

[home](#) / [subscribe](#) / [donate](#) / [tower](#) / [books](#) / [archives](#) / [search](#) / [links](#) / [feedback](#) / [events](#) / [faq](#)

"America's Best Political Newsletter" Out of Bounds Magazine

counterpunch

edited by alexander cockburn and jeffrey st.clair

The New Print Edition of CounterPunch, Only for Our Newsletter Subscribers!

JAMES BROWN: THE SOUL WILL FIND A WAY

It's been a year since he died and now Kevin Gray does full justice to the life and art of this incredible man: his roots in South Carolina; his brutal childhood; his irrepressible talent; his leadership of black America; his never-ending creativity. Exclusively for CounterPunch subscribers here is a definitive portrait of one of the most amazing and inspiring Americans in the nation's history. Get your copy today by [subscribing online](#) or calling 1-800-840-3683 Contributions to CounterPunch are tax-deductible. [Click here to make a donation](#). If you find our site useful please: [Subscribe Now!](#) CounterPunch [books](#) and [gear](#) make great holiday presents.

[Order CounterPunch By Email for Only \\$35 a Year and Receive a Free Copy of "Imperial Crusades: a Diary of Three Wars" by Cockburn and St. Clair](#)

Today's Stories

December 22 / 23, 2007

Ralph Nader
[Politics and Profits: How the Oil Cartel Gets Its Way](#)

December 21, 2007

John Ross
[New Massacres Loom in Mexico](#)

Jacob Hornberger
[Nothing Can Morally Justify the Invasion of Iraq](#)

Dick J. Reavis
[A Way Out of the Newspaper Abyss](#)

Jeff Cohen and Norman Solomon
[The 2007 P.U.-litzer Prizes](#)

Peter Morici
[Business as Usual as Recession Looms](#)

Jack McCarthy
[Let Us Now Praise Judith Regan \(Even If She Did Sleep with Bernie Kerik\)](#)

Raúl Zibechi

Weekend Edition
December 22 / 23, 2007

13 Years of Meanness

Repealing California's Three Strikes Law

By SETH SANDRONSKY

Thirteen years is enough. It is time to repeal California's Three Strikes law, passed by lawmakers and voters on the watch of former GOP Gov. Pete Wilson in 1994.

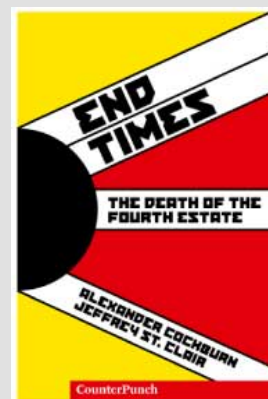
The Inland Empire (San Bernardino and western Riverside counties) is headquarters of Families United for Prison Reform, of which Annie Smith is the executive director. She and scores of volunteers statewide are seeking to change the political conditions of California's prison growth. To this end, their task is to gather 434,000 verified voter signatures by Feb. 25 to put the Sentencing and Parole Reform measure on next November's general election ballot.

This measure has two main parts. The first would roll back the Three Strikes law, which requires longer prison sentences (25 years-to-life) for individuals who have committed repeat, serious or violent felony offenses. The second part of the Sentencing and Parole Reform proposal would allow for the re-sentencing of prisoners convicted under Three Strikes.

There were 8,212 California prisoners sentenced under the Three Strikes law this September 30. That figure compares with 7,945 third strikers a year earlier, an increase of 3.3 percent.

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, which now holds 173,000 prisoners (double the design capacity), has an \$8.75 billion budget for the current fiscal

Now Available!
How the Press Led
the US into War



END TIMES:
The Death of the Fourth Estate
Alexander Cockburn
Jeffrey St. Clair

[Buy End Times Now!](#)

New From
CounterPunch Books

The Secret Language
of the Crossroads:
HOW THE IRISH
INVENTED SLANG
By Daniel Cassidy

WINNER OF THE
AMERICAN BOOK AWARD!

[Sex and Revolution](#)**Steve Early**[How the Presidential Candidates Made Me an Atheist](#)

David Macaray

[Union Aftermath](#)**Patrick Bond**[Zuma, the Center-Left and the Left-Left in S. Africa](#)

Lakota Freedom

Delegation

[A Declaration of Independence from the USA](#)**Website of the Day**[Solomon v. Beck: Tale of the Tape](#)**December 20, 2007**

David Rosen

[Mitt Romney's Secret Life as a Pornographer](#)**Alan Farago**[The Huckster and the Wreckage: Jeb Bush and the Subprime Mortgage Crisis](#)

Laura Carlsen

[Standing Up to NAFTA](#)**Ashley Dawson**[The Return of the Bread Riot](#)

Wayne Smith

[and Jennifer Schuett Cuba Changes, US Policy Stagnates](#)**Website of the Day**[How to Talk to a FoxNews Reporter](#)**December 19, 2007**

Saul Landau

[Is the NIE Bush's Watergate?](#)**Paul W. Lovinger**[Hillary the Hawk](#)

Norman Solomon

[The Mad Corporate](#)

year, or 8.5 percent of state spending. According to the non-partisan Legislative Analyst's Office, the Sentencing and Parole Reform proposal would lower such spending "potentially a few hundred million dollars initially, increasing to the low billions of dollars annually, primarily due to reduced prison operating costs."

On a related note, California is facing a \$14 billion budget deficit for the coming 18 months. Accordingly, the math of the current prison overcrowding matter is simple, say the measure's proponents. Cutting the number of prisoners would lower the number of state prisons.

That action would also reduce the state deficit. This would lessen the need to raise taxes for more revenues and to make cuts in human services. So reducing the CDCR budget appears to be the fiscally "conservative" thing to do. But there are many moving parts in this story as prison reformist pressure grows from the grassroots.

A case in point is the labor union for correctional officers who work in prisons, not happy about the prospect of early releases on parole for third strike or other sentenced prisoners. Take the California Correctional Peace Officers Association's opposition to the proposed plan of GOP Gov. Schwarzenegger to save the state \$250 million through early releases of 22,000 non-violent prisoners, The Sacramento Bee recently reported.

No doubt prison reformers are keeping their eyes on this development. Smith's group will need to craft a political strategy to deal with the political "juice" of the 31,000-member CCPOA, as an unclear number of its rank and file face the prospect of possible job layoffs in response to a fall in the prison population.

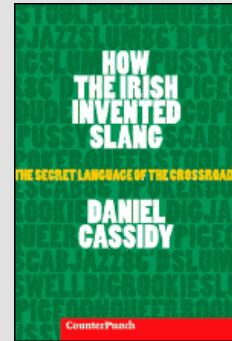
In brief, the political contours of what is unfolding around the fiscal crisis of the state casts new light on the official narrative of Three Strikes law proponents, who have and do claim the moral high ground on the public's legitimate right to be safe and secure. The law's backers said then and say now that it is a necessary tool in the "tough on crime" toolbox campaign against criminals.

Against that backdrop the red ink is flowing for the California budget in part due to the housing market crash and resulting drop in property and sales tax revenue. Annie Smith's group swims in these waters of social instability.

Families United for Prison reform does not stand alone in its dissonance with the view that sentencing reform is an idea whose time has come today. Take a new study by the JFA Institute, which says policymakers have not made the public safer by locking up criminals for longer stretches. "California's "Three Strikes" law has had a number of evaluations; almost all found that it failed to reduce crime," according to the JFA. The study, [Unlocking America: Why and How to Reduce America's Prison Population](#), came out in late November].

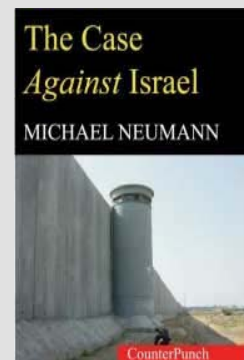
If crime reduction is not the outcome of the Three Strikes law, then public policy around prevention of lawbreaking needs to be rethought. For more information, contact: www.ctddreams.org, or call (916) 308-3441; Families United for Prison Reform at www.californiaprisonreform.org and (951) 210-9149.

Seth Sandronsky lives and writes in Sacramento ssandronsky@yahoo.com.

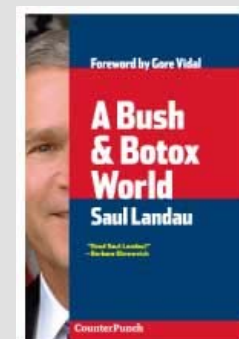
[Click Here to Buy!](#)

Cassidy on Tour
[Click Here for Dates & Venues](#)

"The Case Against Israel"
Michael Neumann's
Devastating Rebuttal of
Alan Dershowitz

[Click Here to Buy!](#)

Saul Landau's Bush and Botox World with a Foreword by Gore Vidal

[Click Here to Order!](#)

Grand Theft Pentagon
How They Made a Killing on
the War on Terrorism