



POST OFFICE BOX 110034 BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11211

Updates for February 19th

21 Jan - A Letter From Jock Palfreeman - Anti-fascist Prisoner On Hunger Strike

Australian Anti-fascist prisoner Jock Palfreeman, who we wrote at our recent international card-writing night and who is serving 20 years in Sofia/Bulgaria for defending two Roma boys from a racist mob, has been on hunger strike from 13th January 2013. This is due to the Director of the Central Sofia Prison has ordered another punishment measure because of Jock's activist work as chairman of the Bulgarian Prisoner's Association.

MORE:

Due to this punishment Jock is now not allowed to finish his studies which is very important to him.

Jock's health is rapidly worsening as he continues his hunger strike and he is not even allowed to see a doctor as yet another repressive measure by the prison authorities.

He asks for solidarity from all of you by sending a letter to the Bulgarian Ministry of Justice. Please start putting pressure now before it's too late. Jock needs our support!

G-day guys! All at ABC,

Well, first of all, the Director stopped me from my Uni degree! See I've been helping other prisoners, obviously part of the union and solidarity with fellow convicts. So to punish me, for my solidarity ie legal advice! the Director of the prison cut me off from the computers where I write my essays. It happened several days ago after 10 guards badly beat a prisoner with batons. I helped the prisoner get legal advice and explained to him the procedure for how to instigate a criminal investigation into their attack. For that I'm being punished in that they are stopping me from my studies.

So on the 13/1/13 I started a hunger strike, I have not eaten since then, I am only drinking water drinks eg mint tea (without sugar) and normal water. I have lost a lot of weight in 9 days but I don't know how much as the prison refuses to send a doctor to me. I don't plan on stopping until I am returned to my studies, but I don't think this director will allow me, so prospects look dim! To help me, please send letters of complaint to:

Ministry of Justice
Diana Kovacheva
No. 1, Slavanska Street
Sofia 1040
Bulgaria

I recommend writing as individuals.

28 Jan - 1/2013 Statement by PP/POW Oscar Lopez Rivera

The following article by PP/POW Oscar Lopez Rivera was written to accompany anarchist author Dan Berger on his January, 2013 book tour through Germany.

MORE:

During the 3 decades I've been a political prisoner i've witnessed the exponential growth in the number of prisoners, the boom in prison construction, the accelerated deterioration of conditions and the elimination or reduction of programs and services for prisoners. These changes have created a prison environment that is more

toxic, inhumane and hostile and has elevated alienation to the highest level among prison population nationwide. Historically, the u.s. prison system has prioritized punishment over rehabilitation, but up to not long ago, it still offered a modicum of programs and services that kept alive the notion that prisoners could be rehabilitated before being released to their communities. Unfortunately most of those programs and services in the area of education, vocational training, health and recreation have been cut or reduced. Even the jobs in UNICOR, that helped prisoners earn money to meet some of their most basic needs, have been reduced and the pay has been lowered. The end result has been more and more idleness and more and more alienation.

It's important to understand that these changes aren't the byproduct of happenstance, but rather of well calculated government plans initiated and implemented by the Richard Nixon Administration (RNA). Using the law and order slogan as a cloak and the recommendations of the Kerner Commission on Crime, the RNA put together the infrastructure needed to carry out its nefarious plans. It created the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), the Law Enforcement Administration Agency (LEAA), and enacted draconian anti-drugs laws and the RICO Act. After that, the alleged War on Drugs was on. But the real war was against the ghettos, targeting primarily the African American, the Latino and the Native American communities. What the war on drugs did was to commodify drugs making them a lucrative business for banks and drug kingpins. What the real war did was to criminalize poverty, filling the prisons with mostly young African Americans, Latinos, Native American and other minorities and creating the conditions for the explosion of the population and prison construction, the exponential growth in the number of prisoners and the creation of the Prison Industrial Complex.

The state governments began replicating the Nixon plans. In states like New York, under the governorship of Nelson Rockefeller, and California, under the governorship of Ronald Reagan, draconian anti-drug laws were enacted and more and more prisons were built and filled with African Americans, Latinos and other minorities. Most of these prisoners had been convicted of small drug related crimes, and /or were addicts or nickel and dime drug sellers.

Reagan created the mythical "Welfare Queen" – his big racist card-, who lived royally by defrauding the government in order to kick start the Nixonian model of a war on crime and the alleged War on Drugs. Because Reagan had experience with the prison construction explosion, he just accelerated it once he was in Washington by enacting more draconian anti-crime and anti-drug laws. Under his administration, the construction of federal prisons started booming, and more and more African Americans, Latinos and other minorities filled them. And just like the RNA had done with the CIA's Operation Phoenix during the war against Vietnam, using heroin to fund it, Reagan's CIA used cocaine to fund the CONTRAS in order to defeat the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. And the cocaine, just like the heroin a decade earlier, served to fuel the commodification of drugs and the criminalization of poverty. It was the cocaine to fund the CONTRAS that inundated the ghettos, started the crack epidemic and exponentially augmented the number of young African American and Latinos in the Prison Industrial Complex. A decade later, the Reagan and Bush administrations picked up Richard Nixon's baton and started their own alleged anti-crime and war on drugs campaign.

The Bush Administration continued on the same path. Bush invented the image of Willie Horton -another racist calling card- to push his tough on crime agenda, and to engrave it in the minds of the majority of the American public. While the prison population grew more and more, the alleged war on drugs was filling the coffers of the banking industry and of the real drug kingpins. Who can forget the \$100 million deposit Raul Salinas de Gortari made just in one day in Citibank? While Raul was sent to prison, no one in Citibank was ever indicted for money laundering. And who owns Citibank? Who can forget Continental Bank in Florida and its drug money laundering operation? And what about major multi-national corporations profiting from the criminalization and commodification of poverty? The prison construction boom was so great that both Reagan and Bush made a big push for the privatization of prisons. Major multi-national corporations started the prison for profit business and commodified and criminalized poverty even further, earning big profits for doing it.

Many states started emulating the federal model of Super Max Penitentiary and across the nation many of them were constructed. Because I spent over 12 years in such prisons I know how deleterious they are. Amnesty

International had called them a “legal crime.” But they really are torture chambers that can destroy the mind and the spirit of any prisoner. And what makes these prisons more toxic and inhumane is that many mentally ill prisoners end up in there. Once the state mental hospitals were closed across the nation, many mentally ill persons were, and still are being, convicted and sent to prison. And some of them ended up in the Super-Max or the solitary confinement penitentiaries.

Clinton’s and Bush Jr.’s continued criminalizing poverty furthering the expansion of prisons and prisoners. Almost 2 and a half million prisoners are being warehoused in the Prison Industrial Complex. What awaits these prisoners, who for years have lived under such inhumane, toxic and hostile conditions? What does society expect of them when they are released back to their communities? How can the government justify what is happening inside its Prison Industrial Complex? Can the commodification and criminalization of poverty be brought to an end? Let’s dare to struggle to eradicate the ogre that has become the Prison Industrial Complex.

To end what I have written, I would like to do it with a bit of good news, Richard Nixon and Otto Kerner left their offices in disgrace, a good example of the hypocrisy of the campaigns to promote law and order.

29 Jan - Two-part article on Albert Woodfox, the Angola 3 and solitary confinement

We are reprinting in full, two recent articles about the Angola 3 by Katti Gray, writing for The Root.

MORE:

January 29th - Albert Woodfox: Freedom After 40 Years in Solitary?

After four decades of solitary confinement in the nation's most populated maximum-security prison -- and one of its most historically brutal -- a member of the internationally known "Angola 3" has reasonable cause to expect that he will soon be released, his attorneys and supporters say. The request to set free Albert Woodfox, 65, is being heard by the same federal judge who in 2008 ordered that Woodfox be released, a ruling that Louisiana prosecutors successfully appealed and blocked.

Woodfox and Herman Wallace, now 71, were placed in solitary confinement in 1972 -- theirs is the longest-running solo detention of which human rights group Amnesty International is aware -- after being convicted of killing a white guard at Angola prison, the slave plantation-turned-Louisiana State Penitentiary.

Both men have consistently said that they were falsely accused and that their conviction was the means by which prison officials punished the Angola 3 for their membership in the Black Panther Party. Also a member of that trio is Robert Hillary King, now 69, who was released in 2001 after plea-bargaining to a crime unrelated to the murder, a crime for which he was never officially charged, although prison officials insisted that he was involved.

As prison activists, the Angola 3 had challenged ongoing, unpunished rape of inmates -- including a system of "sexual slavery" that prison officials eventually acknowledged -- racial segregation and other adverse prison conditions. The three, who did not know one another before landing at the 18,000-acre prison farm -- named for the town where it is located, roughly an hour's drive from Baton Rouge -- initially were convicted in the 1960s of assorted robbery charges that they do not contest.

Concerning Woodfox, his lawyers say that this time around, they believe they have unequivocally affirmed several points favoring their client:

* An all-white, all-male jury -- seated in a jurisdiction where almost half the residents are black -- was wholly disinclined to consider that the Angola 3, who are black men, were innocent of killing a white prison guard, 23-year-old Brent Miller.

* State prosecutors bribed the sole, alleged witness to the killing with a weekly pack of cigarettes and better

living quarters in exchange for reversing his initial claim that none of the three was at the crime scene. Prosecutors and prison officials withheld details of that bribe and other essential information during the trial; have since contended that they lost evidence, including scrapings from the dead guard's fingernails; and refused to release inmate fingerprints to compare with fingerprints left near Miller's corpse that the Angola 3's lawyers obtained.

* Subsequent court proceedings, including Woodfox's 1993 retrial, were tainted by a pattern of excluding blacks from juries and of judges exclusively choosing whites as foremen of grand juries that decide whom to indict for trial. For that 1993 retrial, a white grand jury foreman with a high school diploma was chosen over a black candidate who had a college degree.

Racism's Pervasive Influence

"We had a jury of angry white men in 1972," Nicholas Trenticosta, a lawyer from New Orleans who mostly handles death-penalty cases and is representing Woodfox, told The Root. " ... Pure, flat-out racism is driving this train."

To amplify what the Angola 3's supporters say was the prevailing racial climate at the prison, they point to a 2008 court hearing during which Trenticosta questioned Burl Cain, installed in 1995 as Angola's warden and widely viewed as a prison reformer who has overseen a decline in violence at Angola.

(Transcript begins)

Trenticosta: OK. What is it about Albert Woodfox that gives you such concern?

Cain: The thing about him is that he wants to demonstrate. He wants to organize. He wants to be defiant.

Trenticosta: Well, let me ask you this. Let's just, for the sake of argument, assume, if you can, that he is not guilty of the murder of [officer] Brent Miller.

Cain: OK. I would still keep him in [solitary]. I still know he has a propensity for violence. I still know that he is still trying to practice Black Pantherism, and I still would not want him walking around my prison because he would organize the young new inmates. I would have me all kind of problems, more than I could stand. And I would have the [whites] chasing after them. I would have chaos and conflict, and I believe that. He has to stay in a cell while he's at Angola.

(transcript ends)

While Judge James Brady of U.S. District Court in Baton Rouge, where Woodfox's request for release is on the docket, is prohibited from commenting on cases before him, court watchers say that he is keenly aware of the racial dynamics of the Angola 3's case and the constitutional issues it raises. (Brady issued the 2008 order for Woodfox's release.)

"In 2008 Judge Brady ruled they should release [Woodfox]. I have no reason to believe Judge Brady will not rule the same way today as he did back then," said attorney Angela Allen-Bell of Baton Rouge's Southern University Law Center, a member of Free the Angola 3, a coalition of human rights groups -- including Amnesty International -- corporate moguls, philanthropists, grassroots activists and others who are helping to pay legal fees related to their cause.

If Woodfox wins his petition for writ of habeas corpus -- Latin for "free the body," a maneuver that does not address the question of innocence or guilt -- he could be retried. Or, as his lawyers are banking on, he could reach a settlement with state prosecutors, who retained a private New Orleans firm to handle the case, that would permanently end his incarceration.

The office of Louisiana Attorney General James D. "Buddy" Caldwell would not comment for this article.

The Cruelty of Solitary Confinement

As much as the Angola 3's case spotlights such concerns as racial bias in jury selection, it brings to the fore the broad subject of solitary confinement in a nation that, according to 2005 U.S. Department of Justice data -- the latest federal tally available -- holds 80,000 prisoners under such terms on any given day.

"We're asking the federal court to consider what's taken place in the state, to consider that what happened with the jury is a constitutional violation and to set Woodfox free," said Allen-Bell, author of the article "Perception Profiling & Prolonged Solitary Confinement Viewed Through the Lens of the Angola 3 Case." "We're also pushing to change the status quo."

Published in the summer 2012 edition of the University of California's Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly, that research takes aim at what Allen-Bell and others contend is the arbitrary choosing of whom to remand to solitary confinement in prisons across the United States, a process that lacks streamlined criteria for such decisions and places no limits on the duration of confinement.

That, said Amnesty International spokeswoman Suzanne Trimel, is blatant hypocrisy: "The 40-year isolated incarceration of [Woodfox and Wallace] ... is a scandal that pushes the boundaries of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and flies in the face of international standards to which the United States is a party."

Being constrained in a 6-by-9-by-12-foot, windowless cell was inexpressibly difficult, Angola 3's King, who spent 29 years in solitary confinement, told The Root. "You've got an iron bunk, suspended on the wall, and an iron bench, a small table, a commode and a sink," said King, whose jailhouse lawyering, alongside that of Woodfox and Wallace, did eventually result in Louisiana's solitarily confined inmates being allowed one hour, thrice weekly, in the prison yard.

Staying Strong in Isolation

Assuming that Woodfox is released, that leaves behind bars, at least for now, Wallace. His attorneys are also preparing to request his release.

Roughly a year ago, Woodfox and Wallace were transferred to separate Louisiana prisons, where they remain in solitary confinement and under conditions, King says, that are harsher than those at Angola. April 2013 will mark Woodfox and Wallace's 41st year in solitary confinement.

"There were some things in Angola that they don't practice at Wade Correctional Facility, where [Woodfox] is now," said King, now an Austin, Texas-based, world-traveling prison reformer and author of *From the Bottom of the Heap*, a 2008 memoir that has been revised and expanded. "He says the food at Angola was better -- though food is generally bad in any prison -- and the condition of the yard at Angola was better.

"He is separated from people with whom he was familiar," King continued. "And he is 70 miles farther away from his brother, who he can see now only while shackled and handcuffed. There are no contact visits like what he had in Angola. So of course, Albert feels these are added punishments."

Until the mid-1990s -- when the Angola 3 drew moral and financial support from a wide swath of people, including global activist Anita Roddick, founder of the Body Shop -- the men represented themselves in court matters involving conditions at Angola and other concerns.

"We were motivated by what had us in confinement," King said, "and under those conditions, we had become politically aware and politically conscious of what was going on. We operated out of a sense of consciousness and the reality that there are flaws in this system that need to be fixed."

Their activism, he added, helped them maintain their sanity and focus.

"After being in there for so long, you're not desensitized to the situation, but you build up a resistance, so to speak, against the wear and tear. You're in there ... so you have to become inured to being in there," said King, who, post prison, has lectured and lobbied globally against solitary confinement, conferring with former South African President Nelson Mandela and actor-activist Harry Belafonte, among others.

According to King, who recently spoke by telephone with Woodfox, his friend's optimism regarding his pending court case is clear. "His spirits -- notwithstanding the pressures of all this -- seem pretty uplifted," said King. "He read the argument. He read the brief, both sides. He imagines that the lawyers did a good job. His expectation is high. Ask him if he'll be coming home and he tells you, straight up, 'Yes.' "

Even amid that hopefulness, there's reason for caution.

Californian Marina Drummer -- a Bay Area nonprofit executive, coordinator of the Free Angola 3 campaign and co-founder of Solitary Watch -- said: "I can't say I'm [unequivocally] optimistic. We're dealing with the state of Louisiana ... It seems as if they'll do anything to cover their tracks. If we were going on the issue of justice, they'd all be out by now."

The state could, as it did previously, appeal to have a ruling in Woodfox's favor overturned, says attorney Allen-Bell.

After her own recent visit with Woodfox, Allen-Bell had this observation: "What I do not hear from [him] is anger or bitterness. I see them as civil rights icons, which they're very humble about ... They don't see themselves as anyone special. They were doing the human work that humanitarians do." She quotes Woodfox: " We were doing what Panthers do. This is the penalty you pay for doing this kind of stuff."

January 30th – Reforming Prison's Harshest Tactic

In December 2012 the New York Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit to curb the use of solitary confinement in that state's prisons, broadly decrying it as "extreme isolation" that imperils the physical and psychological well-being of inmates on solo lockdown and risks undermining prison safety overall.

Also in 2012, Maine lawmakers -- including a Republican governor considered tough on crime -- voted to formally ratchet back the use of solitary confinement in that state. In addition, Congress hosted a rare special hearing on the practice, highlighting the fact that the United States has no federal guidelines precisely defining when solitary confinement should begin, when it should end and which infractions merit such an added punishment for prisoners.

Prison watchers and reformers, however, say that incremental activity in 2012 does not in itself suggest that the nation is anywhere near a wholesale crackdown on what many deem to be arbitrary decisions about who is placed in solitary confinement. But in Louisiana, where the remaining two members of the Angola 3 are approaching 41 years in solitary confinement, there is cautious optimism.

"It's exactly the kind of movement on this issue that we've been pushing for," said attorney and law professor Angela Allen-Bell of Southern University Law Center. Allen-Bell is a member of Free the Angola 3, an international coalition of attorneys, human rights groups, grassroots activists and moneyed benefactors who are helping to pay legal fees related to the cause of Albert Woodfox, Herman Wallace and Robert Hillary King.

The three black men have consistently held that white officials of the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola punished them for organizing an arm of the Black Panther Party at the facility -- and, as self-taught jailhouse lawyers, for challenging systematic rape of inmates, racial segregation and other ills -- by falsely claiming that the men killed a 23-year-old white prison guard in 1972. All three, who did not know one another before Angola, landed at the prison in the 1960s after being convicted of robberies that did not involve physical assault.

Hope for One of the Angola 3

Lawyers for Woodfox, 65, say that they expect a favorable ruling in his current petition to be released, which will be heard "any day now" by the same federal judge who ordered him freed in 2008. (State prosecutors successfully appealed to have that ruling reversed.)

But Angola 3 attorneys are convinced that, this time around, they have more emphatically proved the official corruption that resulted in the 1972 conviction of Woodfox and of Wallace, 71, the other Angola 3 member still on solo lockdown.

King, 69, was released in 2001, after accepting a plea bargain on charges unrelated to the murder. King, who spent 29 years in solitary confinement, was never formally charged in the killing, although Angola officials steadfastly claimed that he was involved.

After Woodfox's current petition for release has been adjudicated, lawyers plan to pursue the release of Wallace, who is diabetic and suffers from what his supporters say is unexplained swelling throughout his body.

"My brother's hearing is bad," Vickie Taylor, Wallace's sister, a retired security guard from New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward, told The Root. "His health ain't so good. Period. He been in there so long, and that makes you feel real bad.

"But he ain't letting prison stop him," she continued. "God fixed it so that he and Albert and King remember everything from the beginning to the end ... And it was told to me by God that this is their season. My brother coming home, baby. I believe that."

A Spotlight on Solitary Confinement

Hers is a shared resolve. Other Angola 3 supporters have been fixed, not only on getting Woodfox and Wallace out of prison, but also on spotlighting the impact of solitary confinement on the broader array of people affected by it.

"Crowding, rape, long stints in solitary confinement, beatings and other abuses and forms of torture are not part of the punishment society has condoned. In fact, they are unconstitutional abuses ... precluded as torture by all international standards," psychiatrist Dr. Terry Kupers, a professor at the Wright Institute in Piedmont, Calif., told The Root. He is the author of *Prison Madness: The Mental Health Crisis Behind Bars and What We Must Do About It*.

"Even if [the Angola 3] had committed the crime for which they are accused," continued Kupers, another Free the Angola 3 coalition member, "the constitutional and legally sanctioned punishment would be time in prison, not torture in solitary."

Written comments that he submitted to the U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, which convened a hearing last June on "Reassessing Solitary Confinement: The Human Rights, Fiscal and Public Safety Consequences," noted, among other "psychopathological effects of social isolation," the "obsessive ruminations, confused thought processes ... oversensitivity to stimuli, irrational anger and social withdrawal" of some solitarily confined inmates.

Citing the research of psychologist and lawyer Craig Haney, author of *Reforming Punishment: Psychological Limits to the Pains of Imprisonment*, who testified in person before the Senate committee, Kupers added: "More than four out of five of those evaluated suffered from feelings of anxiety and nervousness, headaches, troubled sleep and lethargy or chronic tiredness, and over half complained of nightmares, heart palpitations and fear of impending nervous breakdowns ... Well over half reported violent fantasies, emotional flatness, mood swings,

chronic depression and feelings of overall deterioration, while nearly half suffered from hallucinations and perceptual distortions, and a quarter experienced suicidal ideation."

Solitarily confined prisoners self-mutilate at rates higher than those of the regular prison population. Once released from prison, they recommit crimes at higher rates, too, according to a solitary-confinement fact sheet (pdf) developed in 2011 by Solitary Watch, an online advocacy news site.

"There is more interest in the subject than there was a couple of years ago. When we started, there wasn't much interest at all," says journalist James Ridgeway, co-editor and co-director of Solitary Watch. "And so far, I don't think the effect of this new interest has changed the lives of these people at all. They are just shut away. Forgotten people -- really, disappeared people. Most of them are people who are permanently excluded. They are never going to come back. And they are in this complete limbo."

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, 80,000 inmates nationwide (more than 2.5 million people are incarcerated in U.S. prisons and jails) were in solitary confinement on any given day in 2005, which is the latest year for which federal data are available. Given that blacks and Hispanics make up a disproportionate percentage of the prison population, they also disproportionately account for those remanded to solitary confinement.

Concerning the Angola 3, the prison's warden, Burl Cain, has affirmed that he would never transfer Woodfox out of solitary confinement and into the general population. "I would still keep him in [solitary]. I still know he has a propensity for violence. I still know that he is still trying to practice Black Pantherism, and I still would not want him walking around my prison because he would organize the young new inmates. I would have me all kind of problems, more than I could stand. And I would have the [whites] chasing after them," Cain told questioner Nicholas Trenticosta, Woodfox's lawyer, during a 2008 court hearing.

Case May Bring Crucial Change

"If we prevail, the benefit will be extended to everyone who is in a similar situation," Trenticosta, of New Orleans, told The Root.

"What happens in Mr. Woodfox's case will be instrumental. It will be crucial," says Parnell Herbert, a New Orleans playwright and Free the Angola 3 coalition member.

Apart from Woodfox's petition for writ of habeas corpus, a civil lawsuit seeking \$5 million in compensation for an extended and unmerited solitary confinement has also been filed on behalf of the Angola 3.

The Angola 3 supporters contend that thus far, Louisiana's attorney general, James "Buddy" Caldwell, has been typical of prosecutors who refuse to admit that they made a mistake. (His office would not comment for this article.)

"We're not saying solitary confinement is never necessary. We're saying this is not the way to go about it," Allen-Bell says.

She continues: "The greater issue is one of prisoners routinely in this country being thrown into solitary cells for no infraction whatsoever. They're subject to what I call perception profiling: A woman who complained of being raped [by a prison guard] has the baby, then gets thrown into solitary. People who [are gay] get thrown into solitary. [So do] people who were in gangs when they were in their 20s, have tattoos on their arms still, but they're 35 now and not involved in gangs. This an arbitrary system with no legal criteria for putting people into solitary and no legal means of getting them out."

Says freed Angola 3 member King, now a globetrotting prison reformer whose 2008 memoir, *From the Bottom of the Heap*, has been revised and expanded: "The broader aspect of this -- and this is what keeps Herman and Albert and myself going -- is that we are just the tip of the iceberg. We have to convince the public of that. We have to let folks know that what's going on with regard to solitary confinement in America is totally reprehensible."

3 Feb - Update from Lynne Stewart

We've been closely following the health crisis facing Lynne Stewart and are including an update form her below.

MORE:

Family, Friends, Comrades, Supporters All,

I have been reminded of the need to update my message now that the Cancer is confirmed and we are about to start treatment. This is definitely Bad news but somehow in the toxic climate in which prisons in particular, but the whole country operates, I am determined that it can be beaten.

Factually, when I went (finally) for the hysterectomy in June of last year, a routine chest X ray showed a spot on my lung. Further Pet scans, sonograms, biopsies revealed (as of September) that there was my old Breast cancer back in my lymph node (armpit) and lung. In January another Pet scan revealed that both lungs are involved as is my scapula (maybe). So now we are working on a treatment. I am fond of and have faith in my doctor—a young woman Oncologist. Other medicos have concurred in that opinion. The treatment (Chemo, pills, shots not necessarily in that order) will be given to me in Fort Worth at a hospital called The Center, part of one of the big places here. There are Problems:

1. It Ain't New York City with Sloan Kettering or New York Hospital where I was originally treated. Cutting Edge Places —excuse the pun!
2. All things in Prison move VERY slowly, as you can see by the history here. it's now February and I have had two sets of shots, estrogen related.
3. I am still transported and held in leg irons, belly chain and cuffs for each of these trips. The guards are not unkind but of course, follow orders. It is most difficult to say the least.

Let me assure you all, though, that I am feeling good and have a high level of energy. This may change but so far so good. I do need a nap every afternoon but my doddering old age may have something to do with that !

We Might Have to Call on All you Folks if we decide to take action to Try and force the Bureau of Prisons/Department of Justice to ameliorate conditions etc. Stay tuned to the website. Ralph and our daughter, Dr.Zenobia Brown did an excellent program on WBAI (Sally O'Brien's show) and Dr. Z as we call her also went on with Bob Lederer. These are archived. My good friends and comrades, Mya Schon and Ralph Schoenman, along with Ralph also did a great show on Taking Aim, a web broadcast that has been distributed widely on the net. I am hoping that my electronic geniuses can hook those up to this site. From the heart —all of this work and running both ways—them to me and me to them !!

Meanwhile, it is dreary in Texas. I will soon be sharing with you our petition for Cert to the Supremes and the outlook there—also dreary !!

I urge all of you to carry on our work politically. Now More than Ever, all able bodied and those less so, need to be out there harassing the enemy and organizing the People, Yes!

4 Feb - Leslie states "Not Guilty," judge convicts, but stays sentence

Leslie Feinberg recently declared she/ze was "not guilty" on a charge of 3rd degree gross misdemeanor (property damage) for spray painting "Free CeCe Now" on the walls and pillars of the courthouse/jail in Minneapolis. Based on police reports of Leslie's actions, which were not in dispute, the judge found Leslie guilty.

MORE:

Asked if she/ze had anything to say before sentencing, Leslie said: "I am a revolutionary journalist and member of the National Writers Union, UAW Local 1981. I am not guilty of any wrongdoing. I delivered the people's verdict on the jailhouse walls. The real crimes are going on behind the walls where CeCe McDonald is

imprisoned.”

“By sentencing CeCe McDonald to prison, Minneapolis sent a green light to neo-fascists at a time of growing racist lynching and massacres in the U.S. CeCe was attacked and survived at a time when an increasing number of transwomen of color are being assaulted and murdered.

“Racist mass incarceration is the crime, as even a former Hennepin County prosecutor admitted in an article—that Minnesota has the greatest racist disparity in sentencing of any state in the U.S.

“The world is watching CeCe McDonald’s struggle. I’m proud to add my voice to the tens of thousands of people who demand: Free CeCe!”

The judge admitted that Leslie’s action was an act of “civil disobedience.”

Then the judge stayed the imposition of sentence for 2 years. During that time, Leslie is on informal probation. This means if Leslie is not convicted of any additional “property damage” for 24 months, the 3rd degree gross misdemeanor charge will be dismissed.

The prosecutor did not pursue court expenses or a fine. Leslie walked out of the courtroom without having to perform community service or report to a probation officer.

Leslie was ordered to pay more than \$1300 for the erasure of the political demand she/ze wrote on the wall. Leslie stated after court, “I refuse to pay for the censorship of the political demand Free CeCe Now!”

Local Free CeCe organizers were present in the courtroom. Many CeCe supporters in the U.S. and around the world sent tweets, e-mails, faxes, and made phone calls to help deliver the people’s verdict—Free CeCe!—to the Minneapolis mayor and prosecutor.

5 Feb - Jeremy Hammond in Solitary Confinement

FreeHammond.org reports that Jeremy is currently being held in solitary confinement. The Jeremy Hammond Support Network has issued a statement regarding Jeremy’s confinement. We quote it in full, as it is a succinct and insightful response to the news. Also, Jeremy has a hearing on Thursday, February 21st and his support crew is asking for folks to turnout and show physical support.

MORE:

We have received notification from Jeremy’s defense team that Jeremy has been placed in solitary confinement for an undetermined amount of time. I cannot go into the reported reasons for this gross attack on Jeremy’s rights but as a free citizen of this Country, I do have the right to find it very coincidental that Jeremy is in Solitary Confinement at the same time a motion to recuse Loretta Preska is being argued. This is an outrage and one that cannot be tolerated. While Jeremy has now lost everything he loves, freedom, the ability to teach other inmates while he is incarcerated, reading and sharing his library of books etc, he is still able to receive some mail. It is very important at this time that we send those letters to Jeremy. It may be all he has left. This is really unacceptable but it is my belief that this is just another way to silence Jeremy and any mention of wrongdoing in this case. We stand in solidarity with Jeremy Hammond and hope that you will join us in fighting for Jeremy when he is not able to fight for himself.

February 21st - Jeremy Hammond Courthouse Support Rally

Jeremy Hammond Courthouse Support Rally, Thursday, February 21st at 9:30am Foley Square NYC. Statements will be given by the following.

Jason Hammond, Jeremy’s twin brother.

Alexa O’Brien, founder of the US Day of Rage and exceptional journalist covering the Wikileaks Gitmo files and trial of Bradley Manning.

Heidi Boghosian, the Executive Director of the National Lawyers Guild.

Micheal Ratner, the President of the Center for Constitutional Rights.

Andrew Blake, from the news agency RT will be there to report on the days events.

On February 21st at 10:30, Jeremy will have a court date at MCC. We believe this is the date on which Loretta Preska will decide whether or not to recuse herself from this case. We will be present and we encourage people to come show Jeremy support by meeting in Foley Square outside the MCC before going into the courthouse, at 9:30. We will have a short press conference to speak about the political nature of Jeremy's case, seeing how he has been in jail for almost a year, without bail and with a biased judge. The Jeremy Hammond Defense Committee look forward to meeting Jeremy's supporters in NYC!

February 14th - The New Bradley Manning: Whistleblower Jeremy Hammond Moved To Solitary

Jeremy Hammond, an Internet hacker and Wikileaks contributor is being called the “other Bradley Manning” as he is moved to solitary confinement this week. It’s an unconstitutional attempt to silence the activist responsible for leaking 5 million emails that exposed widespread corruption within private corporations and foreign governments.

Hammond has been held without bail or trial for more than 11 months. He could face life in prison for releasing millions of emails from

Stratfor, a security firm contracted by governments and private companies.

The 27-year-old activists’ lawyer asked Federal Judge Loretta Preska to recuse herself from the case in December because her husband worked for a client of Stratfor. Preska’s husband was among those who had his email hacked when the cache of emails was made public on Wikileaks in early 2012. Despite this clear conflict of interest in the case, Preska has not recused herself.

The massive leak revealed crimes committed by Stratfor when the firm gathered information to help Goldman Sachs employees engage in insider trading. Additionally Stratfor employees had knowledge that up to 12 members of Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) knew of Osama bin Laden’s presence in Pakistan long before the U.S. raid in May 2011.

Dozens of foreign governments and corporations were implicated in similar crimes exposed by the major email release. The firm’s use of cash bribes was so regular; emails show Stratfor CEO George Friedman retaining a law firm to protect employees against investigations into widespread corruption.

In August 2011, Stratfor CEO George Friedman told his employees “We are retaining a law firm to create a policy for Stratfor on the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. I don’t plan to do the perp walk and I don’t want anyone here doing it either.”

Hammond, the man merely responsible for exposing these widespread crimes has been the only individual punished. Supporters maintaining the Free Jeremy Hammond blog report this week that the hacktivist will remain in solitary confinement for an unknown amount of time, virtually cut off from any interaction with the outside world.

“At this point, he will not be able to receive visits (other than his lawyers) and will have heavy restrictions on phone calls. He is still able to receive mail, although less regularly,” write supporters in a post last week.

Hammond has been dubbed by some as “the other Bradley Manning” for receiving similarly harsh treatment during his unconstitutional imprisonment.

Manning has been held for nearly 1,000 days without charge or trial for leaking over 500,000 classified intelligence documents to the Wikileaks website. The documents revealed widespread corruption and war crimes committed by U.S. forces during wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

6 Feb - What it Means –What it Doesn't, by Mumia Abu-Jamal

We have a couple of recent writings by Mumia Abu-Jamal that we've pasted below.

MORE:

For the second time in American history, a Black man takes the office of U.S. President – a feat not thought possible just a few years ago. The re-election of Barack Hussein Obama to the nation's highest office is indeed a watershed moment and a tribute to a man who is a true master of the game of politics.

Few politicians could've prevailed against the headwinds bearing down upon him – a mobilized and highly motivated opposition, the monetary windfall of campaign riches made possible by the Supreme Court's Citizen's United ruling, and the candidacy of an exceedingly wealthy and utterly ruthless opponent 'Mitt' Romney.

Despite occasional setbacks, few politicians, Black or white, have had careers so blessed.

But the conditions of Black Americans could hardly be called blessed.

By all the measurements by which we rank life, Blacks rank at the bottom, where life is a nightmare. Health, education, employment, life expectancy, mortality, incarceration – you name it—the figures betray a life at the margins; lives at the bottom.

Moreover, it is unrealistic to expect any change for the better in 4 years – no matter who is president –nor what color he or she is.

Them's the facts.

It is a great and remarkable symbol that a Black person is elected – and re-elected – to the presidency.

It is a dazzling spectacle.

Yet, it remains a spectacle.

The lives of everyday Black folk are just as grim as they were 4 years ago.

They still must seek a way out of the prison-keep that is America. A new, dark-skinned warden doesn't change that.

Education will still be a dizzying maze for millions of children, who leave school bitter, and uneducated.

The police are a repressive presence all day long, making life unbearable.

And behind it all stands what legal scholar Michelle Alexander calls "The New Jim Crow" (also the title of her book), a system of oppressive containment on a scale that the world has never seen.

A one day celebration; and four more years of hell.

February 10th – The Last Day

One day, one day relatively quite soon, the administration under President Barack Hussein Obama will come to an end, and enter the realm of history.

Eight years will have passed, true. But it will pass with a swiftness that is difficult to articulate.

Barack Obama, son of a Kenyan goatherd and unsuccessful civil servant, this most unlikely of candidates, will yield his place to another.

And while history will have certainly been made, the stuff of books, museums and presidential trivia, another kind of history, a quieter kind, will also have been made.

The history of Black America, written more in song than on paper, will record not the best of times; but, far too often, the worst of times.

Unemployment, dropout rates, foreclosures, mass incarceration levels-each and all of these will show significant gains, and paradoxically, the worsening state of the national Black community.

Eight years will have passed, and by every measure, Black life will have become more unsteady, more challenging, more raucous – and more brutal.

Some will say that the concerns of Black America shouldn't be his, for he is President of all America;

But, before all others, Black Americans have been his most loyal constituency – of all constituencies, why should those who are the most supportive get the least of everything else?

What kind of political logic is that?

Moreover, what other constituency would accept it?

“I'm voting for you, man – but I don't want nothing!

No better schools!

I want more police terrorism!

I want judges to spit on me more!

I don't want no jobs for nobody in the 'hood!?”

Africans in America have had a long and tortured history of loyalty to institutions that do not return those loyalties. Colonial governments. Political parties. The Army. State governments.

And yes, presidents- even Black ones.

Symbols are powerful things (and the essence of politics is symbol); but when they are empty of substance, they become hollow.

6 Feb - Newly Unsealed Documents in PNW Grand Jury Show Weak Evidence

The US Circuit Court in Seattle unsealed a search warrant and corresponding affidavit relating to the grand jury investigating anarchists thought to be involved in May Day protests in Seattle last year. And the evidence is lacking, to say the least. We've included an article on the documents and other updates regarding the grand jury and its resisters.

MORE:

The revelation of the documents comes from a motion that the National Lawyers' Guild filed on behalf of the Seattle Stranger, after the same documents were leaked to other Seattle news outlets in October, 2012. The government has maintained that it had “accidentally” placed the warrant in a public docket, where journalists were able to read the names of suspects named in the affidavit, but then quickly re-sealed the documents when it realized its “mistake.”

The story the documents tell has already been reported: six Portland anarchists who had been heavily surveilled by Federal agents and Portland police are alleged to have traveled to Seattle to participate in the protests. The government is trying to link those same people to the destruction of three glass doors at the William Kenzo Nakamura Courthouse, a federal appeals court, the attack on which, according to the affidavit, caused “tens of thousands of dollars” worth of damage. The warrant allows the search of electronics believed to belong to some suspected individuals that were seized on July 25, 2012.

Let's put this into perspective: The federal government announced this investigation by kicking in the doors of people around the Pacific Northwest on July 25, 2012. Federal agents assigned to the Joint Terrorism Task Force, toting assault weapons, dragged people out of their beds in order to restrain them in their underwear, serve subpoenas and seize property as ordered by an earlier, and still unsealed, warrant. Not only did the

warrants designate that black clothing, blacks flags and paint be seized, but also political literature.

Three people are in prison right now at FDC Seatac. Maddy Pfeiffer, Matt Duran and Katherine Olejnik. Duran has been in prison since September 14, 2012. Olejnik was next, on September 27. Pfeiffer was the latest to go in, on December 26. They are in prison for refusing to cooperate with the grand jury investigating May Day. After declining to testify, they were all granted immunity from prosecution and found in civil contempt for still refusing to incriminate others. All will be looking to make arguments that their detention is punitive and not coercive, but if they fail, they could be housed in federal prison for 18 months, each.

Over three glass doors. Three fucking glass doors.

The affidavit attached to the warrant includes testimony from Geoffery Maron, an FBI special agent assigned to the Joint Terrorism Task Force out of Seattle.

As to the “evidence” cited in the affidavit to implicate specific people? Transcripts of texts, a Zip car rental, and documents obtained by Portland cops when they raided squats, tying certain people to certain properties. Agent Maron guesses as to the identities of people he presumes were at May Day protests in Seattle based on generalizations about the height of some people and other physical attributes, comparing them with photos and video of May Day. Clothing items seized in the July 25 raids, those from a Portland police raid on a squat on May 3, 2012 and those being worn by individuals observed by the FBI attending a rally at Portland City Hall rally on April 9, 2012 are said to belong to certain participants in the May Day black bloc. Maron also obtained information on “known” anarchists from Portland police. How do you get to be a “known anarchist?” Be suspected of vandalism and attend a protest to keep a killer cop fired, according to this report. The whole thing comes together based on heavy surveillance and inter-agency collusion, basically the exercise of the JTTF. Portland decided to join the Joint Terrorism Task Force in April of 2011 after a decade of refusing to do so, making these partnerships a reality.

If this is all the evidence they have thus-far, then they don’t have a lot. Maron claims to have been present in Seattle on May Day, though exactly what he witnessed is unclear. He says that authorities were unable to tail the suspects to Seattle and identify the suspects named in the affidavit if and when they were changing into black clothing at Westlake Park. If certain articles of clothing are the government’s only evidence, at this point, that ties any individuals to participation in the black bloc, it would be generally consistent with them seizing articles of clothing. Consistent clothing may be enough to obtain indictments; five people being charged for their actions on May Day being charged in King County, Washington were indicted based on similar evidence: clothing, identifying features. It could also be why they need someone desperately to give testimony, and why, without that testimony, the investigation could fall apart.

The government has to establish that suspects traveled from Oregon to Washington, and also establish that those people rioted. To get the destruction of government property conviction, they have to place those people at the courthouse, smashing away. To get the attached conspiracy charge, they have to prove that those people planned to do so. The report mentions a lot of shit about “teardrop-shaped backpacks,” belts, people being left-handed and a Wikipedia definition of what anarchism is.

That is not intimidating.

What this says is that black bloc works: the prosecution will have a much harder time establishing the identities of those who participated in the black bloc than they will protesters who did not conceal their identities and are facing charges in King County. If this document teaches us anything, it’s: don’t wear clothing you’ve worn before to a demo, and throw your clothes away when you’re done with them. Shoes, too.

Also, the government has text message transcripts from suspects, taken from a phone seized on May 3, but they’re pretty vague; the suspects talk about cutting a bandanna out of a t-shirt before the protests and inquire as to the safety of others the night of May 1. While a longer text sent before May Day says one suspect can “meet”

others “at westlake and form a loose Portland bloc,” it does not prove that suspects actually did. Other text messages do seem to indicate that suspects traveled from Portland to Seattle, but if what they actually did can’t be established, then the charges related to interstate travel fall apart. It isn’t illegal to travel to a public demonstration.

About phones: security culture around cell phones and divulging or phrasing information is a concern. That doesn’t mean using some hammy code for texts and conversations; more often than not, it means not saying anything at all. Cell phones can track your location with some certainty when you use them and are often a millstone in court when used indiscriminately. But we know that. If you want to cause some mischief, think about ways in which your cell could incriminate you and don’t do those things.

The government also spends some time talking about the height and relative build of the suspects, as they relate to the images of the riot. They had one agent do this, not a forensics expert and if you think you can be prosecuted for being vaguely the same height as some unidentifiable person at a protest, then that’s incorrect. If you’re really concerned, try to wear something that will really conceal your physique, without being cumbersome and dangerous. Now, if you’re Andre the Giant and you have a very particular build that could be very particularly identified, save smashing capitalism for inside the ring. Take reasonable precautions; we’re living in a surveillance state now, but it isn’t infallible.

What this process is teaching us is that the government has many resources at their disposal: they have surveillance and will pay people to analyze it, compliance and assistance from local law enforcement and hella prosecutors who are sent out to grab people based on the government’s focus on post-9/11 “domestic terror.”

What do we have? Black clothing. Bandannas. Rocks. Sticks. Paint. Smoke bombs. The dark of night, convictions and courage. And many of us will not snitch on our friends.

The government is playing defense on this one. Only a little more than a decade ago, environmental radicals were smashing open wild horse corrals and mink cages and straight burning shit down. Hell, drop an anarchist book from the US on the floor and see if the page that flips open doesn’t mention the Seattle World Trade Organization protests of 1999. That is the definitional event for the alter-globalization-inspired anarchist re-emergence in the US and what did that involve? Breaking the fuck out of some very deserving property in Seattle and frustrating the police that tried to respond as people brought the city to its knees.

The government has a chicken-shit case. Even if they have better evidence that we aren’t aware of, it’s clear that the example they’re setting should not dissuade anyone from adopting black bloc or destroying property. Hell, you could even go to Seattle to do it. It seems to come off pretty well there.

And, again: fuck the government, now and until it falls. This is such a titanic overreach on their part, and it makes them look like fucking chumps.

February 7th - Affidavit indicates FBI targeted anarchists for being anarchists

The newest document released in the Pacific Northwest Grand Jury case reveals the federal government’s criminalization of anarchists. On January 30, a redacted affidavit was unsealed by order of Judge Richard Jones.

Throughout the document Geoffrey Maron, an FBI Special Agent assigned to the Joint Terrorism Task Force, repeatedly refers to individuals under investigation as being “known anarchists,” as if the ideology alone is evidence of a crime. Maron admits that “many anarchists are law-abiding,” but continuously points to the “Oregon Conspirators” as being known as part of the anarchist community. Similarly, Maron notes that some of the Portland police had seen many of those individuals at squats in Portland — as if that had any relevance to the investigation other than that it might corroborate that the targeted individuals are, in fact, anarchists.

Likewise, in justifying a preemptive investigation of the May Day protests, Maron points to an article appearing in the anarchist magazine Tides of Flame, quoting that writers there “urge everyone there to skip out on school

and work to take to the streets.” This passage indicates that, not only was the FBI monitoring the anarchist press in advance of the May Day protest, but the quote suggests that it was precisely the possibility of a popular mobilization under the anarchist banner that prompted law enforcement attention. Elsewhere, Maron also indicates that Portland-based anarchists were personally under surveillance before the May Day protests, and were followed by FBI agents when they left the city.

Furthermore, according to Maron’s statement, law enforcement used information gleaned from electronic records to identify “associates and conspirators” of the anarchists under investigation. By referring to “associates” (in addition to “conspirators”), Maron as much as admits that the FBI is casting its net over the entire anarchist movement, not narrowly investigating specific illegal acts.

The text of this affidavit further strengthens the argument that the FBI is targeting anarchists for being anarchists, not for any alleged crimes.

At present, three people are in jail for refusing to collaborate with the FBI/grand jury witch hunt. The Committee Against Political Repression urges everyone to support Matt Duran, Kteeo Olejnik, and Maddy Pfeiffer, and to demand that U.S. Attorney Jenny Durkan end the investigation immediately.

8 Feb - Grand Jury Refusers: Five Months and Counting

Remember these guys? Matthew Duran and Katherine Olejnik, who have been in prison since September without being charged—much less convicted—of a crime? Last fall, they were sent (not sentenced, just sent) to federal detention by Judge Richard A. Jones for declining to answer some questions in front of a federal prosecutor and a grand jury.

A few days after Christmas, and shortly after The Stranger's story about visiting them in prison ran, they were thrown into solitary confinement (aka the SHU, which stands for "special housing unit"). Their attorneys, Kim Gordon and Jenn Kaplan, are deeply frustrated because SeaTac officials have not given clear answers about why their clients are in the SHU. Have they broken a rule? Are they some kind of threat to the general population? Or what?

Kaplan, Olejnik's attorney, says her client "is still in solitary, and the FDC has refused to give me an answer regarding why."

It is not hyperbole to say solitary confinement is a form of torture. Dr. Atul Gawande wrote an excellent and well-researched article about the psychological and physiological damage of solitary confinement—even for brief periods of time—in 2009.

Even John McCain, who suffered five and a half years of torture as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, wrote that solitary "crushes your spirit and weakens your resistance more effectively than any other form of mistreatment."

According to Dr. Gawande's article:

"A U.S. military study of almost a hundred and fifty naval aviators returned from imprisonment in Vietnam, many of whom were treated even worse than McCain, reported that they found *social isolation to be as torturous and agonizing as any physical abuse they suffered*. And what happened to them was physical. EEG studies going back to the nineteen-sixties have shown diffuse slowing of brain waves in prisoners after a week or more of solitary confinement."

Dr. Gawande writes that the effects on people who've done time in solitary in US prisons isn't much different.

Duran and Olejnik have been in solitary since December 27—to repeat, they haven't been accused of any crime, they haven't been convicted of any crime, and the prison has *failed to explain to their attorneys while they're in solitary*.

This is what lawyers and reporters are talking about when they talk about this kind of process having a "chilling

effect" on free speech. You can imagine, after this example, why people wouldn't want to hang out with other people who describe themselves as anarchists. (Again, see below the jump for background.) Knowing anarchists isn't a crime. But even if you don't commit a crime—even if you are granted immunity from being prosecuted for a crime—you can find yourself in solitary confinement.

That's a problem.

* * *

The background: That grand jury and the federal prosecutor are ostensibly investigating the political vandalism in downtown Seattle on May Day. But Duran and Olejnik say the questions they refused to answer had little to do with actual crimes and more to do with social mapping—names and photographs, questions about who those people were, how they know each other, and their political beliefs.

Most of the questions centered around what search warrants have described as "known anarchists." The 1950s had its Red Scare; we've got our Black Scare.

That's when the two shut down—on principle, not for their own protection, as they'd both already been granted immunity from prosecution—and declined to answer. They've been in prison since September and, since they haven't been sentenced for any crime, are there indefinitely.

On Dec 26, Duran and Olejnik were joined by Maddie Pfeiffer, another grand-jury refuser.

6 Feb - Chris Lagergren Update

Below is a brief update on Chris' case, most notably another continuance.

MORE:

On February 4, 2013, Chris was granted a continuance to April 4, 2013 with trial set for April 22, 2013. Chris' defense team filed a Motion to Dismiss the Animal Enterprise Disruption charge under the Florida Animal Enterprise Act the State has brought against him. This Motion will be argued sometime in April 2013, there is no date set at this point in time.

As with all cases involving charges against activists, what affects one of us, affects us all. It is so critical that everyone pull together and unite around this common cause – for Chris, for the movement, and for the animals. Thank You!!

7 Feb - Effective Activism & State Repression: An Interview with Jake Conroy

Former SHAC 7 political prisoner Jake Conroy was recently interviewed by Profane Existence.

MORE:

How do we shut down a multinational corporation?

500 animals per day die in the labs of Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS), one of the largest contract testing companies in the world. Beagles, primates, rabbits, mice, rats, cats and other species are burned, cut open, or injected with poisons all while alive to ensure products like Viagra and diet pills will make it to the shelves of stores around the world; as well as GMO crops, pesticides, fertilizers and house hold cleaners. A small handful of dedicated activists started a campaign that nearly brought the giant to its knees as over 500 companies quit doing business with HLS, including their insurance company. Activists also managed to get HLS dropped from the New York Stock Exchange, eventually stopping their stocks from being publicly traded altogether.

Jake Conroy was one of the activists involved in Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty campaign (SHAC) in the USA, helping to run the website, and lead demos. For this, Jake was sentenced to 4 years in jail.

PE: How did you get involved with animal activism, and more specially the SHAC campaign? Jake Conroy

JAKE: I've always had strong feelings for the underdog throughout my life. It didn't really occur to me until I was 19 that some of the biggest underdogs in the world were non-human animals. I had spent a long time thinking about the issues and reading books and pamphlets I picked up at hardcore/punk shows, and watching videos wherever I could find them (which actually was pretty hard to do in a pre-YouTube era). But I was somewhat on the fence about making that leap to get involved.

I was living in Seattle at the time, walking downtown to school, when I passed some folks protesting against the circus as they paraded the elephants for miles through the city. I passed them and didn't say a word but it sat heavily in my mind that I should. So I turned around and walked back and asked what they were doing and who they were and how I could get in touch with them. They simply replied, "We're in the Yellow Pages". Sure enough, under Animal Rights, there was one listing – The Northwest Animal Rights Network. I called the number and listened to the info about the upcoming circus protests, and I went down that weekend by myself to join in.

The next 5 years I would participate in civil disobediences, run successful campaigns to close fur salons, help transform Seattle into one of the most animal-friendly cities in the country, and be arrested (with my current co-defendant Josh Harper) for engaging in the first whale hunt sabotage in US coastal waters by piloting a boat between whales and hunters.

In 2001 I had been working locally on the anti-HLS campaign in the Seattle area, when I got a call from a friend asking if I wanted to move out east for a few months to help start the office for this group, Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty USA. I had nothing else to do, so I packed up my belongings, put them in storage, and headed out to Philadelphia. I became so excited and inspired by our first 3 months that I never went back. I would spend the next 5 years helping run one of the most exciting campaigns of my life.

PE: What can people learn from SHAC, and from the repression you faced?

JAKE: I think the most important thing people can learn is that their activism needs to be strategic, smart, and creative, while being thoughtful, careful, and calculated. We shouldn't rush in head first because that's the way it's always been done; rather prepare for all outcomes, be ready to accept them, and not fear them. We need to realize that we are under a microscope, so our actions need to be significant and have a focus on duration and long term strategy.

PE: What do you think made SHAC so successful?

JAKE: Bobby Seale, the co-founder of the Black Panther Party, once said that in order to be successful you have to capture the imagination of the people, and the anti-Huntingdon Life Sciences campaign and SHAC USA did just that. It began in North America at a time when national welfare organizations started to dangle paychecks in front of grassroots organizers, when they began shifting the debate away from liberation to welfarism, and when they made you feel like you were doing your part by voting every couple of years and sending in your donations to cover their expanding paychecks. They were disenfranchising the animal rights movement and getting folks to fall into line. But deep inside, we all wanted more.

SHAC USA sprang into action quickly and furiously. It said loudly and proudly that we weren't going to sit back and accept bigger cages, and we were going to hold everyone and anyone accountable for their actions and support of animal cruelty, no matter when or where. We were happy to push the envelope and support radical ideas and tactics when others wouldn't. We believed in people power, horizontal and autonomous organizing, and supporting and using every tool in the toolbox to enact change. Within months, we managed to gain victories as an all-volunteer organization of 4 where huge national organizations couldn't. We captured the hearts and minds of activist communities and the general public, and we were off and running, bulldozing anyone that got in our way.

PE: SHAC centers on vivisection, specifically contract testing for consumer products like viagra and diet pills. Why focus on vivisection rather than fur, circuses, or the horrors of the pet industries, food/meat, or other areas of animal exploitation?

JAKE: There are so many atrocities perpetrated against the earth, and the animals, both human and non-human, that live on it. It's very easy to fall into a pattern of trying to save the entire planet all at once. But we need to be strategic about our campaigns and smart about how we go about them. There had been a campaign against HLS since the late 80's, with some amazing actions, but it just wasn't getting the job done. But the late 90s saw a perfect storm of sorts in England. Activists had closed Consort Beagle Breeder, Hillgrove Cat Farm, Regal Rabbits and they were closing in on Shamrock Primate Farm and Newchurch Guinea Pig Farm. Energy was extremely high and victories were coming in swiftly. Meanwhile, Huntingdon had two undercover investigations released against them in the UK and the US, and it had almost bankrupt them. They were a huge target, teetering on the brink of foreclosure, and they needed a firm kick to push them over the edge. It would be a gamble, but it was part of a larger overall campaign strategy that was proving to be successful. HLS is the third largest contract research organization in the world and they were on the brink of being brought to their knees by grassroots activists. The time was just right.

PE: Do you still think that the SHAC Campaign can succeed at this point? What is the relevance of the campaign today?

JAKE: Martin Luther King Jr said that the arc of the universe is long and bends towards justice. And to add a footnote by Becky Tarbotton, "sometimes we don't see it bend, sometimes it feels like it flattening out. And other times we can see that arc perceptively bending towards justice." We didn't close down Huntingdon Life Sciences according to our timeline, but I still believe the campaign can and will be successful. It's suffered some major blows to it's infrastructure, but like all good things, it keeps moving forward, it continues to bend towards justice. People are still active all over the world in the quest to shut it down for good and HLS is still financially hemorrhaging.

I think the relevance of the campaign is that it represents the tenacity, passion, and drive we as a global movement has to see justice served, no matter how long that might take. The tactics the SHAC campaign used were innovative and powerful, and they continue to be replicated by a broad spectrum of movements around the world to fight back. That alone is a testament to the relevance of the campaign and how successful it was and continues to be, regardless of the outcome of our explicit goals.

PE: How can activists today become more effective?

JAKE: Effectiveness and success is going to come by studying our collective histories, working hard and being creative today, while keeping long term future strategies in mind.

As activists today we have a unique opportunity to still talk to and learn from some of the greatest revolutionaries of decades past. These folks are still involved decades later and they want to sit with you, to have you learn from their mistakes, and understand their successes. We need to take advantage of these opportunities any chance we get before it's too late.

We need to recognize that we are living in one of the most oppressive times to be an activist. Our targets wield more power than ever before and are getting away with using every tool in the toolbox to silence and imprison us. We need to take their lead and fight back in kind. We as activists need to realize that perhaps our old ways and tactics aren't going to work anymore and we need to start thinking outside the box; to be more creative and look for other ways around the blockades before us in order to reach our desired goal.

Finally, we need to be smart. We can no longer rush in head down, into brick walls. We need to pick our heads up and look forward and see how we can strategically plan not just for this year but the next generation. We need to look deeper and with more thoughtfulness into how we are making change and how we can make it lasting.

PE: Are you still involved with animal activism now that you are out of prison?

JAKE: I'm involved with animal activism as much as I can be. I am currently finishing my third year of probation (out of 3), which puts restrictive conditions on you and your actions. Your whereabouts, employment status and financial records are all monitored by the federal government. I have a list of 30 or so rules, some very specific, some very broad, that I am required to live by. If I violate any of these rules, the probation office has the right to yank me off of probation and put me back in prison. So while they can be lax about certain things, getting in trouble doing animal activism is a sure way to end back in prison.

However, I still do as much animal activism, prisoner support, and outreach that I can. I am also employed by a non-profit environmental organization that uses non-violent direct action and pressure campaigns against global corporate targets to affect change. In a sense it's much like SHAC, minus the radical aggressiveness that landed us in prison.

PE: If we truly want to be effective in our activism, it seems like in today's atmosphere we should get prepared for the very real possibility of prison. Do you have any advice on how to prepare or was there anything that helped you get through it?

JAKE: While I think activists today need to be very aware of the repression going on around the globe and learn how they can fight back, I wouldn't say that prison is a very real possibility for a large majority of us. In the grand scheme of things, very few of us have actually been imprisoned for the amount of actions and campaigns that have been going on. Unfortunately, while the number of folks in prison right now is rising, it doesn't mean that we all are going to end up there some day.

The SHAC7 case was a perfect example of that. Thousands of people in North America alone participated in the campaign in their own way and it came down to a half dozen of us in court. The odds are in your favor.

If you are in the small minority of people facing prison time, I would highly suggest turning to those who have been or are currently incarcerated, for advice and counsel. Prison is a place like no other; nothing can possibly compare to it. It's a place filled with bizarre rules and expectations and nothing can really prepare you for it outside of the experience of others. I spent a lot of time leading up to my incarceration writing friends that were serving time as political prisoners, asking them every thing I could possibly think of. We would write tomes back and forth. But ultimately nothing can fully prepare you for the experience.

Ultimately, prison is a dark and lonely and depressing place. And one of the home1 (1) few things that can put a smile on an inmate's face is a letter. It is what makes the experience survivable. So I would encourage everyone to look through the lists of political prisoners and find a couple that resonate with you, and write them. It doesn't have to be a lengthy diatribe on your political beliefs (its better that it's not), rather, write them about your day, the last back packing trip you took, the last meal you made. Send a photo or a postcard. Anything will brighten their day. Take the time to foster a relationship with them and help them get through their experience. What may seem like an insignificant 20 minutes to you writing a letter, it can be a total life saver when on the receiving end while in prison.

PE: How much dose having a terrorist enhancement effect your life? And how do you feel about being considered a terrorist in the eyes of the government?

JAKE: Just to be clear, none of the SHAC 7 received a terrorist enhancement during sentencing. We were, however, classified by the Bureau of Prisons as domestic terrorists. This meant that during our stay in prison and our time on probation (and I'm sure afterwards), that label followed us around wherever we went. In prison, for me, that meant all of my phone calls were monitored and recorded, all of my incoming and outgoing mail was opened, read, and photocopied if they desired, and my ability to have my friends come visit me was drastically reduced. It also meant that I was put onto a 'high visibility inmate' watch list inside of the prison. I was one of

10 to 15 inmates that the administration said posed the biggest security threat to the institution, in a population of around 1300 inmates incarcerated for murder, rape, bank robbery, high-level gang activity, etc..

PE: Could you please recap what the charges against you were, and what you were accused of doing?

JAKE: Kevin Kjonaas, Lauren Gazolla and I were found guilty of 6 charges based on our direct involvement and so-called “leadership” roles with SHAC USA. They were one count of conspiracy to violate the 1934 Telecommunications Harassment Act, one count of conspiracy to violate the Animal Enterprise Protection Act (now called the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act), one count of conspiring to commit interstate stalking, and 3 counts of interstate stalking.

Essentially we were found guilty of running a webpage that advertised and editorialized events, actions, and strategy; that published write-ups of those events and actions after the fact (much like an online newspaper); that shared ideas, and supported the thinking of controversial ideologies. By doing all of this online, we crossed state lines to enter into a conspiracy with essentially anyone who had ever used the internet. By simply publishing and editorializing ideas and actions, we were encouraging anyone who accessed our webpage to go out and do the same things.

It was a far-fetched (yet successful) attempt at criminalizing controversial, yet legal, forms of demonstrations, supporting radical and controversial ideologies like non-violent direct action, and the sharing of ideas.

PE: Can you talk about the role music & subcultures can play in Animal Liberation and other activism?

JAKE: Subcultures and music has played a very influential role in grassroots and radical movements. The first time I was introduced to the idea of black power and the Black Panther Movement was after buying the album Fight The Power by Public Enemy when I was in junior high. As a white, suburban kid growing up in New England, those radical ideas didn’t make it into our classrooms. Soon after I would be introduced to hardcore and punk rock, which would open the doors to a do-it-yourself subculture, the straightedge philosophy, and veganism. Bands, ‘zines, and literature acquired at record stores and shows filled my imagination and passion with big ideas about grassroots organizing and direct action; the idea that we didn’t need large organizations and governments to enact the change we wanted to see in the world. That change was something we could bring about on our own and on our own terms. This idea wasn’t just mine – this self-empowerment and introduction to direct action through music communities was shared by 5 of the 6 individuals in the SHAC 7 case, and direct action legends like Rod Coronado and Keith Mann. It introduced a whole generation of young people in the mid 90’s to veganism, activism, and direct action, that would eventually shape the entire animal rights movement.

Jake Conroy is available to speak at public events. To contact Jake about speaking in your community go to <http://aidandabet.org/roster/from-activist-to-terrorist>

To learn about the ongoing campaign to shut down HLS today check out the SHAC website (includes videos, lists of companies doing business with HLS, and other campaign materials)
<http://shac.net>

To learn more about the repression of activism and the SHAC 7
<http://www.greenisthenewred.com>
<http://www.shac7.com>

8 Feb - Communiqué, solidarity with Mexican political prisoner

We received the following request from comrades in the Mexico City ABC. Help out however you are able.

MORE:

Hearty greetings to everyone.

The majority of you have likely already heard about the situation Mario Augusto Silva Sosa, better known as "Mayin", is currently in. We remember their participation in different struggles, in the past they were a member of the anarchovegan collective in Mexico City and since then have maintained a vegan diet for over ten years, including these past couple months spent in prison despite the difficulties that entails.

They are also involved in the squatting project at the Casa Naranja, helping out both repairing and cleaning the physical location as well as taking part in its different activities.

Mario has been incarcerated since the 18th of November, 2012, having been accused of aggravated robbery in a case full of irregularities and arbitrary decisions on part of the judicial apparatus and the shithheads (police force).

The last audience was on January the 25th. The conclusions will be given sometime between the 10th and 15th of February and the sentence a week later. Ideally that final result would be the possibility of leaving on bail. Seeing the way the case has been going, however, we're not holding our breath on that one. The worst case scenario would put Mayin away for up to 8 years.

Here in the Casa Naranja we've been trying to keep as up to date as possible with the development of their case as well as trying to provide them weekly with vegan food, helping out however we can. Throughout the process and in their stay in prison we've needed to come up with sufficient cash to take care of the paper work, food, and the inherent corruption within the prison, where they've been a victim of from extortion to robbery. Each month the necessary amount to support them is around 4,000 pesos. This load has turned out to be too much for us, therefore we're making a call of fraternity to all their friends, participants in their life, and anyone who'd like to express their solidarity with our comrade in this difficult situation in their life.

8 Feb - Feds to Open New Supermax Prison Cells at "Gitmo North"

The United States government recently purchased a prison in Illinois that will include "ADX and SMU type prisoners," making it another supermax prison.

MORE:

Even as it announces a review and reduction of its solitary confinement practices, the U.S. Bureau of Prisons confirmed to Solitary Watch that a newly acquired prison in Illinois will hold federal prisoners in supermax conditions. "Thomson will be a high security prison holding inmates with various security needs, including SMU and ADX type inmates," said BOP spokesperson Chris Burke in an email.

Thomson is the unused prison that the federal government recently bought from the state of Illinois. ADX, the notorious federal supermax in Florence, Colorado, holds its prisoners in 23-hour-a-day isolation and near-total sensory deprivation. Federal SMUs, or Special Management Units, such as those found in Lewisburg Penitentiary in Pennsylvania, hold their prisoners in round-the-clock lockdown in two-person cells. Both are forms of long-term isolated confinement, and both have been denounced by human rights and prisoners rights groups as an inhumane and ineffective form of punishment, sometimes amounting to torture.

The revelation of the BOP's plans to introduce new supermax cells at Thomson comes on the heels of an announcement that the Bureau has agreed to undergo a "comprehensive and independent assessment of its use of solitary confinement in the nation's federal prisons." The assessment, to be conducted by the National Institute of Corrections (an agency of the BOP), will reportedly be oriented toward reducing the population of "segregated" prisoners in the federal system.

In recent months, according to Monday's announcement, the BOP has already "reduced its segregated population by nearly 25 percent. In addition, it has closed two of its Special Management Units, a form of segregated housing, due to the reduction in the segregated population." Prior to the reported reduction, the BOP held more than 11,000 prisoners in some form of isolated confinement. Thomson is built to house 1,600.

When asked by Solitary Watch why the BOP needed to build new supermax cells despite reducing its segregated

population, spokesperson Chris Burke replied: “The reduction in our special housing unit population does not lessen the need for these beds. The Bureau of Prisons has not constructed any new ADX type units since 1994, when our population was only 85,000 (our current population is approximately 218,000).”

He continued: “‘Special Housing’ refers to units within our prisons where inmates are placed on a temporary basis as a result of misconduct or as a result of circumstances that warrant their separation from the general population.” The distinction suggests that Thomson will be used for long-term, sometimes indefinite segregation of the kind common in ADX and the SMUs—in other words, for the most extreme forms of isolated confinement.

The lucrative sale of Thomson to the feds was engineered largely by Illinois Senator Dick Durbin. The prison, in the northeastern part of the state, was built by the state of Illinois but never opened. The Obama Administration initially showed interest in Thomson as a possible stateside home for Guantanamo detainees (and it was quickly dubbed “Gitmo North”).

The sale was blocked for years by Congressional Republicans, even after the president promised that it would be used only for overflow from existing federal prisons, and not for prisoners from Guantanamo. But last fall, the administration made an end run around the Republicans on the House Appropriations Committee, and bought Thomson by presidential directive. “Finally, the Department of Justice this afternoon is going to present the \$165 million check...for the transfer,” said Durbin on October 2, “At this point, the president had to intervene and do this directly. I hope people understand he’s doing it for his state.”

Ironically, Durbin, the Democratic Assistant Majority Leader, is also widely credited with drawing attention to the issue of solitary confinement and pressing for national reform. In June he chaired the first-ever Congressional hearing on the practice. According to Monday’s press release from his office: “In his hearing last year, Durbin emphasized the importance of reforming the way we treat the incarcerated and the use of solitary confinement in prisons and detention centers around the country. Following that hearing, Durbin has twice met with Bureau of Prisons Director Samuels to push for additional reforms and encourage a sufficiently robust assessment of the Bureau’s segregation practices.”

When asked about the fact that Thomson would include supermax cells, Durbin spokesperson Max Gleischman responded with the following statement: “As the first member of Congress ever to hold a hearing on solitary confinement, Senator Durbin is committed to reforming America’s segregation policies and practices. As a part of his efforts, Senator Durbin has met with the federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) and continues to work with its director to reform BOP’s segregation policies and practices. One important step in solitary confinement reform, and prison reform generally, is to reduce high rates of overcrowding. The BOP’s acquisition of Thomson prison will greatly reduce this overcrowding crisis and Senator Durbin will work with BOP to ensure that all of its inmates are treated fairly and humanely.”

Recent federal lawsuits have provided a window on conditions inside ADX and the federal SMUs. Suits filed on behalf of prisoners the all-SMU Lewisburg Penitentiary allege that prison officials deliberately pair people up with their enemies and lock them down for 23 to 24 hours a day, and that this practice has led to at least two deaths. It also claims that prisoners have been strapped to their bunks with four-point restraints if they resist cell assignments.

A complaint filed last June on behalf of prisoners at ADX alleges that the supermax’s torturous long-term isolation has produced a variety of psychotic and self-destructive behaviors:

Many prisoners at ADX interminably wail, scream, and bang on the walls of their cells. Some mutilate their bodies with razors, shards of glass, sharpened chicken bones, writing utensils, and whatever other objects they can obtain. A number swallow razor blades, nail clippers, parts of radios and televisions, broken glass, and other dangerous objects. Others carry on delusional conversations with voices they hear in their heads, oblivious to reality and to the danger that such behavior might pose to themselves and anyone who interacts with them. Still others spread feces and other human waste and body fluids throughout their cells, throw it at the correctional staff and otherwise create health hazards at ADX. Suicide attempts are common; many have been successful.

A final irony comes in the fact that after a long battle by advocates and community members, Illinois Governor Pat Quinn's reached the controversial decision to close Tamms supermax, which held state prisoners in solitary confinement. Tamms was finally shuttered for good just before the start of the new year. Now it appears that Illinois has lost a state supermax, only to gain a federal one.

12 Feb - Racism and the War on Books by Alex Hundert

2010 Toronto "main conspiracy" prisoner Alex Hundert regularly writes for a blog and we've included his latest below.

MORE:

The last piece that I posted on this subject was written in this prison a couple of months ago, before I'd been thrown into "the hole" on administrative segregation. I wrote about the prison's banning of reading material, which they have classified as "anarchist." Security here has been removing such items from my mail. Prior to that posting I had written about a newly enforced policy at the CNCC that functionally prevents books from being sent in from the outside.

In the days immediately after that policy became effective – a policy that we are still trying to fight – the prison was in the position of having a backlog of books to still deliver to people in prison here, books that had arrived at the facility before the date chosen to enact the policy. In delivering those books, the same kind of discrimination was employed as that which I wrote about in regard to my mail. Books identified as "anarchist" were denied, including a book of poetry by Kelly Pflug-Back and one authored by the Curious George Collective titled *Anarchy in the Age of Dinosaurs*.

Discrimination against "anarchists" is not the only kind displayed by this prison's administration in their censorship and banning of books, as the title of this piece suggests.

A couple of us were going to file applications to the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal as one of the very few possible grievance mechanisms available to those of us imprisoned here. However, the multiple copies of the application that have been sent to me here seem to have been intercepted by the staff and not one has made it into my hands.

* * * * *

In my last piece, titled *Anarchist Material Removed*, I noted that one of the articles that the CNCC wanted to prevent people imprisoned here from reading was an interview with Shane Bauer in which he spoke about solitary confinement practices in the United States being in some respects more severe than those in Iran, where he was imprisoned. We know very well that the Ontario Super Jails are styled after American prisons, this one having been run by an American corrections corporation for a time, with most practices left untouched or in some cases made even harsher.

In that article Bauer talks about the Secure Housing Units (SHUs) at the Pelican Bay Prison in California. He mentions that one of the things which results in people being thrown in the SHU there is the identification of so called "gang-related material" in their possession or in their mail.

Bauer explains that in at least one instance, Black liberationist political material – an essay by W.E.B. DuBois – was labelled by Pelican Bay Security as "gang-related material" and resulted in the person to whom the essay had been sent getting transferred to the SHU, where they will be held in indefinite solitary confinement.

* * * * *

Adrian Nolan, 31, is another person imprisoned at the CNCC who has had books denied to him because management here have alleged that some of the content sent to him violates their security protocols. The reason he was given was that the books constituted "gang-related material."

Unfortunately, the notes from my interview with Nolan, like all of my notes, letters and papers, were confiscated when I was placed in solitary confinement on January 21 for unspecified "security reasons." Fortunately, I do remember much of the content of that conversation.

Nolan said to me that it is wrong to consider the books “gang related”; rather, he described them as “urban books.” He used that term to draw attention to the fact that a sergeant here had employed it when explaining what Security defined as “gang related”: “You know: urban books,” said the sergeant.

Nolan and others were quick to name this as the obvious racism that it is.

Abdi Mohammed, 23, told me that the only difference between these so called urban books and many of the books currently read by people imprisoned here is that these are written by Black authors with Black characters and set in Black neighborhoods.

Adrian Nolan agreed with this assessment. He talks about one of the book series which he was trying to bring in, which he told me were nearly indistinguishable in genre from many John Grisham or James Patterson books (which are very popular here) – they are thriller mysteries, they’re about crime, like many novels are.

There is also another type of book that is in wide circulation here at the CNCC which Nolan compared to those which were rejected by security: the evangelizing Christian books provided by the Chaplaincy. Ironically, these are for the most part the only books available to people stuck in “the hole” (other than Bibles and Christian self-help books). It seems that this rule may have been quietly and partially – for those of us on “administrative” rather than punitive segregation – repealed since I first wrote about it several weeks ago.

The general outline of these Christian books is that the story is told by formerly imprisoned people who have found religion and become devoutly faithful. The first half (or more) is always full of drug use and violence and then late in the novel the author-narrator finds Jesus and starts to live a religious life.

Nolan pointed out that this is very similar to some of the books he tried to have sent in (and to share with other people), the primary difference being that they are not pushing Christianity, they are about Black people.

Abdi Mohammed told me that it is unfortunate that the CNCC administration is blinded by racism because unlike most of the books available here, ones Nolan wanted to share are “books we can relate to.” I remember Mohammed saying this with reference to himself and other young imprisoned people of color.

Sadly though, this discrimination does not surprise Mohammed. He says that racism is pervasive at the CNCC. He has felt it himself and witnessed it many times.

I wish that I had access to my notes and Mohammed’s own words available. One thing I do remember him saying is that as a Somali Muslim he has experienced racism because of his color, his country and also his religion.

Mohammed said that racism is a serious problem at non-urban jails like this one in Penetanguishene.

The staff here are almost exclusively White, in stark contrast with prisons located in the GTA. The difference is palpable and Mohammed says this results in both systemic and day- to-day racism.

* * * * *

There is a tragic irony in the comparison of books allegedly containing “gang-related material” with evangelical Christian books that are numerous in this and other prisons.

The practice of having only Christian books available to people imprisoned in segregation here is itself a notable colonizing act in a country with a history of violent Christianization.

Indeed, racism is a pervasive factor in the CNCC’s war on books. But as Abdi Mohammed pointed out, the racism in the so called justice system is much deeper than just this front. A deeply ingrained systemic racism – from the over-policing of neighborhoods of color to the normalized hegemony of Whiteness – is but reflected in this prison’s policies that deny imprisoned people access to books.

* * * * *

A couple of things need to be said about trying to file an application with the Ontario Human Rights Commission – a couple of things in addition to the fact that our efforts have thus far been thwarted by the CNCC, which has prevented me from receiving the application.

Resorting to this kind of application is a tremendous compromise. It is a soft reformist measure at best. “Human

rights” discourse is an inherently liberal doctrine that appeals to the authority of the state to define and grant people’s so called “rights” and reflects privilege in terms of who gets access to those rights.

That said, I still find it alarming that when I called “Offender Issues”—also known as the Client Conflict Resolution Unit and which is supposed to be our first recourse for human rights issues in the provincial prison system—they said that access to books is not a serious enough issue for them to care about. More alarmingly, they also said that discrimination against political ideology is not a human rights issue. They refused to talk to me about racism and that complaint stemmed from an incident involving another person.

The application, as a tactic, was not an attempt to portray discrimination against White anarchists like myself on the same plane as racism against people of colour. Rather, it was part of a strategy that is attempting to put the issue of systemic abuse of people’s “rights” onto the table for discussion.

Racism, denial of rights based on political ideology, contesting freedom of thought through the censorship and banning of books and other reading material; these are all happening in the Ontario prison system.

That racism and political identity might be similarly targeted by state institutions merely reaffirms the notion that there is a real necessity for organized resistance against this colonial system that employs prison justice as one of its primary weapons.

Racism is an endemic feature of Euro-American capitalist colonial culture and statehood. It is inevitable that this manifests in the way prisons are run; prisons playing a central role in maintaining and enforcing that system. The CNCC is not only no exception but, as Abdi Mohammed explained, it is actually one of the more racist prisons in the provincial system.

Note: The policy of making non-religious books unavailable to people imprisoned on the segregation unit—for which there now seems to be an exemption for people here on “administrative segregation”—is not a policy that either the chaplaincy or the guards are responsible for. Like most problems, this one is a problem with those in charge.

13 Feb – Statement from Dr. Mutulu Shakur to the Montefiore Medical Center

A target of the FBI's illegal Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), Mutulu Shakur has sent the following statement from behind prison walls.

MORE:

In extending great enthusiasm and support for the objectives of the Montefiore Medical Center Community Doctors (MMCCD), I have kept in mind that 45 years ago an army of committed and concerned have-nots did take a realistic look at the state of the underserved health population in the City of New York, and; From all angles in the streets, community centers, hospitals and mobile experimental units tried to apply a predictable skill, and alternative modalities in which to give some predictability and healing for our community.

That (MMCCD) has decided to resuscitate/professionalize and to apply the same theory in these days and times could not have come at a more crucial stage in the role health care is playing or not playing in the political theater of the United States political paradigm. The awareness of the masses to the motives of the state must ultimately be revealed, by an astute politically conscious and medically deprived population. The revealing stage of the objectives of the American Medical Association and the pharmaceutical companies of 45 years ago was revealed when the collaboration of the state, city and national political apparatus made an attempt to convince the population that the war on drugs could be won and controlled by the introduction of a deadly chemical methadone.

I salute you, the medical cadres of the Black Panther Party, The Young Lords Party, Peoples Free Health Centers, Lincoln Detox, May 19th, John Brown Anti-Klan and; The Republic of New Africa salutes them as well for utilizing all the powers at their disposal to force the victims of the drug plague to submit to extraordinary doses of medication just so they would not be a part of the so called criminal class. We called it then as it was, chemical warfare, and chemical Genocide.

Today we have tons of research and great practitioners such as doctors, nurses, acupuncturists, midwives and activists that are trying to make up for the lack of consistent consciousness of the masses as to the effectiveness

of alternative medicine. The task will be hard, and the opposition by the pharmaceutical companies and the media, will be severe.

I look forward to see the day that the work of our past comrades will be carried on by the work of MMCCD and others; Because so many of those comrades are underground, in prison, martyred or in exile. They suffered tremendous damages and casualties because of their effort to provide health care to the masses. If there are those who doubt this, then they should join me in calling for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission on how the FBI's illegal Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) conducted low intensity warfare waged against alternative health care in the 60', 70's, and 80's.

Thank you all who provide the opportunity for resurrecting the work of community based medicine and; I am very proud that the municipal hospitals in the city of New York make available the alternative acupuncture treatment that we started at Lincoln Detox and carried on in BAANNA for the victims of the Drug Plague, Post Traumatic Stress, and secondary conditions.

I congratulate Montefiore-Einstein for this innovation.

Aim High and Go all out
Long live the spirit of Lincoln Detox and BAAANA
Stiff resistance

14 Feb - Punks & Anarchists Turn Out to Help the Rosenberg Fund for Children

We've pasted a reportback from Nevermind the Inauguration: A Festival of Resistance, a counter-inauguration event in Washington, D.C. at which a member of NYC ABC participated in a panel discussion.

MORE:

With panels like, "Anarchy and Democracy: What's the Difference?" and "State Repression of Social Movements in the U.S. and What We Can Do About It," *Nevermind the Inauguration: A Festival of Resistance* held in Washington, DC on January 20th, (the weekend of that "other" big event in that city), was filled with punk rock fans and activists not high rollers and political insiders. Ryan, an RFC supporter, working together with local promoter Venomous Ideas and the newly reunited anarchist band Catharsis, organized the conference and benefit concert. The latter raised a significant amount of money which was donated equally to the RFC, and to a homecoming fund to help environmental activist Daniel McGowan in the wake of his recent release from prison.

The daytime event was formally entitled, Global Crisis & Global Resistance! A Conference on Organized Resistance to Capitalism and the State on the Eve of the 57th Presidential Inauguration. On one panel, RFC Advisor Board member, Will Potter, and a member of the NYC Anarchist Black Cross, provided an overview of how "activists across the country, including Occupy protestors, anarchists, animal rights and environmental activists and others are being increasingly targeted by authorities for political organizing and protest activity." The presenters discussed "current cases, grand juries targeting anarchists in the NW, the status of several political prisoners and other active cases and what activists can do to prevent, resist and organize against state crackdowns on social movements."

Another panel examined the difference between anarchy and democracy. It explored the questions, "Is 'direct democracy' what anarchists want? If we don't want democracy, what do we want instead? And how should these questions inform how we engage with representative democracy and the political process?"

The festival even included "video dispatches from the front lines of movements in Spain, Greece, and Portugal," and "revolutionary puppetry" in the form of Mysterious Rabbit Puppet Army (MRPA) performing 'Donny Quixote!'--a humorous adaptation of the story of Don Quixote, that presents a scathing critique of 'green' capitalism and technology." To cap the evening, several hundred people attended the "Punk Rock Counter-Inaugural Ball" where Catharsis, Magrudergrind, Trophy Wife, Dead in the Dirt, and Los Gatos Negros performed.

We of course appreciate the sizable monetary contribution from this event. But we also are thrilled that a young and energetic RFC supporter took it upon himself to organize an important and exciting festival that spread word about our work to a network of younger activists with whom we're working hard to connect. Thank you, Ryan, Will, all of the speakers and bands, and everyone else who attended and supported this event!

16 Feb - Total Liberation: An interview with Walter Bond

Animal Liberation Front prisoner Walter bond was recently interviewed by Profane Existence and we've included it below. Topics include anarchy, abortion rights, anti-colonialism, and animal liberation.

MORE:

Punk bands tour the world singing anthems that promote militant direct action & activism, putting out albums with flaming Molotovs emblazoned across their covers, with militant messages; but few of us ever truly put those words into action. Walter Bond on the other hand has spent decades working tirelessly, whether leafleting at shows and in the streets, tabling at Pride events, protesting, or volunteering at animal sanctuaries before finally turning to the more militant tactics of the Animal Liberation Front. Walter is a proud anarchist, Vegan, of Latino heritage, who identifies as bisexual. He also is currently a prisoner in one of the most controversial and restrictive prisons in the USA today.

I have been writing to Walter in prison since he was first arrested 2 years ago, after his brother snitched him out. At the time of his arrest, Walter was living on the streets while attacking businesses that profit from animal exploitation.

interview by Comrade Black

PE: - You identified as an anarchist for most of your life. Can you tell us what being an anarchist means to you, and how it connects with Animal Liberation, and Total Liberation?

WALTER: When I was in 7th grade in 1989 I used to make all kinds of clip art fliers with my friends under the name 'Anti-Statist Counter Culture'. We would distribute them mostly to local corporate businesses and churches in the area, mostly to agitate. By the end of 8th grade I had completely dropped out of school and was living this nihilist lifestyle and was just very reactionary and angry at the whole world, parents, school, everything! Back then I was dealing with a world of shit that was too much for me to handle. I turned to drug abuse and vandalism as an outlet. Anarchism back then was a personal vendetta I had about how my life and the world around me was and how I felt it should be.

I wasn't alone. I had three other very close friends that felt the same. Two of them connected with some gutter punks in Boulder, Colorado and ran away to Hollywood, California. 25 years later one of them is a vocalist for a grind core band, and another is a bicycle maker that lives in a squat in New York City and gets harassed whenever he tries to leave the country because he has been on federal watch lists since the 90's.

Today anarchism is firmly connected to my activism. The Animal Liberation Front has been an anarchistic dis-organization since its inception. There is no way for business-as-usual and Animal Liberation to co-exist in any fashion that is effective for the goals and interests of either side. Business, consumerism and corporations ultimately care about whatever is profitable. Their raw materials are the blood and bones of Animals and the life's' blood and guts of the Earth, which is the fountain head of all life. It's difficult to make this connection as just a foodie Vegan but once you spend some time in the activist world, it's an unavoidable clash.

Anarchism is in opposition to State control, corporate domination, class privilege, oppression of one group by another. These are the identical ideals fought for by Animal Liberation abolitionists, just applied to different objectives. I think that anarchism and Animal liberation from the abolitionist or radical perspective are an organic pairing. What good would it do to establish a human society of free communities only to destroy the planet with a McDonalized diet or a mass addiction to industrialization? The reality is that there are billions of people on the planet! With or without government or state authority, industry is going to continue destroying the

Earth. It doesn't matter who turns on the machines everyday, because things are not made out of no things. And history has proven time and time again that if we do not remove the oppressions of the least defensible of us then the circle of abuse begins again with a brand new name.

PE: - You are an Animal Liberation POW, and you also hold anti-civ views, and have a critique of technology. I see a lot of overlap between the anarcho-primitivist critique of domestication, and mass society, with the views of Total Liberation. Do you feel there is a contradiction there? Or how do you see them fitting together?

WALTER: I definitely am not a fan of technologically advanced civilization. From the industrial age forward what we are really looking at is a lattice work infrastructure, put in place by governments of men to subjugate women, the poor, Animals, Earth, labor and each other according to Ethnicity, nationalism, class, gender and economics. Since the age of the machine and science; pain, suffering, war and murder have been greatly, incredibly and insanely quickened!

Despite all the promises of making things better we are blowing mountains in half to get at their coal. We are chopping down every forest on Earth. We are dropping bombs on civilians from remote control airplanes; we are mechanically murdering billions of Animals at the expense of the natural world. We are wasting mass amounts of crop, soil, and water, all euphemisms for Earth, so that we can eat cheap burgers. Thanks to constant technological crutches most adults cannot listen to, follow or remember simple directions. Meanwhile paranoia and random acts of violence are at an all time high!

It is time to stop pretending that we don't see the writing on the wall. Technology kills! And that is most often its primary use. WE HAVE ENOUGH NUCLEAR WARHEADS ON THIS PLANET TO KILL ALL LIFE SEVERAL TIMES OVER, BUT WE CANNOT EVEN SAVE OUR OWN SPECIES ONCE. I used to build slaughterhouses for a living and I can tell you from first hand experience that it's not physically possible to butcher tens of thousands of Animals a day without an abundance of mechanical aid. Just like it is not possible to destroy a forest without first building roads and inlets to get yellow death machines into the area.

No machine is morally neutral when it's sole design and intent is to eviscerate, vivisect, slash cut and transport the splintered, destroyed and devastated remains of the biosphere! The technologies we use to heal the sick and, lessen pain and suffering and generally make the human world a more comfortable place are scant in comparison to the damage done. But just like any alcoholic or drug addict we exaggerate the pay off we get while greatly ignoring the damage it takes to pay for it. And just as with any other addiction the truly terrible thing is how many other innocent lives have become ruined in the addicts wake.

Politics would have us believe the modes of production are neither beneficial nor harmful but only in the right or wrong hands. Yet time and time again his-story has shown that whether the factory is run by greedy capitalists or free thinking anarcho-communists, the machines still get turned on and the raw materials of industry are still the blood and guts of the Earth and her Animal Nations! In truth, who controls the means and modes of production is of concern to those who labor and profit by and for the machines, with little to no concern for the connectivity of all life, or the world.

As far as how I view the connectivity, or lack thereof of ideas like Total liberation and anarcho-primitivism I guess I view it as parallel. In my estimation Total Liberation should be making steps to unite various struggles in the real world against the common leviathan of government and towards the reality of free communities. Unfortunately, I don't see much grassroots organization around Total Lib. it remains, thus far, in the world of ideas, of salutations of solidarity. I think the occupy movement started out with a truly unifying Total Liberation tactic and showed the tremendous power of coming together. But there has to be an escalation of tactics at the helm or else all is eventually kaput. I'm not trying to be smug here but where is Total Liberation physically? Ideally Total Liberation should be a bridge building movement to unite activists of all liberation struggles be they human, Earth or Animal. That is a huge amount of work. And honestly it's an abundance of work I seldom see getting done. No one wants to yield or compromise enough to make a true united liberation front possible. Or as radicals we use total lib as a pretext to ideological recruitment of other radicals.

Anarcho-primitivism on the other hand is really against the entire foundation of what our modern 'civilized' oppressions are built upon. As such it's not very activist friendly. I mean, you don't protest civilization with a sign. The idea of a truly clean slate is far too radical for that. The only way to effectively protest technology, mass society, domestication and their ilk is for you yourself to become a wild child and destroy the machines. But Total Liberation and anarcho-primitivism are forever united by the same objective. That being the complete escape from tyranny and oppression for as many lives, and ways of life as can exist without any oppressing the other. One is just dedicated to aligning forces in the here and now, while the other is looking at how we will have to not only get rid of the road we are on, but also get rid of the road.

PE: - It almost seems like there was a Class Warfare element to the choices you made when selecting your targets. Was this intentional?

WALTER:- You are the first person to ever ask me this question, and the answer is yes. There were a couple different messages to my arsons beyond Animal Liberation, one was classism. Every place I hit was not what society would try to justify as 'necessary' Animal cruelty. Each place in its own right was of service to the upper middle, to the rich echelon of society. Whether for fashion, hobby or delicacy I wasn't going after stores in the hood or ethnic communities. I was after retailers that sold dead Animals' broken bodies or skins purely for consumer pleasure.

Another thing I have heard grumbles about is why I went after soft targets instead of more strategic targeting. There was a subtle reason behind this as well. As an activist I often saw people pass the buck when it comes to Animal industries. The wholesalers and retailers always blame it on the public. If no one bought their products they wouldn't sell them. Or since there is a demand someone is going to fill it whether them or someone else. The consumers always hide in numbers. They don't feel responsible because there not buying anything that's not being bought a million times over by others. The drop in the bucket syndrome. If you pick on them you will instantly be accused of targeting specific groups of people. And after all it's really the evil corporations fault for putting such cruelly produced products on the market.

I burned three businesses right in the middle of major cities. I did not want to hide my ALF actions the way Animal cruelty is hidden. I wanted every retailer and consumer to see that when you deal in product of death you shouldn't be surprised when retribution finds its way to your doorstep. Honestly, if I would have had more resources or help I would have done live Liberations unfortunately this was not a viable option. But the only good thing about living in a non-Vegan world is that if you want to combat cruelty you never have to go far. You don't need to have a bunch of money or go to some clandestine trading camp to make an impact.

Most of the time people like to imagine that their heroes have all this expertise that they never could. It's a convenient belief because otherwise they wouldn't have any excuse for putting their own self-interest, fear and apathy above doing in their hearts what they know must be done. The truth is when it comes to Animal exploitation or the destruction of the Earth, no one is innocent. Not Vegans, or cadaver munchers. Not anarchists, or capitalists. Not me, or you. We are all shades of red as Screaming Wolf once wrote in the seminal book 'Declaration of War'. We lessen our shade of red with our lifestyles and our actions. And this is our obligation if we have compassion. Not from some outside authority but from inside ourselves, our consciousness.

PE: - Recently you completely changed your position on abortion, what prompted this seemingly sudden shift?

WALTER:- What prompted this change of heart is a growing disenchantment with so-called conservative views. And the pompous attitudes that produce them. I have never been involved in any anti-abortion activism, just so people know. In the hundreds of pages that I have written in the last 3 years I have written approximately one paragraph about the 'pro-life' views I once held. I just want to set it straight from the beginning that I am not some reformed anti-abortion extremist. That said, I once held an obscure view on abortion that was part of a conservative clique within the Straight Edge movement of the 1990's.

My limited comprehension of abortion as an issue was from this two dimensional idea that 'if I am going to care deeply about the rights of shrimp, then I should care about the rights of a fetus'. This was a complete absent reference to the fact that this whole issue takes place inside a woman's body and that there is a more complex issue of rights to be observed. Not just vegan hardline consistency.

I have recently begun to educate myself on feminism and in particular anarchy-feminism. The more I learn the more I feel like an ass for having displayed such an idiotic and disconnected view of abortion in the first place. From an Animal Liberation perspective which is more my field, it must be said that humanity is the cause of extreme amounts of suffering to billions of Animals annually, for food vivisection, entertainment and beyond. Ultra-consumptive societies like north America, china and now India are currently decimating the Earth like a cancer! In this war on nature humans are a tyrannical and abusive enemy. I stand on the side of the Animal Nations and Mother Earth, I am a species traitor. And human birth control is a relief to the planet!

But as I was saying, what prompted me to finally take a long look at my beliefs, not only on abortion but many of my moralist attitudes in general are my surroundings. For those that do not know I am a prisoner of war, inside a political prison, within a prison. On this unit of 40 men, I never leave, and I am housed here for an indefinite remainder of my prison sentence. Most of the men here are orthodox Muslims; with a sprinkling of those god bless America type of militia, Ron Paul weirdoes. It's a super conservative and religious environment. I have learned first hand what dogma and so-called conservatism leads people too. Mainly, bigotry, homophobia, and close-mindedness.

PE: - When you held anti-abortion views, it seemed like most of your criticism was directed towards the medical industries. This brings up the question of herbal abortion as a non-medical alternative. Was this something you had considered?

WALTER:- No it was not. But I am not more for one method than another. It's not my business how women decide to abort, control birth or exercise autonomy over their own bodies. As a man, I am not only never going to be in their position but I am never going to put a woman in that predicament either. I have no children, and the first thing I am going to do upon release, which is years from now, will be to go to the hospital and get myself fixed. Furthermore, no woman anywhere should feel ostracized or shamed for her decision to exercise her reproductive rights be it herbally, or in a clinic.

PE: - Author Peter Gelderloos once wrote that anarchy and colonialism need to be made completely incompatible. Cultural approbation of indigenous art, spirituality, and cultural traditions is a major problem in many subcultures today. I want to ask about your face tattoo. I know it means a lot to you, but is your tattoo an appropriation of Maori Moko?

WALTER:- I have a few supporters from New Zealand and have been questioned about this by a couple different Maori. One told me that the design I have would better be suited as part of a leg piece, and the other argued that it was a handsome piece for Moko, but wanted to know why I don't have the rest of my face done. But the truth is that while I definitely used the style of traditional Maori, my tattoo artist and I made absolutely sure that we were not replicating any traditional or current Maori designs.

I have also been locked up with a Maori guy and several tanga, Samoa and Polynesian islanders. Everyone has been cool with it mainly because I am of Island descent. My mother is Taino. For those that don't know these are the indigenous people of Puerto Rico. This coupled with the fact that I am in prison for fighting for a cause seem to have earned me the respect of other islanders. The general vibe I get is relief that I take warrior hood seriously and am not just trying to look hardcore for my white friends in the suburbs.

I plan on getting the rest of my face tattooed when I get out of prison along with the rest of my body. That said I never promote it as something others should do. Getting a large face tattoo is serious business and can have serious repercussions. And It has intense personal meaning to me. It was a life changing event, it literally

changed my personality. Some would say pushed me over the edge.

And yes, appropriation of indigenous cultures is an epidemic problem. In many larger ways than a very few people getting face tats. Here in the United States every white person wants to pretend they are part native. Out of some feelings of white guilt. Instead of helping the decimated Indian population. They shove real natives onto reservations to starve and die while pretending to be the real deal. Honestly, this makes me sick

PE: - Most of the businesses you targeted reopened and continue to make profits even though you did extensive damage. In light of this do you think your actions were effective? Could you have been more strategic? If so how?

WALTER:- The way I look at it I could have spent everyday of my life standing in front of those businesses holding a sign and I would have never cost them one penny. Even when I used to volunteer my time helping actual Animals it would occur to me that I was still having a negative impact against the industries of Animal exploitation. Even with Veganism, I am one of the few Animal Liberation abolitionist Vegans you will hear admit that my diet is not saving 90 Animals a year. So there I was living as ethical as I could, helping Animals and talking with and educating people. All the while all I am seeing is negative impact. I have friends that have been holding signs and tabling for decades, negative impact. Why is activism always geared to just lessen our roll in the cruelty but never to fight it? Negative impact.

I got fed up with it. All the -more-Vegan-than-thou- conversations that I had at every coffee shop in Denver. Always playing supplicant to people. Practically begging people to care. Then I woke up one day and it hit me. I was a utopianist, I was deluded. I, as most overly idealistic people really believed that deep down everyone was like me. I was once one of them, hell; I even used to build slaughterhouses! If I can change, anyone can, right? Wrong.

I came to the conclusion that most people don't want to change, most people don't want to learn what's going on with Animals because they don't want to feel bad or responsible for it, and most people are not going to sacrifice their time energy or money to make a change. BAM! The facts, welcome to reality! All that was left in my life was to fight back on the Animals behalf of shut up because I was sick of the sound of my own voice.

And you know what I didn't change the world. But I did something that I never was able to before. I cost the Animal abuse industries about two and a half million bucks, positive effect! And with every defiant step forward that I took, I inspired. By my count there were eight international underground acts of solidarity with my case. And now when I speak I really do have a voice. I mean look, we are having an interview. I have been saying all this same stuff for years before I became the 'Lone Wolf' but you would never know it because, no one ever listened.

As far as strategy, of course I could have done better. Unfortunately HOW I could have, or WHAT I would have done different I cannot discuss. Due to my current situation as an imprisoned and monitored man.

PE: -Let's talk about your life on the inside. How do you spend your days? Do you get paid to work? What are the costs you have to spend money on? You have and mp3 player, how does that work?

WALTER:- Here in the CMU it is a very small world. I live day after day, month after month and over a year now in a single prison unit completely segregated from the rest of the penitentiary of Marion. The day I get released from the CMU to the general population of the prison it will feel like I got a parole. I am allowed two 15 minute phone calls a week and no visits. Every person I have tried to have put on my visiting list has been rejected. I have not hugged, touched or physically seen anyone I care about since the day off my arrest in the summer of 2010.

A typical day goes something like this. I wake up about nine in the morning. I walk to the top of the range and sit down at a computer. I log in and see if I have any emails. All my incoming and outgoing email is screened by

the counter terrorism unit in Virginia to make sure I am not sending or receiving coded messages. They also can reject or approve any incoming or out going emails before I have the chance to send or receive them. They can also block me from communicating with anyone they want and they have done this with three of my contacts. When that happens I cannot snail mail, email or make telephone calls to these people ever again. In short, all communication is cut off permanently, and without explanation.

After I am done on the computer I go 'outside' which is a rectangle walkway that surrounds an island of three 'recreation' cages. The sky is completely obscured by chain link fence and razor wire. I walk in rectangles until lunch. Lunch is usually beans, rice or the occasional veggie burger. The food is terrible and unhealthy. It is worse than any other institution I have ever been in. After I eat I go back to my cell and write responses to letters from supporters and friends. At noon, I go to mail call and get any mail, books or magazines that have come in that day. After mail I watch the soaps on Spanish TV. I like 'Amorcita Corazon'. When my soaps are over I go out to the cages and do body weight exercises or shoot hoops. I come back up to my cell and lock down for four O' clock stand up count, and then I nap until dinner. After dinner I walk for another hour. then I study Spanish for one to two hours, after which I slam a couple cups of black tea and go back to my cell to read, write and draw until about one in the morning, or until I fall asleep. Then I wake up and do it again.

As far as work goes, on the other side of the cell house opposite the rec. cages is a ramp and a patch of grass that leads to the chow hall. My job is to clean the walkway and cut the grass. I make twenty dollars a month but they take all of that for restitution and court costs I owe. So in reality I get paid nothing. But I get to go on the only patch of Earth that we have in the CMU and it's 'out of bounds' for everyone else.

As far as cost of living, everything I have shoes, shorts, Vegan food, toothpaste, paper, stamps, envelopes, music, and email (yes, I get charged to send and receive email) Is only because of money supporters send me. Without support funds I would literally have nothing. Recently the entire federal prison system got mp3 players. They installed the hardware and software on the computers. Songs cost a dollar and a half each, no discount for purchasing whole releases. They have some good music. I have downloaded Earth Crisis, Chumbawamba, Jose Alfredo Jimenez, Augustin Lara, Napalm Death, Public Enemy and many, many more! With very little stimulation music is essential for mental health. I went overboard and spent all my money on music, which makes things tight for me but I don't care I would rather listen to music than anything else in here.

The conversations and interactions I am subjected to in the CMU are repetitive and obsessive. There are the legal guys that just talk about law all day long, constantly and without end. There are the religious guys that just talk about god and scriptures and religious interpretation all day. And the institutionalized guys that just talk about every prison they have been at. Most of those guys have spent their entire lives in prison.

I quit talking to most people here because I don't like to argue, it's pointless and agitating. And outside of my circle of about 5 friends whose company I enjoy the rest of these guys can go flush themselves down the toilet, and go where ever the rest of the pieces of shit end up, for all I care!

I'll tell you this, I still feel as hardcore about my beliefs as ever but I am completely over preaching to people that don't want to hear them, protesting is different than proselytizing.

PE: - Recently you quit using the Muslim name you had been given. Have you completely given up on Islam? Religion altogether? Do you still maintain some type of spiritual beliefs?

WALTER: I am going to be honest about my feelings towards religion and much of what passes for spirituality. I don't believe it. It's a human shibboleth. Animals in a state of nature have no use for it and neither do I. I am part of something bigger than any religion, 'god' or hocus pocus, it's called LIFE. When I die I will go back to the Earth. I will go back to where ALL life must, and I will not know where that is until the time comes and death is upon me.

I know god is not in books. I have read and studied most world religions and many obscure spiritualities. I have

learned for certain that god is not in books. The only thing in books is words. The entire concept and production of a book is a human construct. It's our way for the dead and absent to infect the thoughts and lives of the living, for good or ill.

I Got involved in Islam under adverse and incredible circumstances, which is the only way I would have gotten involved in any religion, let alone one so incredibly dogmatic. I won't go into the entire sordid tale except to say that I once promised an old woman that meant the world to me that one day I would attempt, one day, to try and find god. And I gave it my all. Unfortunately, I do not make a very good submitter.

Did you know that the first time I was ever in trouble with the law was for breaking into a church and burning a huge pentacle star into the carpet directly in front of the preacher's lectern? It was a Methodist church in a rich white neighborhood, across the street from the police station. I also have a 14 inch upside down crucifix for half of my tattoo sleeve. On that same sleeve I also have a tattoo of the pope, except this pope has goat horns and is standing in flames. All the things I love the most in life: face tattoos, sex, fire, Animals, music, Liberation and Veganism seem to all be completely against religion. Oh well, I guess that's how 'god' made me!

When I got involved with religion it completely shifted my focus and the focus the movement around me. Everything started to become about my new name and beliefs etc. I didn't like that. I remember one night I went to bed and it occurred to me that I hadn't thought about Animal lib, Straight Edge or resistance all day, just religion. That was the beginning of the end for me. I didn't like that feeling of assimilation, like the Borg on that sci fi show 'Star Trek the Next Generation'. It was a calming feeling but also creepy. Next thing you know you have that glazed doughnut look in your eyes, the one that super religious people get. No thanks, I'm already off in the head enough without any help from the land of make believe!

I also got tired of reading all the terrible stuff about god hating gays and stoning people to death, or chopping off people's hands for stealing. This crap is in all the so-called 'holy books' of various religions; right their in black and white print. And if you believe it then you have to do a bunch of mental gymnastics to somehow make it all not, horrible!

All this said, I did learn a lot about Islamophobia and I am completely against it! the media promotes Islam to be a terrorist religion and that is just not accurate. Every religion has violent fringe elements but we don't paint all their followers as 'terrorist' or 'extremist'. Look at those crazy evangelicals that drink poison or the 'army of god' psychopaths. Still the media doesn't call them 'Christian terrorists'. I learned along time ago that it's not what people believe that makes them good or bad apples it's the things they do and their capacities for compassion, or cruelty. But as far as any more personal beliefs about 'pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die'. I am a disbeliever, and will remain so.

PE: - About a year ago you put out a public statement saying you could no longer call yourself an anarchist, recently you have recanted, re-embracing anarchy. What was the reason for your change of heart? What brought you back to the dark side?

WALTER:- The reason with my disenchantment with anarchism was in reality a disenchantment with certain anarchists. I don't like the concept of publicly battling with people and the spectacle it creates. It's a mistake I have made in the past, and when I look back at those statements they just look egotistical and immature. That said, I will for the first time explain what was going on and what led up to not only that statement but also baseless rumors that have followed me since. I will be careful not to name drop or call anyone out, a courtesy that was not afforded to me by the anarcho-rumor mill.

At the time of my arrest in Colorado in the summer of 2010, the second letter I ever received was from a local anarchist group. They talked about supporting me and were even interested in being my official support team. Furthermore they had their own print shop. I was happy to have their support and planned to write extensively with them as the publishers. A visit was arranged and one of the collective came to visit me at the county jail in Golden. I was told by this person that there were rumors that I was an informant. I was taken back by this and

said that ‘I was the only person on my case and no other arrests had been made so who exactly am I informing on?’ This person agreed, and from that moment support was forthcoming, for a whole four weeks anyways.

I gave my new support team my email address and password so that they could get another picture of me besides the mugshot the media had. I began writing articles about Animal Liberation from an anarchist perspective. I was calling the collective about twice a week. And then abruptly it all came to a screeching halt. Nothing I wrote ever got published or sent back to me. No one accepted my calls. No more visits. A couple weeks later I received a letter from the collective about some so called visit from my email account to a ‘homophobic YouTube video’. I was told I need to explain myself, defend myself and do it quick because ‘anarchists everywhere are calling to drop support for you’.

Words cannot describe how I felt. First I didn’t know what homophobic video they were talking about, and I still don’t. Second the only people that could be turning ‘anarchists everywhere’ against me were the self same people that were my support team, as I was newly arrested and they were the only anarchists I was in contact with. And third, I was not the only person with availability to that email. For all I know the FBI could have been in my email account trying to gather information or spread disinformation; which would make good sense from their end of things. In any event I have never to this day seen the homophobic YouTube video that was allegedly watched in connection with my email account. I haven’t seen it because it does not exist.

I was really pissed off about this for a couple of years because these rumors not only hurt elements of my support but also my feelings. Very, very few people know what it’s like to be in the position I was: In jail, on the news, facing federal prison as a ‘domestic terrorist’ and all the while using this as a platform to discuss Animal Liberation through my writings while facing rumors and tear down tactics from ‘anarchists’! I mean there I was in jail for being an ALF operative and I was being questioned as if I was a Nazi fascist in jail for queer bashing!

When people that do know me tried to post comments to this collective's website stating that I am in fact openly bi-sexual they would not post them. I know this because friends printed me those defenses and mailed them to me in jail along with printouts of their webpage and blogs showing what they were posting, the only comments they would let stand were the ones against me.

So after my court case was finished in Colorado I wrote that statement about not Identifying as an anarchist. I wrote that at a time when Animal Rights activists were being very supportive and at the same time I was getting a lot of accusative mail from anarchists primarily from the united states. It’s one thing when you don’t get along with a group of people in person you just hang out with others. But when you’re in imprisoned and people from several different states critique and sometimes ridicule you in letters there is a feeling of totality to it. So I thought, fine I will cut my losses with the anarchist community and stick with Animal Liberation and Straight Edge which is not hostile to me.

It must also be said that many anarchists such as yourself and the international anarchist community have unfailingly showed true support and solidarity since day one. Two things that have a profound effect on decision making is a lack of information and emotional distress. I have had my share of both since my arrest. But these days find me much more grounded and less erratic. Due in large part to being done with court and in the routine of my current surroundings. I am an anarchist, this has always been a foundation of who I am. Before I was the ALF lone wolf, before I was Straight Edge, before I was Vegan. I was an anarchist. I don’t have to drop one thing to become another. I am all this and more.

PE: - What would you say to people that have characterized you as ‘single issue’?

WALTER: Calling me or the ALF or the Animal Rights movement a ‘single issue’ cause is a little verbal slur that otherwise thinking and activist oriented people like to use on Vegans. Seriously, anyone that has read my book or the statements that I have been making from prison for years knows that I am concerned with more than one issue and I always have been.

But more importantly why the single issue snub when it comes to Animal Liberation?

I have personal met gay rights activists that act like the only thing wrong on the planet is that gay marriage isn't recognized legally. I have never heard anyone tell them that their cause is less valid because it is a 'single issue'. Factually it is incorrect to typecast Veganism or Animal Liberation in this way. A.R. issues have to do with several different species of life and often tie in with environmental concerns. Nearly every other Liberation struggle is only concerned with a fragment of one species, humans!

To those people that equate me or Veganism to being a one hit wonder, I would challenge back: Fine then tell me exactly what you are doing to liberate all life, everywhere! The fact is Total Liberation is the connecting of many different issues and tactics, and Animal and Earth Lib are a big part of that. One need not give up movement autonomy to be valid under the umbrella of Total Lib. I am an Animal person. I love Animals! I am a Vegan activist. These are clearly compassionate and selfless pursuits.

of course not every group or individual is going to click but slighting the A.R. community as if we are going a different direction than Total Lib is messed up! We can point that finger anywhere. I know plenty of anarchists that think that anarchism is strictly a political ideology, or theoretical idea. Or what about independence struggles like my own Puerto Rican peoples struggle for independence from los Estados Unidos? They are definitely very concerned with their own movement autonomy and the single issue of independence. People will always say whatever they feel and that is great but remember this, it's harder to build others up than to tear them down.

Thank you Comrade for this interview. I really wanted to have the opportunity engage in a question and answer session that not only brought these critiques out into the open but one that also allowed me to lay it all on the table with nothing held back. And now my friend.....I rest my case.... Take care and I will do the same. Total Liberation, Whatever It May Take!

17 Feb - David Rovics' Retelling of Visiting Marie Mason

Folk musician David Rovics recently went for another visit to Marie Mason and has written about the experience.

MORE:

I got up early the next morning to go visit a friend who is decidedly not from the camp of the newly-activated. Marie Mason, convicted "ecoterrorist," two years in to a twenty-two-and-a-half-year sentence for doing four million dollars worth of damage to corporate property in Michigan many years before. No prior criminal record aside from trespassing, a vegan who never hurt a fly, let alone a human, she's being held in a supermax, the only supermax for women that is also a Communications Management Unit, where those within it have severely restricted lives and ability to interact with the outside world, much more so than in "normal" super-maximum-security prisons.

This was my second visit to FMC Carswell, so I knew the drill. The hardest part last time was finding the entrance, but this time I had it saved in my GPS. The penitentiary is a massive complex adjacent to an even more sprawling military base on the outskirts of the vast city of Ft. Worth. It was January in Texas, the morning air was crisp but not cold, just the sort of winter weather that could convince me to spend some time there one day. Visitors of inmates were lined up along the badly-maintained road beside the prison complex. Most of the vehicles in the line were the older, more worn cars and minivans of the working class, and about half of them were from Oklahoma, just to the north. As Leonard Peltier and others have pointed out, the US prison system is the country's biggest Indian reservation, and evidence of that was there in the line of cars with me.

Directly across from the strangely unmarked entrance to the prison is a woodsy little piece of property that has an obviously hand-made sign advertising that people can camp there, and there was a little farm stand of some kind. I never checked it out, but I'm curious what reality is like in that little homestead.

The entrance to the prison consists of a ramshackle little guard house with a small, middle-aged Latino man its sole occupant. During visiting hours – which are designed to be confusing, it seems; you have to show up either at 8:30 am or at 11:30 am, something like that, but in between those times he stops processing people for a long while – he’s standing just outside the shack, in front of a little portable lectern which is uncomfortably perched on the gravel-covered road. He’s got a little tattered notepad, and he’s already got information on each of the people coming in to visit their imprisoned friends and relatives. He clearly doesn’t think winter in Texas is anything too exciting, since he’s standing there with an electric heater, much like a big hair dryer, and just as loud, that’s sitting on the ground by his lectern and warming his feet.

From the time I enter to the time I leave I get the feeling that the whole place functions with very few actual staff. I drive through the deserted streets within the prison complex, and the little wooden homes that presumably house prison employees of some kind. Then the lower-security prisoner housing, where some of the women often seem to be outside, carrying around laundry and stuff. Then the parking lot, which you can find easily by following the over-sized American flag blowing in the wind in front of the building through which visitors enter.

Altogether it’s a two-hour-long process from entering the prison to seeing Marie. In the visitor entrance building an impatient, apparently overworked employee repeatedly tells me and other visitors to back away from his section of the room. There are dozens of us, and we’re all supposed to squeeze into one part of the room, which isn’t big enough for us all to fit in. The man behind the counter tells people to wait outside if they don’t fit in the little section of the room we’re supposed to wait in. One young male visitor tests positive for cocaine and has to leave. An elderly woman sets off the metal detector because of a hip replacement, and he tells her she has to have a note from a doctor explaining that she has a hip replacement or she can’t come in. He doesn’t like my Oregon driver’s license because some information on it has faded out. I go to the car and get my passport, and that works for him.

Last time I visited, the two guards who brought me through the myriad of impossibly thick steel doors within the maze of windowless corridors were two white guys, of Italian and Norwegian descent, judging from their appearances and last names. I don’t remember their names, but the Norwegian-looking guy seemed very nice, and I nicknamed him Thor. Anyone else would have, too – he had blond hair hanging down most of the way to his shoulders, arms about the size of my legs, completely muscle-bound, with a neck almost as thick as a Cardassian (if you watch Star Trek and know what one is). This time my guides through the prison were both women of Latin American descent. Word was that Thor was out with an injury, which he actually got from throwing hammers in some kind of Viking competition.

As with my last visit, I was brought into the visiting room before Marie got there. It was a barren room, but unlike the corridors we were walking through, it had windows, plate glass, bulletproof I’m sure, through which you could see a field, other buildings, and lots of barbed wire. The room was slightly less barren than the last time. I guess you could call it an improvement, though such a minor one that it’s barely worth mentioning: in addition to the large, ratty poster of the Statue of Liberty, there was now a plant. A fairly sizable bush of some kind, it sat beside the plastic card table and two plastic chairs in the middle of the room. I was instructed to sit at the table and wait for Marie. I had set up the chairs so they were too close to each other, and one of the guards moved them so they were on either end of the table. She informed me that the chairs had to stay that way, and that after briefly greeting Marie I was not allowed to touch her.

Indeed, when Marie was brought out from a different hallway than the one I came in, the guards seemed to be timing our hug. Two seconds or so, too short to make them get antsy yet. Last time I visited, Thor and the Italian guy made a point of sitting as far away from Marie and I as possible, to give us as much privacy as they could under the bizarre circumstances. This time the guards sat about three feet from us, easily able to hear every word if they were paying attention.

In some prisons, even in some US ones, they have private monthly visits for married couples, visiting performers coming through now and then, and all sorts of other opportunities to avoid total insanity setting in too quickly.

Not here. Marie's efforts to allow us to have access to one of the two guitars that were sitting, rarely used, in a dark room nearby under lock and key, were fruitless. We sang unaccompanied a bit. But even though I'm a professional musician, and Marie's a darn good singer herself, I don't think either of us ever felt comfortable in that room without instruments, trying to sing a cappella with those guards so nearby, despite the fact that there was a nice, bathroom-y reverb in the empty room.

Mostly we talked. I have friends in various parts of the world who I only see once or twice a year at most, like Marie. But most of the rest of them aren't in prison, and although we might spend four hours straight talking with each other and catching up, we'll be doing that in the midst of other activities – walking, going to a cafe, interacting with other people we run into, etc. I once again forgot to bring a bit of money with me – I had left everything in the car, once again forgetting I was allowed to bring a little money to buy food from the vending machines in the prison. I was hungry. By now it was mid-day and I had barely eaten that morning. But the time slipped by despite the circumstances. They let us have an extra half hour for some reason. Marie was concerned if I stayed the extra half hour I might be late getting to my next gig, several hours away in Austin. She's always saying things like that, trying to make sure nobody's inconvenienced, which of course is impossible given her situation, but such a kind gesture, so out of step with her very unkind reality.

We spent four hours talking about politics, mutual friends, political strategies, other political prisoners, art, music... In the course of the two years Marie has been incarcerated she has been moved from a prison in the upper midwest where she had much more musical and educational opportunities, to this hellhole in Texas, where she and the rest of the women on her block spend much of their time on lockdown. The only slightly bright spot since she was transferred to Carswell was the MP3 players Marie and most other federal prisoners were eventually given the opportunity to purchase through the prison store, whatever it's called. Although most of the artists she'd like to find among the one million or so songs they make available for purchase are not in the collection, she's found other songs she likes well enough, and can successfully escape into the music for a bit, most days.

They wouldn't let us have a guitar, but they did allow Marie to spend a little of her money to have a member of the prison staff come and take photographs of Marie and I posing beside the plant. I asked if we were allowed to have the photos taken with the windows behind us, and the barbed wire, but the man said that wasn't allowed – it could compromise security somehow. The photos were taken with a cheap disposable camera. A little more physical contact was allowed while the photos were being taken. I thought the photographer might have been taking his time, perhaps knowing Marie and I wanted to be able to have our arms around each other, as we did for the photo shoot. Then it was time to go. Marie's eyes were filled with tears, and one of the jail guards seemed to feel defensive. She said, "I gave you warning that the visit was ending soon," as if the fact that she did this should have made Marie feel more in control of her life, and less apt to cry, under such outrageous circumstances.

I was escorted through the maze once again in the other direction, found my way to the car, and slowly drove through the grounds of FMC Carswell, and back past the little man in the guard house. Listening to BBC World Service on the satellite radio while driving through the vast, empty, scruffy expanses of east Texas landscape, the world felt like an especially small place. Dominating the news was the scene then unfolding at the gas plant on the Algeria/Libya border. Among the negotiating terms the hostage-takers were attempting to put forward included trading Americans for the blind Egyptian sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman and Pakistani scientist Aafia Siddiqui – Ms. Siddiqui being one of Marie's neighbors there in the gulag. Naturally, if folks are launching an attack against a British-owned gas plant as a result of a French invasion of a neighboring country (that being Mali), there must still be an American role in the whole thing. And if a female "terrorist" kidnapped by the CIA is one of the people in question, then FMC Carswell is where she would likely be found.