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Updates for October 11<sup>th</sup>

### **28 Sept - Help Former Political Prisoner Rita “Bo” Brown**

*As we've said many times before—supporting political prisoners does not end when they leave prison. George Jackson Brigade member Bo Brown needs our help. Do what you can.*

#### **MORE:**

Bo was diagnosed with Lewy Body Dementia, a disease that is not as well known as but very similar to Parkinson's or Alzheimer's however it is very likely that this will soon lead to Parkinson's. Some of the unfortunate features of Bo's medical condition are falling due to a lack of awareness, fainting, and then there's the seizures. Bo has had eight seizures since January of this year. Also, Bo has made it very clear that she'd like to live at home for as long as possible. The current shower at her house is a bath tub, shower combination, and the tub has a high wall, so the need for a new shower to suit Bo's needs is now an urgent issue.

With the unfortunate news of Bo Brown's diagnosis and all that comes with it, there are plenty of individuals doing what we can to support Bo through these tough times. There are medical expenses that the funds here will be directed to as well as the very specific shower that is more conducive than her current one to her condition.

### **28 Sept - The Military Logic of Punishing Chelsea Manning's Suicide Attempt**

*Last week, imprisoned whistle-blower Chelsea Manning was sentenced to 14 days in solitary confinement as punishment for her suicide attempt in early July at the prison barracks at Fort Leavenworth.*

#### **MORE:**

by Natasha Lennard (*The Nation*)

The Fort Leavenworth disciplinary panel could not explicitly punish Manning for attempted suicide. Completed suicide is not a disciplinary violation and, to be guilty of attempting a crime, it's necessary for the act which is attempted to be one. They disciplined her instead under a charge known as “conduct which threatens,” stating that Manning's attempt to die interfered with “orderly running, safety, good order and discipline, or security” of the facility. (She is also being disciplined for possessing an unauthorized book). The whistle-blower stated that she was driven to suicide over the prison's then-failure to appropriately treat her gender dysphoria. Why Manning injuring herself is deemed a threat to the facility's functioning says much about the nature of that place's function, says much about the true function of prisons.

Before 1823 in England, according to early common law, if a person committed suicide, they would be posthumously punished. The body would be buried at the crossroads of a highway, impaled by a stake, often with a stone laid over the face (to prevent resurrection as a ghost or vampire). The deceased's property would be forfeited to the king. Suicide was criminal because sovereignty over life and death did not then reside with the individual but with God, and with his chosen earthly emissary, the king. And since suicide was deemed an ungodly, criminal act, so too was an attempt—at times punishable by hanging. There's no contradiction here: To execute a person who has herself tried to die is still punishment, not wish fulfillment. It's the punishment of removing every last shred individual sovereignty; it's the state's reminder of where sovereignty really resides. Current state punishment of attempted suicide, in its rare cases like Manning's, serves the same purpose.

Suicide was decriminalized over time (and with that, so too was attempted suicide). Not until 1961 in England, though, was attempted suicide removed from the business of criminal law, aside from assisted cases, and placed within the purview of medical and mental-health professionals. This shift echoed not

only increased secularism and a decrease in religious moralism around suicide but also a shift from royal sovereignty to a sovereign citizenry. Military law regarding suicide has remained stubbornly archaic. The contradiction, that an attempted suicide could be criminally punished even though suicide could not be a crime, still lingers in military law. Suicide attempts are punishable under Article 134 of the Manual for Court Martial, which states that criminal conviction is possible if “the accused has inflicted injury(s) on himself or herself” and “in these circumstances, the accused’s conduct was adverse to the discipline and good order in the armed forces or the nature of the act brought discredit to the armed forces.”

In 2012, the same year that the Department of Defense admitted that the armed services had a “suicide epidemic,” Pvt. Lazzaric T. Caldwell was handed a court-martial six-month incarceration on Article 134 grounds for slitting his wrists. There was court-admitted evidence that the marine had PTSD and depression. The military judge noted that it was an odd charge, because “it is basically criminalizing an attempted suicide,” but convicted anyway. One year later, Caldwell’s conviction was overturned because it was deemed that his particular actions fell short of an Article 134 violation, but the judge did not use the occasion to decriminalize suicide attempts tout court.

The military criminalization of suicide is inconsistent—service members who succeed in killing themselves are given honorable treatment and their dependents get full benefits. Failed attempts can be punished with prison. The criminalization further stigmatizes mental illness and may worsen the military’s “suicide epidemic.” But the message of a criminalized suicide attempt in the military remains the same as in archaic common law: To act as a sovereign individual over your own life threatens order, because you are not a sovereign citizen, you belong to the state. For whom else can this be a fiercer fact than for a prisoner like Pvt. Manning, convicted of a politically charged crime?

Numerous mental-health professionals have noted that Manning’s punishment can only harm a person in mental anguish (or any person, for that matter.) “It’s a sure-fire way to worsen symptoms,” Ron Hornberg of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, told *The Guardian*. An American Civil Liberties 2014 report found that 73 percent of suicides in prison occur in solitary. But Manning’s punishment is only counterproductive if we assume the military cares about her mental state. The latest punishment speaks for itself, as does her harsh 35-year sentence: Manning would have been martyred in death. The state needs her to live, but suffer, as an example.

We see a similar function at play—the maintenance of prisoners in a state of bare life—when inmates on hunger strike with a public profile, as in Guantánamo Bay, are force fed (deemed torturous by the international medical community). Right now, while prisoners across the country enter a third week of a labor strike, inmates in both Wisconsin and Ohio prisons are engaged in a hunger strike to protest long-term isolation (among other harsh treatments). The Wisconsin food refusals began in the notoriously brutal Waupun Correctional Institution in June. One participant, LaRon McKinley Bey, has been in solitary confinement in Wisconsin’s prison system for over 25 years. The United Nations has stated that over 15 days in isolation can constitute torture. While information is limited, support networks communicating with the hunger strikers say that participants are being aggressively force fed. The slogan of the strike is “Dying to Live.” It serves the prison better if the strikers live, but barely, and without a scratch of personal sovereignty.

To be sure, hundreds of prisoners are left to die or self-harm in obscurity in US prisons. Suicide leads to more prisoner deaths than homicides, overdoses, and accidents combined, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. But as Italian theorist Giorgio Agamben argued, the state needs the *Homo sacer* (sacred or accursed man)—the person stripped of the human and legal rights of a citizen, but still kept under law. This figure affirms that there are no gaps in the state’s control over human life. Manning’s suicide attempt is punished as a “threat” to order because it’s legible as a threat to the state’s management of her life, and

ability to punish. “I am feeling hurt. I am feeling lonely. I am embarrassed by the decision. I don’t know how to explain it,” said Manning in a statement following her sentencing. Manning has not forfeited her sense of individual sovereignty, nor mentally submitted to the state’s seizing of it.

Given the strong correlation between solitary confinement and suicide, Manning’s isolation punishment for a suicidal act carries the grim color of a Dantean hellscape. A circle of repetitive punishment to echo the condemned act. The subtext: Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.

There may appear to be a contradiction in the government’s recent decision (after long delays) to permit Manning’s gender-affirming surgery. The decision came in response to Manning’s going on hunger strike, explaining in a public statement, “I need help. I am not getting any.... I was driven to suicide by the lack of care for my gender dysphoria that I have been desperate for. I didn’t get any. I still haven’t gotten any.” One desperate act—attempted suicide—led to punishment; another—food refusal—led to the military meeting her overdue, medically affirmed, needs. But the decision to grant Manning’s surgery is in step with the military’s 2015 decision to accept transgender service members. It also aligns with nationwide Bureau of Prisons directives, which assert that it is the right of prisoners to receive whatever form of gender-affirming treatments are deemed medically necessary. Finally, providing surgery can be seen as a recognition that Manning would die of starvation or suicide without the treatment. And Manning must remain alive in order to serve her sentence.

In her essay on Homer’s Iliad, a powerful reflection on the operations of power, French philosopher Simone Weil calls the “force that kills” the “grossest and most summary form” of power. The force that is more “surprising in effects” is that which has not killed yet. “It will surely kill, it will possibly kill,” she wrote, “or perhaps it merely hangs, poised and ready, over the head of the creature it can kill at any moment.” Whenever this threatening force is present, “its effect is the same: it turns a man into a stone.” Weil resisted this force that does not yet kill; she died at 34 from self-imposed starvation in 1943, allegedly refusing food in solidarity with victims of the war. Her death has been criticized and derided, but none can say she was turned to stone by the force that does not yet kill. That same force hangs over Manning, and all prisoners reduced to bare life. Like the prisoners striking around the country, Manning again and again resists the state’s efforts to petrify.

## **28 Sept - Reflections on White Supremacy by Anti-Imperialist Political Prisoner Jaan K. Laaman**

*This wide-ranging essay, written by anti-imperialist U.S. political prisoner, Jaan K. Laaman, one of the original Ohio-7/United Freedom Front defendants, lays out a historical and current analysis of white supremacy in the United States.*

### **MORE:**

Recently a smart progressive retired English professor remarked, “how can it be that in late 2016, police are routinely shooting and often killing Black people with almost no legal consequences?” Police in the United States have been killing Black and other people of color, just like this for 20, 30, 50 years and more. Back then they used to totally get away with it and today, not much has changed.

One big difference now, is that many of these killings are caught on phone cameras and put online and thus, seen by millions. In the last few days, we are again witnessing footage of police murdering Black people making the national news, and new protests and resistance are erupting as a result of these murders. Nonetheless, cops are rarely charged with any wrongdoing and even when they are, very few are ever convicted of any crime. For example, in April 2015, Freddie Gray Jr., a 25-year-old Black man, was arrested by police in Baltimore. Freddie Gray had three fractured vertebrae and a crushed voice box, which

he suffered during transport in a police van. While in the police van, Gray fell into a coma and subsequently died; his death was due to injuries to his spinal cord. Although six officers faced charges related to the murder of Freddie Gray, they were all ultimately let off without any convictions.

An even more typical example, of police killing with impunity, is the decision of the Prosecutor and Grand Jury in Cleveland not to charge the two white cops who shot and killed a 12-year-old Black boy named Tamir Rice. In 2014, Tamir Rice was playing with a toy pistol in a park outside a recreation center near his home. Two Cleveland cops drove up and within 2 seconds, one cop repeatedly shot him. They left him lying on the ground, not even attempting to give him first aid. Tamir died of the gunshot wounds. The Cleveland Prosecutor said, "it was a tragedy," but the police did not break any laws or regulations and a Grand Jury absolved them of any wrongdoing.

### ***Police Violence Today***

Life in the USA means white cops routinely, that is, on a daily basis, killing people of color. The government and legal authorities always have and continue to rule almost all of these killings as lawful and acceptable actions of the state. So how can this be, that in the 21st century in a country supposedly based on law, Black people and other people of color can be routinely abused and even killed by agents of the state?

It's not a mistake and it isn't about Republicans or Democrats. It is a historical and ongoing reality that people of color face institutional disparity and discrimination from all aspects of the U.S. state apparatus. On a human individual level, a large percentage of white people have at least some prejudicial attitudes towards people of color. It is true that throughout history, especially in the 20th century, great leaders and massive popular struggles confronted and challenged institutional discrimination and racist practices. Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. DuBois, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, Fannie Lou Hamer, H. Rap Brown, Huey P. Newton, Assata Shakur, all these and so many more outstanding reformers and/or revolutionary leaders and activists, contributed significantly to the struggle for justice, freedom, and equality for Black people and all people of color in the United States.

Yes, progress has been made. Barack Obama, the first Black man to be President, was twice elected. Yet everywhere we look, right on the surface and especially if we dig deeper, institutional discrimination, prejudice and racist practices and abuses continue in all aspects of life in the United States.

In 2016, the USA is a majority white country. The United States comprises 5% of the world's population, but incarcerates 25% of the world's prisoners. The majority of prisoners across the U.S. are people of color. And on a daily basis Black men, women and even children are shot and often killed by mainly white cops, who almost always are cleared of any wrongdoing.

These are the indisputable realities in early 21st century life in the United States. If we look back historically we can see even more blatant and vicious racist abuses and practices in all areas of life, directed against all people of color. This began with the earliest European contact and conquest of the Americas. Genocide, land theft, slavery of Indigenous people and the African slave trade, this was the origin of all the modern countries in North, Central and South America.

### ***Resistance to Racism***

From the early period of colonialism, when white supremacy was being constructed on lies, material benefits based on white skin privileges and the super exploitation of Black labor, there also was opposition and resistance to this hateful thinking and practice. Native and Black people found many ways to resist and oppose slavery, from running away to burning down the plantation, sometimes with the slave owner still inside. From these earliest times of resistance, there were white people who supported and assisted with

the escapes and uprisings. The “underground railroad” was operational for well over 100 years. Networks, often of white homes and farms, gave refuge and assistance to Blacks who escaped from slave plantations and traveled north, sometimes all the way to Canada, to seek freedom.

The Abolitionist movement, actively worked for the end of slavery. It included many white activists and leaders. Although fewer in number, there also were militant white abolitionists like John Brown, who literally, with guns in hand, freed Black people held as slaves on plantations in Missouri and Virginia.

There have always been white people, often in leftist and revolutionary organizations and sometimes from religious groups, who have allied with and supported the freedom struggle and the National Liberation struggles of New African/Black, Native/Indigenous, Puerto Rican and Chicano people. White people were in the Civil Rights movement, Communists in labor and community struggles, students, anti-racists and anti-imperialist activists supported the Black Power struggles. In the 80’s and 90’s the John Brown Anti-Klan Committee actively organized against racist attacks and terror, whether the racists were in white robes or blue uniforms. Other anti-racist formations, like the Partisan Defense Committee, which is still active today, organized large anti-Klan rallies in many cities. In 2016, we see the Movement for Black Lives mobilizing on a nationwide level, including the recent release of their comprehensive platform. We also see this movement gaining solidarity and support from a variety of white activists and organizations, as well as from other communities and people of color.

White supremacy, in theory and in actual racist practice, has always had opposition. This resistance has and does include white people acting as allies and supporters of nationalist organizations and working in multinational formations.

### ***“Freedom is a Constant Struggle”***

Many changes have and continue to occur in U.S. society. Change, of course, is the only constant in all life and reality. But the question my sister, the English professor, asked, how can racial discrimination and racist murders of people of color still be happening every day, can only be understood and answered by realizing that the false and ugly ideology of white supremacy continues to exist. This false ideology was the underlying ideological foundation of what were the British colonies that transformed into the slave owning U.S. republic, which grew into U.S. imperialism and that today exists as the main military and imperialist superpower in the world. Many changes have occurred, including progress and advances in human and public rights, but underneath it, the ideology of white supremacy still exists and corrupts the U.S.. This false ideology manifests itself in public acts and attacks, and in private thoughts and motivations.

White cops murdering Black children, millions of people of color facing discrimination in a myriad of ways, even while we have a President who is Black. So, a final point about the false ideology of white supremacy. The fundamental and necessary changes, that we the vast majority of people in the U.S. very much need and want, will only be achieved once we can unite and work together for our common good. Racism and prejudicial thinking has been the main weapon used against working people – common people, to break our unity and defeat our struggles for progress, justice, a better life, for a revolutionary future of hope and peace. Again and again strikes have been broken, community efforts derailed and sections of people have been misled and misdirected to act against their common interests because of racism and racial prejudice.

The false ideology of white supremacy has been the main weapon used against us, common people, working people, farmers, miners, teachers, shop keepers, unemployed people, and yes even prisoners too. Most of us have had some direct experience dealing with the negative impact of white supremacist ideology. Whether at work, in school or in the community, it is likely that some of our struggles have come

up short or were defeated, because we were unable to sustain our unity in the face of the old “divide and conquer” tactics, based on racist thinking and perhaps weak or racist leadership. Many decades of community activism and revolutionary organizing all across the U.S., have made clear that no matter what the specifics of the struggle, unity is always necessary to sustain the effort and to actually win. As Mumia Abu-Jamal has famously stated, “when we fight, we win.” The main weapon used against popular struggle is and has been, to divide us based on racism and playing to lies of white supremacist ideology. Unity is our strength and rejecting racism is necessary for unity. Racism will continue to be used against us, until we expose it and simply reject it, for the lies and fabrications that it is.

### **30 Sept - Daniel McGowan**

*Please check out the following from Mask Magazine’s “The Prisoner Issue—“ an article about and interview with former political prisoner Daniel McGowan.*

#### **MORE:**

by Hannah K. Gold (*Mask Magazine*)

We met up at The Base, an event space in Bushwick that caters to an anarchist political perspective, to do the interview. An hour later, we migrated to a coffee shop in the shadow of the elevated M train, Little Skips. This café holds particular sentimental value for me, the bad kind – it’s filled with anxious, oddly beautiful young artists and professionals staring at laptops, wearing hats no matter the weather, and I used to be one of them, indistinguishable.

McGowan, 42, ordered an iced coffee (he takes it with cream) and whipped out his regulation reusable Starbucks cup. I teased him lightly about it. “I’m embarrassed by that cup because it’s such a stupid Starbucks cup,” he said. “Someone gave it to me and I was like thanks I’m going to cover it with stickers.” The cup is permanently emblazoned with “Vanilla syrup” and there is a check-mark in the box adjacent to “large.” One of the baristas overheard the word “Starbucks” and immediately chimed in, totally unbidden. “Oh Starbucks,” he said, “they treat their employees pretty well. I worked there for years, cashed out a ton of money in stocks.” Wilco blared from the café’s master laptop.

McGowan’s name is a household one for many radical types because of his involvement with the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), a leaderless group of environmental activists, established in the 90s and designated a domestic terror threat by the FBI in 2001. Through the 90s and continuing into the early aughts, the ELF and its animal rights counterpart the Animal Liberation Front claimed responsibility for dozens of property destruction actions, mostly arsons, targeting threats to the environment and to life, animal and human alike. None of these actions physically maimed, much less killed a person, (though some owners of properties the ELF torched have claimed ‘psychological harm’), however prosecuted members often had terrorism enhancement clauses tacked onto their sentences. These can have all sorts of negative consequences, the most dramatic of which is ratcheting up the severity of the sentence.

In 2004, prosecutors at the Department of Justice threatened ELF member Jacob Ferguson, a buddy of McGowan’s from his days in Eugene, Oregon, with arson charges, and in return they got him to cooperate completely. The terms of Ferguson’s coerced loyalty to the government, which it dubbed “Operation Backfire,” included wearing a wire to entrap his fellow activists and friends. The information he provided led to the indictment of 11 environmental and animal rights activists, including McGowan. In 2006, McGowan pled guilty to arson and conspiracy to commit arson, and was sentenced as a terrorist for his involvement in two arsons in Oregon: one inflicted upon a lumber company, another on a tree farm. For this, he got seven years in prison (in the end he spent nearly five-and-half years in prison and another six months in a halfway house) which came with a \$1.9 million restitution fine.

McGowan got off probation in June and is currently between jobs after working for almost a year as an executive assistant at the Correctional Association of New York. Since getting out of prison, McGowan has become immersed once again in activism, and his efforts are now primarily focused on aiding political prisoners. His associations as an activist include the NYC Anarchist Black Cross, the Political Prisoner Support Committee (operated by the National Lawyers Guild), Certain Days, and the Civil Liberties Defense Center.

Being an environmentalist, then, is not all that McGowan is known for. The “eco-terrorist” moniker has adhered to his public persona just as fixedly; so has his reputation as an organizer in prison resistance movements. Perhaps this is why nearly every time he mentioned this term, “environmentalist,” or I questioned him about it, he affixed an “or whatever” to the end of it. I got the feeling he was also expressing a well-earned aversion for labels – “one man’s freedom fighter is another man’s terrorist,” he told me, acknowledging this too is a cliché.

Still, I asked him, as an environmentalist, if he could please tell me what his guilty pleasures are. He thought about it too long.

“Oh here’s one! So my partner has a car and there’s definitely times we take the car when there’s no fucking good reason to. That is my guilty pleasure.”

“You mean, like, for a joyride or something?”

“No. Just, like, when we could easily accomplish it by foot but we don’t. Is that not good?”

McGowan did not talk about pleasure, other than when I asked; instead he stressed the importance of living in a way that was meaningful to him. Over the past decade of his life this goal has been a constantly moving target, unattainable at times. “I try to minimize the waste that I produce. But it’s more about me living my life in a way that makes more sense and doesn’t feel disrespectful to those around me and towards the environment, for lack of a better term.” McGowan highlighted the importance of anarchist prefigurative politics in his everyday environmental praxis – “living how we want the world to be.” At the second prison McGowan reported to, the Sandstone Correctional Institution in Minnesota, he would write his letters on the backs of old fliers for correspondence courses, dredged from the trash. On “chicken nights” he made a point of delivering the scraps, down to the bones, to the feral cats that stalked the prison grounds.

It’s undeniable that McGowan is a person who likes things a certain way, even as he has opened himself to the, at times, messy and downright chaotic practice of a heady, anarchist lifestyle. Not that these elements have to be at odds. Labels get worn and rejected, but mostly they are recycled.

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McGowan grew up in Rockaway Beach, Queens, pronouncing it “caw-fee.” The accent fell away once he left and he spent his early twenties in Asia, California, the Midwest and in school at SUNY Buffalo. He told me all this, and never slipped up on the accent once.

In 1996, McGowan moved back to New York City (Brooklyn and Queens), where he worked in administrative capacities at various Manhattan offices and a vegetarian restaurant in Brooklyn. In July of 1997 McGowan picked up his first copy of Earth First! Journal from the free pile at Blackout Books, a radical vendor that once existed on the Lower East Side, at a time when there were still a number of independent bookstores in Manhattan. Reading through the directory of environmental groups in the journal, McGowan found a tip on a local joint, the Wetlands Preserve Rock Club, which held weekly “eco-meetings” in addition to regularly hosting jam bands, hardcore, and hip hop acts. McGowan started

attending the meetings and quickly realized that the conversations therein were never restrained to the subjects of animal rights and environmentalism; they covered myriad social initiatives, as eclectic as the music streaming from the venue each night.

At one of the first meetings he went to participants wrote to political prisoner Rod Coronado, who at the time was serving a four-and-half-year-long sentence for aiding and abetting the arson of a Michigan State University research facility that compiled data on minks for the fur-farming industry. “I went to one of these meetings and was blown away by what they were talking about,” McGowan told me. “I didn’t really know much about it. I’d grown up in New York City, my dad’s a cop, and I didn’t have hammered-out beliefs on prisons and criminal justice.” McGowan ended up writing to Coronado for the duration of his time in prison, and met him in Eugene when he got out.

“In the 90s, at least amongst a lot of animal rights and eco people, there was this strong idea of one struggle, they would kind of bemoan single-issue activism,” McGowan said. “And so my socialization into the activist world came in this idea of intersectional multi-issue activism. The idea that we would be talking about prisons at a meeting for animal rights or environmental stuff seemed rather natural.” This meant freedom to protest practically anything, which led to near constant protests – McGowan recalled participating in two or three a week. They’d be at Zamir Furs on Houston Street one day, at the Japanese embassy obstructing whaling practices the next.

So, McGowan’s identity as an anti-prison activist had begun taking shape long before he arrived at the Manhattan Detention Center in July 2007 to begin serving his sentence. From there he was moved to Sandstone in September. It was far from ideal, but at least he could pursue a Master’s degree, had regular visits from his family, and the relative comforts of a low-security prison. “When I was at [Sandstone] I would be at a visit, we’d sit there and play Uno,” McGowan said. “I’d get a hug and kiss at the beginning and at the end, be able to hang and out chill, eat a fucking Milky Way.”

Nine months into his incarceration at Sandstone, McGowan heard his name over a loudspeaker, demanding he report to the Receiving and Discharge office. Prison management had gotten after him before about not using the correct amount of postage, and he’d just mailed some books home, so he picked up some stamps on the way to the office. When he got there, the R&D cop said, “Pack your shit up and get back here in 20 minutes.” He handed McGowan two empty boxes.

The next day McGowan was on a bus, he didn’t know where to, with a black box on his lap, just another charming feature of his terrorism enhancement stipulation. On that bus, a cop finally told McGowan he was going to Marion, a name instantly recognizable to those familiar with the US prison system, but whose significance has recently undergone a dramatic change. Marion opened as a supermax (maximum security) prison in 1963, conceived as the second coming of Alcatraz, which closed that same year. “Nah man,” said the cop when he saw McGowan’s face, “it’s like that unit in Terre Haute, they opened a new one, and you’re one of the first people in it.”

McGowan had read about the facility in Terre Haute because of its controversial and secretive Communication Management Unit, a block of cells designated for inmates with terrorism-related convictions. The Federal Bureau of Prisons dreamed up the CMUs to prohibit such inmates from communication with “extremist groups outside the prison.” Over two-thirds of inmates placed in the CMUs are Muslim, a group that comprises only 6 percent of the total federal prison population. The first CMU opened in 2006 in Terre Haute, Indiana, nicknamed “Guantanamo North”; Marion followed soon after, in 2008. Terre Haute is where McGowan served the last 22 months of his sentence.

At this point in the story McGowan leaned in just slightly, the universal signal of oncoming gossip. “There’s this guy who drives prisoners in the federal prison system – I don’t know if you’ve heard of him, but people who have been on [the real] ConAir and the bus in the Midwest know about this guy. He has one arm, he’s an amputee from his elbow, and he wears an old-style hook.” That’s the guy who drove McGowan to Marion. “He’s holding the fucking steering wheel with it.”

You won’t hear Clinton or Trump talk about “eco-terrorism” today, a sure sign its political currency is spent. That term, which was only recently bandied about by every top US government official associated with national security, is now nearly unrecognizable, more of an anachronism than a threat, something to do with the 70s, maybe, and Edward Abbey, and monkey-wrenching, perhaps. Yet a decade ago the FBI claimed that in the three years after the 9/11 attacks all but one action classified as domestic terrorism was the work of an animal rights and environmental activist. FBI Deputy Assistant John Lewis told a senate committee in 2005, “The number one domestic threat is the eco-terrorism, animal rights movement.” Around this time, the Washington Times – which, full-disclosure, is Breitbart-lite – warned of an encroaching “eco-Al Qaeda.”

McGowan suggested to me that “eco-terrorism” hasn’t disappeared so much it’s been subsumed by a monolithic word, “terrorism,” which encompasses a running list of the government’s perceived enemies. Meanwhile, the definition of “terrorism” is expanding. “The current enemy happens to be Americans who are radicalized and sympathetic to Al Qaeda or ISIS,” says McGowan, to which he adds people who work at charitable organizations that materially support inhabitants of Gaza, like the Holy Land Foundation, and anyone who expresses violence towards a cop. Anyway, people tend to think of “terrorist” from the government’s perspective. To the government, labeling McGowan a “terrorist” meant he had helped burn down someone else’s property; to McGowan, it meant he was going to Marion.

He arrived in Southern Illinois in August 2008 – “hot as fuck” – and was instantly relieved to discover that of the 16 or so people there, one of them was a friend, Andy Stepanian. A fellow animal rights activists, Stepanian was one of the SHAC 7 (Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty) convicted of violating the Animal Enterprise Protection Act (a precursor to the later passed AETA or Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act) for campaigning to close the animal testing lab Huntingdon Life Sciences. Nearly all the other inmates at the CMU were Muslims brought there because of terrorism-related convictions.

Stepanian immediately told McGowan how horrible the CMU was and asked if he’d like “the tour.” For starters, the CMU at Marion was originally designed to be the prison’s Secure Housing Unit (SHU), or solitary confinement. The rec yard consisted of a rectangular path surrounding an inner cage with 20-foot walls topped with barbed wire. The cage was divided into four sections containing two basketball half-courts, a handball court, and nothing. “It was the most compressed space I’ve ever seen in my life,” said McGowan. “I felt a sense of dread.”

But even worse than the physical restrictions were those placed upon communication. The 300 minutes of monthly phone time that Sandstone afforded McGowan were whittled down to one 15-minute phone call per week at Marion. When McGowan first arrived, the administration was only allowing inmates one four-hour visit per month (in 2010, the BOP increased CMU visitation ours to “eight hours per month, in two four-hour blocks, excluding Saturdays).

McGowan’s ex-wife would fly from New York City to St. Louis, then drive for an hour to the Best Western near the prison. She made the trip nearly a dozen times. The visiting room was really more of a booth; a large plastic chair took up most of the space. Visitors remain on the other side of plexiglass panelling, and conversations flowed through a phone, which McGowan later discovered was live-monitored by a counter-terrorism unit in Martinsburg, West Virginia. “They fucking yell at you for putting your hand on the glass.”

At Sandstone, mail was opened and quickly checked for contraband, but McGowan noticed immediately that it came through Marion at a much more sluggish pace. That's because incoming mail was scanned and emailed to Martinsburg for approval. McGowan didn't realize this until late in his time at Marion – part of what tipped him off was a printout of a conversation between a cop in his unit and an intelligence analyst. He found it sandwiched between the pages of a book he'd ordered off Amazon.

Another censorious feature of Marion was the constant barrage of mail rejections McGowan received, mostly for publications like *Earth First! Journal* and *Rolling Thunder* (a magazine put out by the anarchist collective *CrimethInc.*), which he'd subscribed to since his Sandstone days and beyond. "Part of it was communication restriction, but the other part of it was communication management," McGowan told me. "In a way they wanted to see what was being written. And in some cases they tried to use things I wrote to justify further placement in the CMU." McGowan's lawyer proved in court that his notice of transfer from Sandstone to Marion was in fact the notice for a co-defendant of his, copied and pasted and passed off as his own. As such, "some of what was in the rationale for sending me to Marion wasn't even meant for me." Yet another instance where McGowan has had a discarded identity foisted upon him.

With Stepanian getting out just a few months after he got in, and virtually nothing to occupy his time, McGowan turned his attention towards fighting the conditions at the CMU through legal channels. He became a plaintiff in "*Aref v. Lynch*" ("*Aref v. Holder*" originally), a lawsuit filed by lawyers at the Center for Constitutional Rights in March 2010 for the purpose of "challenging policies and practices at the CMUs," mostly related to inmate communication and visitation. McGowan's lawyers also argued that McGowan and his five co-plaintiffs had been sent to CMUs on the basis of false information about their histories. In March, 2015, the D.C. Circuit district court dismissed the case, but a federal appeals court in D.C. reinstated it just a month ago, in August. The court did, however, reject allegations that the plaintiffs' placement in the CMUs "stigmatized" them as terrorists.

By the time McGowan made it back to New York City, the term "eco-terrorism" had fallen out of fashion, rendered virtually meaningless, yet its bearing on his sentencing, his imprisonment, and his probation, remained integral to his life.

When McGowan first got out, in December 2012, he lived in a halfway house in Brooklyn for six months and started working as a receptionist at the Law Office of Rankin and Taylor. In addition to the standard probation provision that McGowan not be in contact with any convicted felons, he had stipulations that forbade him from being a member of an animal or environmental organization associated with illegal activism, or being in contact with anyone who'd been involved with such a group. "I would have loved to have contact with people who had been in [prison], in order to have someone to talk about it with," McGowan told me. Then, a few months after he got out, his marriage ended. McGowan was fairly isolated while acclimating to the language and rhythms of life on the outside. He had developed an aversion to small and crowded spaces, which in New York City, is practically every space. "It's crazy," he said, "It's fucking seriously hard to adjust."

Not all adjustments were personal and interpersonal, there were environmental factors to consider as well. McGowan moved to Brooklyn just in time to witness it in the full boom of "revitalization," a term developers use to refer to land they are gentrifying, so they can make money off it hassle-free. "The city changed a lot in six years and I was pretty horrified coming home," McGowan said. "I was politically horrified but also like oh my god the subways have more riders than they literally ever have had. Like, the idea of letting an A train go – I've never let an A train go."

Since his release, McGowan's been getting back into the city's activism scene, especially since he got off probation. He's currently trying to figure out his place, his contribution, to a movement that these days is largely youth-based. In August, he spoke on a panel at the National Lawyers Guild conference where he was supposed to discuss "newer political prisoners" and the Black Lives Matter movement, but felt it wasn't his story to tell, that it was wrong. "The question is, you kind of see history repeat itself and it's kind of like, okay, how do you mitigate or help newer generations of activists that are coming up?" Though McGowan is cautious about speaking for the younger activist circles, he's also critical of the idea of a generational divide in the first place. "It's an interesting generation gap and I'm struggling with that in a way. I'm going to be me, I'm not going to follow certain music, certain things. I think having a youth-based social justice movement is a bad idea. Not because it's youth, but because it's homogenous."

Homogeneity, in markets and in social movements, has a tendency to flatten history, orient one towards the future, towards a single, agreeable product. The same can be true of burnt, over-roasted coffee. McGowan looked down at his Starbucks cup, then around at the café, "I like places like this," he said of our meticulously disheveled caffeine hook-up. "I don't like places where I can get a fucking latte in downtown Manhattan and I can get a latte in Bangkok and it's the same fucking thing."

This comment reminded me of a scene from the 2011 documentary about McGowan's plea bargaining and the history of the ELF, *If A Tree Falls*, where his sister, Lisa, tells a story about how McGowan used to take the labels off all the cans of food in her pantry when he came to stay in an attempt to separate out unlike materials for recycling, reduce her personal waste. As a result, she no longer knew what she'd be consuming before she opened it up. When she complained to McGowan, he told her he'd never thought about it that way.

How does one name things, and through that naming draw sustenance from them, when every brand that beckons our desire forth seems to end in a landfill? It's a question many living under capitalism have asked themselves, especially those who wish to oppose it. It's probably a question that can't be resolved, but it can at least be allowed to express itself. For instance, McGowan told me that in his activism he generally tries to resist the instinct to champion tidy solutions, to always have an answer. "That has something to do with my political perspective," he told me, "but it also has to do with my belief that these are questions people have to ask themselves." For instance, when I asked him if I could write about what he was wearing he said he'd prefer I didn't, but that I could write about the Starbucks cup.

### **3 Oct - Jeremy Hammond: Reflections from the SHU**

*New writing from Jeremy about his experience in the segregated housing unit, or SHU, at FCI Manchester.*

#### **MORE:**

#### **October 3<sup>rd</sup> - Part One**

"When are you going to start doing your time right?" one of the prison administrators tell me on their weekly rounds of the Special Housing Unit. I'm back in SHU again, this time for making hooch. I explain one or two disciplinary shots a year is really what you should expect out of a medium-security prisoner. Seems like all of my comrades behind bars are in solitary these days. I'm not complaining though: refusing to be a model inmate, I've been in and out nearly a dozen times since I been locked up, and the time is easier to "digest" if you know it's because of something you actually did unlike some fabricated charge or "investigation." I'll be in and out in a month – or so I thought.

You can't get straight sugar or yeast in prison, and there aren't many hiding spots that aren't regularly searched by the police: nevertheless, nothing could ever stop determined convicts from making prison wine. With a partner, I was microwaving the cream from generic Oreos to separate the grease from the

sugar and mixing it with spoiled tomato paste stolen from the kitchen, stashed in a vent at my job in vocational training. Two weeks later, and this shit is like gasoline! I had just finished drinking a glass, brushed my teeth, and was feeling pretty good until they call me to the Lieutenant's office for a breathalyzer test. What the fuck? Then I see them hauling out our stash: only me and dude knew the vent where our next batch was put up so I already knew what time it was. I find out later the full story when I'm in the SHU: he was trashed, talking shit to somebody in the chow hall and ended up getting slapped and humiliated, and when his homeboys tell him he's got to step up and handle that, he "checks in" – he turns himself in to the cops and tells on everybody for wine, shanks, tobacco, even people who were stealing onions out of the kitchen. He was going home in a few months and didn't want to lose his good time, so now there's ten people back here in SHU cursing his name on the range. Unfortunately this sort of thing happens all the time in the feds.

A week later I see the Disciplinary Hearing Officer (DHO): there's really no defense for failing a breathalyzer so he finds me guilty and gives me 30 days Disciplinary Segregation (DS), 6 months loss of commissary, and 41 days loss of good time "mandatory pursuant to the Prison Litigation Reform Act," that tough-on-prisoner law passed in the Bill Clinton years. It's the standard sentence landed down for a 100-series shot: drinking is in the same "greatest severity" class with rioting, stabbing, and taking hostages. I think it's a bit harsh for wine – an extra month and some changed added to my sentence – but I knew this could happen before I started making it, and I'm not being singled out or anything, so I resign myself to kick back for a month in the box and I'll be back on the compound soon enough.

I've been at a few different SHUs at different spots. Stuck for a week in MCC NYC during Hurricane Sandy when the lights and plumbing weren't working. Spent a few days in SHU holdover at FCI Petersburg where they have triple-stacked bunks so cramped you can't even sit up straight. The SHU at FCI Manchester has not changed much since I was back here last year. The only good thing I'll say about this one is that they have a shower in each cell: hard to mess up a faucet and drain, though some cells flood and there's standing dirty water everywhere. It's downhill from there, though. Sticky plastic mattresses not washed between uses. The standard two-piece steel sink/toilet has broken buttons in every cell, so we affix torn up strips from their sheets to the insides to be able to drink or flush. Bunks so old, bent up, and warped they creak and clang every time you move around. Bright lights that stay on 18 hours a day reflect our orange clothes, rubber shoes and blanket no doubt further destabilizing our psyche. There's a thin vertical window strip giving you a great view of a brick wall, but fortunately you've got enough gang graffiti, calendars, and "so-and-so's a rat" scrawled on the walls to keep you entertained.

By international standards on the minimum conditions for prisoners held in SHU, we're supposed to get a few hours of sunlight and fresh air per week, but the cops are constantly trying to find arbitrary reasons to take that away. At the crack of dawn they quietly sneak up to your cell window to see if you're ready for rec. You have to be already up on your feet by the door all dressed up, shirt tucked in, your bed made, your room looking spotless. So much as a book on the table or your towel drying on the side of the bunk, and they'll tell you, "Try again tomorrow," even though BOP policy states they are not supposed to take away rec as a form of punishment. If you pass, your reward is an hour in the "dog run," a cage twice the size of your cell where the concrete ground is covered in bird shit.

Theoretically, we are allowed access to the "law library" where they cuff you up and lead you to a cage smaller than your cell with a computer that has access to court rulings and case law. But it takes more than a month after you put in your written request, and by then you'll have already seen the DHO thereby preventing you from adequately preparing any meaningful defense. I put in multiple requests and only got to use it once my entire SHU visit.

Every week they roll around a raggedy-ass book cart and we can pick out two books to exchange. The selection is the same set of junk fiction from the time I was here last year: Tom Clancy, James Patterson, Patricia Cornwell – all BS “political spy thrillers” and murder mysteries portrayed from a law-and-order perspective of a cop protagonist. I read a book a day so after I devour mine and my bunky’s, it’s looking pretty rough. Fortunately plenty of comrades on the street were mailing me various anarchist zines, news articles, and internet printouts to keep me aware of events in the free world. But any incoming books, magazines and newspapers that come in through the mail go straight to property storage. They even take any incoming pictures you receive. I already had a hundred books in storage, but they aren’t trying to put them on the cart. FCI Manchester Institutional Supplement on the SHU and personal property is far more restrictive than the national BOP policy, and the problem is compounded by this lazy and malicious SHU property officer who happens to be the same guy who caught me trying to smuggle a bag of coffee in the SHU a year ago.

Everybody fiending for coffee, we are constantly trying to smuggle in that Keefe yellow bag well known to prisoners across the country. When available, I was able to sample some of that forbidden black gold by fishing from other cells down the range by means of a long string cut from sheets and piece of soap. The BOP national menu does guarantee coffee on Saturday and Sunday mornings, so when they feel particularly ambitious, we do get four tiny packets a week altogether amounting to about half a spoon. It’s the leftover cheap stuff not fit for sale on the streets because it is too old and has hardened into a taffy-like wafer that tastes like ashes. Nevertheless, every weekend I’m at rec swapping mailing stamps with others who don’t drink coffee. The sink water isn’t hot enough to dissolve it so you have to build a fire by means of a battery and a tiny strip of aluminum from the coffee wrappers, warming water in those little milk cartons suspended over the fire with more sheet strings. In general population, I was mixing Keefe instant coffee, Kool-Aid, and Coca-Cola to make a coffee energy drink commonly known as a Foxy, Bombay, or La Bomba. The SHU one is the same minus the soda and using these generic “clear punch” Kool-Aids that have solidified like the coffee. Highlight of the week!

Of course, if they catch you making a fire, fishing down the range, saving an apple or a breakfast cake to eat later at night, or just rub one of the COs the wrong way, they got something special for you in this SHU. National policy allows them to deny you your mattress except during eight hours at night, but here at Manchester, they take all your clothes and give you these thin paper suits normally used for prisoners in transit. They even take your blanket and sheets and give you what is essentially a large paper towel.

Thirty days and a few different cellies later, my time is up and I’m stoked! I’m drinking the last of my coffees and making a to-do list when an officer walks up and slips a paper in the door and walks away. “Administrative Detention Order: Hammond is terminating confinement in Disciplinary Segregation and has been ordered into Administrative Detention by the Warden’s Designee Pending SIS Investigation” it reads. What the fuck?! I’m kicking the door, screaming curses at the police down the range, running back and forth in the cell. Later my counselor walks by and gives me more bad news: another visitor application rejected for “security reasons.” (I find out much later that twice my grandparents tried visiting me while I was in SHU and were denied visitation, and I only recently came off two-year visiting restrictions.) “What the fuck am I still doing in SHU?” I demand to know. “SIS investigation” is all I hear for weeks. One of the administrators tell me, “There are things you’ve been doing that we know about, that you don’t know that we know, but we know.” ...Huh? It’s true I’m generally up to something, so without knowing what they’ve got, I can’t do anything until they show their hand. I was supposed to get out in time to do the Running Down the Walls 5K run, but that’s not happening, so instead I just ran in place for an hour.

Eventually a SIS guy walks around and nonchalantly tells me, “Someone mailed you some drugs in the mail. You’ll be back here for a while and then probably transferred.” He said it was greeting cards soaked in liquid K2, all the rage in prison these days because it is odorless and easily concealed. I’m relieved

because even if it really happened, I obviously had absolutely nothing to do with it and I'll be cleared. On one hand, I'm not trying to leave because I have unfinished business on the compound: half-finished tattoo work, books on loan everywhere, etc. But I've pissed off most of the staff here and I'm sure they're just trying to make me somebody else's problem. I'm tired of the land of Mitch McConnell and Kim Davis – get me out of Kentucky already!

The time drags by with no answers and now I'm stressing. I've finished my sentence for the wine and am now on "administrative detention" status, supposedly "non-punitive" because they allow you your radio and two personal books (which the property officer is refusing me). While "under investigation," you aren't charged with any crime, but they can hold you for 90 days then apply for another 90 days on top of that. If they end up giving you a shot, the time you spent waiting for the DHO doesn't even count towards your DS sentence. After the DS time, you're sent back to AD awaiting designation and the next transfer bus. All in all, it'll be months. There are still people in SHU for a big fight back in May that shut everything down. Four months later, the weight pile was reopened, but some of these people haven't even been charged yet. I'm really supposed to sit back here "for a while" and then be sent somewhere else? If transferred I can't bring all my books with me, not even the ones people mailed me since I've been back here. I'm telling them, "You have to donate them to the book cart," and some of the administrators seem understanding and promise to do something about it, but more weeks pass by and I still haven't received a shot and it starts to sink in how badly I'm being screwed. I start the administrative grievance process and submit a few BP-8s and BP-9s, but I already know that endless gerbil wheel goes nowhere.

The time for talk is over: I'm ready to go to war. These showers and toilets will flood the entire range very easily like we were doing in NYC, but later on the way back from rec, I discover this SHU has drains on the floor preventing that possibility. You could always cover the door window with paper to disrupt their count, hold the food tray slot hostage, and refuse to cuff up. I start saving milk cartons in the morning so they start spoiling. Position it under the door and wait for one of the bigwigs to walk by and you can stomp on it to splatter nasty milk all over their fancy dress shoes. Fill up toothpaste tubes with piss, and it works the same way. Damaging the sprinklers will trigger a deafening alarm and spray black oil everywhere. And starting a fire is always an option. Almost everything burns. Any one of these will result in the goon squad forcibly extracting me with shields, Tasers, etc. and is definitely result in more write-ups and injury, but fuck it, I'm already feeling like I have nothing to lose. If I'm going to be in SHU, it may as well be about something, and if they're going to transfer me, I'm going give them something to remember me by.

It's burger-and-fries Wednesday. Everybody normally looks forward to it, but when they roll the cart around, I reflexively tell them to get that stinking-ass tray out my cell. Hunger strike, ya bastards! I rile up the rest of the range, getting everybody to kick on the doors and start chanting "Fuck the police!" They immediately shake me down, take everything, and put me in a cell by myself. It's not long before the bigwigs show up trying to calm me down. They reassure me that they're not messing with me, that they're waiting on the drug test results from the lab, and that I will have a chance to mail my books home. They give me what I'm entitled to in AD, my radio and two books out of my property. I pick *Beyond Walls and Cages*, and *¡Presente!* in English and Spanish so at least I have something to study besides militaristic junk fiction. It was worth it just to show them I'm not going down without a fight, but I realize that the time was starting to warp into a sense of hopelessness and desperation. It's a constant struggle to maintain discipline and sanity, to be able to pick your battles. I got nothing else coming, and no matter what I do I'm still going to be stuck back here until they transfer me.

More time passes, and then suddenly I'm being kicked out back to general population. Turns out whatever they received in the mail wasn't drugs after all, and was most likely just perfume on a greeting card. No shot, no transfer, no nothing. Just an extra month for free. They bring me to the front of the SHU with my duffle bags of property and I dress out of the orange jumpsuits into the standard BOP khakis. Much of my

stuff is damaged or missing, which is the norm, but I'm more concerned about my books, dozens of which I haven't even seen yet because they were sent while I was in SHU. Weeks later I'm still fighting to get them back from the confiscation room or at least be able to donate them to the library. [Note: Almost a year later, Jeremy still has not received all the books that were confiscated from him during this stint in the SHU.]

As I'm leaving the SHU, the property officer tries me one last time and makes me take off my shoes right on the walk just for the orange socks I was wearing, but the joke's on him. I had already managed to throw a bag of Keefe coffee from my property to the SHU orderly to share with the other comrades still left behind. The door opens and I'm nearly blinded by the sun. Just like that, the journey is over. Even though I spent nearly the entire summer in the SHU, lost twenty pounds, and now have to breathalyze three times a day, I'm feeling free at last, happy to get some fresh air and sunlight.

While I was in SHU, the Director of the BOP Charles E. Samuels was blatantly lying in front of Congress, a federal offense in and of itself. "We do not practice solitary confinement... We do not, under any circumstances, nor have we ever, had the practice of putting an individual in a cell alone." Besides the graveyard-like control unit ADX Florence, there are plenty of everyday situations where you'd end up in a cell by yourself: the dry cell (for those suspected of smuggling contraband), the drunk tank (if you fail a breathalyzer), hunger strikers, protective custody cases, or just lazy SHU cell placement. Open the book on any SHU in the BOP and you'll find people in single cells. The dude across the hall from my cell in "max custody" all by himself was doing a 24-month DS sentence for assaulting the guards in another prison. Every day, he played solitaire and paced the cell endlessly.

The BOP tries to whitewash SHU by calling it "administrative detention," or "disciplinary segregation," among other things. Indeed, the word "solitary" does not appear anywhere in the entire BOP program statements. No matter how they rebrand it, it's still a torturous disregard for human rights that has attracted the UN's attention. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Juan Mendez says, "Segregation, isolation, separation, cellular, lockdown, supermax, the hole, Secure Housing Unit... whatever the name, solitary confinement should be banned by States as punishment." It's true that in general they try to give you a cellmate, and many people prefer single cell placement for short-term SHU bids because it gets cramped and crowded in that tiny cell and you want to be able to stretch out comfortably. But after a month or so, even with a strong spirit you start losing your mind and you crave meaningful social interactions not possible in a box the size of your bathroom, with or without a cellmate. Hundreds of thousands have experienced solitary confinement. Anyone doing more than a few years is inevitably going to end up in seg at some point during their bid. Prison administrators and correctional officer unions defend this practice claiming that it deters people from breaking prison rules, but all it does is make you bitter, erratic, psychologically damaged and more willing to lash out – especially if you're doing time for some petty rule infraction or fabricated "investigation."

The cops especially love to harass political prisoners and other "troublemakers" who submit grievances, file lawsuits, interact with the media, or communicate about prison conditions with the outside world such as Barrett Brown or Chelsea Manning. Their weapons include solitary confinement, supermax, communication management units, denying visits, and monitoring and censoring your mail, but that's only what is sanctioned by policy. The police violence of pepper spray and batons that you see at protests is an everyday occurrence in prison where the guards got each others' backs and there is no accountability. Remember in the 1970s, prison guards repeatedly tried to arm racist white prisoners with shanks instructing them to kill George Jackson. His comrade, Hugo "Yogi" Pinell, who himself spent decades in solitary confinement and had participated in the recent hunger strikes in California to end this practice, was murdered under mysterious circumstances just a week after finally being released to general population.

With Black Lives Matter and widespread public opposition to mass incarceration, finally there is attention on solitary confinement, police brutality, capital punishment, three strikes laws, mandatory minimum sentences and other aspects of the police state. Public outrage has forced Obama and other politicians to make token reforms, but they would never willingly give up these profitable tools of social control without a fight. We cannot sell out our desire for a world without prisons and police by settling for their promise of a more benevolent human warehousing industry, as if there could ever be such a thing. We must continue to build pressure on their pipeline till it bursts. The extra harsh treatment and counter-intelligence operations ordinarily reserved for the rebels, such as SWAT teams created to fight the LA Panthers, will be used against the general population if we do not challenge it with fierce opposition. Behind enemy lines, our strategy is to unite various factions against our common enemy and successfully engage in system-wide hunger strikes, work refusals and sabotage. Coupled with militant street demonstrations and targeted direct action campaigns against prison officials, we can make this industry so toxic and unmanageable so that no one would ever want to have anything to do with it and it is swept into the dustbin of history.

### **October 7<sup>th</sup> - Part 2**

Back in the box again. Anyone doing time is going to end up in solitary confinement at some point; no self-respecting convict is obeying each and every petty rule, and I've been averaging at least a month or so each year since I've been down.

While it's not surprising I found myself in SHU again, this time I had no idea what I supposedly did: no charge or explanation, no one says anything to me for a week. I'm back there pacing the tiny-ass cell thinking maybe this is about reporting on the various lockdowns and water issues, or encouraging mayhem at the DNC and RNC, or writing public statements against the proposed federal prison in nearby Letcher County, KY, or the FOIA requests, or maybe a few other things in the works I'm not sure whether they are aware of or not. None of this is really against the rules, but you never know if they're going to hit you anyway. Either way it brings me pleasure to know I've caused them some headaches and annoyances over the years.

Eventually the bigwigs do their weekly clown parade and I find out I was locked up because I was "encouraging rebellion and criminal activities on the Internet" – i.e. the same thing I've been doing since I arrived at FCI Manchester two and a half years ago. But this time I crossed the line, they say, by inciting violence against police officers. I'm told I'm being transferred, and on three separate occasions I'm being told I'm going to a communications management unit (CMU) – a controversial control unit built during the Bush administration with heavy restrictions on communications primarily reserved for supposed "terrorists."

Later I find out it was specifically over this tweet: "Cops getting away with murder for so long it's about time someone started popping off on them pigs. It's tit for tat, baby. Support the Dallas Shooter!"

Inflammatory, sure, and in retrospect I don't want anyone to think I'm encouraging people to shoot at random cops, But I also didn't say anything that's not being said in every prison and in every neighborhood that experiences police violence on an everyday basis. This came in the immediate aftermath of the murders in St. Paul and in Baton Rouge, after the acquittal of the cops in Freddie Gray's death: it just keeps happening over and over again. Imprisoned, we've watched all of this from afar, unable to attend the rallies and join the widespread public outrage against these killer cops who just keep getting away with it over and over again.

Groups like the Fraternal Order of Police and various police chief associations knew they had another mess on their hands and launched a coordinated PR campaign to turn the story away from all the people being murdered by cops and focus on some supposed Dallas shooter conspiracy to attack law enforcement. They

condemned the shooter as a terrorist and a racist, saying he was visiting “hate” websites and tried connecting the attack to Black Lives Matter despite the fact BLM is overwhelmingly nonviolent. For days all you’d see on the news was “American heroes under attack” with various police representatives justifying increased militarization at rallies while somehow also claiming that “police protect the protesters,” a ridiculous assertion considering how they regularly beat up and mass arrest us.

You’d get the impression there was universal denunciations of the attack, but when they showed his picture with his fist in the air, most everyone here in prison was like “Hell yeah!” and “It’s about time!” – supportive sentiments contrasting so heavily from the seemingly universal condemnations from the TV networks and the pacifist reformists. I put the tweet out because the perspective of prisoners who have also experienced police brutality, whose voices are otherwise silenced and dismissed from the debate, must be heard.

Understandably, the BOP was pissed about it: after all, the flag at FCI Manchester was at half mast for a week, just as it was when Nancy Reagan died. But some friends also raised similar concerns whether I was wise to be so explicit and brazen, whether I really believe indiscriminate violence against police is the best strategy. What I said was really not all that different from what I’ve been putting out since before I was locked up. For example, the Anonymous “Chinga La Migra” hack of Arizona police included an ASCII graphic of an AK-47 with the words, “Yes we’re aware that putting the pigs on blast puts risks their safety, those poor defenseless police officers who lock people up for decades, who get away with brutality and torture, who discriminate against people of color, who make and break their own laws as they see fit. We are making sure they experience just a taste of the same kind of violence and terror they dish out on an every day basis.” Another comrade in Texas brought up a point: since they very well could have been at that protest, would it have changed my attitude if they were also hit? The shooter was specifically targeting cops, but two protesters were also hit.

To be clear, I don’t think we should be going around killing cops, and it is extremely reckless to shoot off guns at protests. With any tactic, you absolutely have to eliminate any possibility of inadvertently injuring innocent bystanders: consider that for all the actions of the ELF and the Weather Underground, they never killed anybody. When I did the “Shooting Sheriffs Saturday” hack of 70+ police departments, I redacted the personal information of people in jail, while posting the names, addresses, and email contents for thousands of police officers.

The state of free speech in imprisoned America and the growing rift between police and the people was swirling through my mind as I sat in the SHU. This is the third time I’ve been here at Manchester SHU, four if you want to count the two day “mistake” they made a month earlier. For all the talk of prison reform, there have been no observable changes in the cruel and unusual conditions that is everyday life in the Special Housing Unit. Manchester’s SHU is more restrictive than national BOP policy: no newspapers, books, magazines or photographs allowed from the mail. No coffee. Two junk fiction books off this janky-ass cart they pass around once a week. Only five hours of fresh air a week in the dog cages, if they don’t take it for frivolous reasons like our shirts not being tucked in or our bed not being made. Catch a shot while you’re back there, even for something as petty as saving bread or a packet of ketchup from one of the meals to eat during those late night hungry moments, they’ll come and take your blanket, put you in paper suits, and give you cold meals for five days.

The isolation and drudgery can’t be understated: even strong minds, no matter what, you’re going end up a little bugged out and have to find creative ways of passing time. I folded some origami dodecahedrons, played the movie “The Matrix” in my head with Neo being played by Will Smith as it was originally intended, and mastered the technique of peeling paint off the walls by simply staring at it long enough with enough concentration. But the stretches of boredom are sometimes punctuated with brief intense moments,

like when my comrade two doors down was hit with the extraction squad. Refusing to cuff up to be put into the paper suits for refusing a cellie, a goon squad decked out in riot gear busted down the cell, roughed him up a bit while shouting “stop resisting,” cut off his orange rags, and forced him into the paper suits. It was horrific, but cell extractions like this are pretty common and supposedly backed by policy.

After a month of being told that I was going to be transferred, all of a sudden I’m kicked out the SHU and back on the compound. I’m given a write-up which reads like a federal indictment: “Hammond has the ability to influence the decisions and actions of others in public. Therefore, by directing his outside contact to post messages advocating violence towards a particular group of people, Hammond has effectively endangered the public, specifically police officers.” But it’s only a 397 series write-up for “phone abuse,” a low-severity shot you generally don’t even go to the box for (though they did take my phone privileges for two months).

I was given a stern warning by the prison’s intelligence officers who made it clear I got off light and that they are watching my every move and communication. I asserted my right to speak freely about politics, prison conditions or whatever I feel like, which they even acknowledged was allowed, but that I “can’t incite or advocate violence in any way.” Furthermore, “we know about the strike,” referring to the September 9th nationwide prisoner work strike on the anniversary of the Attica rebellion. “Hmm?” I mused. “Don’t know what you’re talking about.” Though there are a thousand complaints about our conditions, and that they’re working at UNICOR military sweatshops for nickels an hour, the climate here and at most medium-security prisons is pretty chill and it doesn’t look like people here are trying to buck. In any case, I don’t want to go to a CMU or spend months in the SHU awaiting transfer: they’ve won this round, I’m going to chill out, happy just to be drinking coffee, getting some sun, and reading good books.

Catching up on world events from the giant stack of newspapers and magazines they’ve held since I’ve been gone, it looks like the situation has been getting worse and worse. Another police murder of a black youth in Milwaukee while Donald Trump encouraged law enforcement to use increased militaristic tactics, specifically mentioning my hometown of Chicago where the cops have been basically waging a war on the people. Despite the “blue code of silence” cover-ups, the Homan Square black site, the failures of the Independence Police Review Authority, the police propaganda machine is pushing “Blue Lives Matter” laws to create a new class of hate crimes, something which I probably could have been prosecuted under simply for what I’ve spoken about in the past. The word is out, they’re monitoring everything, so watch what you say, even what you think, especially if you’re in prison. But in the back of the minds of all those who have experienced police oppression, the question remains: what is it going to take to put an end to this police state once and for all?

#### **4 Oct - Why Prisons Strikes are Necessary: An Ex-Prisoner’s Experience**

*At the beginning of 2005 in Corcoran, California, Phillip Ruiz started a ten year prison sentence for a non-violent drug offense.*

##### **MORE:**

by Phillip A. Ruiz (*It’s Going Down*)

A year and a half later, I was placed in the SHU, (Security Housing Unit or also known as solitary confinement), for the remainder of my prison sentence for my participation in numerous direct actions inside prisons such as, work stoppages, walk-outs, wildcat strikes, slow downs, hunger strikes, alleged acts of sabotage, and some not so well known tactics that are exclusive to prisons. My defiant and rebellious behavior according to the prison authorities deemed me, “a threat to the safety and security of the institution.” I was frequently labeled as an organizer and leader during such strikes. At the same time, I was labeled a “Program Failure” and was given an indeterminate SHU program because of this. Hello long term isolation, goodbye phone calls to family and friends, good bye to physical visits with family, meaningful

human interaction, daily sunlight and fresh air, good bye to daily showers, and any sort of rehabilitation or education programs.

Long term isolation is a very real risk prisoners take when they challenge the forced prison slave labor system that exists inside American prisons. It was a risk I consciously took and it is a risk many, many, prisoners are currently taking during the present prisoner strike that began on September 9, 2016.

At the beginning of my prison sentence I was given a much desired job of working in the institutions lunch room. I was given \$16.00 a month for this, which was a hot job considering most prisoners come from poor socio-economic backgrounds like myself. Our hours were 6:00 am to 3:30 pm. No break and no lunch time. We were told our break and lunch was when we got off at 3:30. What I did was prepare the sack lunches for the entire prisons prisoner population, which was at the time like around 1,600 prisoners. What was inside these sack lunches was an apple, a elementary school size milk or juice carton, two cookies or graham crackers, a small bag of pretzels, four pieces of bread and either two slices of “lunch meat” or a small pack of peanut butter and jelly.

This lunch room was set up in a sweat-shop type environment. There was a huge table/conveyor belt in the center of the warehouse/lunchroom and prisoners standing side by side on each side of this contraption. Brown paper lunch bags were placed on conveyor belt and each prisoner had the task of placing a specific lunch item inside a brown lunch bag. But in reality it was more like throwing the item inside the brown bag, like a game of basketball, since the lunch bags moved so fast down the line; and don’t you dare be the one to miss an item in a bag. If you didn’t keep up to the speed and rhythm of the conveyor belt, you would be the cause of shutting it down, stopping the flow of lunches, keeping everyone overtime, and eventually could be fired if you did it again.

Forced prisoner slave labor, I’m often asked why i call it this term. I call it what it really is. So, if a prisoner refuses to work in these sweatshop conditions or wanted to challenge specific conditions they couldn’t go to their union and organize around the issue. Prisoner unions did not exist at the time. Thankfully, prisoner unions are becoming a tangible possibility and reality now, thanks to the I.W.W. and its standing committee, the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC).

Consequently, when and if a prisoner refuses to work ANY job inside a California prison they are quickly fired and given extra time onto their prison sentence and commissary , phone calls, and visitation “privileges” are revoked. That is why it is forced slave labor. If you don’t work how, when, and where the prison authorities demand you to, then you don’t get released from prison.

So back in the Corcoran lunch room, being that we had no breaks or lunch time we incarcerated workers at the time had the habit of munching on some of the snacks that were placed in the sack lunches throughout the day. We didn’t take away from the sack lunches we just found a method to take snacks before we started making the lunches so that we would have something to eat throughout our shift. Most guards wouldn’t trip on this although officially it wasn’t allowed. Then one day an asshole guard, who never worked in the lunchroom, came on duty...and all hell broke loose. This fascist guard who would’ve been a poster-child for the gulags in a different time told us snaking on snacks during work hours would result in us being immediately fired. Fucking really.

You deny us a break, lunch, and force us to work in sweatshop conditions then you won’t allow us to get our munch on with some cookies (that prisoners in another prison baked). Oh, hell no. All of us looked at each other in defiant disgust and started whispering, fuck this shit. I loudly said, “Fuck this,” I quit. Each prisoner looked at me in half amazement and bewilderment. So I keep on going on a rant loud enough so every prisoner could here me. How they are exploiting us, we are prisoner slaves, that we have no voice but

that we could have one through our action, that this is bullshit, we need to rise up, take action and show these pigs we ain't gonna put up with this shit anymore.

Keep in mind, most prisoners are not activists nor socially conscious or up on union organizing. At the same time, the prisoner mentality is often broken to the point where one accepts the prison status quo and wrongly believes things can't get any better. This is a result of years of the prison system gaining illusory power and authority over the poor, working poor, people of color, and all minorities. Hence the school to prison pipeline. Subsequently, lots of prisoners just go with the flow. At least that's how it was when I was in prison. Prisoners are now realizing that by with-holding their labor they have the power to shut down prisons and get the authorities, at the very least, to reevaluate the prison slave labor system. In essence, they are realizing that striking is a necessary stepping stone in changing the prison system and the dynamics of prison slave labor.

Surprisingly, most of the lunchroom decided to quit, too, which had a domino effect because soon people from all over the central kitchen started hearing about what was going down in the lunch room and started saying "fuck that" while bringing up their own beefs. Soon after our walk out we had cooks, dishwashers, maintenance, and clerks walk out on their job. The prison was put on emergency lockdown and we had to purchase food from an outside source because the majority of the central kitchen, which cooked and prepared the food for the entire prison, walked out in a type of wildcat/work stoppage.

Some criticize the effectiveness of prisoner strikes. Although this first hand experience didn't change the forced prisoner slave labor practices, it did shut the prison down to the point where there was a major structural overhaul in the form of giving prisoners not only a break but a lunch break as well. But most importantly in my opinion, is that this spur of the moment walk out empowered prisoners, who were beaten down most of their lives and use to being hyper exploited and used to being slaves, gave them a new sense of belief and fresh breath of life what is possible; of what change is possible through their action. Changing the prisoner mentality and breaking the state sponsored racial and gang segregation that exists in prisons is priceless and that happened through striking prisoners.

That is why supporting the current strike is so important and necessary.

### **5 Oct - Marius receives second T shot**

*As Marius Mason continues his transition behind the wall, we have a very brief update.*

#### **MORE:**

Marius got his second shot, after being worried that they would forget or it might be delayed. No bad reaction or really any strong reaction at all. He's feeling happy and relieved, energized and upbeat. "It feels deeply, deeply good in my bones, in my blood. Like my heart is more steady, my mind is more focused."

### **6 Oct - Barrett being denied book shipments at Three Rivers**

*Supporters just received the following note from Barrett, who asked us to publish it.*

#### **MORE:**

*"Today I received three forms informing me that three different book shipments to me from three different Amazon processing centers had been rejected and returned, stating that inmates are not generally supposed to receive packages. In fact, the BOP mail program statement says very clearly that packages containing books shipped from bookstores are perfectly acceptable, which is why over the past four years none of the countless other packages of books I've received from Amazon have ever been rejected for arriving in a package, as books always arrive this way by necessity. This comes just a few days after I'd*

*assisted another inmate in filing a complaint about the prison mailroom's illicit rejection of magazines to which he is legally entitled, and just a few hours after I'd finished writing a post on that very topic for publication, using the inmate email system, which staff members are able to access. It also comes just days after my medication had been disrupted without explanation. As I continue to document wrongdoing at the Three Rivers Federal Correctional Institution, I expect to incur further retaliation, as I have in the past. I would simply hope that as I work to document instances of state criminality, that the press will pay attention."*

Books are obviously a crucial resource for all prisoners. In the course of his incarceration, fans and supporters have ordered literally hundreds of books for Barrett through his Amazon wish list. That the prison administration continues to find new and inventive ways to retaliate against him, such as this, is astounding.

### **8 Oct - Update on Situation of Political Prisoner Jalil Muntaqim**

*We just received the following note. Good news, all things considered.*

#### **MORE:**

I got a text message that Jalil beat his charges. Good news. If not he would have gone to the shu, solitary, for three months. AND it would have been on his record for parole.

Also, I just got a call from Jalil as I was posting this. He wants to thank everyone who made phone calls and wrote to Commissioner Annucci regarding his situation.

Jalil will be sending out an update, which we will post as soon as we receive it. Jalil has been told he cannot correspond with any organizations outside of New York State, which is a definite violation of his First Amendment rights, especially as he corresponds with people from all over the world.

### **9 Oct - Introducing project FANG: A Travel Fund for Earth and Animal Liberation Prisoners**

*We're excited to be working with Sacramento Prisoner Support to facilitate a much-needed attempt to fill a gap in the ongoing support work for earth and animal liberation prisoners in the United States. Below is detailed information about the fund; we extend an invitation for prisoners and their supporters to use it.*

#### **MORE:**

For now, the fund is limited to earth and animal liberation prisoners in the United States and their visitors. With additional funding, we hope to expand access to the fund in the future. You can donate by going to [gum.co/projectFANG](http://gum.co/projectFANG)

As people with loved ones, friends, and comrades in prison (and in some cases, as people who have done time ourselves), we know how necessary and reinvigorating visits can be. They help us stay connected with one another and with the struggles we all care about. They help us overcome the separation of walls and wire. Unfortunately, visits are cost prohibitive for many of our friends, families, and comrades.

This project aims to help with the financial strain imposed on the families and loved ones of prisoners by providing cash allowances for travel expenses to and from prisons. The funds will be available in two separate amounts. Tier 1 will be a \$300 allowance. Tier 2 will be a \$500 allowance. If you will be using the fund, please carefully consider how much you, as a visitor, will need for travel expenses. Things to keep in mind might include: airfare/busfare/trainfare, car rental, hotel rental, money for the vending machines at the prison, et cetera. While we encourage you not to be afraid to ask for what you need, keep in mind that other

people will be accessing this fund. If Tier 1 is enough to meet your needs, then that is what you should apply for. We also strongly encourage visitors to use any excess funds to further support prisoners, which might mean putting money toward commissary, ordering books for prisoners, or simply donating the money back to project FANG.

The size of the fund at any given time will guide how often you can apply for funds. Initially, each prisoner may apply for funds once per quarter (1st Quarter is January-March; 2nd Quarter is April-June; 3rd Quarter is July-September; 4th Quarter is October-December). Please remember that an application for funds does not ensure receipt of funds. We will do our best to accommodate all requests and we sincerely hope that we are able to do so. However, we might not always be able to meet everyone's needs.

The process is simple and initiated by the prisoner.

We have already sent letters to all eligible prisoners—those imprisoned for taking action in defense of non-human animals and the earth (and who have subsequently not cooperated with the state). After the prisoner completes and mails in an application form, with contact information for up to four potential visitors, we will begin contacting their list of possible visitors to let them know they are eligible to receive funds. We ask that prisoners only include people who have been approved for visits by the facility they are in and they prioritize their list of visitors, as we will be starting by contacting the first person on their list and moving down the list from there. If the first potential visitor would like to receive the funds, they will fill out and submit an application form. If/when the application is accepted, we will mail a money order. If they do not wish to receive the funds, we will contact the next potential visitor on the list. Once someone accepts the money, that will count as the prisoner's single use of the fund for the quarter.

If prisoners have any thoughts or ideas about project FANG or how to improve it, they are encouraged to include them with the response to the introductory letter we have sent to them. Prisoners know what their needs are better than we do, and the fund is here for them.

We realize that everyone is differently situated. If, for any reason, a prisoner you support is not able to respond to the introductory letter or to make direct requests for funds, we will not take it as a denial of need. We will make every effort to be in touch with support groups who might be better situated to correspond with groups such as ours.

Initially, project FANG will be facilitated by NYC Anarchist Black Cross and Sacramento Prisoner Support. More folks may become involved in the project should the need and interest arise.