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Dave Sprout Interview, 2018

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Bucknell: Occupied
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Jennifer Thomson, interviewer (JT)
Dave Sprout, interviewee (DS)

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JT: Hello and welcome to Bucknell: Occupied here on 90.5 WVBU, Lewisburg this is DJ [Anaris] in the studio again after a very long 14 month hiatus. It's good to be back in the studio. And to restart the show for this year. I have my show's most frequent and most welcome guest--Dave Sprout from the Lewisburg prison project. Welcome to the show. Dave

DS: Thank you, Professor, glad to be here, kind of.

[LAUGHS]

JT: So tonight we're gonna be talking first and foremost about the SMU unit. The Special Management Unit at USP, Lewisburg, which is just up the road from campus here. We're gonna be talking a bit about the impending closure of that facility, some enduring issues that are still at the facility for the inmates, and then we're gonna broaden out and talk about some of the issues going on in PA Department of Corrections. So Dave, just for people that, you know, maybe have missed one of your shows in the past, I'm wondering if you can just talk to us for a minute about what is the organization you work for what is Lewisburg Prison Project?

DS: Sure, the Lewisburg Prison Project is a nonprofit prisoner's rights organization. What we try to do is deal with conditions of confinement for inmates mainly in the middle district of Pennsylvania and we deal with county, state and federal prisoners in the middle district. And we don't deal with any criminal matters only conditions of confinement and our main focus, the last probably nine years has been USP Lewisburg because of the Special Management Unit, but also in the middle district of Pennsylvania, there are two other USP or penitentiaries. There's USP Allenwood, and there's USP Canaan, and and there's USP Lewisburg, which I believe there - - we're the only judicial district that has three penitentiaries. So our main focus of his on the federal system, but we do deal with county and we have thirty-three counties, and I believe there's 14 state institutions and the federal penitentiaries that we deal.

JT: So in terms of you know what makes USP Lewisburg special. Can you walk us through that?

DS: Sure. In around 2009. The Bureau of Prisons came out with a program statement regarding Special Management Units, and at the time, Lewisburg -- the penitentiary Lewisburg -- was chosen to where... to be one of the facilities for the Special Management Unit and it has been ever since from 2009. Now, most of the institution is Special Management Unit. There are a couple blocks of what they call cadre of inmates which are really general population penitentiary inmates for working and things like that. But the Special Management Unit is a lockdown program where the guys are in their cells 24 hours a day. Most of them double cell.

They are by policy supposed to get one hour of rec five days a week. Sometimes they choose to do that, other times they are not allowed to do that. So almost the entire time very Special Management Unit they are locked in their cells with another inmate. So so this type of conditions have fostered many many issues at at Lewisburg that we feel have been unconstitutional. And even more, possibly criminal at some points in times, but that but that's what the Special Management Unit here at Lewisburg is.

JT: So before we talk a little bit about some of the violations that have happened can you just give listeners a sense of what is it that inmates can actually do with their time during those 23 hours. Do they have any options for how to spend their time?

DS: Well, really they have not. They are for this so-called program that they are in they received booklets under their doors to to fill out. These are puzzle books, they're crosswords, they're col -- and this is what programming them to become better inmates and better individuals. But there is no classroom work anything like that. They may have a few courses on on the radio, but generally they are locked in 24 hours a day. Some of the cells, some of the blocks the cells are 8 x 10 where two men cannot walk in the cell at the same time. So it its -- and you have to understand USP Lewisburg is one of the institutions in the Bureau of Prisons I think it was built in 1932 so the physical plant is atrocious. I believe there is one block that might have air conditioning. The air circulation the heat, the cold in the winter -- it, the physical plant is terrible for for these men plus the absolute boredom of nothing to do for for day on day. And that that's what just causes the stress level for for these men to just be out-of-control at times.

JT: What's the average length of time that an inmate can spend at the SMU?

DS: Well, when the program started in 2009 up until 2016 when there was a new program statement. It was a four phase program for the first from 2009 - 2016, and generally it was an 18 to 24 month program. With the new program statement which I believe we've had some help in possibly having the Bureau of Prisons look at some of issues they were having. It is now a three phase program, and it can be done, finished in nine to 12 to 14 months. So in some ways it has got a little bit better that way and there have been some changes made at the institution compared to the earlier days. We've been contacted by several men who are back here for their second and third times and they said things are a little bit different, a little bit better to a degree, but it's still the double cell and complete lockdown that is so difficult for the men to deal with at times.

JT: Can I ask you to talk to us a bit about some of the problems that have happened? Particularly in terms of the behavior of guards in the treatment of inmates.

DS: You have to understand at at Lewisburg in the Special Management Unit. No inmate is ever around staff when they're not in restraints. So any time an inmate goes out to rec, or goes out for a shower, they have to be cuffed behind their back and be taken out of their cell. So there's really very little threat to staff at Lewisburg, we believe, but some of the issues -- one of the main issues that that have happened and is still going with the double celling is if you have an

issue with your cellmate that when you try to get out of that cell assignment and if staff does not allow that to happen if you have to take things, matters through your own hands, either by assaulting your your cellmate which will get you moved, or if you refuse to go back in the cell, or refuse your cellmate to come back in because you are not compatible -- you generally will be put in what's called hard restraints for this, even though you're asking is just to be separated from someone that you're not compatible with. And that is lawsuit -- the Richardson lawsuit that is still ongoing. Were still trying to make it class-action, but it was filed in 2011 and it is still ongoing. So we have not made much headway litigation-wise regarding that issue. But it still is certainly one that is ongoing and a concern.

JT: Can you tell us, what does that mean to put an inmate in hard restraints and then can you give us a bit more detail about the case?

[CROSSTALK]

DS: Sure. If your-- if you're going to be put in hard restraints, you're taken out of your cell, taken to usually off the block to shower area, your stripped down, you're put in paper clothes, and then you are shackles are attached to your legs, you-- a Martin or belly chain is put around your chest or belly, and cuffs are attached to that with black box cuffs., meaning you cannot move your wrists, and then you are placed in a cell until staff decides that that you could come out or you would agree, possibly to take us a cellmate who you believe there could be an issue with either that you are afraid you might get assaulted. And guys were kept this way for hours and days at a time -- and again in the Richardson case, he was double celled, two people in the cell, being in the hard restraints -- that has changed now only one person is in the cell, but they're locked that way. And you know, we believe that that most of the men that are placed this way cannot eat, they cannot drink from the sink, they cannot use the bathroom facilities. So... and again they're in a cell by themselves, they're no threat to anyone at this point in time. So that's that's basically what the Richardson case is about. That we believe this is a completely unconstitutional condition that these men are placed in when they're in hard restraints for for wanting to not be celled with a cellmate who could possibly cause you harm.

JT: For those of you just tuning in, you're listening to Bucknell: Occupied here on 90.5 WVBU I'm talking to Dave Sprout from the Lewisburg Prison Project about USP Lewisburg. Dave, can you talk to us a bit about the upcoming closure of the SMU here at Lewisburg and its transfer to another facility?

DS: Sure, I believe it was June 6 of this year, the Bureau of Prisons sent out a notice that the SMU at USP Lewisburg would be closing within a year by 2019 at some point in time, and the SMU would be moved to a new facility in Illinois. It's at A USP Thompson and that this is where the SMU was going to be housed. The SMU will be closed at Lewisburg. Now they did not say, release the information, we gathered so far that we do not in the Bureau of Prisons has not stated what is going to happen to USP Lewisburg. Whether it's going to continue to be just a regular USP or something else or you know... We don't know that and as far as I know, nobody does as of yet. So that's certainly a concern for, you know, for staff at Lewisburg, but as for the

Special Management leaving here it's kind of a bittersweet thing for the project because we been dealing with it for, ever since 2009, and our hope had always been to stop the SMU program. To shut it down, but that is not happening because the program is moving to Thompson, where kind of, it won't be here anymore, so in that regards, possibly the new facility and the new program, things will be run properly and by policy, that is our hope. We we always believes many of the issues that happen here at Lewisburg were mainly because of the big house mentality that USP Lewisburg, the reputation that they've always had here. They take that very proudly and we believe that possibly it's one of the reasons it was even started here, but hopefully at Thompson with, you know, a new administration and new staff, and... that they will follow the program statement, and if they follow the program statements and practices of policies we do not have a problem with the SMU. But you know whether that's that culture -- the big house culture's gonna chang-- gonna follow it to Thompson. It's our understanding that the warden at Thompson is Warden Hudson who was an Associate Warden here in 2009, or 2010 or 2011, I'm not sure, but he certainly was here during the start of the program or soon after it. He certainly knew how things were run here. He he's a named defendant in a couple lawsuits that are still pending. So, hopefully, hopefully, the Bureau of Prisons. The higher higher-ups will see that the program is run properly this time, and add a new facility. We have heard from staff -- or from from some guys that there have been different groups of of correctional officers from Thompson who've been here training for a couple weeks at a time; different groups of them. Again, this is this is just our understanding.

JT: MmHm.

DS: I don't have anything official but again this this this concerns us because if they were here and warning ways of of how special management was run here that that certainly concerns us that is taken back and things are implemented the same way Thompson. But but that that shall be seen what that's going to be There there is one of there is a it's Colby uptown people lost center that's in Chicago, Illinois. They are a prisoner's rights organization and law off-- or group who deals mainly with Illinois prisoners, but it's my understanding that they will deal with the federal prison there. They are... They've been been... Their director -- I've met him, he's Alan Mills and they know about the about the SMU here and the issues that that we've had and hopefully they will be able to be on top of things out there.

JT: MmHm.

DS: So I think that that's a plus for for anybody that's going to be there. There will be another, a prisoners rights group or law office that hopefully will try to help the guys there. If, if the BoP program statement policies are not followed. So so that that was one plus of it going to Thompson that there would be another nonprofit group that will hopefully keep an eye out for the guys that are going to be there.

JT: Can you talk to us about what's going to happen or you know if you have any information about what's gonna happen to inmates currently at the SMU facility in Lewisburg?

DS: We don't know for sure, because obviously, that's not information were normally given. Again, we've heard from some guys there that they been told. Again, this is not official, but as as of September 1, that no new people were going to be coming to Lewisburg in the SMU. Now again, this is just what we've heard. I don't know if this is policy yet or not. Whether they will try to to get people out of the SMU program to move them onto another another institution before they get moved, but the Bureau of Prisons and the marshals are very good at moving inmates. So that will would not be a major issue, but I don't know. What we're hearing that the first people going to Thompson will be around the first of this year coming up er 2019.

JT: MmHm.

DS: Right now, according the BOP website. There's only about 100 inmates at Thompson and it's our understanding. They are probably workers getting the facility in ready because this, even though it's a new facility, meaning it hasn't been used, it was built about 20 years ago by the state of Illinois, but it's our understanding it never was open due to funding. So it's a newer institution, but it hasn't been operated so sure there's lots of kinks and bugs to get out. But it's our understanding that nobody in the special management unit has been sent there yet.

JT: MmHm.

DS: And we do not know exactly when that's going to be, but we will try to keep an eye soon as we can. Because mainly on the BOP website for AUSA Thompson. They still do not have any of the programs listed, any of the admission and orientation documents that would be on there to let the guys know what's expected of them. So I believe until that's starts to be showing up on the website. That there won't be anyone in the Special Management Unit. But again, these are just our speculations and thoughts because we are not privy to what the BOP is is going to do or their timeline.

JT: OK, and certainly if any information comes your way, or my way over the next month or so, I'll be sure to share it on the show here.

DS: Absolutely.

JT: Do you have any idea of what might've prompted the this move?

DS: The BOP statement was that this... they have a facility that was designated a design force, a special management type of inmate not necessarily a Special Management Unit because whatever Illinois would call that. But it was built with the idea of being a secure institution with the capabilities of having a lockdown, blocks, things like that. So that's what they're saying. I would like to think maybe there was some pressure that had been put on Washington that about what has transpired at Lewisburg in the SMU ever since it's open. Some of the lawsuits, some of the, some of the press that that it has gotten. The Marshall project and the NPR reports that have come out. Some of the District of Columbia Correctional Institute has has put out several reports about it. They deal with the District of Columbia inmates that

are here in the federal system. The Office of Inspector General has issued a couple reports. Pretty scathing about the conditions and how USP Lewisburg Special Management has been run, so I would like to think maybe we had a small part in it. [LAUGHS]

JT: Yeah.

DS: But it really doesn't matter, the reasons. If this program here is shut down that's... it's best for the guys that are there. That that's the way we look at it.

JT: And what happens once the program is switched, what happens to cases that you are currently working on?

DS: And again as I'm not an attorney [LAUGHS] my legal expertise is, is not that good. I believe the ongoing cases would still obviously go forward because the incidents we're dealing with happened here at Lewisburg. There possibly could be a question about-- again we're trying to make two lawsuits -- the Richardson case regarding the restraint issue, there's also, it's called the, the lead plaintiff is McCreary, that's dealing with mental health issues here Lewisburg and the Special Management Unit that is also trying to be made a class-action what will happen with a possible class-action with the SMU not here anymore. I really don't know the answer to that. I think we would try to persuade the court that they, the Bureau of Prisons could change it back here anytime and that it class-action should go forward it to get certified. But that would be out of my league.

JT: Gotcha.

DS: So now there are there are several ongoing, individual lawsuits. The Project and the Pennsylvania institutional law project have, there are three within the next three or four months. Now these are individual cases they're not class-action or injunctive in any way so they certainly won't have any problem with the SMU move.

JT: MmHm.

DS: Because all three of the plaintiffs in these three cases have been out of Lewisburg for years but and they have... they're regarding one was his claim was is that he was assaulted by his cellmate after staff would not move him. The other two are where staff assaulted -- allegedly's assaulted -- the inmates and that's what the lawsuits are about assault by correctional officers on the inmates. So they they will continue, in fact they're scheduled for trial and will go to trial in the next 2 to 3 months so... There are other... There are other lawsuits out there, many pro se ones. There's one regarding mail issues that are ongoing. But there, that is still pro se. There's no attorney involved. Hopefully the court will appoint an attorney for them because the mail issue is is a real concern still here at Lewisburg and it seems to be everywhere now even in Pennsylvania.

JT: Yeah.

DS: This isn't a new, really new for a lot of prisons, it's where they're basically cutting off communication with family and friends. Makes it very, very... that much harder on the guys in the Special Management Unit where a visits are not hardly allowed at all. Only by video so most guys don't want their family to come to Lewisburg to visit at by video. Phone calls are very limited, and you can get a incident report -- a false incident report -- and lose your phone privileges very quickly. So so the mail really is is the only, the main way to stay connected to family and friends and they're making that very, very difficult also.

JT: So what is the state of mail correspondence at this point, right? The different categories of mail that an inmate might be able to receive and might not have been receiving and not understood so far, what's actually going on.

DS: So in the Bureau prisons there would be general correspondence, and this would be from family, friends anyone that that and general correspondence are are opened outside the presence of the inmate, check for contraband, check to make sure there's nothing in it, and then at some point it is given to inmate. And then there's special mail, legal mail where it's treated where it is to be opened in front of the inmate. It can be checked for contraband, but it's not to be copied or read and should be logged in that it was received. Also when an inmate writes out under legal mail, they properly note that on the envelope, they seal that envelope up, give it to staff, and it should be documented as legal mail, it should be of when it was sent out. An inmate wants to write the family or friends of general correspondence they can't seal the envelope, that that mail can be open, read, copied, whatever staff wants to do with it, that's that's the difference. The problems that we're having at Lewisburg is... at what they're having, and what we've had over the years are at times letters, even even legal correspondence is not getting out. We've had, I've met with guys who said they written to the Project two, three times and we never got back with them. We try to respond to everyone not to say we don't make sometimes something falls through the cracks, but we log every letter that comes in, and we never would receive any of these letters to people who wrote to us under legal. And that that's a real concern and to us and sometimes they may not get our letters. Now again, we generally feel our mail is treated properly most of the time, and they do get a lot of letters, so I know there can be things can happen. But when letters can't go out to the court or to a project like ours, or to a private attorney well that's a real concern. The issues, you know, with family that's, you have to understand how important that is for these men to have some connection with the outside with their families, with their children, with their parents, with friends. When you are locked down like these guys are, it's really, really important. And the Bureau of Prisons tries to even say how important it is to have family connections, because it helps when somebody gets out, but then they make it so difficult to even do that any more. and I'm afraid things are going to get worse, not even here, just at the project -- or at USP Lewisburg -- throughout all correctional institutions. Unfortunately, it seems to me that there will be too long down the road that mail into almost any institutions is gonna be banned somehow, but we shall see about that. It might just be my pessimism showing. [LAUGHS]

JT: For those you to have just joined us you are tuned into 90.5 WVBU Lewisburg this is Bucknell: Occupied and we are talking about USP Lewisburg with Dave Sprout here from local organization, Lewisburg Prison Project. Anybody who's listening who might want to call in with a question. The number here in the studio is 570.577.3489 if you have a question for Dave either about the SMU unit at USP Lewisburg or about correctional issues in PA more generally, feel free to give us a call. So Dave, when we were talking a little bit earlier, we were talking a bit about what's going on in PA more generally. So as some of our listeners might know, the Pennsylvania State Department of Corrections put all of its facilities, which I think is 25...

DS: I believe that is, I kinda know what's in ours, but I believe you're probably, that's probably correct.

JT: So put all of its facilities on lockdown for about the past week after scattered reports of staff being exposed to drugs and different ones of the facilities, So I mean I saw one report coming on August 6 from SCI Camp Hill. Another report from August 13 at SEI Green, which is in Waynesville. There's been a lot of speculation in the news about which drugs exactly staff were exposed to. But a lot of ideas have sort of focused on synthetic cannabis and fentanyl and things like that. And the state's solution to this was to put the facilities on lockdown, which Dave, maybe you could talk a little bit more about what that actually means for inmates in these in these particular facilities?

DS: It would be my understanding in the DOC that lockdown would be that men are kept in their cells 24 hours a day. They were fed in their cells there. There's no recreation, there's no job, there's no shower. Unless it might, you might have a block that has a shower in the cell, of course, but... And they're fed, usually it's bagged lunch kind of thing. They are fed. I don't want to make that... but but obviously being locked in, these are these are general population. The vast majority in the state system they are not used to that. But the lockdown would be, our understanding 24-hours a day you are locked in your cell. We have heard that some of the institutions the last few days have started allowing guys to come out for showers, and starting to ease off of the lockdown, but I don't believe it's been totally lifted as of yet. At least the information that we have at this point in time. But it does sound like the superintendent is working towards that. Where the institutions will be back to normal. Because during this time, there's no visits. We had one of the attorneys from Philadelphia that's from the Pennsylvania Institutional Law project had a... their client was going to trial and she was not allowed to see her client before trial, but that case settled. So it's it's a it's a problem for everyone. Obviously for the inmates who are locked in, but no, no mail, no phone calls, no visits by family, and/or legal during the lockdown like this. This wasn't, this was almost unprecedented where it's... You know, we've seen where a certain institution could be lockdown, but the whole system lockdown. Especially when many of the institutions have had no issues with drug issues. But again, this is what was decided and they are in charge, so this is what's happened.

JT: Do you have a sense, obviously all the news reports have focused around staff exposure to drugs is that as the cause of the lockdown. Do you have any idea what other things might be going on at the same time?

DS: Well, you know, again, not being privy to everything that goes on in the institutions, you know, I do believe some of the some of the claims that I've read about in papers are dubious at best. That that that many correctional officers had become sick or or over a substance that... at least my understanding, is that some of these, if you're not smoking it or taking it internally, there's really no touching it, it usually has no reaction. So I again, a more cynical person may think there are other reasons involved, but again I don't know there's... There was earlier in August, there was a national prison strike in many of the states, and whether that had anything to do with the reaction, I don't know. Whether this was a time to try to try to get more control over the institutions by by staff. Again, I don't know, but it does seem like some of the claims were hard to fathom at times. But again they they are in charge, and they will do what they feel is best. Obviously, no correctional officers, staff, should be put in harm's way at work. And we certainly don't what that to happen, but but there there was very little talk that always correctional officers were affected, but we never heard much about any inmates being affected. And it seemed quite surprising that if the inmates had the drugs that they wouldn't be more, but again we only know what what information they let out at times. But but it has, it is leading to some very drastic changes in the Department of Corrections in Pennsylvania and and again not knowing what we've heard these these changes are going to be are very disconcerting and I do believe some will be challenged in court at some point in time. Because they certainly have seemed to go pretty heavy handedly over over these issues, at this point in time. How their, these new policies are implemented, it's always one thing to have a policy, and the next thing is how is that going to be implemented. And and that is where the meat's on the bone as it were. Because each institution kinda, even the way the policies are before this, they would not follow them exactly at each institution. So how each institution's going to implement these new policies, we'll just have to wait and see. I know our organization and many others are concerned. And will be monitoring it the best we can to make sure. Obviously, everyone should be safe, that's not a problem but that that that the men and women that are incarcerated, that they're not losing their constitutional rights that they have. So so we will be trying to keep an eye on that.

JT: So I'm wondering if we can go into a bit of specifics about the new guidelines that just got released so... I'm looking at a piece of paper here, and I think you got a better one talking about a new set of guidelines for PA state correctional facilities to be implemented over the next several months. So I'm wondering if you can call our attention to some of...

[CROSSTALK]

DS: Sure.

JT: the main, the main points here.

DS: And this is off the Department of Corrections website.

JT: Yes.

DS: So again, we're just going by what they're putting out there, but it does seem like there's gonna be no mail, no general correspondence -- again, this is not legal or special mail -- will be processed at the institution. There's a new address that's listed in St. Petersburg, Florida that all mail will be... that's where you will address any any letters to your loved ones. Anyone that's in the Department of Corrections, and again they're saying this mail will be opened, and then scanned and sent to the institution where then it will be given to the inmate. Now how that's exactly going to happen, I don't know and and how that... what's going to be the timing of this... Again, we don't know how this is going to play out. But it certainly is a major change where where you're not writing to your loved one at the institution. It's going to -- I'm assuming -- it's called Smart Communications -- I'm assuming that's a private company who has gotten a contract with the Department of Corrections to handle this mail so so that's... again how that plays out... There there certainly, again not being an attorney, but if this... if you have the opportunity to mail a letter to this place, and it is opened, it's scanned, and then it is given to the inmate. I would think that probably would would would not be against constitutional claim that that that certainly would be something that would be reasonable under under under the law. Now if these scans and letters are not given to the inmate per the law, then that's become something else. So, again, we'll just kinda have to wait and see how this system... I'm sure there will be some some bumps in the road, and I do believe the Department of Corrections are entitled to a bit of leeway to get this up and running properly. But they do have to understand that these people that that are under their care who have not done anything to to have this crisis kinda come on are entitled to some rights, too. Our main, more concern for us -- not that that's not a concern for a family -- but would be what happens to legal mail.

JT: Yeah.

DS: This would be mail that's not to be opened, not to be read or copied by by staff. Due to the nature of it being legal. I... they're saying that that this legal mail's gonna be copied in a centralized contained location in front of the inmate by staff wearing protective equipment. I don't. I'm not too smart but I don't quite understand how that's going to be... where if you have an inmate who's in the Special Housing Unit in the Department of Corrections, which they have many many inmates that are that these inmates are gonna be taken out to centralized location to watch their mail be open... Maybe it will. I don't know, I'm just a little, I find that being very difficult to to do. Then supposedly they, this is going to be recorded, that that that that the mail is not read -- I'm assuming that's the reason -- and they will be given a copy of legal mail. They won't... the original will be kept separate for a certain amount of time and then destroyed possibly. That... we have a major concern with that, so the legal mail issue, I think there's going to be many bumps in the road [LAUGHS]. Because there there's civil issues that inmates have there's many many inmates that still have ongoing criminal matters that they're dealing with, appeals, there are habeas type things that that need documents, they need inmate--er attorneys need them to sign, they need them to make sure that they're understanding what's happening with their case, I could just see where this could be a major problem. Then that certainly to us becomes a constitutional claim. If you cannot have proper contact with your

attorneys or access to the courts, and how this is going to again play out. We don't know. But, it certainly seemed like another heavy-handed... way of trying to deal with an issue that possibly could have been dealt with other ways. But again, they are in charge. Another real problem is going to be that whole books and publications cannot be sent into... it has to come from the DOC now, which is again a major problem. I can see because right now, a family if they want to send a book they could go to Amazon or Barnes & Noble at the bookstore up here, and have a book sent in, not from the family, but from...

JT: MmHm.

DS: And now it sounds like that DOC is saying that's not allowed so I don't and same way with magazines and newspapers, which again I never heard too much where the USA Today has has synthetic marijuana on it, when it comes from USA Today, but again, this, this seemed like a very heavy-handed way of dealing with these issues. But again, they are in charge, and we will try to sort them out along with many other attorneys and groups that that will try, you know, try to hold them accountable. Again, no drugs should be sent into prison, and that's understandable, but I think they certainly maybe over-stepped here, at least, as it seems, on paper. Yet how that plays out, we don't know.

JT: So we're gonna take a very brief break to listen to a public service announcement and then we will be back and continue the conversation.

JT: There's only like 10 minutes left.

JT: Welcome back you're listening to Bucknell: Occupied here 90.5 WVBU Lewisburg. We've got about 10 minutes left in the show here. Dave Sprout has been kind enough to come into the studio and spend his hour with us talking both about issues at USP Lewisburg and in PA Department of Corrections. More generally. Just before we took that break, I Dave was talking to us about recent enhanced security guidelines that have been issued for PA state facilities and particular ways in which mail and reading material are being pretty severely restricted. And Dave, I'm just wondering your thoughts on the role of privatization here, right? When you talked about the mail, you talked about how now it's gonna have to be sent to a private facility, and they're gonna, they presumably have a contract for this. In terms of books, inmates are only good to be allowed to receive e-books, which you know, sounds kinda like a private contract possibility there. So, you know, if you could just talk either in this condition, this situation, or more generally about the role of private corporations and prisons.

DS: Well, I mean, I do believe that that the private corporations that are in prison work and are trying to get the contracts for whatever may be. Whether it's food service, whether it's books, whether it's mail here. This is, kind of new, I don't think Pennsylvania at least for privatizing the institutions, that has not been, I don't believe, anything that that's gotten much traction here. Some states, that certainly is the case, but I think that the union is very strong in Pennsylvania, and again I do believe that that that the state and the federal do a better job than the private prisons, for running the prisons.

JT: MmHm.

DS: When it comes to, now the federal system has e-mail. The inmates, if you're in general population you can use email, and I do believe that's something that's gonna be pushed in the state more and more. And again that's a private company will be... the state will get money for that. It will cost, it will cost, family members or inmates to use that that service. Again, whether trying to to to weed out the mail. Obviously with with emails there's not a threat of drugs being with that, so that will be their argument, but I think part of it is where are they... Where can they make money off of the inmates and their families and by privatizing certain... well, like emails, or books, or commissary, things like that where they can get a contract, make money, and not have to deal with it, I think comes into play, too. Safety, your with with with the email as opposed to a letter, but not everyone's able to do that. The whole world is not email yet, although the students might not understand that [LAUGHS]. Some of my generation that aren't aren't capable. So again, there's a line between what what can make it safer for staff and inmates. We have no problem with that, but if things are done economically, for economic reasons, as opposed to what's best for for an inmate then there seems to be more of a problem that we would have with that. Again, the courts usually allow them to do pretty much whatever they want, so, so again it's just more public pressure or issues. If that's the case, and again the inmates are certainly not the most popular group for society, and that's understandable but it's hard on the families, and sometimes people forget, for every person that's in prison, there's usually a family and extended family that are also paying the price.

JT: And I mean, it seems like with with what you're talking about with the guidelines here, I mean, there's so much, there's so much emphasis on information control, right? Whether it's coming through correspondence with somebody or through receiving something that's already been written.

DS: Right, and we had... I know the Pennsylvania, er, Philadelphia office has had issues several months ago with some of the prisons saying, not allowing self-help material to go in, because obviously we have some attorneys, but they're overworked and they can take... you know, a very small percentage of the cases that are out there. So a lot of the guys do a pro se and they really rely on these pro se forms.

JT: MmHm. MmHm.

DS: And information that they can get out, and it will be interesting because the court, the federal system have had forms and things that they can send to inmates. So it will be interesting to see what the DOC does with court filings and court documents. Are they going to be considered legal mail or are they going to be sent to Florida and come back? That's another, again, wondering how that's going to play out, and things that have to be worked out. Because we believe that even though a person's incarcerated, they have not given up all of their rights. And access to court is certainly one of them that even the Supreme Court has said that an inmate still has that right.

JT: Right.

DS: And it seems like they may be limiting that in some ways, and again we can't say for sure yet because things -- we have to see how things play out. But that's a real concern for for us and anyone who does this type work, and private attorneys who have clients that are incarcerated. How how that's going to how it's gonna play out. And we just have to wait and see, I believe.

JT: In our last few minutes here, are there any other PA state Department of Corrections issue you wanted to put out there?

DS: There really isn't. One of the other, they're going to supposedly be having body scanners at all the institutions, for going, for visitors going in, for for inmates when they leave the institution. You know, again, that's something that I don't think there's going to be any way that the court would... but but if you are, if you do visit a correctional facility then you probably will be going for a body scanner to to get in. This would be anybody. So again, whether this, again if we can can stop people, from drugs going in in and correctional officers being subject to some harm, that's not a bad thing. But it has to be a balancing act, I believe, for for the inmates rights, and to try to keep their connection with their family. Which is, as everyone knows, most people that are in prison are going to get out at some some time, and losing that connection with their family will not make it easier for most guys and women.

JT: If somebody listening wants to get in touch with the prison project. How would they do that?

DS: We we can, can write to us at Lewisburg Prison Project PO Box 128, Lewisburg, PA 17837. We have moved our office, but we have not moved our address is still the same as it has been for approximately 40 years.

JT: Thank you Dave. This is really been a great interview. I'm I'm really happy that you were able to come into the studio.

[CROSSTALK]

DS: Thank you very much, Professor for allowing me to come on. And again, hopefully my last time with... [LAUGHS] and thank.

JT: Thank you, Dave. So next week at 6 PM I'll have an interview with a member of the incarcerated workers organizing committee. Earlier in the show, Dave briefly mention the ongoing prison strike, it began on August 21, which as many of you probably know, was the anniversary of the killing of George Jackson at San Quentin prison, which is out in California. And the strike is going to end on September 9. So, three days from now, and that happens to be the anniversary of the Attica uprising, that facility is obviously in New York. So one of the

members of the incarcerated workers organizing committee, which has been helping to organize the strike will be phoning in for an interview. He's a former inmate in New York State, who is both working with the IWOC, but also working on the campaign to free Mumia Abu Jamaal. So he's going to be talking both about the prison strike and about that particular campaign. For those of you that might want to send music request news or just requests for shows to be played. You can write to the show at WVBU you want to name the show, it's called Bucknell: Occupied and the mailing address is 701 Moore Avenue Box C3956 and that's Lewisburg, PA 17837. Thanks for tuning in and I will talk to you next week.

[END]