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Prisoners Strike in Georgia

By **SARAH WHEATON**

In a protest apparently assembled largely through a network of banned cellphones, inmates across at least six prisons in Georgia have been on strike since Thursday, calling for better conditions and compensation, several inmates and an outside advocate said.

Inmates have refused to leave their cells or perform their jobs, in a demonstration that seems to transcend racial and gang factions that do not often cooperate.

“Their general rage found a home among them — common ground — and they set aside their differences to make an incredible statement,” said Elaine Brown, a former Black Panther leader who has taken up the inmates’ cause. She said that different factions’ leaders recruited members to participate, but the movement lacks a definitive torchbearer.

Ms. Brown said thousands of inmates were participating in the strike.

The Georgia Department of Corrections could not be reached for comment Saturday night.

“We’re not coming out until something is done. We’re not going to work until something is done,” said one inmate at Rogers State Prison in Reidsville. He refused to give his name because he was speaking on a banned cellphone.

Several inmates, who used cellphones to call The Times from their cells, said they found out about the protest from text messages and did not know whether specific individuals were behind it.

“This is a pretty much organic effort on their part,” said Ms. Brown, a longtime prisoner advocate, who distilled the inmates’ complaints into [a list of demands](#). “They did it, and then

they reached out to me.” Ms. Brown, the founder of the National Alliance for Radical Prison Reform in Locust Grove, Ga., said she has spoken to more than 200 prisoners over the past two days.

The Corrections Department placed several of the facilities where inmates planned to strike under indefinite lockdown on Thursday, according to local reports.

“We’re hearing in the news they’re putting it down as we’re starting a riot, so they locked all the prison down,” said a 20-year-old inmate at Hays State Prison in Trion, who also refused to give his name. But, he said, “We locked ourselves down.”

Even if the Corrections Department did want to sit down at the table with the inmates, the spontaneous nature of the strike has left the prisoners without a representative to serve as negotiator, Ms. Brown said.

Ms. Brown, who lives in Oakland, Calif., said she planned to gather legal and advocacy groups on Monday to help coordinate a strategy for the inmates.

Chief among the prisoners’ demands is that they be compensated for jailhouse labor. They are also demanding better educational opportunities, nutrition, and access to their families.

“We committed the crime, we’re here for a reason,” said the Hays inmate. “But at the same time we’re men. We can’t be treated like animals.”