

**The Innocuous Displeasures
of Johnny Mahaffey**

This week, it's said, thousands of people will be gathered around the South Carolina capitol in protest of the whole mass-incarceration racket (if there's a better word for it, than racket, let me know).

However, we shouldn't go blaming the prisons, it's not entirely the fault of the South Carolina Department of Corrections, SCDC. It's the result of years upon years of political/authoritative positioning, the accumulation of all the past state "leaders"--at ALL levels; from the lowly detectives in search of advancements via high arrest/conviction rates, up to the judges themselves, and the politicians--and I reiterate that previous stated fact, the PAST leaders: because change is certainly upon us.

Today's leaders seem somewhat disaffected with the end-games of their predecessors. All those individuals (I won't call them people) responsible for today's penitentiary, no longer even work for the state; they've moved on, taken the money and run, or found THEMSELVES behind bars (search: Michael Moore, and find evidence of one such ... individual ... and his rampant criminal behavior that ran unchecked for quite some time during his charge of authority in South Carolina).

The current regime--I think--has gotten the hint, jumping South Carolina onto the rehabilitation bandwagon. This, of course, affords them right to some of the MILLIONS of dollars, available via donations, given by the now informed public, that wishes to actually decrease recidivism, and not just have prisoners DETAINED until release. There's something like 25,000 prisoners statewide, with probably just as many--if not more--in city (and county) jails, waiting to join them: and more than 90 percent of these people WILL be rejoining society! Why only detain and torment?

The educated jailers of today understand that prisons have the job of rehabilitation. It's the old Spiderman adage, "With great power, comes great responsibility." The prisons have the responsibility, simply because they are in the position (with the power) to dish it out, when no other group has quite that opportunity. A man walking out of a prison gate, after 10, 20, 30 years, is the embodiment of that prison, and everything that prison had to offer during that time. Did it better him? Or did it embitter him? If an ex-prisoner stands behind you at the grocery store, do you want him to have been rehabilitated? Or, are you okay with detained...? Would you prefer he had gotten trained in a vocation, or, sat in an empty cell--stewing? Because many lawmakers of yesteryear preferred the latter.

The prisoner can only know as much as the prison has allowed him the

opportunity to access--since in all actuality it is the prison that controls the prisoners' stimuli (if any). However, it is up to the prisoner to take the opportunity given: the ex-prisoner CAN know LESS, by ignoring the provided stimulus; but under NO circumstance can he know more than what was allowed! I'll use myself as an example here:

I now have various diplomas, obtained at my own financial cost, the prison contributed NOTHING to my education; however, the prison DID allow me the opportunity. It was my own initiative that drove me to better myself. There is no credit, no time off, or pay--nothing of that nature available for me, not even a CHANCE at parole (these are some of the issues of protest now facing the state capitol). I did my college courses, because that's just me, it's who I am. I could never just sit here and do NOTHING, play cards and watch TV as the previous lawmakers designed. No. And I'm not alone in that line of thought, many want more.

Expect more.

Inside; and outside the prison.

The prison congratulates such achievements--with the wardens themselves shaking the hands of those that get a GED, or college education. Especially when they do it with no gain, other than the education.

My achievements did not go without notice: it's why I now find myself employed in the Education Department, teaching GED (covering English, science, math, social studies, etc.), and on Fridays I have my MFA-style class, Correctional Writer's Initiative, CWI. I enjoy it, I like to think of myself as a veritable Vonnegut. Except of my woes being in Dresden, they're in prison. My teaching, is a way of, not so much as giving back--since I did it all myself--but a way of offering to others what was not available for me. Just, as all the prisoners say, "doing the right thing."

And a lot of good is already becoming of it.

I arrived in prison in 2007, at the height of the mid-2000s corruption scandals that filled South Carolina; but now, in 2015, most (but not all) of the corrupt (the near dozen sheriffs, countless cops, and officials, along with many attorneys, etc.) are gone from the system, charged with crimes. Yet, the cases that they manipulated, still sit behind bars, waiting to be re-tried. Things have changed, they continue to change for the better. New opportunities present themselves with every coming month: new classes and types of rehabilitation are being developed throughout SCDC as you read this rant. And hopefully this wagon of rehabilitation will keep on meandering its way for many years to come, taking South Carolina along with it, into the future.

The protests are conducted by people sick of the keys being turned and tossed under the prison. It's not the prisons' fault, it's on the lawmakers who gave each county the right to think they were their own country, their own government in some Orwellian backscratching-club. We're overdue for a massive reforming, or, unreforming, I should say. Nothing will ever be perfect or even close, but it can be--will be--better. I already see it around me, improving. The prisons are doing what they can with what they've got, and

while there are still many bad apples on the tree, the tree is being shook. It's just that they need help, they can't shake such a largely rooted oak easily, they're tired, and they need more hands. Many bad apples have somehow TIED themselves in place.

Over-sentencing, wrongful convictions and incarcerations are now in question, in the light. It's not just a few prisoners griping about ... being in prison. Lawyers, cops (ex-cops, retired mostly), correctional guards, families that are sick of it all--current lawmakers must address this--while the South Carolina judicial system gets put under public scrutiny, with the citizens reminding the capitol who actually runs it.

There's a reason movies like "The Hunger Games," are so popular! People detest big government, and the state that claims to hate big government the most (South Carolina) happens to be the very embodiment of it! Someone has to find a way to cut the Gordian knot of Orwellian idolization, binding our authoritative branches; and thankfully people (inside, and outside of its foliage) are trying. Cut that knot, or just loosen it slightly, and watch all the bad apples come rolling away--and in that, there can be no displeasure.

But I wouldn't know anything
about that.