



KIM GERBICH/staff photographer

Malaya Proctor, of Indianapolis, chants with the crowd outside the Porter County Courthouse in protest of treatment of prisoners at Westville Corrections Center.

Hundreds protest conditions

By Joseph N. DiStefano

Staff writer

VALPARAISO — Almost 100 anti-prison activists paraded through the courthouse square Saturday afternoon, then tried to march on the state's toughest prison in nearby Westville.

The protesters were stopped at the gates of the Maximum Control Complex when officers drove police cars into their path.

Denouncing the institution as "racist" and "inhumane," the mostly white marchers chanted "Victory!," then retreated down the hill to their waiting vehicles.

► PRISONS

The protests were orchestrated by a coalition of Chicago lawyers, South Bend human rights advocates and Indianapolis ex-prisoners who have been trying to shut MCC since it opened in 1991.

The 46 MCC inmates are kept in solitary confinement for at least 23 hours a day. Visits are limited. Prison officers have admitted problems with water and heating systems.

MCC is modeled after the 30-year-old federal prison in Marion, Ill., where New York crime boss John Gotti was incarcerated last month.

At Marion, "the mens' vision becomes blurred, they lose the ability to concentrate, they become paranoid," said Lourdes Lugo-Lopez,

See PROTEST, B2



KIM GERBICH/staff photographer

Chicago attorney Erica Thompson, left, and Sister Landia of Chicago join in a protest march on the Porter County Courthouse in Valparaiso Saturday.

Protest

From Page B1

whose uncle, Puerto Rican independence fighter Oscar Lopez-Rivera, has spent five years there for "seditious conspiracy."

The protesters said Marion-style prisons violate human rights.

Chicago attorney Tim Lohraff said he met Friday with three MCC prisoners active in an on-and-off hunger strike. He said the three were beaten and sprayed with hoses.

But state Sen. Bill Alexa (D-Valparaiso), who watched the Valparaiso march, said he investigated the protesters' charges — and found them groundless.

"It isn't a country club," said Alexa, who added he reviewed hunger strikers' files and found they'd committed serious crimes "both inside and outside . . . They can't expect to be treated as if it were summer camp."

Porter County resident Lynn Walker said one hunger striker was sent to MCC for stabbing her husband, a prison guard, in the face.

"I'm sure (protesters) are sincere," she said. "But they don't have the facts."

Protester Virginia Burns, of South Bend, admitted never having visited MCC, but said she's still certain it's "the worst institution in the country."

She denounced crime fighters who call for tough punishment. "That's a racist, ignorant, uneducated response," she said.

Marcher Eric McCauley, of South Bend, agreed prisons like MCC are effective at breaking inmates' wills. But he said most prisoners are eventually released — and that MCC makes inmates especially dangerous once they're free.

Indianapolis ex-convict Achebe Lateef called MCC a "Clockwork Orange Behavior Modification Center," recalling the Stanley Kubrick film portraying government-sponsored psychological torture.

Lateef said the protest marked "Indiana Prisoners' Solidarity Day" for inmates across the state.

On July 10 state officials declared lockdowns at the 1,300-prisoner Indiana State Prison in Michigan City and in half the 3,200-prisoner Westville Corrections Center.

State prison spokesman Kevin Moore said Friday that inmate fighting forced the ISP lockdown, while the WCC action was to block a threatened protest.

On Saturday, corrections Capt. Charles Reed said he was "not sure" if the WCC unrest was related to the march.