

National Coalition Against Censorship

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Christopher M. Finan
Executive Director

NCAC PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Actors' Equity Association
American Association of
School Administrators
American Association of
University Professors
American Association of
University Women
American Booksellers for Free Expression
American Civil Liberties Union
American Ethical Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Jewish Committee
American Library Association
American Literary Translators Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Society of Journalists & Authors
Americans United for Separation of
Church & State
Association of American Publishers
Authors Guild
Catholics for Choice
Children's Literature Association
College Art Association
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
The Creative Coalition
Directors Guild of America
The Dramatists Guild of America
Dramatists Legal Defense Fund
Educational Book & Media Association
First Amendment Lawyers Association
Free Speech Coalition
International Literacy Association
Lambda Legal
Modern Language Association
National Center for Science Education
National Communication Association
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Youth Rights Association
The Newspaper Guild/CWA
PEN American Center
People For the American Way
Planned Parenthood Federation
of America
Project Censored
SAG-AFTRA
Sexuality Information & Education
Council of the U.S.
Society of Children's Book Writers
& Illustrators
Student Press Law Center
Union for Reform Judaism
Union of Democratic Intellectuals
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ
Office of Communication
United Methodist Church,
United Methodist Communications
Women's American ORT
The Woodhull Freedom Foundation
Writers Guild of America, East
Writers Guild of America, West

November 28, 2018

Dean Peterson
Library Services Administrator
Florida Department of Corrections
501 South Calhoun St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-2500

Dear Mr. Peterson,

The National Coalition Against Censorship was formed in 1974 to promote freedom of thought, inquiry, and expression. It opposes all forms of censorship. On behalf of our coalition and the associations listed below, we urge you to end the growing number of cases in which *The Militant* has been impounded without any apparent justifiable cause.

The Militant, which has been published for more than 80 years, has subscribers in state and federal prisons across the United States. Yet nearly two dozen issues of the paper have been impounded by Florida prisons over the last two years without explanation. This is four times as many attempts to block the *Militant* as occurred in all the other prisons in the country over the last 10 years.

While most of those attempts were blocked, the Florida Literature Review Committee has upheld the impounding of six issues.

The recently overturned ban on issue no. 34 of *The Militant* is an example of how prison officials have abused their power to censor. They cited as justification an article about opponents of solitary confinement in California and another about the hunger strike by Oleg Sentsov, a Crimean movie director who was imprisoned in Siberia by the Putin regime. They claimed the articles could encourage "riot" or "insurrection" without explaining how.

Federal courts have repeatedly affirmed that prisoners have a First Amendment right to read, and publishers and others have a right to send them reading materials. *Thornburgh v. Abbott*, 490 U.S. 401, 407-08 (1989); *King v. Federal Bureau of Prisons*, 415 F.3d 634, 638 (7th Cir. 2005) ("Freedom of speech is not merely freedom to speak; it is also freedom to read. ... Forbid a person to read and you shut him out of the marketplace of ideas and opinions that it is the purpose of the free-speech clause to protect"). While they have restricted those rights in the interest of security, it serves no penological purpose to block the free flow of ideas that makes it possible for prisoners to consider a wide variety of viewpoints in forming their opinions.

We urge you to halt the frequent and unjustified efforts to disrupt the distribution of *The Militant*, which violate the First Amendment rights of both the publication and the inmates who wish to read it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Finan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christopher Finan
Executive Director

David Grogan, American Booksellers for Free Expression
Deborah Caldwell-Stone, American Library Association, Office for Intellectual Freedom
Pat McNees, American Society of Journalists and Authors
Mary Rasenberger, Authors Guild
Sue Udry, Defending Dissent
Phil Harvey, DKT Liberty Project
Emily Knox, Freedom to Read Foundation
Marge Baker, People for the American Way
Mickey Huff, Project Censored
Roy S. Gutterman, Tully Center for Free Speech
Ricci Joy Levy, Woodhull Freedom Foundation

David Cay Johnston, author
Aaron Gell, NYU Prison Education Project