

## Ten arguments against prison

Prison means isolation, alienation, poverty and violence. Prison is a method used by the state to deal with social problems. Prison is supposed to punish, scare and „resocialize“ you, i.e. reintegrate you into society. But you have hardly any opportunity for self-determination and are isolated from the rest of society. Every third person ends up back inside after release. Prison is a violent and monotonous place. The authoritarian penal system reinforces discrimination and economic exploitation. Jails therefore do not serve to reduce violent behavior between people, but rather reinforce it.

### 1. Jail does not solve social problems

Laws are designed to hit the poor harder than the rich. Minor thefts or not being able to pay bills can put you behind bars, while you don't have the money for lawyers. About 2/3 of the crimes prosecuted are property crimes - if you numb poverty-related stress and psychological suffering with drugs, you are criminalized. Violent acts against people play a minor role. People traumatized by discrimination and patriarchal violence are even punished for the consequences of their trauma. Social problems are locked away instead of being solved.

### 2. Jail means exploitation

In 13 of the 16 German federal states, work is mandatory in jail. Inmates get about 1-3 EUR per hour and have no pension claims. People in prison are poor. At the same time, products in the jail store are much more expensive than outside. If you don't want to be locked up all day and want to buy tobacco or chocolate for example, you adapt to these unfair conditions. Jail labor is a profitable source of income for many companies, while the operation of the jail is financed by tax revenues. The costs of operating a prison are shouldered by society, while the profits are privatized.

### 3. Jail makes you sick

Jail is a bad place to cure physical and mental illness. Medical care is poor and there are few places for therapy. The healthcare system is a class system - people often have pre-existing diseases due to poverty. The whole prison structure makes people get even sicker. The medical service is characterized by a lack of staff and lack of consultation hours. Lack of self-determination, one-sided physical activity, hours of confinement & lack of social contact put such stress on the psyche that physical problems are the result.

### 4. Jail leads to social isolation

In jail, almost all opportunities to be close to your friends, children and family are denied. There is one supervised visiting hour per month, and the transportation costs to the prison are often expensive for family members. The remaining ways of communication (phone calls, writing letters) are highly regulated and overpriced. In Zeithain Penitentiary, for example, a call to the German mobile network cost 0.70 cents/minute. It is not possible to book flat rates or choose a cheaper provider. In many jails, only a few numbers from a fixed list may be dialed. Letters can be checked and sometimes even confiscated. As a result, information from the outside does not reach inmates at all or is very delayed. People become socially isolated and lose contact with their former environment. How these circumstances can be compatible with the goal of resocialization is a mystery.

### 5. Jail is supposed to break people

Everyday life in prison is a chain of many senseless rules. Sleeping, eating, going to the toilet, going around the yard, working, being creative, being close to others; everything is regulated and is in the hands of third parties. People in prison are denied their independence and dignity. The structures in prisons are specifically designed to strengthen interpersonal violence and break solidarity. For example, you can

get prison privileges or benefits if you „cooperate“ to the disadvantage of other inmates. If you stand up for others, there is a high probability that you will be transferred. If you resist, you face cell searches, confinement and loss of „privileges“. All of this puts tremendous pressure on your psyche. It is no coincidence that the suicide rate in prison is much higher than outside.

### 6. Resocialization does not exist

Again and again, „resocialization“ is used to mask the violent nature of the penal/prison system. Resocialization in a violent place, where you are deprived of your independence, isolated from your environment, forced to follow rigid rules and exploited, is in itself contradictory. The prison system is contrary to the idea of resocialization. Processes of socialization in prison are unsuitable as a preparation for a life in freedom. Reflection on behavior under coercion is impossible. Even if therapies took place of one's own free will, there would be too few places for all inmates. In Germany, the open prison system, which most closely resembles living conditions on the outside, is under-occupied, while the opposite is true of the closed prison system.

### 7. Jail reproduces discrimination

People who experience poverty, racism, who do not fit into gender norms, who experience other forms of discrimination, or who suffer from mental illness are more likely to be incarcerated than others. This occurs, for example, through alternative prison sentences or racist police controls. The biographies of incarcerated people are often marked by interpersonal and family violence. Jail does not provide any support or improvement in this context. Instead, everyday life in prison is marked by violence. The prison staff and the inmates, who are in a higher position in the hierarchy, oppress the weaker ones. In this way, the power relations that already exist outside prison also persist inside.

## 8. Punishments and measures inside jails are torture

Prison is a form of punishment. But the violent and humiliating treatment of imprisoned people does not end there. In prisons, there are other ways of sanctioning undesirable behavior, such as deprivation of yard time, solitary confinement in a bunker, or keeping the lights permanently on in the cell. In Germany, solitary confinement is a completely legal option. There, people can not only be locked up in isolation from other people. They can also be deprived of any sensory stimulation. This extreme form of isolation is also called white torture, because it leaves no physical traces. Torture - no matter in which form - destroys the psyche of the human being.

## 9. Jail stigmatizes for life

Although incarcerated people have served their „crime“, according to the logic of punishment, they continue to be discriminated against after release. They face disadvantages in finding jobs, in the housing market, in receiving pensions, and in interpersonal relationships. The stigmatization of people with prison experience further hinders their reintegration into society. The poverty that brought most of them to prison is worse afterwards. Every third person ends up in prison again after release.

## 10. Jail does not protect people affected by structural violence

Criminal laws primarily protect property and positions of power, not people. Victims of (sexualized) violence repeatedly report the retraumatizing effects of criminal trials. The focus is on punishment and not on rehabilitation. In the end, neither the suffering of the victims is healed nor the violent behavior of the offenders is reduced. On the contrary: in prison, the future Nazis are recruited and toxic images of masculinity are reinforced. Prison is an obstacle to addressing and dealing with discrimination and violence in society.

### Summary:

The judicial system and jail affect your everyday life and the entire scope of society. Yet punishment and conditioning already begin within family, school, work, and government agencies. There, our behavior is shaped by the use of pressure. The greater the alleged misconduct, the greater the punishment.

A large percentage of prisoners are in jail for poverty-related offenses. We demand that social inequality is problematized and not that the behavior of individuals is criminalized.

We want a society in which it is possible to live together without violence and in a self-determined manner. To achieve this, people must be able to take responsibility for their behavior. We do not solve problems by locking up people. People need active support in dealing with violent behavior. We also need structures to support those affected by violence. We need a culture of direct intervention and action against discrimination and violent behavior.

**We don't want a queer, vegan jail with free phone and internet, we want no jail at all.**

**Prison cannot be improved, it is a problem as a whole system!**



# 10

# ARGUMENTS AGAINST PRISON