



POST OFFICE BOX 110034 BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11211

Updates for May 27th

13 May – Oscar López Rivera: The Invisible Man and His Invisible Nation

Oscar López Rivera has already served six more years than Mandela. Yet pleas for his pardon continue to fall on deaf ears in the White House, as do Puerto Rican people's public call to end the colonial status they have been subject to for 115 years.

MORE:

by Matt Peppe (*Latino Rebels*)

“Around the world today, men and women are still imprisoned for their political beliefs.”—President Barack Obama

“But one prisoner remains, now a vivid reminder of the ongoing inequality that colonialism and empire building inevitably bring forth. After more than 30 years, Oscar López Rivera is imprisoned for the ‘crime’ of seditious conspiracy: conspiracy to free his people from the shackles of imperial justice.”—Nobel Peace Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu

If you ask any American what is the first thing they think of when they hear the term “political prisoner,” the vast majority will say Nelson Mandela. To the millions who witnessed Mandela leading the South African liberation struggle and those who were born in its aftermath, Mandela has become a symbol of resistance to the worst form of political repression. The 27 years he spent imprisoned in Robben Island are an almost unimaginable punishment to people in the West, who like to think that nothing remotely similar could happen at home. Meanwhile, in a prison cell in Terre Haute, Indiana, out of the media spotlight and the history books, Oscar López Rivera on May 29 will mark his 33rd year spent behind bars (almost half in solitary confinement) as a political prisoner of the U.S. government for a nearly identical “crime” and a nearly identical cause.

López holds the distinction of being the longest-serving Puerto Rican political prisoner ever. He has already served six more years than Mandela. At 71 years old, he is not scheduled to be released for another 10 years. Convicted of “seditious conspiracy,” trying to overthrow the U.S. government by force, López was imprisoned for the same charge as Mandela. Although the government implied he was part of FALN (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional Puertorriqueña), a Puerto Rico nationalist organization, he was never accused of any acts of violence that killed or injured anyone.

The 55-year prison sentence handed down to López was egregiously excessive. For comparison, in the mid 90s, the average time spent in prison by people convicted of violent felonies was four years; for those convicted of murder or manslaughter it was 10 years.

To Puerto Ricans and those who belong to the Puerto Rican diaspora around the world, the cause of justice for Oscar López has become a unanimous and ubiquitous pursuit. Tens of thousands gathered in San Juan to demand López's release in November. There have been popular demonstrations that included musicians, athletes and politicians engaging in a symbolic lock up to bring attention to López's cause. Ricky Martin made a public plea at the Latin Grammy's and boxer Felix Verdejo did the same before his latest fight.

President Obama has recently received letters appealing for him to pardon López from fellow Nobel Peace Laureates Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Máiread Corrigan Maguire and Adolfo Pérez Esquivel; from Pedro Pierluisi, the sole Puerto Rican (non-voting) member of Congress and from Puerto Rican governor Alejandro García Padilla. Florida Representative Alan Grayson, spurred on by public outrage among the Puerto Rican community in his district, petitioned Obama for López's release in January. José “Pepe” Mujica, President of Uruguay, called on Obama to free López during their meeting at the White House.

Yet in the rest of the States it is as if López does not even exist. Obama has never publicly responded to the pleas from human rights activists, politicians, celebrities, or the hundreds of thousands of average citizens who have made their voice heard on the streets and on social media. While Arab Spring protests were featured on the national news broadcasts and pages of the newspapers and magazines, an equally large movement of U.S. citizens has been ignored by the President and the U.S. media.

When he gave his eulogy for Mandela, Obama proclaimed that, “We, too, must act on behalf of justice.” Presented with an opportunity to fulfill his pledge, Obama has instead chosen the convenience of indifference. What matters is not how Mandela was eulogized, but how he was judged in the moment. It is easy to talk about justice in a case that history has already decided long ago.

“I wonder if you would be interested in imbuing your presidency with historical significance in the form of a direct action to assuage this injustice perpetrated by the American government,” writes Guillermo Rebollo-Gil in 80grados. “Students at the march [in San Juan] were chanting in unison: ‘Obama can’t talk about freedom, if he keeps brother Oscar incarcerated.’ Thousands upon thousands agreed. And now I am tempted to ask, can you?”

Everyone now accepts that South Africa was an apartheid state. Whites created a racial caste system that denied blacks political and social rights while institutionalizing economic oppression. South Africa of the 1950’s in many ways resembled the U.S. South at the same time. In both cases, white supremacy was defended hysterically, above all other political considerations. The inherent inequality of the apartheid system of “Separate but Equal” has now been completely discredited.

Up until the bitter end, the United States government defended the apartheid regime in South Africa. Ronald Reagan, who declared Mandela’s African National Congress a terrorist organization, called South Africa “a country that is strategically essential to the free world” in 1981. Previous administrations backed the white South African army as they invaded neighboring Angola to suppress that nation’s liberation movement to achieve freedom from colonial rule. While apartheid now is universally accepted as an atrocity and a crime against humanity, it is important to remember that was not always the case.

The measure of a leader’s courage is whether he fights for social justice when he can make a difference, not what he says in hindsight decades later. If President Obama were the judge who Mandela stood before in Rivonia, would Obama have dared to reject the accepted legitimacy of South Africa’s political system, as he might like to believe, or would he, like Reagan, dismiss Mandela as a “terrorist?” Based on his actions as President, it is hard to believe that Obama would have had the courage to see Mandela’s struggle as the fight for justice we all now recognize that it was.

When it comes to Puerto Rico, Obama has not even bothered to acknowledge the monumental referendum in which the Puerto Rican people decisively rejected the current colonial status they have been subjected to for 115 years. The most Obama has done is include a few million dollars in his budget for the Puerto Rican electoral commission to hold another non-binding vote. He has not spoken at all about ensuring Puerto Rico’s will is carried out by achieving first-class status, either as its own nation or as part of the United States.

Residents of Puerto Rico and the other U.S. colonies (Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands) have no vote in presidential elections, nor any representation in either the House of Representatives or the Senate. They have no voice in making the policies they are subjected to under Article 6 of the Constitution, which they never agreed to. Economically, Puerto Rico is completely dependent on the United States. It imports 85% of its foodstuffs. To this day, efforts to create self-sufficiency are being undermined by U.S. laws imposed on Puerto Rico without their consent.

The result is what Judge Juan Torruella of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit has called “political apartheid, which continues in full vigor.” Torruella, a Puerto Rican native and Reagan appointee, writes eloquently of the similarities between the “Separate but Equal” status endorsed in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* and the “Separate and Unequal” status endorsed in the *Insular Cases*.

If there is any doubt how Puerto Rico has fared as a colony, one simple statistic illustrates the point: the average income in Puerto Rico (\$18,660) is 50% less than the poorest state (Mississippi), and 65% less than the national average. In many ways, there is little difference —either politically or economically— between Puerto Ricans today and black South Africans until the end of apartheid.

When it concerned another government, somewhere else, Obama could praise Mandela for challenging the oppressive system he faced, saying Mandela turned his trial into “an indictment of apartheid.” Just like Mandela, López made a similar argument in his own defense, admitting his fight against the structure of the colonial system oppressing Puerto Rico.

“The United States government will not say that international organizations have determined that Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States and that, according to international law, they are committing a crime against my country,” López said.

This appears to be a crime Obama is not willing to admit, much less challenge. The longer Obama maintains his silence, the larger the calls for justice for López grow. Puerto Ricans who oppose colonialism but have historically disagreed politically otherwise have found common cause in demanding López’s freedom. And this movement may serve as a catalyst to achieve the political change López has sacrificed 33 years of his life for: ending apartheid in Puerto Rico.

In the end Obama’s legacy will be not as the transformational political leader he promised to be, but rather as the President who pretended to support social justice while working behind the scenes to ensure it was never achieved.

Someday if both Oscar López and his nation of Puerto Rico achieve freedom, López may wind up becoming the symbol of struggle against injustice that Mandela is today. The United States under Barack Obama, like South Africa decades earlier, will be the symbol of political repression.

May 29th - Picket for Oscar Lopez Rivera

WHAT: Demonstration

WHEN: 5:00-7:00pm, Thursday, May 29th

WHERE: 26 Federal Plaza/Jacob Javits Federal Building - the intersection of Broadway and Thomas Street, near Worth and Duane Streets

COST: FREE

MORE:

Despite 33 years of psychological and physical torture, Oscar Lopez Rivera’s revolutionary spirit has never been broken! Oscar continues to be a powerful voice calling for Puerto Rican Independence!

BRING YOUR FLAGS, NOISEMAKERS, SIGNS AND BE READY TO CHANT!

13 May – Pre-Order “For Love and Liberty” by Tom Manning

A campaign on IndieGogo seeks funds by June 12th to complete publishing of a full-color book of paintings by Tom Manning.

MORE:

Tom Manning is a freedom fighter, political prisoner and prolific artist. His paintings are stories that jump off the page, revealing the outlook of people who struggle for liberation around the world. His paintings are about life and his landscapes recall times of importance.

The years of work to produce this beautiful book and important document are nearing their end and we need your help to fund the last phase of production!

Preorder YOUR copy of For Love and Liberty today to make this project come alive.
Choose from the three options to the right based on the level of support you can give
All proceeds, after production costs, will be donated to the Rosenberg Fund for Children.

Preorder Your Copy Today!

Featuring:

- ***86 full color reproductions of Tom's Painting
- ***Preface by Robby Meeropol
- ***Article, "In My Time" by Tom
- ***Poem by Assata, "Affirmation"
- ***Autobiography of Tom Manning
- ***Afterword by Ray Levasseur
- ***Notes from photographer Penny Schoner

From the Preface by Robby Meerpol:

"Tom's been incarcerated for 29 years. But even before he received his current life sentence he was trapped by the limited choices left to an impoverished child surviving in Boston's infamous Maverick Street Projects. The military during the Vietnam era seemed like a way out, but that too became a hellish form of confinement.

Tom broke free, he revolted. He became a revolutionary. He committed the unforgivable sin of confronting today's great imperial empire, the United States, on its home turf. For that, I expect the prison industrial complex will do its best to keep him confined for as long as it can."

14 May – Chelsea Manning's Lawyer Upset He Learned of Possible Prison Transfer Through Pentagon Leak

The Pentagon is leaking information about a possible transfer to a federal facility in a transparent attempt to strong-arm Chelsea into dropping her requests for medical treatment.

MORE:

by Kevin Gosztola (*The Dissenter*)

The Pentagon won't respond to Chelsea Manning's requests for gender treatment, but they'll apparently permit officials to leak information on how the agency plans to handle her requests to the media.

The Associated Press reported, based off two anonymous Pentagon officials, that the military was planning to transfer Chelsea Manning to a Federal Bureau of Prisons facility. However, according to her defense attorney, David Coombs, this leak is the first that he has heard of such a plan.

Chelsea Manning Support Network could not confirm the possible transfer because Manning had not been notified that such a plan was being considered.

Manning, who is in a military prison after being convicted of offenses stemming from her transmission of information to WikiLeaks, has been diagnosed with gender dysphoria by military medical professionals. She has sought medical treatment, but the Pentagon has refused to allow her to have hormone therapy. They have chosen to ignore her requests.

In a statement, Coombs declared, "The Pentagon's leak is intended to strong-arm Chelsea into backing down in her requests for medical treatment, ironically using the same method (leaking information) that sent Chelsea to prison for 35 years."

"The Pentagon's strategic leak of this story to the media is a transparent attempt to pressure Chelsea into dropping her request for needed treatment under the artificial guise of concern for her medical needs," he continued. "It is common knowledge that the federal prison system cannot guarantee the safety and security of Chelsea in the way that the military prison system can."

He added, “Accordingly, Chelsea would face the ‘choice’ between receiving necessary medical treatment but potentially jeopardizing her personal safety or not receiving necessary medical treatment but ensuring her personal safety.”

What the AP reported was that “Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel last month gave the Army approval to try to work out a transfer plan with the Federal Bureau of Prisons, which does provide such treatment,” according to “two Pentagon officials,” both whom were “not authorized to speak on the record.”

They also told the AP that the Pentagon and Bureau of Prisons were in the beginning stages of discussing the transfer.

Though Pentagon press secretary Rear Admiral John Kirby denied that a decision on a transfer had been made, based off the two Pentagon sources making unauthorized disclosures, the AP stuck to their story that the Pentagon had okayed the move.

Additionally, as highlighted in AP’s story, a military doctor approved a plan for treatment last November, which included hormone therapy. “It was sent higher up the chain of command for consideration, according to a complaint filed by Manning in March over the delay in getting treatment”

Manning filed a complaint where she indicated she requested a “regimen” known as “real life experience.” In other words, she demanded to be able to dress and live the way she wants so she could make a transition to life as a woman.

She expressed a desire for hormone therapy, which would likely lead to physical changes “such as breast and hair growth” as well as surgery.

Coombs stated, “The military’s refusal to provide necessary medical treatment to Chelsea is flat-out transphobia. Rather than deal with the reality that transgender persons are currently serving in the military, the military would seek to pawn off any responsibility for these individuals to other entities.”

“There is absolutely no reason that the Fort Leavenworth facility could not provide [hormone therapy] to Chelsea, other than a self-imposed and regressive policy that is based on archaic views of transgender persons as sexual deviants.”

He argued that the military’s invoking of “military catchphrases,” such as “contrary to the good order and discipline” or saying it would interfere with “the needs of the service” or “the mission,” were “pure rhetoric used by the Pentagon to perpetuate a backward policy that federal courts have already determined amounts to cruel and unusual punishment.”

As highlighted in Coombs’ statement, the Transgender Military Service Commission co-chaired by former US Surgeon General Dr. Joycelyn Elders and retired Coast Guard Rear Admiral Alan M. Steinman (also a doctor) released a study on whether the US military’s current policy against transgender service members is based on “medically sound reasons.”

“We find that there is no compelling medical rationale for banning transgender military service, and that eliminating the ban would advance a number of military interests, including enabling commanders to better care for their service members.”

Furthermore, “The prohibition on medically necessary cross-sex hormone treatment is inconsistent with the fact that many non-transgender military personnel rely on prescribed medications, including anabolic steroids, even while deployed in combat zones, and is based on inaccurate understandings of the complexity, risks and efficacy of such treatments.”

The study indicated there are “approximately 15,450 transgender personnel who serve currently” in the military.

Military regulations that prohibit “transgender service members from obtaining medically necessary gender-confirming surgery are harmful to the service members.”

The Commission’s study also concluded, “Defense Department rules concerning mental health, deployment and fitness for duty do not regulate gender identity in a manner that is consistent with the management of other psychological conditions, and have the effect of singling out transgender personnel for punishment even when they are mentally healthy.”

Manning cannot be discharged from the military until her sentence is complete. She will be subject to Pentagon policies unless the Pentagon chooses to avoid allowing her to force a change in policy by transferring her to a civilian prison facility.

May 14th - Statement from Chelsea Manning concerning her proposed move to a civilian prison

Late last night, an AP article reported that unidentified Pentagon officials had indicated that the Office of the Secretary of Defense might transfer Chelsea Manning to a civilian prison facility so that she could receive treatment for gender dysphoria. Chelsea responded to the report concerning her potential transfer as follows:

“I wish to clarify that my request for a treatment plan did not involve any request to be transferred. At the beginning of 2014, the U.S. Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth, KS and the Army Corrections Command were ready to approve and implement a treatment plan that at least conservatively met the standards set forth by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health. I was content with this plan. Based on these facts I don’t understand why the Office of the Secretary of Defense would feel the need to punt this issue by transferring me.”

Chelsea’s trial attorney, David Coombs, also issued a strong response to this announcement. You can read David Coombs’ statement on his blog.

He explains that,

“Whether the Pentagon likes it or not, Chelsea is a military service member and responsibility for her falls on the military. Although a very small number of military inmates are transferred to federal prison each year, this is only after all appeals have been exhausted and the military inmate has been discharged from the service. Chelsea’s appeals have not yet begun and her transfer to federal prison in these circumstances would be unprecedented. Chelsea has been asking for medical treatment from the military for the past ten months. So far, the military has outright ignored her requests. The military absolutely needs to revisit its “policy” on transgender medical care and adapt it to 21st century medical standards. It cannot continue to bury its head in the sand any longer.”

14 May - The Barrett Brown Review of Arts and Letters and Jail: I Wish I Could Do, Like, Magic

This is the seventh installment of The Barrett Brown Review of Arts and Letters and Jail.

MORE:

Shortly after I was transferred from the notoriously low-end Mansfield Law Enforcement Center jail unit over here to the posh Seagoille Federal Correctional Institution, which I’m now privileged to call home, I met my new fellow prisoner Sam Hurd, the Dallas Cowboy who had run afoul of the law, or at least the most recent Dallas Cowboy to run afoul of the law — unless yet another one has been arrested in the last few months, which, come to think of it, is more likely than not. I don’t follow sports myself, sport being merely a pale imitation of warfare, which is far more dramatic (with the obvious exception of American warfare, which I understand to now mostly entail the shooting of Arab teenagers with flying robots). But one day I happened to notice Hurd reading a book by Manly P. Hall, the early-20th-century stockbroker-turned-occultist whose comprehensive

1929 compendium of the esoteric arts, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, I had read during my stay over at Mansfield. We got to talking, and it came to light that both of us had likewise recently read *Transcendental Magic*, by fin-de-siecle Kabbalist Eliphas Levi. So I loaned Hurd my copy of *Gnostic Philosophy*, by the Freemason scholar Tobias Churton, and, later, when it was time for him to ship off to the medium-security prison where he'd be serving a 15-year sentence for cocaine distribution, I presented him with an autobiography of the renowned English initiate Elias Ashmole, for which he was quite understandably grateful.

Mysticism has always thrived among prisoners, but I suppose some explanation ought to be forthcoming as to why I myself happen to have so many occult texts lying around that I can just hand them out like candy to every magic-wielding football star who comes along on a drug rap. It might seem especially odd inasmuch as that I used to write a column for *The Skeptical Inquirer* and the occasional book review for *Skeptic*. But the truth is that my heart was never really in all that skepticism stuff. By temperament, I'm really something of a druid, and meanwhile I've always despised science and the sordid fruits thereof. Now, populizers of the scientific method and secularization and all that — turtleneck-clad sorts such as Carl Sagan — will tell you that the natural universe, illuminated by facts, is more awe-inspiring than any hazy product of human superstition. But then Sagan, like most other reefer addicts, often talked a great deal of nonsense. Tell me what you like about the stars and the Big Bang and string theory, but for my money you're never going to beat the Norse creation myth involving a giant cow that licks a block of ice until the first humans emerge from within.

It had also occurred to me, sitting in my jail cell one day, that I really do have quite a lot of enemies, a disconcertingly high percentage of which happen to be executives of shadowy corporations with ties to the intelligence community. If there's any such thing as magic, I decided, it would probably be a good idea to get a hold of some.

Aside from these joke reasons I just made up, my main impetus for studying the occult was the truly wonderful novel Foucault's *Pendulum*, by Umberto Eco, the Italian professor of semiotics who is perhaps better known for *The Name of the Rose*. Having read it at least four or five times since first being taken captive by the local nation-state back in 2012, I was gradually struck by how little I knew of Hermeticism, alchemy, Rosicrucians, astrology, necromancy, and the assorted emanations of the divine Sefirot, whereas just a few centuries ago all of this was common knowledge among literary men and members of the Royal Society and whatnot. Suddenly I felt uncultured by comparison — although in fairness to myself, I'm quite conversant in all manner of contemporary fictional lore with which Isaac Newton never had to contend, including but not limited to the *Final Fantasy* and *Elder Scrolls* video games, Frank Herbert's *Dune* series, the Gulf of Tonkin incident, and the first seven seasons of *The Simpsons*. Still, I've always considered myself to be much better than Isaac Newton at most things, and so I had no problem setting out to match and even exceed his command of colorful nonsense. About a year ago, then, I started ordering books.

The first of these to arrive was *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus*, Paracelsus being the 16th-century alchemist and mage par excellence who also dabbled in legitimate medicine. The following extracts should give you an idea of what a High Medieval alchemical text involves:

“It is a great error to suppose that chiromancy is concerned only with the hands, for it includes the significance of the lines upon the entire body.”

“For the basilisk is produced and grows from the chief impurity of a woman, namely, from the menstrual blood... But who would be so bold and daring as to wish to produce it, even to take it and at once kill it, unless he had first clothed and protected himself with mirrors?”

“Take care not to be misled by Arnold de Villa Nova, who has written on the subject of coal fire, for in this matter he will deceive you.”

“I, as an experienced man, will lay before you what I have learned about sulphur... Sulphur confutes Aristotle when he says that the species of things cannot be transmuted. Sulphur transmutes them; and if Aristotle were alive at the present day, he would be completely put to the blush and made ashamed of himself.”

It was difficult to know what to make of all this information. I have as much contempt for Aristotle as the next man, but I wasn't sure I was prepared to found my budding spirituality upon a desire to show his ass up (and I imagine that were he actually alive today, he'd be more embarrassed about his claim that men and women have different numbers of teeth than about having not been in agreement with Paracelsus' obviously incorrect notion of what it is that sulfur does). And Arnold de Villa Nova had certainly never steered me wrong before. Having said all that, it's hard to disagree that basilisks should only be handled by specialists, and you can't help but like a guy who starts a sentence with "I, as an experienced man ..."

Next up was the aforementioned Transcendental Magic, by Eliphas Levi, translated from the original French and otherwise edited by the American occultist Waite back in the 1930s. Waite himself seems to be some sort of savant, bearing as he apparently does an encyclopedic knowledge of every magical text ever written, including those by Levi; the footnotes consist largely of Waite pointing out, chapter and verse, in which other of his books Levi has written something that directly contradicts what he tells us here. The editorially ubiquitous Waite also intervenes on such occasions as he deems Levi to be simply in the wrong; whereas Levi claims that 40 days of preparation are necessary before summoning any sort of extra-dimensional entity worth having around, Waite explains that this is not at all the case, which is reassuring, as 40 days really does seem a little high.

My magical education proceeded apace even when I didn't intend it to. One of my more surprising finds at the Mansfield jail library was a faded, Eisenhower-era paperback copy of The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini, Cellini being the post-Renaissance goldsmith and sculptor. Not having any interest in the non-verbal arts, I expected to find the account rather boring. But this being 16th-century Italy, and Cellini turning out to be something of a murderous thug even for that time and place, otherwise dull passages involving the commission and execution of various jewel-encrusted doodads are invariably interspersed with the most extraordinary and frankly unjustified acts of violence, many perpetrated by Cellini himself. Even more entertaining is Cellini's remarkable penchant for bragging. Naturally he is the greatest artist the world has ever known; more surprisingly, he is also the greatest lover. He shoots a pheasant out of a tree at some incredible distance and is immediately surrounded by hordes of lesser sportsmen who tell him what a fine fellow he is; modestly, he gives some of the credit to his special preparation of gunpowder, which is his own invention and, by the way, the greatest fucking gunpowder the world has ever known. When Rome is invaded, he mans an artillery piece and turns out to be the greatest heavy gunner the world has ever seen, etc. Later he is invited by a prominent local priest to practice some necromancy over at the ruins of the Coliseum, and of course Cellini manages to summon, on his very first try, hundreds and hundreds of demons, because, after all, he is Cellini. They didn't spend 40 days in ritual preparation, either. Fuck you, Eliphas Levi.

Incidentally, you might expect that when one joins the Catholic priesthood there is entailed a sort of implicit agreement that one will refrain from engaging in recreational necromancy, but apparently not.

16 May - International Day of Solidarity with Marie Mason, Eric McDavid & all Eco-prisoners

June 11 began as an international day of solidarity with long-term eco-prisoner Jeff "Free" Luers in 2004. At the time Jeff was serving 22+ years. Locally, NYC ABC will be hosting an event and co-sponsoring another in solidarity with Marie Mason, Eric McDavid, and all eco-prisoners.

MORE:

After years of struggle, Jeff and his legal team won a reduction in his sentence and he was released from prison in December 2009. But in the years between Jeff's arrest and release, the FBI had carried out a series of indictments and arrests in an attempt to devastate the radical environmental and anarchist communities.

Two of the people caught up in this maelstrom of repression were Eric McDavid and Marie Mason. Marie Mason and Eric McDavid share the unfortunate distinction of having the longest standing sentences of any environmental prisoners in the United States.

Please join us in an International Day of Solidarity with Marie Mason, Eric McDavid, and all Eco-prisoners on every June 11. As we support Marie and Eric, we also work to build networks of support for our movement to resist state repression and recognize that the state's tactics against our movement can affect all of us. This is a time to remember our friends who are in prison – who are continuing their struggles on the inside. This is a time to continue and strengthen the very work for which Eric and Marie are now serving so much time – to struggle against capitalism, ecological devastation, and the ever more diffuse forms of control in this prison society. June 11 is also a reminder to those of us on the outside that there are things worth fighting for and consequences worth facing because the future will be decided by the actions we take.

Never Alone Art Exhibit www.neveraloneart.org

This year on June 11 – the International Day of Solidarity with Marie Mason, Eric McDavid & all Eco-prisoners – we will be running the 2nd annual Never Alone online exhibition. It will serve as an avenue not only for fundraising for these political prisoners, but as a way to reach out informatively to a broad audience on issues of earth & animal liberation and state captivity. We would love to invite you to contribute artwork to this exhibition.

2014 Call Out from June11.org

“This call is not proscriptive in any way; read what you want in these words and put them into action as you and your crew see fit. But remember, what we're calling for is not a ritualistic expression of solidarity, a once a year party in which we, for only an instant, call to mind those captured by the State. Rather, ours is a call to live the history of our imprisoned comrades, to take their names, their actions, and their struggles and to turn them back on the world that locks them up. Ours is a call to action. In solidarity with Marie and Eric; with all long-term anarchist prisoners; >> in defence of the earth; until all cages are empty!”

For more information on June 11, Marie and Eric, and Earth First! Prisoner Support:

supportmariemason.org

supporteric.org

earthfirstjournal.org/june11

17 May - Update on Kevin Olliff

It's been a while since we've posted an update on Kevin's wellbeing, mostly because life at Vandalia has been fairly quiet and uneventful. But Kevin is still doing well, looking healthy, and feeling optimistic about what's coming next after his release.

MORE:

He's actually talking about how it's starting to feel closer and closer, and he's excited to get back to the people and things he loves.

In the meantime, he's reading your letters and all the books that have been sent, and wants to thank everyone again for keeping him in mind. He's also recently completed a couple classes that should earn him some time off his sentence, and has been contributing ideas to a developing project on grassroots activism (more on that to come).

Right now, because of still-looming legal fees and necessary commissary costs, he's still in need of donations. If you can spare a little, please send it his way via the PayPal link on his site, supportkevinandtyler.com.

On that note, Kevin wants to emphasize that donations are also always needed for long-term eco/AR-prisoners who may not be in the forefront of people's attention. So he asks that you consider putting 10% of whatever you want to give him towards the legal and commissary funds of people who are doing many years in prison because of their convictions and support of animal liberation.

19 May - Transfers, transfers, transfers by Joel Bitar

Recently imprisoned comrade Joel Bitar has started blogging about his experiences in prison. We'll be printing

them here.

MORE:

As I mentioned in my last post, after spending over a month on Unit 5 I was transferred to the education range on Unit 6. At that time I wasn't happy about moving for a couple of reasons. A.) in jail being uprooted and then forced to adapt to a new environment is exhausting and often traumatizing and B.) Unit 5 is a good place filled with good people. Subjectively speaking it is a more down-to-earth, "real" jail experience with plentiful amounts of solidarity amongst prisoners.

While on Unit 6 my time slowed to a snail's pace despite beginning classes and having a bit more freedom of movement. It may have simply been that I landed on a boring range, however, my theory is that the inmates behaved differently due to the methods of control utilized by the guards. The staff there constantly remind inmates that they are in a place of privilege and threaten to send them back to Unit 5 if behavioral standards are not met. For example, after bringing a water bottle to class for days without incident, a guard arbitrarily decided to one day forbid me from taking it with me. After some back and forth, I was told I had a disrespectful tone in my voice and that if I didn't like the rules I could always go back to Unit 5. I said that to me it seemed that certain rules were being made up spontaneously. The guard responded, "If you don't like the rules you shouldn't have decided to come to jail in the first place." There isn't really room for healthy debate with someone who enjoys total power and control over you so I sucked it up and left my water bottle behind.

I saw similar situations occur between guards and inmates where those who fall out of line are reminded that they are lucky, then are threatened with transfer back to Unit 5 if the "undesirable" behavior continues. This also creates an environment where inmates begin to police one another's actions. For example, I created a piece of workout equipment and was encouraged by another inmate to get rid of it because the guards wouldn't like it. Instead of pushing the boundaries and pushing for more rights, inmates walk around scared and engage in self-policing which I find pitiful and toxic to be around. A quick lesson on jail lingo: inmates who do the work of the jailors are called "birds" and are generally less "solid" if they forsake the prisoner's code of solidarity.

Despite my discomforts, I started to settle into a routine and form bonds with the other prisoners around me. Then earlier today, out of the blue, a guard called me over and said, "Pack your stuff, you're moving to Unit 1." I was told that because I am a foreign national, I would have to do my time in the remand jail pending my deportation back to the United States. Remand jails are widely considered to be a more unpleasant and chaotic experience than sentence jails. Folks are usually stressed about their cases and don't know what their futures hold. This can lead to tense situations.

So as you can imagine, I was devastated to hear that I would be spending potentially the next 10 months in such a place. The reason for my transfer didn't make sense because my sentence has only just begun, but ultimately I had no say in the matter.

After a customary strip search, I was escorted from Unit 6 to Unit 1 where I waited in the holding area until assigned to a range and cell. I waited and waited. It turned out the staff had some internal disagreements as to where I should be placed. Because I am both sentenced and a foreigner who will eventually be deported, there is ambiguity about where to put me. Eventually, they decided to return me to the sentence area of the jail. My fate: back to Unit 5 where I began my Penetang experience.

The main reason I was spared months of suffering is because of the kind and good-hearted staff on Unit 5. When I arrived, they explained that they advocated for me to do my time on a sentence unit because it was only fair to me with so many more months ahead. It was one of the first times since the start of my incarceration that I was treated like a human being and not a number. I thanked them thoroughly for their kindness and I am still grateful. I found that the guards on Unit 5 are generally quite respectful, and in such an environment, it's easy to return respect. They were even kind enough to give me my own cell with a view of the TV. After such an exhausting day moving around it was touching to finally be treated humanely. Apparently, even in jail the arc of the universe bends toward justice.

19 May – Cecily McMillan’s Sentencing Statement

The statement that Cecily McMillan read in her sentencing hearing after being wrongfully found guilty two weeks before of felony assault of a police officer and facing 2 to 7 years in prison. She read the statement immediately before the judge handed down the sentence.

MORE:

Your honor, I stand before you exhausted. I have spent 35 of the 42 months that I have been in New York City in this room trying to convince the court of my innocence. I have lost friends and family, school and work, and, most recently, my freedom. I have been exhausted of nearly everything that makes me, me, except, that is, my dignity.

As a young girl my mother told me, “Cecy, everything you see, your home, your loved ones, even your life, can be taken from you at will. But no one can strip you of your dignity without your consent.” I don’t think I knew what dignity was then, but I did understand that it was deliberate, something you had to define for yourself. And though I am still young, and still searching for answers, I have started down a path where dignity is derived from the law of love, and though it has been said that this trial is personal and not political, I maintain that the personal cannot be divorced from the political. Whereas nonviolent civil disobedience is the manifestation of my ideology, it is rooted in a love that is central to my identity. The law of love holds that we, all of human society, live one common life, our existence beats with one common pulse - that as we listen to one another, learn from one another, love one another – we draw closer to one another and towards our collective happiness. Therefore - whether in resistance or in retribution, whether personal or political, violence is not permitted. This being the law that I live by, I can say with certainty that I am innocent of the crime I have been convicted of. And as I stand before you today, I cannot confess to a crime I did not commit; I cannot do away with my dignity in hopes that you will return me my freedom. However, the same law of love requires me to acknowledge the unintentional harm I caused another - for this accident, I am truly sorry. And in this spirit, your honor, I ask you to halt the violence there. Consider my words as I ask you to not perpetuate one injury with yet another.

May 19th - Cecily McMillan's Lenient Sentence Is Punishment Too Much

by Natasha Lennard (*VICE*)

Every night, according to her first letter written from detention at Rikers Island, Cecily McMillan rereads lines from historic socialist leader Eugene Victor Debs.

Debs told a Federal Court in 1918, having been convicted of sedition: "While there is a lower class, I am in it, and while there is a criminal element I am of it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free." Debs was sentenced to 10 years.

And indeed, McMillan is — in every sense of the word — not free.

The 25-year-old student today learned that she will spend three more months in prison, receiving a sentence of 90 days (with credit for time served) and five years probation. Compared to a possible seven-year sentence for her conviction for felony assault on a police officer, the sentence is lenient. It remains 90 days and five years probation too long. Her protracted pre-trial ordeal — for knocking a cop's face with her elbow while swinging round after he grabbed her breast — has been punishment too much.

"The court finds that a lengthy sentence would not serve the interests of justice in this case," Judge Ronald Zweibel said today.

While McMillan has avoided a potentially worse fate, the lesson of the young woman's two-year collision with the criminal justice system should not be soon forgotten.

As a university-educated white woman, McMillan has been accorded more privileges in her life than many of the millions of daily victims of US "justice." Nonetheless, as the last criminal case to remain on the docket from an Occupy-related arrest, McMillan's ordeal reflects patterns in the justice system that should not be treated as rarities: Overreaching prosecutors with an imbalance of leverage, a structure lending impunity to police officers,

police brutality, and assault and trauma.

The possible conditions for McMillan's comparatively short sentence — still, too long — should also not escape our attention. Unlike most convicts held without bail who make the lonely trip to and from Rikers Island prison to receive verdicts and sentences, often without a supporter to speak of, the courtroom Monday was packed for McMillan.

"Supporters are overflowing in the halls," noted freelance journalist Carol Schaeffer.

43,000 signatures — including those of two formerly imprisoned Pussy Riot members and New York City Council members — were delivered to Judge Zweibel on a petition asking for leniency for McMillan. The very jurors that convicted the activist wrote to the judge asking for a light touch in sentencing — having foolishly not appreciated the weight their "guilty" verdict might carry.

McMillan was an unlikely candidate to run the cruel gauntlet of a protracted felony case, squared against an NYPD officer with a history of brutality — the details of which were ruled inadmissible in her trial. She was also an unlikely avatar for Occupy: As an activist and organizer, she was a moderate social democrat, pushing for system reform.

McMillan and Occupy's more radical participants stood at ideological odds. Her victimization by the NYPD and then the New York court system does not make them friends; it may, however, be the basis for camaraderie. "Which side are you on?" As the old union hymn asks. The fact of Occupy — confined to recent history as it may be — laid the groundwork for the sort of solidarity McMillan has garnered. Hers should not be the only courtroom packed with supporters. Her case should not be a rarity in producing rage at a system stacked against defendants.

Today McMillan will return to a jail cell. Tonight, no doubt, she will reread Debs' famous words. And while she will leave her cage in three months, she will remember that "freedom" is a fragile state indeed when so many souls remain imprisoned.

20 May - New writings by Mumia Abu-Jamal

We're including transcripts of Mumia's latest commentaries.

MORE:

May 20th - May 13th's Meaning

For years I've written on the meanings of May 13th, 1985.

The murders. The massacre. The bombing and the burnings (involving the MOVE organization in Philadelphia)

The unjust incarceration of Ramona Africa.

And the immunity for killer cops - baby killers in blue - immune for crimes that would make devils blush.

29 years have passed - and except for Ramona, no one ever entered a jail cell.

How has this impunity served the city and the citizens of Philadelphia?

Today, cops - in broad daylight - rob people, testify falsely, and plant drugs on people.

Recently a Philadelphia newspaper reported on a squad of cops robbing hundreds of thousands from local businesses. Walking in; tapping the till - at gunpoint.

State and federal prosecutors turn a blind eye, like nothing happened.

This some of the foul fruits of May 13th, 1985.

Impunity breeds corruption - and the whole city suffers.

May 20th - The War Within

The horrific events of Chibok, in northern Nigeria are symptoms of a deeper malady than the mad-men of Boko Haram, the indigenous group which recently kidnapped hundreds of school kids and threatened to enslave and sell them.

Events such as these tell us that the very notion of nationhood, one imposed from outside by pens and purposed of European colonialism, are as shallow as a backyard pool.

For Europe built and bordered the states of Africa purely for their own convenience, to better exploit the resources of Africa -not for African people.

So today we have nations, drawn on maps in Europe, where bitter divisions dwell - and where tribe trumps nation as the center of identity.

The Muslim North of Nigeria has ever felt ill at ease with its southern, Yoruba and Christian neighbors. Nigeria has hundreds of languages, and perhaps as many tribes and ethnic groups.

It is still trying to find a common ground of what it means to be Nigerian.

May 23rd - The Racist Rich

When news broke of the comments of a wealthy NBA owner to his lover, it made me feel queasy.

That's because some things should remain private, especially between lovers.

It's not the business of the media, much less the government -- nor us, for that matter.

I feel this way even when the issue of racism is raised, for even racism shouldn't trump personal privacy.

Nothing Donald Sterling has said has changed my view.

Moreover, this event looks like episodic racism, and reflects occasional eruptions, but also within the realm of the private. This ignores systematic racism, which, unlike episodic racism (which effects, at best, less than half a dozen people), has an impact on the lives and life-hopes of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people.

An example. Many people will agree that mass incarceration has affected the lives of millions; disproportionately African-Americans and Latinos.

This was no accident. It didn't just happen.

It was the specific policy of public officials, like Das, judges, legislatures - and promoted by media.

This was a racist policy, made by politicians to play to the imagined fears of whites of dark 'Others'.

It was also a cynical political decision to exploit the sufferings of millions of people to enrich the prison-industrial-complex, and boost employment in rural America, where most prisons are situated.

It is this vast, impersonal, systemic racism that deserves our attention - and our condemnation.

Not that of an old goat lusting after a 30-something and animated more by jealousy and envy, than real hatred.

But guess which one the media will exploit?

21 May - Post Traumatic Stress After Prison

Former political prisoner Jordan Halliday wrote this article for an upcoming zine titled "after prison," featuring interviews and writings from former earth & animal defense prisoners such as Rod Coronado, Josh Harper, and Jeff Luers, to be launched on June 11, the International Day of Solidarity with Marie Mason, Eric McDavid & all Eco-prisoners.

MORE:

Serving a prison sentence is an experience in one's life that cannot be compared with many other things outside prison itself. Prison is a very dark and depressing place with a culture of its own, and it can really get into your psyche. You begin to experience a heightened alertness to attack and aggression. Many will bottle up and suppress emotions while creating a hard emotional/mental exterior to hide behind. Some experience a total loss of humanity.

When a guard instructs an inmate to strip down for a search they must comply. You will often come back to find your room, bed and locker in disarray after a guard has come through to check for contraband. To put this in perspective, this is the only thing you can really call your own. It is your place, your home. It can feel like a complete violation of personal space and property.

You can also feel under threat of attack from other inmates if you fail to provide paperwork proving why you are

incarcerated. The prison will often not provide this paperwork in an effort to even the playing field for inmates who may have snitched, cooperated or been accused of a crime of a sexual nature. Some inmates will have to learn to eat fast and cover their food to avoid theft from other inmates. Each prison and jail has its own set of inmate created politics and rules you must abide by in order to make it. This will often involve the way you eat, sleep, shower, brush your teeth, watch TV or even use the restroom. These are only a few examples of life in prison.

When a prisoner is released from prison into society it is usually with little or no preparation for what the outside world expects. Adjusting to freedom and to the stress, demands and expectations of others can often be difficult. I want to touch on a subject that is not often talked about when a person gets out of prison. This is the fact that when released many of us have experienced signs and symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress & Post Incarceration Syndrome. Nicole O'Driscoll, a qualified nurse who manages a mental-health crisis house, explains that "Post-traumatic stress disorder is characterised by traumatic memories and flashbacks, emotional numbing or episodes of anxiety and depression, difficulties managing mood and behavior, and problems with normal daily activities such as eating and sleeping."

For myself I still get bouts of anxiety from things like the jingle of keys, which subconsciously remind me of when the guards were close and walking towards my room or down the hall. I've also had debilitating anxiety from loud sounds, and the sight of authority figures, or even black or white cars that were parked outside my house or behind me in my car. These things have gotten better for myself overtime but haven't ever fully gone away.

Some inmates may have been a victim of violence, abuse or other traumas while serving their sentence, and this isn't always from other inmates. Terence T. Gorski who wrote an article on Post Incarceration Syndrome noted that it can be "caused by constant fear of abuse from both correctional staff and other inmates." As I mentioned, most of my symptoms are brought on by an association with authority and/or correctional staff.

These traumas are not always only the result of being incarcerated but also with experiences leading up to incarceration such as arrest as well as many other things. For myself it is definitely a combination of many things. I feel I need to add a little background to give context to my personal experiences dealing with PTSD.

During the summer of 2008 I experienced a lot of strange harassment outside my home. Some of this harassment I believe was coincidental, while others were more directed. During that time I was heavily involved in animal rights activism and my name would sometimes appear in newspapers. I believe it was shortly after my name appeared in a University of Utah newspaper in regards to anti-vivisection demonstrations that I received a decapitated rat head in the mail. I had a pet rat at the time and the fear that it was him only added to the trauma of the situation. During that time someone also spray painted the word "MEAT" all over my street, delivered extremely hardcore pornographic videos (which had really explicit titles that could have been taken as threats), and woke me on a regular basis with loud knocks on my window and/or searchlights in my windows, followed by screeching tires from a fleeing truck. Over time I've tried to put all the harassment together and come to conclusions about who might have been behind it. But I haven't ever come up with anything concrete.

Living with these fears of constant harassment definitely increased my own personal anxiety. To add salt to the wound, I found out that my parents were visited by the FBI who asked them questions about me. After not returning their call I was kindly visited by the FBI at my work a few days later. This ended with me storming out of an office while the FBI trailed me and told me that I was making a big mistake by not cooperating and that they would subpoena me to a grand jury, in front of corporate management and for all the customers to hear. They followed through on their promise 6 months later and again visited me at my work to deliver my subpoena.

After refusing to cooperate with my first initial grand jury & filing a motion pro-se declaring their subpoena invalid as it wasn't properly filled out, I was once again visited at my work by at least 12 FBI agents and the lead United States Marshal to make sure the subpoena was properly filled out this time. Every visit certainly increased my anxiety and fear of authority.

I ultimately was arrested and sent to jail for my refusal to cooperate with a grand jury. This process in itself is enough to break some people emotionally and mentally. Besides the thorough body search which requires you to strip completely nude, bend over and cough – which is extremely humiliating and can make a person feel subhuman very quickly – there is also the contempt and force in which the people in authority feel and use towards you. Just a routine fingerprint can be aggressively done. For myself the US Marshals made fun of my jacket and pressed my fingers extremely hard against the fingerprint scanner before leaving me in an isolated cell for a few hours. I was eventually moved from federal holding to a county jail where the entire process was repeated over again. While at the county jail I spent over 72 hours with 12 other individuals in a holding cell designed for 5 as a temporary place to keep inmates for a couple of hours when moving them to another facility or courthouse.

The jail was overcrowded as they had just mass arrested over 800 homeless individuals that night from a local park (mostly on vagrancy charges). The holding cell had no beds, just a toilet and sink. I ended up having to sleep next to the toilet. Constantly being moved around and staying in cells without beds caused hours of sleeplessness. No sleep (nor food as they would not provide me with vegan meals) is extremely draining on the body and mind and can break down an inmate, further affirming the feeling of being less than human.

While inside a county jail in Cache County, Utah I was placed with someone who asked me directed questions that I later found out in legal documents was working with the government. This person would often get violent and even choked me when I refused to “accept Jesus Christ”. In this jail I was also moved into another cell with a black inmate. The white guys tried to move me and I refused because the alternative was a gross old white man named “grandpa”. I was cornered, choked, punched and nearly beaten up for not complying. At one point the guards tried moving me back in with the inmate who was working with the government, which I refused to do (I didn’t know for certain he was working with the government at that point he had just given me so many red flags that I knew something was up) to which they threatened to forcibly remove me with taser shields. This is the jail I also quickly learned to not use the restroom when someone else is eating. All of these things increased my already heightened anxiety and fear.

Fortunately for me, I was released during my initial incarceration after about 4 months as the grand jury had expired and we had filed our 3rd motion for release. But unfortunately the government decided to charge me with criminal contempt of court (something they had only ever done twice before in United States history). So the whole process started over again. There was also a large falling out within my local animal rights community as friends of Nicole “Nikki” Stanford (formerly Viehl), who was the other individual subpoenaed to the same grand jury, whom I had called out for choosing to testify, created threats and general animosity towards me. They defended her with the typical statements of “she didn’t tell them anything they didn’t already know” and that she had the defendants blessing to testify. This caused a rift in our community as some individuals felt ignoring the situation instead of dealing with the confrontation was the best route. This was extremely damaging to me emotionally. I felt I had lost a large amount of support because I wasn’t willing to deal with the people who refused to address the situation. I remember leaving a collective house crying, telling a few activists that I couldn’t be a part of an unsafe community that allowed people like her to be a part of it.

I spent the next few years on pre-trial probation while I was fighting my charge, in which I ultimately took a non-cooperating plea deal. During that time an officer was allowed to search my home, car and myself at any time without a warrant, and could and did show up unannounced to do so. This added even more stress and anxiety as I was in constant fear that a probation officer would come over and for some reason decide I was doing something which violated my probation and put me back in jail. Although there was no reason for them to do so the worry was still there. This worry turned out to be not far from the reality. After writing a comment on a blog in favor of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) I was brought to court with the prosecutor and officer claiming this was an association with the ALF (something that my probation strictly prohibited). Luckily I had a great lawyer who got me out of it claiming that my support was simply free-speech and didn’t constitute an association. This was still obviously not the best way to start things off. As time went on I was assigned new officers and I was eventually sentenced to 10 months in prison. Things were starting to shift towards me self-surrendering as soon as a date was provided.

During this time I fell in love and started dating my now wife Mariana, online. As soon as it was becoming clear that I was going to go back to prison soon, we decided that we should meet in person. She bought plane tickets from Colombia to Utah and was just finishing up a week away with her family before she visited. While she was away with her family I saw some men looking into my window one morning. I opened the door to see what they wanted and was immediately surrounded by a dozen armed agents all pointing weapons at me. Then they started piling out of my backyard and I was arrested. In the year prior I had given an interview to a clothing line that happened to sell Vegan and Straight- Edge apparel. The court claimed that this was in direct violation of my probation which prohibited me from associating with “ALF, ELF, and VSE (vegan straight edge) animal groups [sic]”. This was obviously a tactic to break me by my probation officer who knew that my partner was set to visit in just a couple of days.

This incapacitated me emotionally, mentally and physically. I spent that night in my jail cell crying. I was transferred from facility to facility at that point. Something referred to by some inmates as diesel therapy. Wikipedia describes Diesel Therapy as “...a form of punishment in which prisoners are shackled and then transported for days or weeks. It has been described as ‘the cruelest aspect of being a federal inmate.’ It has been alleged that some inmates are deliberately sent to incorrect destinations as an exercise of diesel therapy.” During my entire experience being incarcerated I was moved to and from at least 7 different facilities. The process of being stripped down and searched being repeated every time I was moved, even if it was a move from one cell block to another in the same facility.

One facility was a privately owned prison from Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) in Pahrump, Nevada. The blocks of this prison house 100 inmates each with 50 bunk beds in the middle, 25 tables in the front, and a few toilets and showers in the back. No walls, no privacy. During my stay in this facility, I was denied access to vegan food, threatened with charges of additional crimes, and placed in a Special Housing Unit (SHU) as a risk to security when supporters called in demanding I get fed, and denied access to any exercise, books, or television (as they had no more radio sets to give to inmates). I sat and slept, and this was the extent of my stay. At this CCA I also first witnessed someone getting stabbed over the television (for the few inmates who were able to obtain radios). I also witnessed someone hit someone over the head with a sock full of batteries. This led to a full on riot between two prison gangs which ultimately ended with a tear gas canister being lowered from the ceiling and sprayed on all of us.

During my stay at another facility someone had heated up petroleum jelly in the microwave until it was a liquid and threw it into someone’s face. This coupled with constant fighting and sights and sounds that you would walk the other direction from and pretend you never saw if you stumbled upon them added an overwhelming amount of anxiety and fear. Probably one of the most emotionally draining experiences for me involved being thrown into solitary confinement for 24 hours for wearing my hat flipped up. Solitary confinement is a horrible place that can take you to the ultimate point of feeling subhuman and I am fortunate that I wasn’t there for as long as some other people have to be. The Center for Constitutional Rights states that “Solitary confinement is torture” and “The devastating psychological and physical effects of prolonged solitary confinement are well documented by social scientists: prolonged solitary confinement causes prisoners significant mental harm and places them at grave risk of even more devastating future psychological harm.”

Researchers have demonstrated that prolonged solitary confinement causes a persistent and heightened state of anxiety and nervousness, headaches, insomnia, lethargy or chronic tiredness, nightmares, heart palpitations, and fear of impending nervous breakdowns. Other documented effects include obsessive ruminations, confused thought processes, an over-sensitivity to stimuli, irrational anger, social withdrawal, hallucinations, violent fantasies, emotional flatness, mood swings, chronic depression, feelings of overall deterioration, as well as suicidal ideation.” They also claim that “Exposure to such life-shattering conditions clearly constitutes cruel and unusual punishment – in violation of the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Further, the brutal use of solitary has been condemned as torture by the international community.”

For the most part I was pretty accepted in prison. People respected the fact that I didn’t testify. I had it a lot easier than many people, not to mention I had the support of people on the outside. I received books and letters, and it made my time that much easier. This should just help illustrate that even with all the support that political

prisoners can receive, PTSD can still occur and it shouldn't be taken as a lack of support from the community. I believe that for many without the support, PTSD can be much worse.

Flash forward to my release from prison. I was sentenced to 3 years of supervision after release. I was assigned a new Probation Officer. This is the point where I really felt my PTSD at its worse. I think the courts could sense it too. They required that I attend mandatory mental health counseling. Something to cover themselves I am sure. Although anything I said to the therapist would be given to the probation officer, so this wasn't the ideal situation. During this time people would comment on how my mannerisms had changed. I would now cover my food while eating it. I'd flush the toilet multiple times. I would spit in the trash after brushing my teeth. I eventually got over many of my prison habits.

However the constant fear of going back was a daily occurrence that never fully dissipated. I would get severe debilitating anxiety multiple times a day. It got to its worst point when my partner bought tickets to visit me again. It was almost the same time of year as the last time she had bought them. I was still under the supervision of a Probation Officer. It all felt exactly the same and I was irrationally expecting the FBI agents and US Marshals to show up a few days before she got here, just as it had happened the last time. I think that was the peak of my PTSD. When I finally picked my partner up from the airport and was holding her in my arms that's when I think the peak started to decline again for me. Even though she was with me during the next few months I still had the daily, pending fear that they would snatch me up. I think the fear and PTSD only got to its lowest point once I was off of supervised release (which thankfully I was able to get off of early). It still took me a while to actually feel like I was free. But I was able to quickly tell myself that I was and that there was no reason to worry about violating or being sent back anymore.

I feel that for the most part my PTSD is very minimal now. While writing this, however I actually got a reminding dose of its existence when I saw searchlights in the window of my new place and looked outside to see a cop car parked in front of my place shining a light around my house, and all of my neighbors houses. I had no idea why they were looking around, but this sent me right back into a panic attack that I was eventually able to overcome with the help of Mariana. I think that is the key too. PTSD may never go away for me or for other ex-prisoners, but having the courage to admit to our community and loved ones that we have these issues after prison, and not feeling like it makes us weaker by doing so. For them to understand that these issues happen, and to be there for support even after we get out of prison, and understand that just because an ex-prisoner says they are ok, it might not entirely be the reality all the time.

22 May – A Black Liberation soldier needs help

Jamil-Al Amin's health is at risk and his requests to see a physician are being ignored.

MORE:

During the 1960s and 1970s one of the strongest voices for Black liberation and a new just world order was H. Rap Brown of the Black Panther Party and Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee.

While jailed in 1971, he accepted Islam and became a stalwart Muslim leader and community leader committed to having a healthy and whole community in Atlanta's West End, which had been ravaged by drugs. He changed his name to Jamil-Al Amin and went to work building his community and reforming the neighborhood.

Since 2007, Imam Al-Amin has been incarcerated in ADX Florence supermax prison in Florence, Colo. He was found guilty of murder in a controversial verdict and his supporters say the freedom fighter was again targeted. He was found guilty of suddenly opening fire on two Black deputies who had come to serve him a subpoena. One of the men died.

Instead of serving time in Georgia, the imam was moved to the maximum security prison across the country and taken away from supporters, family and loved ones. Authorities decided he was too high profile to stay in prison in Georgia.

The fight for the imam and his family, the demand that he be freed and the demand that U.S. government

targeting end has been ongoing.

Now a new crisis in his case has arisen. The imam was visited by his wife Karima and Kairi, their youngest son, in early May. “His jaws were still swollen from an obvious abscess or two which they had witnessed on their previous visit in October 2013! He waited 10 months to see a dentist, and after seeing one the condition worsened. He now has been waiting an additional five months since submitting another dental request and has not received any care,” said El-Hajj Mauri’ Saalakhani of the Peace And Justice Foundation in an e-mail. “Imam Jamil has been requesting to see a physician since his wife and son’s last visit, but that request has been ignored. His breathing is now affected and he feels toxic fluid has entered his chest area as well. His legal team is now very concerned about his health yet overwhelmed with the federal habeas,” the Peace and Justice Foundation added.

The Peace And Justice Foundation and the Jericho Coalition are calling for writing letters of concern to Charles E. Samuels, director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Those who wish to respond to this latest injustice can also call Mr. Samuels to express their concern about the imam’s unanswered request for urgently needed medical care. Call Mr. Samuels at (202) 307-3198.

“Supporters have also suggested calling Governor Nathan Deal to request that Imam Jamil be transferred back to Georgia. Given Imam Jamil’s age and declining health, placement at the Federal Medical Center in Butner (North Carolina) may address his condition. Governor Deal’s number is (404) 656-1776,” added the Peace and Justice Foundation.

According to Mr. Salakhani, former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark was once asked at a National Press Club press conference about Imam Al-Amin, the “war in Afghanistan,” and then-mounting civil liberties concerns in the U.S.

“Let me say first, I remember Rap Brown well from the 60s, and I thought that he was a splendid human being and leader of the civil rights movement, with a strong touch of nobility and commitment. I remember when Congress passed the H. Rap Brown law, just to try to get people like him; and finally he was indicted under the law that he honored with his name ... There can be no question that the United States government, through its intelligence agencies and most of its appointed leadership, and a great deal of its elected leadership, considers Islam—not just militant Islam, but Islam—to be the greatest threat to the domestic and international security of the United States,” Mr. Clark reportedly said.

Abdul Jabbar Caliph and the Jericho Movement want recognition of political prisoners and prisoners of war inside of the United States. “These people belonged to organizations like the Black Panther Party, La Raza Unida, FALN, Los Macheteros, North American Anti-Imperialist Movement, May 19th, AIM, the Black Liberation Army, etc., and were incarcerated because of their political beliefs and acts in support of and/or in defense of freedom,” said the Jericho Movement.

The imam has been suffering and it needs to end, said the activist. But the key to ending suffering is Black America organized, galvanized and willing to take a stand. For more information or to get involved, call Abdul Jabbar Caliph 610.621.0699.

Imam Al-Amin has been denied the constitutional right to free speech through a media blackout, supporters add. “Imam Jamil-Al-Amin is a Political Prisoner who by all International and Human Rights Standards and by all standards of decency and common sense should not be housed and treated in the manner in which he is presently housed and treated,” they said.

Imam Al-Amin has stood for you and me, and a letter or phone call showing support should not be too much for us to do. A man has lost his freedom and now sits suffering in prison. We are free to act, but will we?

24 May – Update on Political Prisoner Abdullah Majid

We are elated to report that Majid's mother, Ms. LaBorde, informed us that Majid finally had his surgery on

either Tuesday, May 20th or Wednesday May 21st.

MORE:

Both she and Majid thank everyone who made phone calls and wrote to DOCCS about this situation.

We will soon be launching a campaign to get Majid released from SHU. We are awaiting the results of an investigation being conducted by the Muslim community regarding the DOCCS Muslim chaplain at Elmira, Mr. Afify.

26 May - Russia, Crimea, Ukraine, Venezuela and U.S. Imperialism by Jaan Laaman

United States imperialism's contradictions with Russia have drastically increased in the past two months. Ukraine, Crimea and Russia are prominently and regularly featured on all platforms of the corporate media in the United States.

MORE:

Russia is portrayed as the enemy, the intruder and belligerent country. The U.S. government and its European Union (EU) imperialist allies are put forth as supporters of democracy and legal order. This is almost the complete opposite of what has actually taken place in the Ukraine and Crimea. But if the U.S. corporate media repeats its version loudly and frequently enough, it starts to be accepted by viewers and listeners. 4SM is printing a more insightful and critical report of Ukraine and Crimea, put out by the Workers World newspaper (the WW article precedes this one and 4SM edited it for length). There certainly is need for more independent, objective and critical information and analysis. Most importantly there is the need for concerned and intelligent people to analyze and evaluate what is happening.

Any analysis should start with an objective view of who the parties are and what their interests and objectives really are. United States imperialism, even with dissension in its elite ranks, is the most powerful modern-day empire in the world. The EU and especially its major players— Germany, England and France—are smaller imperialist powers who usually follow the U.S. lead.

Russia, today, is a capitalist regional and to a lesser degree world power. Russia does not automatically and routinely accept or submit to U.S. imperialism's lead, as the EU often does. Russia is an independent nation with its own interests.

Russia was the heart of the former Soviet Union. The USSR and Western imperialism had a decades long fundamental contradiction between socialism and capitalism/imperialism. With the demise of the Soviet Union, this contradiction also ceased to exist. The contradiction between U.S. imperialism and Russia today is the contradiction between two competing capitalist powers. Both are trying to seek advantage, resources and power for the benefit of their respective ruling elites. Capitalist powers mostly compete and collude with each other. But we should be very clear—some of the worst wars in modern times have been the result of capitalist countries fighting for markets and resources (e.g., WWI, WWII).

Since the end of the USSR and its socialist system, the USA, in its drive for world hegemony, has been trying to curtail Russia's strength as a regional power. United States imperialism has continuously expanded NATO into East Europe. It has also attempted to install pliant regimes through a series of color "revolutions" in former Soviet republics. The U.S. government has established bases on Russia's periphery, in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, to militarily encircle most of Russia.

On the other hand, Russia is the world's biggest producer of oil and gas. It also still has a large nuclear arsenal and a sizable military. Russia is a permanent member of the UN Security Council and has the power to, at times, block U.S. moves, such as when Obama threatened to attack Syria last year.

While events in Crimea and Ukraine have dominated corporate news in the U.S., there have been reports of demonstrations and struggle in Venezuela. There have also been minor news reports of U.S. citizens and embassy officials being accused of organizing activities against the Venezuelan government and president.

United States imperialism basically lost its control and domination over Venezuela and its very large pool of oil with the 1998 election of Hugo Chavez as president. When Chavez died last year, a leader of his party, Nicolas Maduro, was elected to replace him. President Maduro has continued Chavez's revolutionary and socialist policies, but he is perceived as more vulnerable to a renewed imperialist and local right-wing assault. Somewhat under the cover of news about Russia and Ukraine, there is an ongoing imperialist effort to destabilize and subvert the popularly elected government of President Maduro in Venezuela.

Events in Ukraine, Crimea and Venezuela are serious. The confrontation with Russia, in particular, has the potential for unimaginable consequences. By all measures, much of the American public is sick and tired of U.S. government wars, invasions, bombings and drone attacks. Despite this, U.S. imperialism and the USA government have not stopped their machinations and attempts to gain control over other countries and their resources, or to lead the United States into a new war. This makes it so important for us—the people, and particularly activists and organizers—to evaluate and analyze developments and struggle independently, and not simply follow corporate news and government versions of events.

One very significant and clarifying issue to hold on to is understanding who our primary enemy really is. What is the main obstacle in our struggle for greater peace, freedom and economic justice? What is the principle or primary contradiction? Understanding this and keeping it firmly in mind as we examine developments makes it much less likely that we will get swept away with government pontifications of who we should consider our enemy. Dialectical materialism is the scientific revolutionary method of analysis that allows any situation to be broken down and examined. In issue 11 of 4SM, we printed an entire short booklet (“A Basic Introduction To Dialectical and Historical Materialism”) that lays out this method.

As people in the United States, we must always keep in mind that whatever the government does, it acts in our name. We may not and probably do not have any control or voice in what the government does, which country they declare an enemy and/or attack, but it is done in our, the people's, name. This makes it crucial that we determine for ourselves what is correct and real or propaganda. If we do not accept the government's plans for war, we must loudly and clearly make known to the government and the world that we oppose, and will try to stop, what the U.S. government does in our name.

The country of Russia is not our, the American People's, enemy. Crimea has been part of Russia since the 1700's. In late March, for the first time in its history, the Crimean people got the opportunity to vote on whether they wanted to be part of Russia, and they overwhelmingly voted to join the Russian Federation.

The elected President and parliament in Venezuela may not be the leaders who U.S. imperialism and the USA government approve of, but it is the right of the Venezuelan people, not Washington politicians and Wall Street bankers, to decide who leads Venezuela's government. The people of Venezuela, Russia, Crimea or Ukraine are not our enemies. We should make that clear to politicians in Washington and to the world, and we must not let the USA government launch any wars or attacks against these people, their governments and countries.

1 Jun - War on Terror: Criminalizing Communities, Suppressing Movements

WHAT: Panel Discussion

WHEN: 12:00-1:50pm, Sunday, June 1st

WHERE: Room L2.81, John Jay College of Criminal Justice - 899 10th Avenue, New York, New York

COST: \$15-\$35, not sliding scale

MORE:

The panel will discuss the erosion of basic rights resulting from post-9/11 War On Terror (WOT) policies and practices - in our communities, courtrooms and prisons across the US. It will feature stories of impacted family members, former prisoners, and advocates, who have been resisting alarming trends in human rights violations since 9/11. Panelists to include: 1. Daniel McGowan is an environmental and social justice activist from NYC, and a former political prisoner; 2. Ms. Shahina Parveen Siraj is a leader in DRUM - South Asian Organizing

Center, and the mother of Shahawar Matin Siraj, who was entrapped by the NYPD; 3. Fahd Ahmed is the Legal and Policy Director at DRUM; 4. Chair: Abigail Downs is a Legal Worker at the Center for Constitutional Rights. By exploring the linkages between repression of environmental activists, Muslims, and immigrants in the US under the WOT paradigm, the panel will encourage activists of the Left to think through how we can build bridges and mobilize together to achieve a more just society -- by challenging both the rights violations that have increasingly become the norm in terrorism prosecutions post-9/11 and also broader injustices in the criminal justice system. In the spirit of the Forum's 2014 theme, the panel will explore strategies to effect change and debate the pitfalls of reform tactics that permit categories of people to remain vulnerable to grave abuses.

Sponsoring Journal:
No Separate Justice Campaign

Reading List:

1. Published by The Nation in collaboration with Educators for Civil Liberties, the "America After 9/11" series features contributions from scholars, researchers and advocates to provide a systematic look at the patterns of civil rights abuses in the United States' domestic "war on terror."
See:<http://www.thenation.com/article/177761/america-after-911#>
2. For additional information, see:<http://no-separate-justice.org/>. No Separate Justice is a post-9/11 domestic human rights campaign, a new public education initiative that aims to shed light on and end a pattern of abuses in "War on Terror" cases in the U.S. criminal justice system.

1 Jun - The Road to Change: The Struggle to Free All Political Prisoners/Freedom Fighters/Revolutionists/Human Rights Defenders - Nothing Has Changed

WHAT: Panel Discussion

WHEN: 3:40-5:40pm, Sunday, June 1st

WHERE: Room L.76, John Jay College of Criminal Justice - 899 10th Avenue, New York, New York

COST: \$15-\$35, not sliding scale

MORE:

In the words of Frantz Fanon, "Each generation must discover it's mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity." Imagining a world with transformative justice, to quote Dr. Mutulu Shakur, is to dedicate our lives to the premise that "Each of our generations has to erase the divide to evolve a strong base to win freedom of our Exiles, Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War." Direct action, societal transformation, revolutionary struggle and relentless attacks on metaphysical imperialism imposed by global capitalistic institutions must be acknowledged as the root of the reason why political prisoners exist. This panel discussion, led by Ralph Poynter, Lynne Stewart and some of their comrades will explore successful strategies for building solidarity and a global movement to free all political prisoners.

Participants

Chair/Facilitator: Ralph Poynter

Speakers/Co-Facilitators: Lynne Stewart, Anne Lamb, Pam Africa, Noelle Hanrahan, Ramona Africa, Jess Sundin, Ana Lopez, Mimi Rosenberg, Peter Rosenwald

Reading List:

1. "Maroon the Implacable" by Russell Maroon Shoatz
2. "The Cuban Five" The Militant
3. "Prison writings, my life is my sun dance" by Leonard Peltier
4. "The classroom and the cell" Mumia Abu Jamal & Marc Lamont Hill
5. "Jailhouse Lawyers" by Mumia Abu Jamal
6. Speeches, Poetry & Prison Letters - Lynnestewart.org

2 Jun - No Separate Justice Vigil

WHAT: Vigil

WHEN: 6-7pm, Monday, June 2nd

WHERE: Outside the Metropolitan Correctional Center (MCC) in lower Manhattan

MORE:

The next No Separate Justice vigil will be on Monday, June 2 at 6PM outside the Metropolitan Correctional Center (MCC) in lower Manhattan, a federal prison where people accused of terrorism-related offenses have been held in solitary confinement for years, even before they have been tried. These inhumane conditions are not unique to the MCC and, in an effort to shine a light on and end a pattern of human rights and civil liberties abuses in happening in “War on Terror” cases at the MCC and across the criminal justice system, the No Separate Justice Campaign - a coalition of community groups, academics, family members and human rights and civil liberties organizations including Amnesty International USA, the Center for Constitutional Rights, the Council On American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)-New York, and Educators for Civil Liberties – holds evening vigils outside the MCC on the first Monday of every month from 6-7PM.

Each month, the No Separate Justice vigils spotlight an individual case to reveal a part of the larger systematic abuses happening across the criminal justice system in these cases. June's vigil will focus on the case of Farooque Ahmed who is currently serving a 23 year prison sentence in the “Communication Management Unit” in Terre Haute, Indiana. Sometimes referred to as "Little Gitmo" or "Guantanamo North," these prison units were covertly established to house high-risk inmates. However, according to the Center for Constitutional Rights, many prisoners end up in CMUs “for their constitutionally protected religious beliefs, unpopular political views, or in retaliation for challenging poor treatment or other rights violations in the federal prison system.”

These units are an experiment in social isolation. CMU prisoners are forbidden from any physical contact with family members such as hugging, touching or embracing their children, spouses or loved ones during visits.

Please join us as we shine a light together to expose the human rights abuses happening at MCC, the federal government's domestic torture site in New York City, and across our country in these cases. We have plenty of signs to share.

6 Jun - Dance benefit for Oscar Lopez Rivera Freedom Campaign

WHAT: Benefit

WHEN: 6pm-12am, Friday, June 6th

WHERE: 1199 SEIU MLK Labor Center - 310 West 43 Street (between 8th & 9th Avenues) NYC

DONATION: \$20 (students \$10)

MORE:

---A Pre-Puerto Rican Day Parade Dance to Benefit The National Boricua Human Rights Network

---Traditional Boricua Dinner

---Music by Jova Rodriguez y su Conjunto Sakao Aka DJ Francisco Navarro

Online Tickets: <http://freedom4oscardance.brownpapertickets.com>

Sponsored by: Latinos Unidos Latin American Caribbean Solidarity, Committee AFRAM NYC, 1199 SEIU 33 Mujeres Por Oscar NY, Labor Council on Latin American Advancement AFL-CIO, Workers Alliance 32BJ La Coordinadora NYC, Latino Leadership Institute