

# 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, appearing to read "Chris Finan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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 Rights & 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