

agcu

July 16, 2014

Dear "arethusarose":

In response to your query regarding public employee unions and guards in the state prison systems, I offer the following:

Just like the guards in California, apparently, the guards in Illinois are interested, first and foremost, in keeping prison beds full in order to protect their jobs. No doubt, they are also big contributors to politicians and fund numerous groups that appear to be independent but are actually created solely to support their position. It's a tough and durable political strategy that was pioneered in this state and that has spread across the country. I don't know how "progressive" your union movement is, but it seems to me that the only way to combat this is to appeal to the progressive heritage in the labor movement. The guards are pushing a radically reductive position, more akin to hard right positions, but from within the labor movement. The pushback that might gain traction among your peers could be exposing that truth. Crime is down all over, this country already locks up more people, both in raw numbers and per capita, than any country in the history of the world, and too much money has been diverted away from worthy social programs into unworthy prisons. (And crime didn't go down because of increased levels of incarceration, but because of a decrease in the number of young men in their crime-prone years.) Finally, LWOP is the death penalty. Illinois did not do away with the death penalty, it just changed methods. Being sentenced to die in prison is a death sentence. Thank you for your interest. Good luck!

Ken Hartman