

Mental Anguish

The New York Sun

November 30, 2004 Tuesday

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Section: EDITORIAL & OPINION; Pg. 10

Length: 685 words

Body

During the Republican National Convention, Mayor Bloomberg and the Police Department created a "little Guantanamo on the Hudson," attorney Jonathan Moore alleged last week, referring to the military detention camp in Cuba. The accusation sounds rather unimpressive, since the detainees at Guantanamo are reportedly well fed and clothed, have access to medical care and shower facilities, and Muslim detainees even have the opportunity to pray six times daily with military chaplains and copies of the Koran.

Mr. Moore must have meant his charge to be damning, since he serves as a lead attorney in a class-action lawsuit filed in federal court by the Center for Constitutional Rights and the National Lawyers Guild against the city. The suit claims that anti-Republican protesters were "detained under filthy and toxic conditions for unreasonably prolonged periods of time" at the NYPD's post-arrest processing center at Pier 57. "The mayor and the Police Department suspended the Bill of Rights for those who chose to protest the foreign, military, and domestic polices of the United States government," Mr. Moore avers.

We have some reason to be suspicious of these charges. The New York Sun's own Josh Gerstein was detained at Pier 57 during the Republican convention. He found the facility to be clean and comfortable, with benches and portable toilets provided to arrestees and carpets covering the floors. A spring-water dispenser was also accessible.

"They're calling this 'Guantanamo on the Hudson'? It's more like 'Club Med on the Hudson,'" said one arrested activist, Andrew Coamey. Mr. Coamey, who works for an AIDS housing nonprofit, Housing Works, was among 19 people arrested during a demonstration at Grand Central Station. He said conditions in a crowded precinct lock-up would almost certainly be worse than those at Pier 57. Besides, Mr. Coamey said, those who intend to be arrested should expect to endure a bit of discomfort for their cause.

"The vast majority of the hundreds of thousands of protesters were peaceful and law abiding and Pier 57 was safe and clean to hold temporarily those who weren't. The police installed lighting, ventilation, sanitary facilities, and other amenities at Pier 57, the deputy police commissioner, Paul Browne, said in response to the Center for Constitutional Rights lawsuit last week. "Those who broke the law are still complaining that they were inconvenienced by arrest, and their advocates continue to make false allegations about conditions at the pier."

We find the carping over the relatively lush conditions at Pier 57 especially surprising given the characters involved. The National Lawyers Guild - which served as a pro-Soviet front group during the 1980s and continues to support Fidel Castro's communist regime - knows a thing or two about harsh prison conditions. The guild organizes annual "solidarity" trips to Cuba, where they've been known to meet with el presidente himself. The Center for Constitutional Rights, meanwhile, has spent two decades helping activists violate the travel ban to Cuba.

So apologists for the Castro dictatorship in Cuba, where political prisoners really are rotting away in unsanitary prisons, are now complaining about prison conditions in America, where protesters - who typically took to the streets with the intention of getting themselves arrested - had to spend a few hours sipping spring water in a holding cell before being released.

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The class-action complaint, filed initially on behalf of 24 plaintiffs, frets about the arrestees being subject to "excessive handcuffing" and having "to sit or lie on the floor in order to rest." There's also some vague talk about exposure to what each plaintiff "fears may be some illness related to exposure to toxic chemicals and substances." By arresting them, moreover, the police evidently caused the protesters "emotional injury" and "mental anguish." Whatever New Yorkers think about their city, they know it's no Havana. But aren't radicals and revolutionaries, who fancy themselves acting in the tradition of Wobblies and their ilk, supposed to be tougher than this?

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