Florida Inmates Launch MLK Day Strike Over Inhumane Prison Conditions

The protest was held over allegations of “prison slavery,” “deplorable conditions” and high death rates across the state’s prison system.

January 16, 2018 By Casey Halter

Prisoners in Florida held a daylong strike yesterday to protest alleged “prison slavery,” “deplorable conditions” and high death rates among inmates across the state’s prison system, Newsweek reports.

Nicknamed “Operation Push,” the MLK Day protest was launched at the Reception and Medical Center state prison and hospital for men in Lake Butler, California. Several rallies in support of the campaign have been planned for the remainder of the week at several locations, including the Florida Department of Corrections (FDC) headquarters in Tallahassee and Miami. A talk by political activist Angela Davis is to take place at Florida State University (FSU) this evening.

Organizers of the rally say prisoners are demanding payment for their labor and better treatment by FDC officers and calling for the state to do more to prevent prison overcrowding. Inmates are also drawing attention to the fact that Florida has the second highest number of prison deaths in the country (behind Texas), despite the fact that the number of inmates in state prisons is decreasing.

A recent Department of Justice report found that in 2017, Florida saw a total of 407 deaths in state prisons, with 133 of those deaths attributed to natural causes, 11 to accidents, seven to suicide and three to homicide. Top natural causes included cancer, followed by heart disease and liver disease. Another 253 cases of death are marked as “pending.”

Earlier this summer, it was reported that inmates at several prisons in Florida had been left struggling with untreated medical problems and were being denied basic hygiene items such as toilet paper.

The Campaign to Fight Toxic Prisons says nearly 100 advocacy groups, including the Black Lives Matter Alliance of Broward County and the Florida State University division of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), are planning to join the demonstration.

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