

Troupe appeals to state legislators

State Rep. Charles Quincy Troupe (D-Mo.), is circulating the following letter to the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL):

“As members of NBCSL, it is our moral as well as our political duty to oppose the privatization of prisons in our states, and also federally. I believe this, both because we represent African-American constituents, who are the principal grist for this man-killing ‘industry,’ and because the philosophy which stands behind *prison privatization is un-American and inhuman*. Prison privatization is being sold as a cost-saving device, particularly in an era when Americans, and particularly African-Americans, are being incarcerated in record numbers, indeed numbers greater than in *any* other democratic nation. But there is no study today which demonstrates that, in the long run, these savings are real, and there is plenty of evidence, as recently as earlier this year in the case of Missouri prisoners being tortured in privately run jails in Texas, *to indicate that the cost is far too high for what little might be saved*” (emphasis in original).

Reminding his audience that Auschwitz, too, was a private prison, where prisoner-slaves were worked to death, Troupe went on to say:

“While private companies have run some aspects of the prison industry for decades, the large-scale takeover which we are experiencing today began in the 1980s, under the Reagan-Bush administration. It coincided with the huge increase in incarceration and with the general thrust toward privatization of all government functions to funnel business into the hands and pockets of the administration’s friends. So, for instance, CCA, founded in 1983, and today the largest private prison concern, had 685 beds under management in 1984 and has more than 15,000 today. Perhaps the best evidence of this political relationship is the fact that Bush’s Bureau of Prisons director, J. Michael Quinlan, moved from that position when Bush lost the election, to ‘Director of Strategic Planning’ at CCA. Today Quinlan is making a fortune off CCA’s meteoric rise on the stock exchange. . . .

“It is up to us, you, me, and NBCSL, to stop this monster before it eats us alive. The next step, should we accept the privatization of our prisons, will be the wholesale establishment of work camps in private prisons, something now beginning in states like Virginia, whose sole purpose will be to break the wage scale of free labor. If you remember what slave labor was in this country before the Civil War, you will recognize the intended effect of such a policy.”

her husband’s Presidential bid, many other elected officials or their spouses are still on the CCA payroll and/or hold substantial amounts of CCA stock. The wife of the Democratic Speaker of the House, Jimmy Naifeh, is the chief lobbyist for CCA. Tennessee law does not prohibit this, nor does it require the Speaker to recuse himself from voting on awarding CCA contracts. The only stipulation in state law is that lobbyists for CCA be registered and that their holdings be transparent.

Battle over privatization in Tennessee

Earlier this year, Democratic Lt. Gov. John Wilder and Democratic State Rep. Matthew Kisber drafted the legislation that CCA had boasted would pass. This bill proposes to break the state code, which prohibits more than one privatized facility.

(In fact, CCA has already gotten around the law quite successfully. They built, and are currently operating, a 1,500-bed facility in Hardeman County. The sleight of hand here was that they used another state law which allows counties to contract in the event of overcrowding. So the county contracted with CCA, and then the state turned around and leased the 1,500 beds from the county. Then CCA argued for the

addition of 500 more beds in Hardeman County. When the state said they didn’t need the beds, CCA went ahead anyway, bringing in prisoners from Montana. They are now building another 1,500-bed private facility just down the road from this facility — with no authorization by the legislature. CCA obviously assumes if they build the prisons, they will certainly find some prisoners to fill them! CCA also has a contract with Davidson County to manage their 900-bed facility.)

The House bill came before the Select Oversight Committee on Corrections (SOCC) in October, for their review and recommendations. The committee opposed total privatization, stating that at least 30-40% of the prisons should *not* be privatized. Their report addressed several other problems with the existing CCA contract. For example, CCA will not allow any prisoners with AIDS in their prisons, and has a cap of \$4,000 for medical expenses per prisoner per year. Any prisoner who costs more than that, has to be covered by the state. The implications for medical care for prisoners in these facilities is obvious.

When CCA announced its plans to privatize all the Tennessee prisons, an explosion ripped through the state. The Tennessee State Employees Association (TSEA) immediately began to mobilize, as did employees of the Department