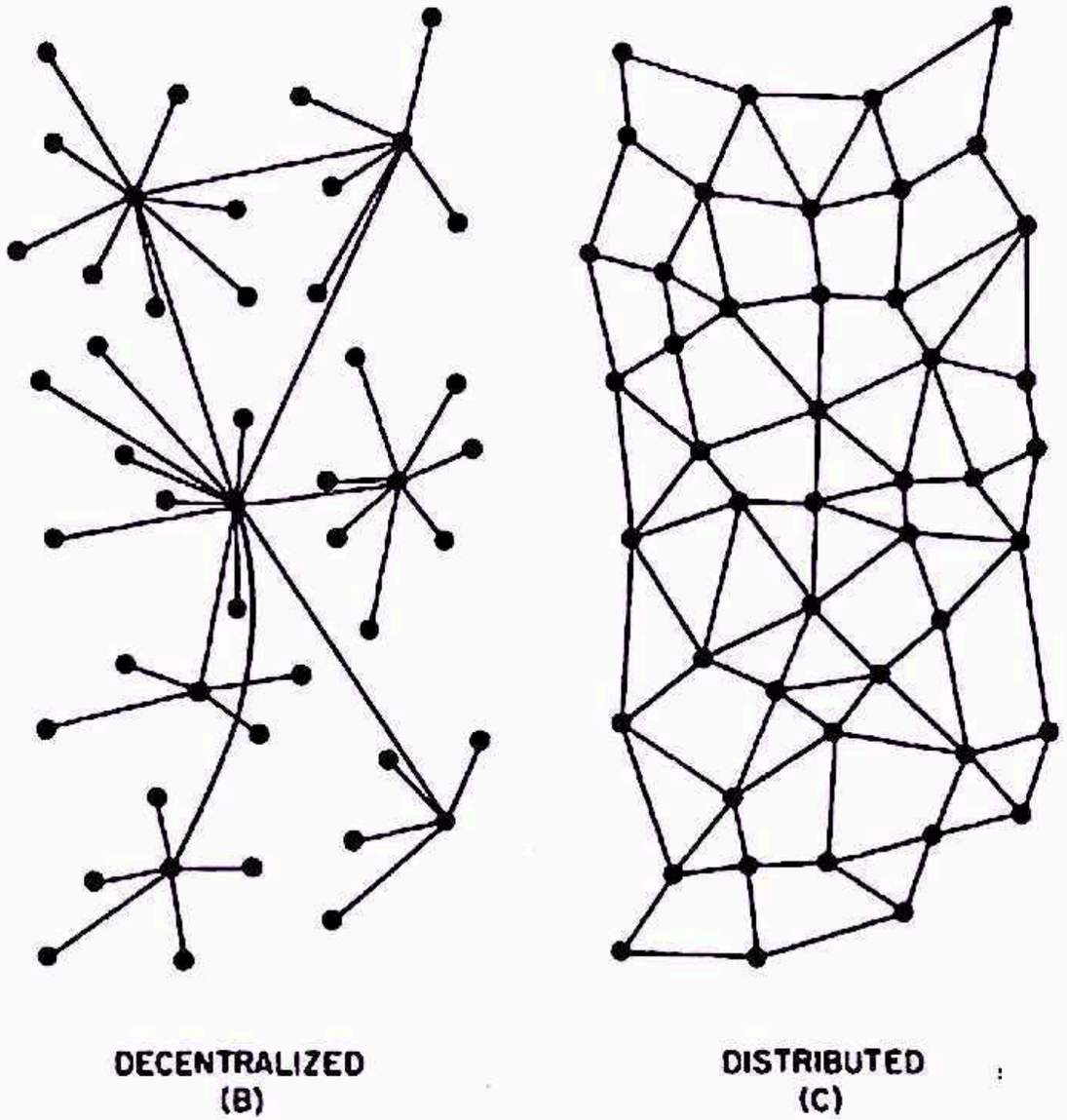

Taking Direct Action To #FreeThemAll

From Stateville Prison to the Front Yard of its Warden

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There has been a major shift in tactics and strategy for the grassroots campaign to #FreeThemAll in U.S. prisons, jails, and detention centers, quite noticeably right now throughout the Midwest.

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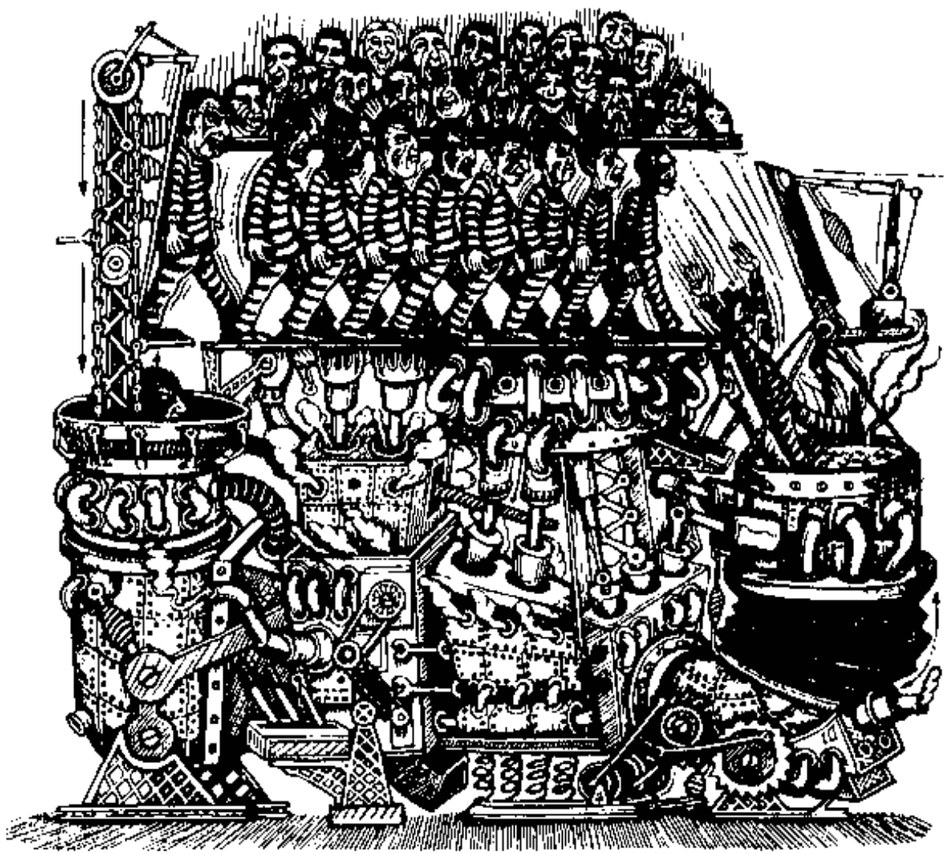
https://itsgoingdown.org/direct-action-to-freethemall-from-stateville-prison-to-the-front-yard-of-its-warden/

Stateville Correctional Center in Joliet, IL is quickly unfolding into a nightmare scenario of lethal punishment and carceral-police violence. As of April 20th, 123 imprisoned people and 65 guards/staff officially tested positive for the COVID-19 virus at Stateville. Infections are assumed to be multiplying exponentially.



Woodcut by James Graybow

Such as the maneuvers of the community of struggle that executed this action. It is long time the demands of loved ones of prisoners and abolitionists, inside and out, are brought directly to the front-yards of those who are responsible for (and make a living from) killing and terrorizing people in state custody. We hope that they can experience a hint of the unbearable terror, fear, and trauma that they inflict on others.

We need militant direct action to #FreeThemAll

We need revolutionary community organizing for Abolition NOW.

On Friday, April 17, a group of concerned loved ones and advocates for prisoners in the Midwest took the fight against conditions at Stateville into their own hands and to the fascist's front door where they used life-size replicas of body bags to block the driveway of prison warden David Gomez.

These body bags represent the ongoing accumulation of causalities from the COVID-19 pandemic at Stateville, as the infection continues to spread rapidly throughout its carceral facilities.

Unfurling body bags at the foot of Gomez's driveway, the masked group reads off the following statement:

"David Gomez! We uplift the names Larry Bourbon, Russell Sedelmaier, Joseph Wilson, Rodney Rice, and countless others unnamed that are languishing behind your prison walls. The conditions at Stateville have always been horrific, ripe with medical neglect and fascist abuse of power but now they are truly. Undeniable death camps. While COVID-19 carves up our friends and family held at Stateville. You are the warden there David Gomez…and blood is on your hands! The deaths of our 9 friends and family are on your shoulders! In the names of those fallen and those struggling still to live we uplift the following demands. The people [across prison walls] demand that you:

1. **TEST EVERYONE FOR COVID-19**
2. **INCREASE HEALTHCARE AND MEDICAL STAFF & SUPPLY**
3. **END LOCKDOWN: ALLOW YARD ACCESS**
4. **KEEP FACILITIES SANITIZED**
5. **FREE UNLIMITED PHONE & VIDEO CALLS**
6. **PROVIDE THOSE CAPTIVE WITH SAME PROTECTIVE GEAR AS STAFF**

FREE THEM ALL!
FREE THEM ALL!

According to IDOC reporting, 13,000 people out of 43,657 within its facilities could be eligible for release immediately. This number is nowhere near high enough to prevent a world-historical catastrophe inside the Northern Illinois prison. The concerned loved ones participating in this courageous action vocalize a rejection the idea that only "non-violent" offenders are deserving of consideration for release. They emphatically use the language of: #FreeThemAll #NoMoreIsolation #NoMoreDeaths and #AbolitionNOW.

In an effort to lead by example, these folks are asking that other non-imprisoned activists join them in future militant direct actions to smash the fascist state. The U.S. prison industrial complex is enabled by every and all established social institution and the dominant culture of white American society more generally. This means that the targets of our actions to abolish it are therefore not only aimed at the physical site of the prison/jail itself but extend into every facet of daily life, from institutions to the roads and streets and in spaces of everyday life.

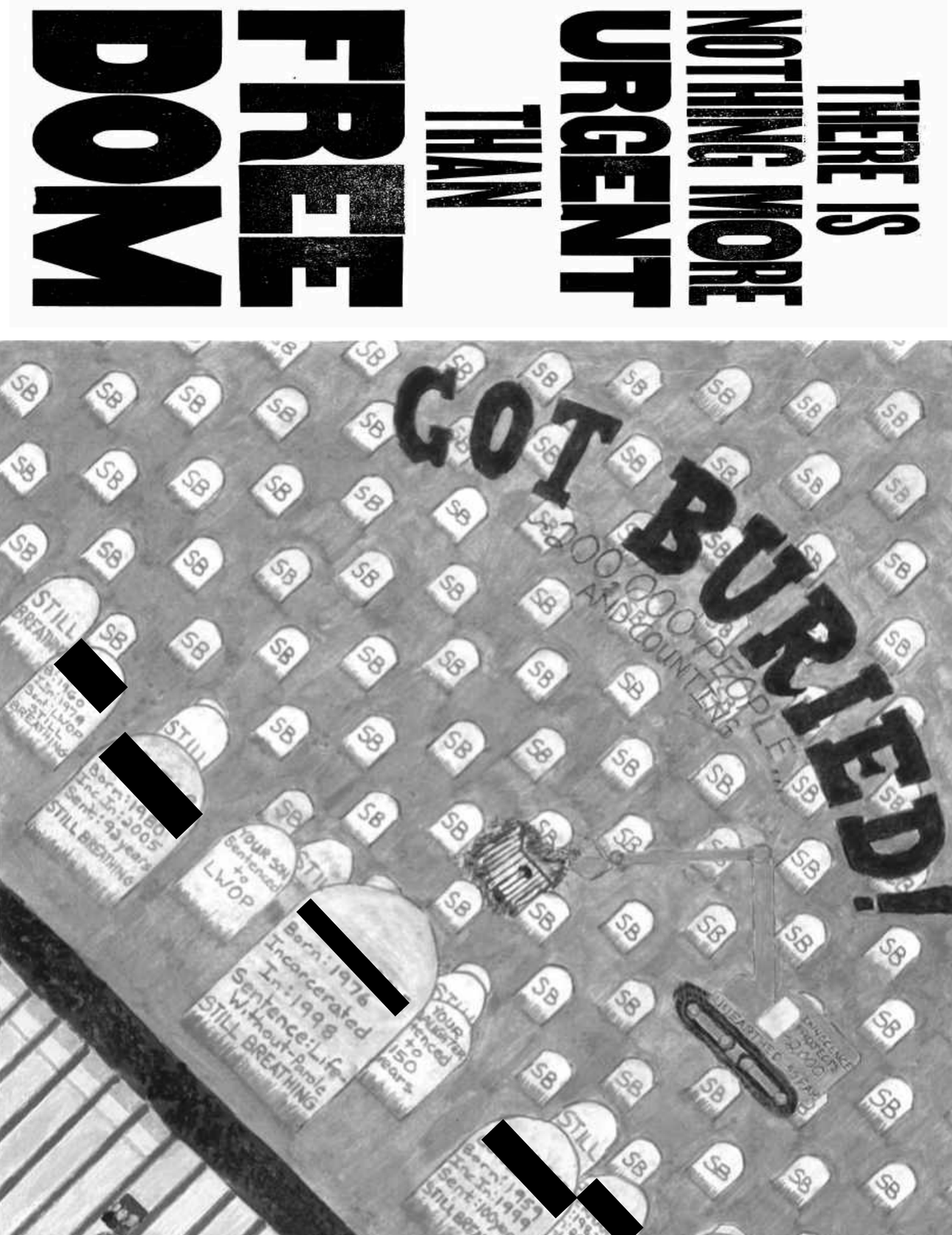
Powerful actions and disruptions can take place in numerous spheres of the so-called "free-world."

vulnerabilities to premature death inherent to the prison regime.

Other questions that must be asked of the Stateville administration, and specifically its warden and medical directors, include: How many people do you hold captive have such conditions as diabetes? How many prisoners have high blood pressure simply as an effect of their incarceration? How many people have asthma and respiratory issues from gratuitous immobilization of their bodies, from inadequate meals, and exposure to facility-wide pestilence? How many of the captive imprisoned are immunocompromised? It is getting more difficult by the day to see the gruesome truth of the prison regime's sadism shed its liberal cloak for all the world to see.

The day this action took place, an estimated 10 men were already killed by the virus while in custody at Stateville, with numbers estimated to actually be much higher, with increasing numbers of captives infected throughout the prison. Experts say this is because "social distancing" is virtually impossible in the context of prison life. While there is a long-documented history of Stateville operating as a site of industrialized genocide and medical violence against its imprisoned population, the COVID-19 pandemic, as it progressively spreads throughout prisons, makes clear that imminent death is a now the accepted norm of carceral state practices.

Russell Sedelmaier, Larry Bourbon, Rodney Rice, Joseph Wilson, and six other un-named prisoners have been killed in custody by the state's poor handling of the COVID outbreak. It is these persons who inspired abolitionists to pay a visit to the warden's house. Such instances of legally-sanctioned and state-condoned manslaughter reveal systematic patterns of medical neglect by Gomez and current prison staff as well as Louis Schicker and Steve Meeks, former and current medical directors of Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), and the Wexford Health Sources.



As is the inherent nature of incarceration and policing, ranking authorities like Gomez are objectively culpable for murder yet enjoy *complete impunity* as well as an income paid by the state.

Numerous lawsuits against IDOC medical administration reflect a long history of open neglect and violence against incarcerated persons while Gomez, Meeks, and Wexford CEOs continue to profit. Moreover, Wexford Health Sources (a subsidiary of Bantry Group), which holds a contract for administering a large percentage of medical services throughout IDOC facilities, has a demonstrable pattern of abuse of prisoners in other states as evidenced by lawsuits in Alabama, Mississippi, and New York.

Stateville holds an incapacitated population of about 2,674 prisoners overall. Many are elders, a significant portion sentenced as juveniles for long sentences of upwards 20, 30, and even 40+ years. A whopping 687 people held in Stateville are over the age of 50, 35 people are in their 70s or older, and 1 person is older than 80. This is no different than a majority of facilities around the country. If it isn't elderly people, then there are a host of other