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Updates for February 14th

23 Jan - Examining “Post-Truth” Through the Categorical Imperative

Here is the latest from soon to be freed Chelsea Manning.

MORE:

Today, my friend and security expert, Yan Zhu, asked us to consider the following post-truth thought experiment:

Imagine that you had a magic machine. You tell the machine what your goals are. The machine tells you, in any situation, the optimal statement to say in order to achieve your goals, and who to say it to. The statement may or may not be true.

Under which circumstances, if any, would you follow the machine’s instructions?

Example 1: Bob tells the machine that his goal is to become as rich as possible. The machine instructs Bob to publish a “fake news” article about how climate change is an illuminati conspiracy theory.

Example 2: Alice tells the machine that her goal is to cure cancer. The machine instructs her to tell the local florist that her favorite color is red when in reality it is blue.

Instinctively, most truth-loving people would consider Bob to be immoral for following his instructions; however, we would probably not say the same of Alice. Many of us would even admit that in Alice’s situation we would follow the machine’s instructions.

She then concludes at the end:

“[1] How effective is honesty at achieving your goals, and [2] at what point do you decide that lying is a more effective means to an end?”

I want to say “never” for the second question, but I can clearly imagine a world in which it is the wrong answer.

Yan’s analysis has roots in a consequentialist flavor of the utilitarian perspective.

In plain English, the question she is asking is this: “Will more good than bad come from lying?”

In other words: “should I lie to get cookies, even if they’re being shared with everyone?” then, “if we can get cookies for everyone (because they’re so delicious) is it a moral imperative to try to achieve that goal?”

In the utilitarian perspective, right and wrong is determined by what causes the most pleasure. What will get you the most cookies. Even if it’s bad in the long run. If it feels good. Do it.

Being honest still gets you cookies in the end. It just harder. (Arguably, in the end though, it feels better, which is also sweet.)

Perhaps the best lens with which to analyze this thought experiment is to use the “categorical imperative” suggested by Immanuel Kant: “an objective, rationally necessary and unconditional principle that we must always follow despite any natural desires or inclinations we may have to the contrary.” – (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

Fundamentally, under the categorical imperative, you should never lie, even if it gets everybody cookies. This is because you can still achieve your goal of obtaining cookies through honest means—it is just harder.

But it's not only about whether everyone gets cookies or not; it's about how you get them. For Kant, the Categorical Imperative called upon the basic principle of morality to command, quite unconditionally, certain courses of action, "quite independently of the particular ends and desires of the moral agent." This categorical imperative "binds us regardless of our desires: everyone has a duty to not lie, regardless of circumstances and even if it is in our interest to do so. These imperatives are morally binding because they are based on reason, rather than contingent facts about an agent." (Wikipedia)

In the case of Yan's thought experiment; even if the machine can help you achieve the goal (of getting cookies for everyone) you should carefully consider the outcome of the machine and act on your own moral imperative. When you depend on the output of the machine, whether lying or telling the truth, you are no longer acting as an independent moral actor.

In other words, in the post-truth world, we need to make our own choices based on our conscience and the categorical imperative.

27 Jan - Inside the Clemency Lottery

On the randomness of clemency. So many more federal prisoners deserved mercy from the last president and the difference between those approved and those denied was often just luck. Here is original TMP commentary from Sean Nuttall, a staff attorney with the Clemency Resource Center, founded to prepare applications during the Obama years.

MORE:

by Sean Nuttall (*The Marshall Project*)

Of the thirty-odd clemency petitions I prepared this year as an attorney with the NYU Clemency Resource Center, Tom's was perhaps the strongest. Tom left home at sixteen because his mother, a methamphetamine addict, physically abused him. Out on his own, he began using drugs and was soon addicted, dealing small quantities to support his habit. One night when he was twenty-one, his girlfriend, also a drug user, asked him for heroin. They shot up together; unbeknownst to Tom, she had also taken a large amount of cocaine, and she suffered a fatal overdose. At trial, the jury found Tom guilty of drug distribution, but acquitted him of causing his girlfriend's death, following testimony she had taken only about one-twentieth a lethal dose of heroin. Notwithstanding the verdict, however, the Judge found that heroin had contributed to her death. He sentenced Tom to eighty years in prison, under then mandatory sentencing guidelines.

Tom is no angel, but eighty years for an accident that happened when he was twenty-one seemed wildly excessive. I was not the only one to think so: In a letter of support to the pardon attorney, the judge explained that Tom's sentence had haunted him since he imposed it sixteen years ago. But despite this strong support, last week I had to inform Tom his petition had not been granted. Understandably, he was devastated. The Office of the Pardon Attorney provides no explanation for clemency decisions, so I was left to give him the same answer I had to give so many of our clients: That, as deeply unsatisfactory as it must sound, the Obama administration's clemency initiative was often a crapshoot.

The initiative shares this quality with federal sentencing in general. Using a quasi-arithmetic formula, the federal sentencing guidelines promulgated by the United States Sentencing Commission produce a time range that forms the basis for federal judges' sentencing determinations. The range's odd specificity — 262 to 327 months for many drug offenders with prior distribution convictions, as just one example — lends an almost scientific aura to the calculation. But in practice, depending on the charging decisions made by the prosecutor and the views of the judge randomly assigned to the case, sentences for the same offense may

vary dramatically. And, largely because of mandatory-minimum sentences that Congress has enacted, sentences often skew wildly more severe than the underlying crimes warrant, particularly for drug offenses.

The clemency initiative was designed to help remedy this problem, by reducing some of the most egregious outlying sentences for certain deserving inmates. To identify these individuals, the administration announced a series of criteria, including that the petitioner be a non-violent, low-level offender, with good conduct in prison and without a significant criminal history, who had served at least ten years of a sentence that would be substantially lower today. Initially, administration officials estimated that perhaps ten thousand inmates met the criteria. Ultimately, however, only about 1700 petitions were granted.

For these lucky few — even when the clemency grant shaved only a few years off the initial sentence, or the new sentence remained enormously long (twenty-five years or more, for some grantees) — the Obama administration did an extraordinary thing. But unfortunately, in granting so many fewer petitions than originally projected, the administration may have done more to exacerbate the arbitrariness of the sentencing regime writ large than to remedy it. As became clear over the last several months — during which the majority of the clemency decisions were announced — it was often impossible to find any meaningful difference between the petitions that were granted and those that were denied.

One can see how this happened. The administration's criteria appear straightforward enough, but as every law student knows, a multi-factor test with such nebulous requirements (what does "low level" mean? "Good" conduct? "Significant" criminal history?) will defy consistent application. This would be true even for a single decision-maker; under the much-critiqued clemency process, however, the Office of the Pardon Attorney, Deputy Attorney General's Office, White House Counsel's Office, and ultimately the president himself all separately evaluated whether the criteria were met. Along the way, the local United States Attorney's Office — the same entity that initially prosecuted the applicant — and the sentencing judge could offer their views and any additional information they possessed, without the applicant being afforded the opportunity to respond, thereby risking entrenchment of the same individual biases and regional differences that produced the initial sentence. Running this gauntlet, petitions might easily be declined even though they deserved to be granted.

Our experience at the Clemency Resource Center provides some small indication of the extent of the problem. Of the 200 or so petitions we and a sister organization submitted, ninety-six were granted — on its face, a wonderful result. But while each grant was the cause for celebration, as well as for sincere gratitude to the administration, predicting which clients would be successful was impossible. Petitions only a mother (or a defense attorney) would be confident about might sail through the process within weeks of submission. A handful of inmates whom we declined as hopeless — a difficult decision, but one we thought the criteria required — later successfully petitioned the administration on their own. Meanwhile, petitions that clearly appeared to meet the criteria, for clients like Tom with incredibly compelling stories, languished for months, only to be finally denied last week.

Still, at least these clients received a decision: Others — for reasons that again appear largely arbitrary — did not. The Obama administration never settled on a clear deadline for submitting petitions. During a conference call with clemency attorneys in August 2016, the pardon attorney suggested that petitions submitted by the end of September would make it through the process; the deputy attorney general, however, later announced that August 30th was the cut off. Last week the administration announced that all petitions received by the earlier date were considered, but almost ten percent of the petitions CRC submitted before this deadline still remain pending. And while the administration ultimately reviewed several hundred petitions submitted in September, heartbreakingly, many deserving clients whose petitions we rushed to submit that month also never received a decision. There is no apparent reason why any of these petitioners was passed over.

For the incredible difference it made in the lives of about 1700 inmates and their families, the Obama administration should be heartily commended. I have no doubt that the administration tried to be consistent in the undeniably monumental task of winnowing this elect from the tens of thousands of petitions they received. And, as administration officials stated repeatedly and rightly, clemency could never be an adequate substitute for comprehensive sentencing reform, which Congress failed to pass. But as this remarkable moment has come to a close, with the Trump administration highly unlikely to do anything remotely similar, there is good reason to be troubled by the randomness of the decisions and profoundly saddened for all the deserving inmates left behind, the thousands and thousands whose hopes were raised so high and now have been dashed.

30 Jan - Oscar López Rivera Plans His Future After Being Pardoned

Oscar Has been released to a halfway house in Puerto Rico!

MORE:

by José A. Delgado (*El Nuevo Día*)

Everything is different. The clandestine caresses and the capability of laying in his shoulder when they can avoid the guard gaze or when he just ignores them.

But, in 107 days, at most, everything will be just a memory.

After over 150 visits in the last 18 years to the jail in Terre Haute, it is time to plan the future.

Oscar López Rivera, the last Cold War's revolutionary Puerto Rican that it is imprisoned and that spent more time on American prisons will be freed at the latest on May 17, after almost 36 years.

"He is happy, really upbeat", said on Saturday López Ramos, at the end of the first of 2 visits she would give him this weekend.

When the past January 21 she entered for the first time to the jail after that president Obama had commuted her father's sentence, the world just looked different.

The vicissitudes have not changed. After all, for the federal government he still is the old militant of the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN), a group that claimed the authorship of dozens of bomb attacks that caused 5 casualties.

López Rivera never denied his vinculation with the FALN. But he denies having blood on his hands.

Like in other visits, hir daughter – who first met him at a Chicago prison months after his arrest on May 29, 1981, still has to obey the routine that the jailer imposes. Reporting through an intercom that authorizes her official entry to the Terre Haute correctional complex, located at the city with the same name at Indiana State, of 62,000 inhabitants and three and a half hours south from Chicago city.

Prisoners get naked to get searched before and after they get visited. When Clarisa entered the saturday to the visits room, along with the president of the Municipal Council of New York, Melissa Mark Viverito, as usual, the prison guard told her where to sit.

The custody officials determine where the prisoners and their families are placed. The prisoner and the visitor sit shoulder to shoulder, in a saloon that may seem like the waiting room of an office or hospital.

Visitors may salute the prisoner on the way in. After that a barrier is in the way until the moment of saying "goodbye".

The system tells Clarisa López Ramos how and when to embrace her father, even though she has him by her side for almost 7 hours.

"We are both counting the days, the seconds, the moments to fulfill more dreams. At last we talked about the pending things we have outside prison", said López Ramos, in an interview with *El Nuevo Día*, in the Roberto Clemente school of the Puerto Rican neighborhood of Chicago, when she talked about her first visit to the jail after receiving "the good news".

The past weekend she went to see her father along with his lawyer. On Saturday the councilwoman Mark Viverito joined her. Yesterday, along with the councilwoman, attorney Jan Susler came to the visit, as well as the democrat congressman Luis Gutiérrez, his uncle José López Rivera and the secretary of the Board of Directors of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center of Chicago, Alejandro Molina.

Once president Barack Obama, on the 17th of January, commuted López Rivera's sentence to 70 years in prison, he is not supposed to stay in the Terre Haute penitentiary anymore.

Therefore, López Rivera had to immediately initiate the solicitude for the transfer process to a partial time penitentiary institution (halfway house) that would allow him to go out to work, or under house arrest.

His intention is to fulfill his sentence in Puerto Rico, where San Juan's Mayor, Carmen Yulín Cruz, offered him a job. "My father's wish is to live with me", said López Ramos.

But there is not any warranty that the bureaucratic procedure will end before May 17.

Anyhow, López Rivera has already begun his removal. His belongings, accumulated during his 35 years in captivity, are stored in boxes and sent to Chicago. Others, are already headed towards San Juan.

López Rivera does not taste Puerto Rican food since over 3 decades, but with his daughter, an enthusiastic cook, they are planning which recipes he would like to eat.

"He asked me if I remembered how to make my grandmother's yam doughnuts. He told me cook pineapple vinegar. He says it is vinegar, but it is actually pineapple pique", sustained her daughter.

The countdown is running. To end, for once and for all, with the goodbyes.

February 9th - Oscar Arrives in Puerto Rico Today

by José A. Delgado (*El Nuevo Día*)

US prison authorities today transferred prisoner Oscar López Rivera to Puerto Rico, who has served 35 years and eight months in US jails.

New York state representative Jose Rivera said he was aware that the Prison Bureau was taking López Rivera to the island, where he will complete his sentence, which expires on May 17.

"Family, after so many years of struggle Oscar López Rivera is at the airport en route pa '(ra) Puerto Rico," Rivera published on his Facebook page.

López Rivera would arrive today in a flight accompanied by the mayor of San Juan, Carmen Yulín Cruz, according to a source of endi.com.

López Rivera's close family and attorney have been silent over the past 24 hours over unofficial reports that Lopez Rivera's move would occur today, which was likely after President Barack Obama commuted his sentence.

After the sentence was commuted, the US Bureau of Prisons, to find space, was obliged to remove López Rivera from the Terre Haute prison complex to a part-time prison as part of the process toward his reintegration into the community.

López Rivera had requested that he be transferred to a federal institution in Puerto Rico, where he will serve the last 97 days in prison and is supposed to be allowed to leave for work.

The mayor of San Juan has indicated that she has a community job for Lopez Rivera, who on the last 3 Kings Day turned 74.

López Rivera was convicted of seditious conspiracy due to his links with the clandestine armed group of National Liberation Forces (FALN).

Interviewed a few days ago in Terre Haute (Indiana), López Rivera's daughter, Clarisa López Ramos, indicated that her father had begun the move, sending boxes to Puerto Rico - where she plans to live with him.

López Rivera has probably not touched Puerto Rican soil since January 1975, when he was at a conference in Isabela.

Reactions to the arrival of Oscar López Rivera to the Island

"He's happy, super-cool," López Ramos said on Jan. 28, concluding one of his recent visits to Terre Haute jail after President Obama commuted his father's sentence.

Although he arrives in Puerto Rico today, López Rivera's lawyer, Jan Susler, has warned that he remains a prisoner and that restrictions are maintained much like in prison, including not being free to talk to the media.

30 Jan - Thank You Sisters! by Political Prisoner Jaan Laaman

The latest by Jaan Laaman, about the recent womens march, among other things.

MORE:

We all should thank the women who put out the call and organized, coordinated, led, spoke at and participated in the January 21st "Womens March". Truly sisters, your insight and effort created a tremendous result, literally unlike any event(s) we have ever seen in this country.

The huge central march in Washington, and the 600plus rallies in cities and towns across all 50 states, brought out 2 to 3 million people, and maybe more. These marches were very positive and heartening and definitely very necessary. As a long held political prisoner, I was up early and spent most of the day in the cell block TV area, watching a lot of CNN and MSNBC. Even the Republican Party sycophants at Fox News admitted that huge numbers of protesters were marching across the country.

As many have chanted in past marches, *el pueblo unido, jamas sera vencido*—the people united, can never be defeated, yesterday we saw the reality of unity and power. Let's be clear, these marches and rallies across the United States, were unlike any other public protests ever seen in the country. Of course there have been previous marches that were very large, coordinated and ,occurring in multiple cities simultaneously. As a life-long revolutionary activist, since the 1960's, I have taken part in huge marches, peaceful rallies, civil disobedience and street fighting. Let me tell you, what we saw on January 21st has never happened before in the US. Thousands, tens of thousands, and even hundreds of thousands of marchers gathered in cities in all 50 states, united in positive determination for Women's Rights, Human Rights, for justice, equality and much more.

Historically and around the world, much smaller numbers of protests and protesters have led to regime change and the launching of revolutions. Of course the purpose and plan of yesterday's massive outpouring of young and old women, men and children, was the peaceful but determined expression of a wide range of people, telling this new government and the world, that justice, equality, freedom and basic Human Rights were realities that must be upheld. The many, and also very large, rallies in other countries, London, Berlin, Paris, Sydney, Rome, etc., showed that people in the US were not alone in standing up for these very important rights and principles. These international marches also showed that Donald Trump and his new government, were causing concern and worry around the world, and not just for us here in the United States.

International solidarity is great, but the real strength and significance of January 21st was the massive outpouring of all kinds of people all across the USA. This huge historic statement is the ground on which the Trump government begins operating. As powerful as all the marches were, I'm sure few of us doubt that Trump and his government, will soon still begin its assaults on various groups within the US public.

While many dynamic and significant organizations and women were responsible for calling and coordinating the rallies, no one organization or leadership did it all. Many groups and organizers worked together and huge numbers of women heeded the call and carne out. Now, the really important steps ahead are how to maintain this unity and build on the powerful positive momentum of January 21st.

As a man sitting in a federal prison cell, it is not my place or ability to tell all you good activists, organizers and people of conscience what to do and how to keep the momentum going and growing. What I do know and have already heard expressed, is that marchers have been urged to go back horne and connect with activist groups in their communities, as well as with larger formations and national organizations. Many paths and efforts are and will be put forth. Reformist electoral organizing, beginning with local elections; work towards new parties—a labor party; grass roots community programs and organizations; building and joining with national left/labor organizations; joining with or creating caucuses at work or school. No one size or strategy will be enough. The important point I would urge, is for all the- marchers, and those concerned people who did not actually get to a rally, to join with others in building for the principles and goals you marched for. We have to use the energy and power of this historic mobilization and upsurge of so many people, to be ready to stand up to and confront Trump as we know we soon must. Even more importantly, we really should build and create life and hope centered efforts and momentum to not only stand up to bigotry, war, misogyny, injustice and other hateful policies, but to go beyond Trump. It might take 4 years to be rid of Trump, but we can already be working on and creating a more just, equal, peaceful and life centered society from our neighborhood up. The time for that is now and yes, we will, no doubt also need to get out into the streets in all our numbers and even more, to stop at least some of the attacks Trump has in store for us, the people of the United States.

Let's remember—Unity brings strength,

brings hope,
brings change!

Freedom is a Constant Struggle!

30 Jan - Blog #41: The Women's March on Washington – An Event or a Movement? by Jalil Muntaqim

Jalil Muntaqim has also written a piece about the recent womens marches that happened across the country.

MORE:

"... The conditions of disenfranchisement and oppression affecting women must be thoroughly developed in a political program of national significance. Distinction must be made between the level of oppression between oppressed-nation women and that of the oppressor-nation women. This distinction must be further clarified in developing provisions of redress in the oppressed masses' struggle. For Third World women, their national condition of oppression must first be addressed on local grassroots levels, with the establishment of Third World women community liberation associations, independent of the oppressor nation's women's movement. These Third World women community associations must uphold the demands of the class and national liberation struggle. In this way, national aspirations of Third World women can realize their goals as part of, and take a leading role, in the national liberation struggle." (Quoted from We Are Own Liberators, pp. 92-93)

The Women's March on Washington, D.C. on January 21, 2017, captured the country's anxiety about the right-wing turn of the country by the new Trump administration. While it was amazing to see this demonstration protesting Trump's inauguration, it is extremely important to consider what it means moving forward. The myriad issues raised in the general women's movement have yet to forge a national agenda that the majority of women will address to either preserve rights and/or to manifest demands for specific government changes. This transition and challenge to evolve from an event into a movement, will confront Third World women differently than Euro-American women. The reason is because their relationship to the government of capitalist-imperialism is fundamentally and historically different.

But it is for certain at this point, the women's movement at this time, politically, is not anti-capitalist and can be equated as similar to the bourgeois civil rights movement. The fight for women's civil rights in many respects can be facilitated by the system of capitalism. The U.S. corporate government has the capacity to adjust and absorb specific women's demands to defuse any potential for women to demand, for example, redistribution of wealth. Because American women are the sisters, daughters, mothers, grandmothers of those sons and daughters who fill the ranks of the armed forces and militarized police, the U.S. corporate government has to be sensitive to women's demands in order to preserve the ideal of American patriotism to fight imperialist wars and repress/control minority communities.

Here, the potential exists for division in this resurging movement that has to be a point of broad discussion among women. The fight opposing institutional racism and imperialism that should be a significant political objective among Third World women may be found to be in competition with Euro-American women. How these concerns will be addressed is important as it pertains to how women unite in building a national agenda challenging the overall system of racist capitalist-imperialism.

When serious consideration is given to the number of women who joined the Women's March around the world, it is important to recognize to what extent U.S. government foreign policy (i.e.: colonialism/imperialism) negatively effects the livelihood and relationship those women have with their governments, in response to their governments' relationship with the U.S.

Objectively, and ideally, the building women's movement must evolve from being a civil rights into a human rights movement. The hopeful ideological debates will create an environment in which, politically, the entire struggle challenging Trump's agenda, will evolve into a revolutionary determination for socialism

... So, while there is a need for class consciousness to deepen in the women's movement, the potential for this event to spark a prairie fire of class and national liberation struggle may depend on which way the wind is blowing – is it blowing left or right?

January 30th - Message from Political Prisoner Jalil Muntaqim to the Community

For decades, I have been fighting for the amnesty and freedom of not only myself, but all U.S. political prisoners. Back in 1977, as part of initiating the first national prisoners' petition campaign to the United Nations and establishing the first national prisoners' newspaper "Arm the Spirit," I wrote and distributed a call for a national organization—Political Prisoners Revolutionary Solidarity Movement (PPRSM). Unfortunately, that call to action was premature, and activists failed to respond in any appreciable numbers. The general support base for PPs at that time was sectarian and divided on political lines of whether one was a revolutionary nationalist, Marxist-Leninist or Maoist.

After being paroled from San Quentin and moved to NYS apartheid prison system, I wrote and had published, with assistance from Attorney Bob Boyle (editing) and PFOC (publishing), a pamphlet titled "A Case Against United States Domestic (Neo) Colonialism—for the National POW Amnesty Campaign." That pamphlet provided both legal and political analysis and explanation of the importance of petitioning the United Nations to redress U.S. failure to give recognition to the existence of political prisoners, and for our demand for amnesty.

By 1980, the United Nations International Jurists toured the U.S., interviewing a selective group of U.S. political prisoners, and then reported to a U.N. Special Subcommittee that political prisoners do exist in the U.S. Some of those same political prisoners still languish in prison. ... A year prior to the International Jurists tour, then-President Jimmy Carter fired his U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young for his response to the question that I asked a journalist to pose to him: "Are there political prisoners in the U.S.?" He answered, "Yes, perhaps thousands." (Ironically, now former President Jimmy Carter wrote a letter to former President Obama to grant clemency to Oscar Lopez Rivera. I wonder, did he ever offer an apology to Andrew Young?)

Fast forward to 1997-98. I made the call for the Jericho March in Washington in support of U.S. political prisoners, and more than 6,000 activists across the country responded. Beloved comrades Safiya Asya Bukhari and Baba Herman Ferguson organized this national determination culminating with the advent of the Jericho Amnesty Movement.

Next year will mark the 20th Anniversary of the Jericho Amnesty Movement. Jericho has gone under several leadership changes after the demise of Sister Safiya and Baba Herman. Jericho has provided political prisoners with legal support, medical assistance, and political campaign solidarity. Jericho continues to raise the existence of U.S. political prisoners to the international community, building solidarity with political prisoner support groups around the world, and petitioning United Nations forums.

However, unfortunately, the U.S. progressive community has yet to provide Jericho the essential support necessary to ensure Jericho's growth, development and capacity to represent U.S. Political Prisoners to the best of its ability. This lack of support and solidarity generally weakens the overall political prisoner support movement, negatively impacting the fight to win amnesty and freedom for political prisoners.

As we approach the 20th Anniversary of the Jericho Amnesty Movement, I personally request all those who have a copy of my book "We Are Our Own Liberators" to read the chapter "A Case Against United States Domestic (Neo) Colonialism" (pages 41-60), and if possible make a copy of the chapter and post online if you agree with what was written over 35 years ago is relevant today in our continued fight to win amnesty and freedom for our political prisoners. Furthermore, I ask that you contact Jericho Amnesty

Movement representatives across the country to learn how you can support our collective capacity to support political prisoners.

Our collective determination has not diminished. Recognizing we are entering a new phase of repression, we must come to terms that a greater potential exists for more activists to become political prisoners. It is incumbent on all of us to anticipate these developments and adapt to the changing political environment. While our successes have been few and far between, the Jericho Amnesty Movement has been a constant, a 20-year national determination that will always represent the best character of our class and national liberation struggles—the character and principles of the indomitable revolutionary spirits of our political prisoners.

1 Feb - Visiting Herman In the Age of Trump

This past year was good for prison activists. Those who advocated for high-profile political prisoners in the federal system celebrated when President Barack Obama commuted the sentences of Chelsea Manning and Oscar Lopez, both now scheduled for release on May 17.

MORE:

by Susie Day (*Gay City News*)

Activists who supported less-known “social” prisoners, most serving inordinate time for what the media like to call “nonviolent drug offenses,” rejoiced at Obama’s unprecedented 1,715 commutations by the end of his presidency.

Locally, New York State activists, having spent years beseeching Andrew Cuomo to grant prisoners clemency, finally saw a little light when Cuomo commuted the 75-year-to-life sentence of Judith Clark, as well as those of six other people with felony convictions. All told, about 1,722 actual human beings, who once contemplated their deaths inside prison, are now free or facing the increasing prospect of walking out alive.

But given that Obama also denied a record number of petitions (14,485, including Leonard Peltier’s) and that this country has for years held the world’s largest prison population, there remain about 2.2 million people behind US bars. Social prisoners and political prisoners, disproportionately black and brown. People like my friend Herman Bell.

Eleven years ago, I wrote about visiting Herman, a former Black Panther convicted of killing two police officers and sentenced to 25 years to life. In 2006, my partner Laura, our Canadian friend Tynan, his two-year-old daughter Frankie, and I visited Herman at the Eastern Correctional Facility on his 58th birthday. Herman was then preparing to go before the New York Parole Board for the second time.

I’m writing again about visiting Herman, except that Frankie is 13 and prefers to be called Franca; and Herman has just turned 69 and has now been denied parole seven times.

Herman’s also been moved around to several other prisons, so these days, we take a five-hour bus ride to see him at the Great Meadow prison in Comstock. Since this “correctional facility” allows prisoners only three visitors, Franca couldn’t come this time. Ty, Laura, and I go through the usual body scan and metal detection before we’re allowed in the visiting room. We’re assigned a bench behind a long metal table set on painted cinder blocks, over which Herman will lean to hug us when he gets here.

“Imprisonment exacts an incalculable toll on the body and mind,” Herman once wrote. It’s “the closest descent into Hell as one can imagine.” He ought to know. Herman’s been caged since he was 25. Research shows that, because of stress, bad food, and inadequate medical care, people in prison age rapidly – so fast

that by the time they're 50, they're considered "elderly." That's one reason why Laura, with Herman's encouragement, helped start an organization called Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP).

Now in walks Herman, in a rumpled green uniform, much the same "tall, sweet-smiling, quiet man" I described over a decade ago. But he's looking more worn and tired. For weeks now, he's been telling us how he expects to lose his cell on the honor block. There are rumors that, because of the 2015 escape of two honor-block prisoners at Clinton prison, honor blocks in every New York state prison may close.

If you're a long-term prisoner in New York, honor blocks are an essential means of survival, especially as you age. To be granted the "earned housing" privilege, you have to work long and hard, avoiding any write-ups for misbehavior. The Comstock honor block isn't much different from the rest of the prison, except that it's blessedly quieter and has its own recreation area, making it easier to get to the phones to call the people allowed on your list. Without it, there's uncontrollable noise, a kind of psychic drowning.

Herman appraises the spread of junk food we've amassed from the vending machines. He starts to peel the plastic off a microwaved burrito, and we catch up on life. Laura keeps Herman posted on RAPP meetings. Tynan mentions Franca's roller derby team, the Rhythm and Bruise. Herman's relieved he didn't see his name on this morning's list of people to be moved off the honor block. He figures he's safe for now.

I buy a chocolate chip muffin, hoping it will pass for a birthday cake; but first, some prison gossip. Rural, intensely Caucasian Comstock – yet another prison holding mostly African Americans and Latinos – seems to have employed exactly one black guard, who, Herman says, refers to himself as French Canadian. "Name of Deshawn," sneers Herman, "yeah, right." The muffin is still sitting unopened when a white guard taps Herman on the shoulder.

"We're packing up your cell," he says. Herman can stay at the visit or go back to see that his possessions – which fit into a few cardboard boxes – aren't broken or waylaid on their way to another cellblock. Herman says he'll stay with us, but we insist that he go protect his stuff.

People who've never been inside a prison usually can't fathom how small, bureaucratic changes like this can prove life-threatening. And disappearing honor blocks may not be all that's coming down the pipeline. Governor Cuomo, citing budgetary constraints, has proposed cutting visiting days at maximum-security prisons to three a week. Then there's Cuomo's 2017 State of the State platform. Even after Judith Clark's commuted sentence, it doesn't mention releasing other prisoners in the "graying" population. Instead, Cuomo plans to "create a 50-bed dormitory at Ulster Correctional Facility to house eligible individuals aged 55 years or older."

As the Trump regime sinks its talons deeper into our body politic, people like Herman – anybody left behind bars – will be the first to be forgotten. Standing Rock, refugees, healthcare: such emergencies will – rightfully – demand our attention. Yet part of the trick of our survival will be to connect our lives to the lives of these people inside, grappling with their own deepening hells.

Here at Comstock, Herman returns to our visit. He's shaken, but cracks that his new cellblock resembles "south of the Mason-Dixon line." Which makes us worry at yet another level. We sing "Happy Birthday," share Herman's cupcake, shoot a crap game with "dice" Ty has improvised from scrap paper, and leave when visiting hours end.

We'll need to contact Herman's wife. Tell her he may not be able to call for a while.

2 Feb - Over 70 Arrested at Standing Rock as Dakota Access Aims to Finish Pipeline

North Dakota police have arrested 76 people at Standing Rock one day after federal officials suggested that the government could soon approve the final stage of construction of the Dakota Access pipeline.

MORE:

The arrests occurred after a group of activists, who call themselves water protectors, established a new camp near the pipeline construction.

Rob Keller, spokesman for the Morton County sheriff's office, told the Guardian Wednesday night that it was too soon to say what charges were being filed. In a statement, he claimed that a "rogue group of protesters" had trespassed on private property.

"A lot of water protectors really felt that we needed to make some sort of stand as far as treaty rights," said Linda Black Elk, a member of the Catawba Nation. "We basically started to see police mobilizing from all directions. Someone came along and told us we had about 15 minutes before the camp would get raided."

Black Elk, who works with the Standing Rock Medic & Healer Council, said there were initially hundreds of activists at the new camp but that those who did not want to be taken into custody ultimately decided to retreat.

"There were a lot of people who felt like the prospect of treaty rights was something worth getting arrested over," she said.

The tense confrontation comes one week after Donald Trump issued an order demanding the revival of the Dakota Access pipeline and the controversial Keystone XL pipeline, reversing Barack Obama's actions.

The Standing Rock Sioux tribe, which has long argued that the \$3.8bn pipeline threatens its water supply and sacred lands, has vowed to fight the order. Activists are seeking to assert indigenous treaty rights, which they say the government and the oil company have violated.

On Tuesday night, Senator John Hoeven of North Dakota announced that the acting secretary of the army has directed the army corps of engineers to proceed with an easement necessary to finish the pipeline. His spokesman said the easement, which Obama had denied in December, "isn't quite issued yet, but they plan to approve it" within days.

MG Malcolm Frost, US army chief of public affairs, said in a statement on Wednesday that the government was acting on Trump's order "to expeditiously review requests for approvals to construct and operate the Dakota Access pipeline in compliance with the law".

Some indigenous and environmental activists have been camped out by the pipeline project for months, remaining in place through the cold North Dakota winter. A group mobilized Wednesday to form the new camp, which quickly attracted attention of local law enforcement.

The Morton County sheriff's office said it took action to "enforce the law and evict" the "illegal camp" after people refused to leave. At around 3.30pm, police began making arrests.

"Our law enforcement officers conducted themselves in a safe and responsible manner," Morton County sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier said in a statement.

The sheriff's office – which has now made a total of nearly 700 arrests since the Standing Rock demonstrations escalated last summer – said the camp was cleared by 4pm. The activists were taken to five different jails across North Dakota.

Two medics were arrested, according to Noah Morris, a medic who has been at Standing Rock for months.

“We’re always concerned when any of our friends or comrades end up in the hands of the state,” said Morris, who monitored the actions from a distance and was not apprehended. “We hope they act in a professional manner and don’t harm them in any way and don’t target them for extended detention.”

During numerous arrests last year, Native Americans have alleged mistreatment and inhumane conditions in local jails.

“We’re trying to get them out of that situation as soon as possible,” said Black Elk, who was not arrested. “We have completely lost faith in local law enforcement and their ability to control themselves.”

She added: “We’re standing up for our first amendment rights. We’re standing up for our treaty rights ... They are punishing us for that.”

6 Feb - Water Crisis in Mumia's Prison

From Flint and Standing Rock to SCI Mahanoy and prisons across the country, people are defending the life-saving right to clean water.

MORE:

While all of us need clean water, prisoners are especially vulnerable when the institution they are controlled by, does not provide it. They cannot use filters, buy clean water, or move to a different city. And the large majority of prisoners' health is already compromised by the prisons' poor food, dirty surroundings, and horrific medical care. The DOC is responsible for providing for the prisoners' basic needs which it regularly fails to do.

At SCI Mahanoy, the Pennsylvania prison that houses Mumia Abu-Jamal, the water is unsafe for prisoners to bathe in, shower in and drink. It is “dirty, brackish, turbid, even black water” —that is how Mumia Abu-Jamal describes the dramatic situation in a grievance he filed last week. The grievance includes six demands, including 1) the immediate provision of an alternative source of “clean, fresh, safe, and untainted water” for bathing and drinking and 2) “testing of the water piped into the infirmary tub and showers.”

Please help amplify the voices of all prisoners. Take action. Call the prison and publicize Mumia's grievance widely (see transcript below). A grievance about the lack of clean water has also been filed at Frackville Prison, only a few miles from Mahanoy

As you know, Mumia has a severe skin ailment, a symptom of his untreated HEP C. The water contamination at the prison, therefore, poses a serious threat to his life through infection. For this reason Mumia has refused the three baths a week that prison doctors prescribed to alleviate his symptoms. In addition to violating the January 2017 court order of a federal judge mandating that Mumia be immediately treated with the HEP C cure, which is the root cause of his skin problem, the DOC is in violation of its own woefully inadequate “baths prescription” for the treatment of his skin condition and HEP C.

TAKE ACTION. Call the prison, the DOC & the Pennsylvania Governor

LANGUAGE TO USE and DEMANDS

Hi, I am a concerned citizen from _____. I am calling to demand that the Mahanoy prison administration

1. Immediately provide all prisoners clean water for bathing, showering and drinking.

In addition, I am demanding that the institution

2. Comply with Judge Mariani's court ruling of January 3, 2017, which ordered the immediate treatment of Mumia Abu Jamal with the Hep C cure by the DOC. Give Mumia the cure he needs.

Officials to Call:

1. Theresa Del Balso, Superintendent SCI Mahanoy: 570.773.2158 x8102 | 570.783.2008 Fax | 301 Morea Road, Frackville, Pennsylvania 1793
2. John Wetzel, Pennsylvania DOC: 717.728.4109 | 717.728.4178 Fax | ra-contactdoc@poc.gov | 1920 Technology Parkway, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania 17050
3. Tom Wolf, Pennsylvania Governor: 717.787.2500 | governor@PA.gov | 508 Main Capitol Building, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

6 Feb - Zolo Azania released from prison

Zolo was finally released on Monday, February 6, 2017, after spending 35 years in prison, 27 years on death row.

MORE:

Zolo is a prolific writer and an accomplished artist. His writings and art reflect his deep commitment to the Black freedom struggle and a just world for all people. Now, HE NEEDS YOUR HELP.

Zolo exited prison practically penniless and faces enormous financial challenges. He needs to pay for housing, food, clothing, transportation, furniture, a cell phone, utilities, and the many other expenses we all encounter.

Zolo will seek employment but at the present time he has little savings. He has been paid \$.35 an hour during most of the time he has worked inside Indiana's prisons.

Let's ease Zolo's path and make sure he does not confront his financial challenges—and all the challenges he will face--alone. Please donate generously.

Zolo is alive today due to his efforts and the work of his supporters and a strong legal team. The Indiana Supreme Court twice reversed his death penalty conviction due to racially discriminatory practices that occurred during the trial process.

Zolo is a jailhouse lawyer. He has done legal work on his own behalf and for other inmates. He has acquired a paralegal certificate and has gained an associate degree by completing 2 years of college work.

In spite of his difficult circumstances, Zolo is a positive person with a quick smile and a vibrant laugh. Let's answer his positivity with support.

All funds will go directly to Zolo and will be deposited into a fund managed by me, Howie Emmer. Along with others, I have visited and supported Zolo for 13 years. For more information contact: zoloazania.org and Chicago Committee to Free Black Political Prisoners on Facebook.

Thank you in advance for your generosity.

gofundme.com/helpzolarebuild

6 Feb - Action Alert Against Gov Cuomo's Proposed NYS Visitation Restrictions

We have been made aware of an awful piece of the Governor's budget proposal that that would affect thousands of folks in NYS prisons, including all of the political prisoners in NY that we list in our guide. This call to action has been circulating and we hope that you will take part and pass it along as well.

MORE:

Governor Cuomo has just proposed to limit visiting at New York State maximum security prisons to 3 days a week instead of the current 7. If passed, this measure will be awful for David Gilbert, Herman Bell, Seth Hayes, Jalil Muntaqim and thousands of other maximum security prisoners.

This proposal will seriously escalate suffering and family disruption. Under the current 7-day system, weekend visitors (many are women with young children) often wait 2-3 hours to see their loved ones. With reduced days, the wait will be longer, the visitor rooms more crowded, the visiting days and hours even more limited. This will be terrible for everyone and impossible for many.

Please email and write these people below and remind them how important visiting is and how this proposal is wrong on all levels.

******* Governor Cuomo *******

Sign: <https://www.change.org/p/governor-cuomo-don-t-restrict-visits-in-nys-prisons>

Call (weekdays) -> (518) 474-8390

Email: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/content/governor-contact-form>

Write:

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, New York 12224

Email these people:

- 1) Marta Nelson, marta.nelson@exec.ny.gov – Executive Director of the Governor's Council on Community Re-Entry and Reintegration
- 2) Acting DOCCS Commissioner Annucci, anthony.annucci@doccs.ny.gov
- 3) Senator Gallivan, gallivan@nysenate.gov – Senate Chair of Corrections Committee
- 4) Assemblymember Weprin, WeprinD@nyassembly.gov – Assembly Chair of Corrections Committee
- 5) Senator Avella, Avella@nysenate.gov – Senate Chair of Children & Families Committee
- 6) Assemblymember Jaffee, JaffeeE@nyassembly.gov – Chair Assembly Committee on Children & Families

9 Feb - Medical Campaign for Robert Seth Hayes

Seth suffered another diabetic coma on February 5! This time he fell so hard he broke a tooth and opened a cut above his eye.

MORE:

He is currently with stabilized sugars in the infirmary with a headache and being monitored and getting X-rays.

Seth has been suffering from uncontrolled diabetes for over 16 years now. His sugars go up to the 400's, then down so low he falls into a diabetic coma. Each diabetic coma he goes into could end in death if not noticed and treated right away or from a fall such as the one that occurred today.

We are asking that Seth be given an insulin pump/sugar monitor immediately to avert these near fatal incidents. He had consultation with an endocrinologist at Coxsackie in early October 2016 and was told the paperwork to receive a insulin pump would be pushed immediately. On November 20, 2016 Seth wrote a grievance stating he has not heard anything. He has still not received any response to this grievance almost 3 months later. Despite the endocrinologist's recommendation, call in campaigns, and the grievance, it is months later and still no pump.

The NYS DOCCS is completely aware of the situation and is stalling; we cannot afford to have another incident of low sugar. **THIS IS A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH!**

Seth's constant extreme fluctuations in sugar levels have led to him no longer being able to tell when his sugars are high or low. The sugar monitor sends a loud warning if his sugars are beginning to get either too high or too low and the pump allows him to use small dosages of insulin when needed along with his eating schedule and daily activity.

In addition, Seth had another incident of low sugar on Monday, November 28, 2016, and was in the infirmary for overnight observation. It really is a matter of life and death that Seth be provided with an insulin pump/sugar monitor as soon as possible.

Seth called on December 4 to state the following:

If Seth's sugars are high in the morning, he is given a dose of Levamir. If his sugars are still high at 11 a.m., he gets a dose of actual insulin. By the time his sugars are checked at 4 p.m. they are usually in the 30's, prompting an emergency response.

We therefore urge you to call, write and fax to demand immediate provision of an Insulin Pump/Sugar Monitor to Robert Seth Hayes 74A2280. Seth needs this device immediately!

The Demands

1. Immediate provision of an Insulin Pump/Sugar Monitor to Robert Seth Hayes 74-A-2280. Seth needs this device immediately!
2. A Diabetic Diet that consists of fresh fruits and vegetables and all the current recommendations for diabetics. Not the false diabetic diet that is currently being issued. A bologna sandwich on white bread at night is **NOT A DIABETIC DIET!**

We ask people to please remain calm and respectful but to be clear in these demands

PHONE, WRITE, FAX THIS DEMAND TO:

Carl J. Koenigsmann M.D.
Deputy Commissioner/Chief Medical Officer
NYS DOCCS Division of Health Services
Harriman State Campus, Building #2

1220 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12226-2050
Phone: 518.457.7073
Fax: 518.445.7553

Acting Commissioner Anthony J. Annucci
NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision
Harriman State Campus, Building 2
1220 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12226-2050
Phone: 518.457.8134
Fax: 518.457.0076

Thank You for Your Time & Effort. It has and continues to make a difference!

9 Feb - MOVE 9 Political Prisoner Michael Africa Sr Denied Parole

An appeal to the 2014 denial of parole for Mike Africa has been denied.

MORE:

In 2014 Michael Africa went before the Pennsylvania Parole Board and was, as expected, denied parole. What was even more sinister with this parole denial was the fact that Michael was given a five year hit. One of the reasons cited was that Michael was considered a threat to the safety of the community at large. In 2015 Michael appealed the denial and was granted an appeal hearing that took place in August of 2016. After a six month wait Mike was finally given word that he was again denied parole. We know that Michael was given a one year hit, the reasons for this denial have not been cited, but we know the forces behind the denial.

A couple of weeks ago we brought to people's attention the background of Mark Koch, one of the newest members of the Pennsylvania Parole Board. We exposed in full Mr. Koch's lifelong career in law enforcement and the special role he has played with the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP). We exposed to people the danger in having someone of such a long storied background in law enforcement voting over the potential release on parole for Move political prisoners. Mr Koch was one of the Parole Board members who recently voted against parole for Michael, as was to be expected. the Fraternal Order of Police no longer have to lobby against parole for The Move 9 now that they have one of their members in place on the Pennsylvania Parole Board to do their work.

From 2012-2014 a former Board Member, Randy Feathers, voted against parole for The Move 9, stating in their denials that they were a risk to the safety of the community. Randy Feathers resigned from his position from the board due to being involved in the recent kiddie porn scandal with recently convicted disgraced former Pennsylvania Attorney General Kathleen Kane. A man that's a risk to the safety of every child in the community stated that our family is a threat risk to the community's safety and cannot be paroled.

By the end of the month, our course of action will begin. In the meantime we are asking people to sign and share the petition we have aimed at the United States Justice Department calling for a civil rights investigation into the case of The Move 9. People can sign the petition at causes.com/campaigns/92454-free-the-move-9

10 Feb - Continued Support Needed for Cleveland 4

Thank you so much to everyone who has supported Brandon, Connor, Doug, and Josh since their arrest, and thank you to everyone who is new to supporting them.

MORE:

These past years have been rough ones for them as they've dealt with harsh prison conditions, periods in solitary confinement, transfers between prisons, and being away from their loved ones and communities. But support has been a beacon of light through the darkness -- the letters and books they've received, donations to their commissary funds, and efforts to raise awareness about their case have meant so much to them. It's their connection through the walls of prison.

And they need that support to continue. As the years pass, their case may fade in memory -- but we cannot let them be forgotten, and we cannot let the government's manipulation and use of "terrorism" prosecutions go unchallenged. Please continue to do what you can to show support for the Cleveland 4, whether that's writing a letter, making a donation, or sharing information about them. Every day that each of them is in prison is a day that they should know people care about them. Donate at paypal.me/Cleveland4Donate

10 Feb - Global Day of Pro-Peltier/Anti-Pipeline Action to Commemorate Wounded Knee '73

Join us in honoring the February 27 anniversary of the 1973 Wounded Knee Stand-Off on the Pine Ridge Reservation, wherever you are in the world, by declaring your support for Leonard Peltier and opposition to the oil and gas industry.

MORE:

from Sabal Trail Resistance

Just days after the previous administration denied clemency to Peltier, the next one followed up with a commitment to push through as many oil and gas pipelines as it could... This is a clear example of how the U.S. is continuing a legacy of corruption and greed that can only be backed by extreme repression and the largest prison system in the world.

The goals of this mobilization are to show Leonard (and the world) that he is not forgotten, and illustrate that we are not backing down in our fight with the energy empire.

On February 26, A rally will be starting at the Coleman federal prison where American Indian Movement (AIM) prisoner Leonard Peltier is locked up for his involvement in fighting to defend people and land in Lakota territory. His incarceration stemmed from efforts to challenge corruption, violence and resource extraction on the Pine Ridge Reservation, of which the 71 day Wounded Knee stand-off with the U.S. government in '73 was one example. Peltier was framed in 1975 during a shoot-out with FBI agents on the Reservation.

In 2011, Peltier was moved to Florida's Coleman federal prison. The prison is several miles from active construction of the Sabal Trail pipeline which is being pushed in large part by Energy Transfer Partners of DAPL infamy.

10 Feb - FBI Terrorism Taskforce Investigating Standing Rock Activists

The FBI is investigating political activists campaigning against the Dakota Access pipeline, diverting agents charged with preventing terrorist attacks to instead focus their attention on indigenous activists and environmentalists.

MORE:

by Sam Levin (*The Guardian*)

The Guardian has established that multiple officers within the FBI's joint terrorism taskforce have attempted to contact at least three people tied to the Standing Rock "water protector" movement in North Dakota.

The purpose of the officers' inquiries into Standing Rock, and scope of the task force's work, remains unknown. Agency officials declined to comment. But the fact that the officers have even tried to communicate with activists is alarming to free-speech experts who argue that anti-terrorism agents have no business scrutinizing protesters.

"The idea that the government would attempt to construe this indigenous-led non-violent movement into some kind of domestic terrorism investigation is unfathomable to me," said Lauren Regan, a civil rights attorney who has provided legal support to demonstrators who were contacted by representatives of the FBI. "It's outrageous, it's unwarranted ... and it's unconstitutional."

Regan, who has regularly visited Standing Rock and is the executive director of the Civil Liberties Defense Center in Oregon, said she learned of three cases in which officers with the taskforce, known as the JTTF, tried to talk to activists in person. She described the encounters as attempted "knocks and talks", meaning law enforcement showed up at people's doors without a subpoena or warrant and tried to get them to voluntarily cooperate with an interview.

The three individuals, who include a Native American and a non-indigenous activist, asserted their fifth amendment rights and did not respond to the officers, according to Regan, who declined to identify them to protect their privacy and out of fear of retribution.

Two of them were contacted in North Dakota and a third at their home outside the state, according to Regan. She said all three contacts were made in recent weeks after Trump's inauguration.

Trump, a former investor in Energy Transfer Partners, the Texas-based firm behind the pipeline, took executive action in his first week in office to expedite the project. On Wednesday, workers began drilling to complete the pipeline across the Missouri river.

The JTTF revelation comes at a time when there have been increasing concerns at Standing Rock about law enforcement surveillance, police violence and the targeted arrests and prosecutions of activists.

Since the summer, law enforcement officials have made roughly 700 arrests, in some cases leading to serious felony charges and possibly lengthy state prison sentences. Following recent indictments, at least six activists are now facing charges in federal court. Rumors about JTTF have caused further stress among the activists.

Regan said she was able to confirm the identity of one of the JTTF officers, Andrew Creed, who attempted to contact an activist. Reached by phone, he declined to comment to the Guardian, saying, "I can't talk to you" before hanging up.

An FBI spokesman, Jeffrey Van Nest, also declined to answer any questions, saying: "We're not in a position to provide a comment as to the existence of an investigation."

In November, a JTTF officer also showed up to the hospital room of Sophia Wilansky, a 21-year-old who was seriously injured during a standoff with law enforcement at Standing Rock, according to her father,

Wayne Wilansky. The FBI took her clothes and still have not returned them, he said in an interview this week.

Wayne said he suspected that the FBI brought a terrorism agent given that local police had alleged that activists set off an explosion that caused his daughter's injuries. Witnesses have said they believe she was hit by a police concussion grenade.

The timing of the FBI hospital visit in Minneapolis was upsetting, he added. "It was especially disturbing, because Sophia's blood pressure was going up. She was about to be wheeled into surgery."

Police have repeatedly painted the anti-pipeline movement as dangerous, which is why JTTF may be involved, Regan said.

"From the very beginning, local law enforcement has attempted to justify its militarized presence ... by making false allegations that somehow these water protectors were violent."

The attorney said it also seemed likely that JTTF may have contacted other water protectors and said she worried they may not have realized their best option is to remain silent and contact a lawyer.

This is not the first time the JTTF has been tied to an investigation of civil rights protesters. Records from Minnesota suggested that the taskforce monitored a Black Lives Matter demonstration.

For indigenous leaders who have vowed to continue fighting the pipeline on the ground, the FBI investigations and ongoing federal prosecutions have become increasingly worrisome. It's particularly troubling to some given the US government's history of aggressively targeting Native American protesters and turning them into political prisoners.

"This is history repeating itself," said LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, who founded the first camp opposing the pipeline. "I keep on thinking, how we did come to this point? ... When did Americans lose their rights? When did America stop following the law?"

Brandy-Lee Maxie, a 34-year-old Nakota tribe member from Canada, said it's difficult not to worry about possible prosecution. But the cause, she said, is too important to give up: "I'm staying here. Whatever happens to those who stay happens. We've just gotta keep praying."

24 Feb - Newsletter Launch! "Kite"-A Journal by and for NYS prisoners

WHAT: Launch Party

WHEN: 7:00-9:00pm, Friday, February 24

WHERE: Sisters Uptown Bookstore and Cultural Center - 1942 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, New York 10032

COST: FREE

MORE:

Join Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC) for the launch of "KITE"-a new newsletter by and for New York State Prisoners! This is our very first issue, featuring writing and art from prisoners and family members. We will also be stuffing envelopes and sending this work to our inside contacts. We will hear about the newsletter, hear readings from the text, and talk about how to get involved. Plus you can get a copy!