



POST OFFICE BOX 110034 BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11211

Updates for December 29th

15 Dec - Send love through the walls this holiday season

While we generally think any day is a good day to write political prisoners, we would be remiss to not mention how hard the holidays are for anyone in prison.

MORE:

via *Anarchist Black Cross Federation*

Now is a great time to send cards or letters to people behind the walls.

Please check out our political prisoner page <abcf.net/prisoner-info> and consider sending a few holiday cards to some political prisoners. We also highly recommend NYC ABC's Illustrated Guide to Political Prisoners which has bios, addresses and information about U.S. held political prisoners and prisoners of war: nycabc.wordpress.com/guide

While there won't be any of the big holiday card party gatherings, you can still do something similar on your own or with your family.

16 Dec - Virtual Prisoner Letter-Writing 2020

This December London ABC wants to launch a special prisoner letter-writing: virtual, but with the same aim.

MORE:

Send some warmth and complicity, towards a world without cages or barriers.

To write a letter just send an email with the content to london_abc@riseup.net with the number of the solidarity card of your choice (between 1,2,3 above). Include the name of the prisoner you would like send the letter to (choose from prisoner list, or the name and the address of someone you know is inside, if not in the list) and the address you want to the reply sent back to, or you can use this address: Freedom Bookshop, Angel Alley, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London, E1 7QX. And we've done, you done, ABC will provide next day delivery.

When you write us the email with the content* (that will remain strictly confidential between few people from ABC London group), don't forget your name or pseudonym, so we can recognise you in case the person inside writes back to the Freedom Bookshop address.

*content. If it's a problem for you to share your thoughts, no worries, we understand. But we still encourage you to write: pick a name from the list and do so in your own pace and means.

If it's the first time for you writing a letter to an inmate have a look at nycabc.wordpress.com/write-a-letter

17 Dec - Kings Bay 7 Plowshares update

Carmen Trotta and Martha Hennessy, two of the Kings Bay Plowshares disarmament activists, recently self-reported to federal prisons to begin their sentences.

MORE:

Carmen was driven by a group of community members and friends from St. Joseph House Catholic Worker in NYC to the prison in Otisville, NY, about a two hour drive. Before leaving he received a blessing from many friends with a laying on hands. The group also stopped for a farewell meal near the prison.

Carmen was given a 14 month sentence and has already served 7 weeks. He is expected to be quarantined for two weeks and then put into the prison camp population. The prison has stopped all visiting which may be a sign that the virus rate is growing.

Martha was brought from her home in Vermont to Danbury, CT by her husband, Steven Melanson to begin her ten month sentence. Two of her codefendants, Mark Colville and Liz McAlister along with Liz's daughter Frida Berrigan and Bill Marsten met them in the parking lot. Mark reports, "I was conscious of Martha's courage and faith, her faithfulness to the Gospel and compassion for all of creation which has made it possible for our community of love and justice to extend beyond that prison.

Martha goes in with a message that we need now, more than ever, to abolish nuclear weapons and war. She's laying down her life for that good news. We celebrated her there with homemade soup and chocolate. Frida's children made beautiful signs saying 'FEAR NOT' and 'We love you, Martha!'

I remember one particular moment when Liz stepped forward and reminded all that many great spirits had passed through those prison gates, including her beloved, Phil Berrigan. God rest his soul and many other resisters. Martha is carrying on that tradition and we were able to celebrate her as a community. It was a beautiful day, with snow descending as we drove up and intensifying as we drove back.

On the way, we passed through the little town of Sandy Hook. Dec. 14th, was the 8th anniversary of that terrible school shooting of all those children and educators. We are conscious of the connection between nuclear weapons and the kinds of violence that plague our communities and neighborhoods everywhere in this country. Martha's going forward very much was a witness to this connection between the ultimate violence of omniscidal nuclear weapons and the violence that plagues our neighborhoods."

Fr. Steve Kelly is now being transported from jail in Georgia where he has been held since the action in April, 2018 to federal court in Tacoma, WA to appear for a probation violation. Steve had been convicted of trespass in an earlier action at the Kitsap-Bangor Trident nuclear submarine base. Taking into account his good time credit, Steve has served beyond the 33 month sentence given by Judge Wood. It is expected that his extra time will be credited to any sentence from the Tacoma court. So far Steve has stayed COVID-free and healthy. He gave away all his belongings just after his October 15th sentencing expecting to be moved soon but it didn't happen quickly. The transport to the West Coast could take days or weeks through various intermediate stages and holding prisons. Check kingsbayplowshares7.org for updates.

You can send letters to them on white paper with blue or black ink but no drawings. We are checking what else they may receive. See the website for updates.

Clare Grady and Patrick O'Neill will report to prison in the New Year. Mark Colville has a delay for sentencing until February 19. To access the defendants' powerful sentencing statements go to kingsbayplowshares7.org/sentencing-statements which is under the "Legal" tab in the menu. Biographical information can be found under the "About" tab.

The Kings Bay Plowshares 7 symbolically and nonviolently disarmed Trident submarine nuclear weapons on April 4, 2018, the 50th anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who devoted his life to addressing what he called the "triple evils of militarism, racism, and materialism." Carrying hammers and baby bottles of their own blood, the seven attempted to convert weapons of mass destruction. They hoped to call attention to the ways in which nuclear weapons kill every day, by their mere existence and maintenance.

December 28th - East Village pacifist starts sentence for '18 nuke-sub protest action

by Mary Reinhoz (*The Village Sun*)

Prominent East Village pacifist Carmen Trotta, a Catholic Worker volunteer who opposed the war in Iraq and led a march on Washington, D.C., against the war on terror in 2002, was scheduled to report to a federal prison camp Monday for his actions during a 2018 anti-nuke protest in Georgia, according to one of his lawyers.

Spending time behind bars is nothing new for the energetic 58-year-old Trotta, who has been busted and sent to varied slammers so many times over the years that he can't remember the exact number.

In a recent interview while still a free man, he told *The Village Sun* that most of his arrests were for misdemeanor acts of nonviolent civil disobedience under the aegis of a group he cofounded called Witness Against Torture. Members, many dressed in orange jumpsuits and black hoods, railed about the suicides and abuse suffered by inmates held indefinitely without trial as U.S. enemy combatants at the Navy's detention camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, otherwise known as Gitmo.

"Twelve days, that's the longest I spent for Guantanamo," said Trotta, at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, a graffiti-splashed, five-story Catholic Worker residence and soup kitchen at 36 E. First St. The house was established by Christian anarchist Dorothy Day in 1936. Three years earlier, Day cofounded the Catholic Worker movement and she is now being considered for sainthood by the Catholic Church.

Trotta, a bachelor who wears his late father's wedding ring, seems pretty saintly himself. He spoke with this reporter while preparing lunch for hungry people about to arrive at the red brick C.W. outpost, among them a homeless man asleep outside under a blanket. Trotta has lived at St. Joe's for 30 years and practices voluntary poverty, claiming with a smile, "I don't lack for anything."

But Trotta also admitted to moments of serious anxiety last week as he prepared to enter the low-security federal prison camp at the Otisville Correctional Facility in Orange County during a rise in COVID-19 cases in jails. He's there now after his first arrest on felony charges, serving a 14-month sentence for participating in an April 4, 2018, protest at the Kings Bay submarine base in southeast Georgia with six other Catholic peaceniks, one of them an elderly Jesuit priest.

All of them acted as members of the controversial Plowshares movement, formed in 1980 by famed antiwar Jesuit priest Daniel Berrigan and his brother Philip Berrigan. The movement they founded 40 years ago takes its message from the prophet Isaiah, who predicted that nations "shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks."

Under cover of darkness, Trotta joined six other religiously inspired activists who broke into the military installation with bolt cutters and conducted a "symbolic disarmament" on the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination.

They prayed and separated into three groups, spray-painting peace messages like "Love One Another" and smearing baby bottles of their own blood on sites of the Navy's East Coast home to six Ohio-class submarines. The subs are equipped with Trident ballistic nuclear missiles that critics claim can deliver enough firepower to decimate the planet.

Trotta and his comrades, known as the Kings Bay Plowshares 7, were discovered, detained and transported to a Camden County jail after what appeared to be a major security breach.

Asked how he justified raiding the base and defacing government property —actions he acknowledged that Dorothy Day would not want associated with the Catholic Worker movement — Trotta, who pleaded not guilty to the charges, said he was acting out of his religious beliefs.

“I think these places are outrageous to God,” he stated intently at St. Joe’s. “I genuinely believe they are part of a genocidal criminal conspiracy that could destroy the nation.”

Trotta said later in a phone interview that he and his codefendants spent about a year considering nuclear facilities to target for a protest and concluded that Kings Bay “could be a no better place” to expose the horrors of a potential nuclear holocaust in the U.S. He believes that one-fourth of America’s nuclear arsenal is deployed at this home port of the Navy’s Atlantic submarine fleet.

“If there is a serious nuclear exchange [with Russia], it’s the first place they would go,” he predicted. “The Russians would knock out all [Kings Bay’s] missiles before they could fire them.”

Kings Bay spokesperson Scott Bassett said the base does not confirm or deny the presence of nuclear weapons on its sprawling 17,000-acre installation. But he acknowledged that Ohio-class submarines when carrying Trident D5 ballistic nuclear weapons were “capable” of inflicting massive damage on targets.

Bassett said Kings Bay was commissioned in 1978 during the administration of President Jimmy Carter, Democrat of Georgia. The base was built in the 1980s.

“Our mission is to support the nation’s policy of strategic deterrence,” he said, adding, “We also do a lot of repairs to submarines.”

Bassett noted there is only one other Navy submarine base with a similar mission, in Bangor, Washington.

The Bangor submarine facility spurred a Plowshares protest in 2013 by a nun, 84-year-old Sister Anne Montgomery, a social worker and two priests.

One of those priests was Jesuit Steve Kelly, then 61. Kelly was indicted again five years later for his participation in the Kings Bay action with the six other Catholic militants. They were unanimously convicted by a jury trial on Oct. 25, 2019, of three felonies: conspiracy, destruction of government property and depredation of property — plus one misdemeanor count for trespassing.

Besides Trotta and Kelly, the defendants include Martha Hennessy, 65, a granddaughter of Dorothy Day, and Elizabeth McAllister, 80, a former Catholic nun and widow of the aforementioned former Catholic priest Philip Berrigan, cofounder of the Plowshares movement.

During pretrial hearings in Brunswick, Georgia, U.S. District Judge Lisa Godbey Wood said she would not allow the Kings Bay Plowshares 7 to argue their case to the jury by invoking a 1993 statute called the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Under the R.F.R.A., the defendants could claim that government prosecutors were imposing a burden on their abilities to practice their religious beliefs sincerely.

“We think she got that wrong but I believe the judge showed mercy to us,” Trotta said, apparently referring to reports that he and his fellow activists could have been hit with sentences up to 25 years each.

Trotta said he planned on immediately appealing for compassionate release upon his arrival at Otisville because of COVID19 cases spreading in the prison system. He hopes for a transfer to a halfway house or home confinement.

New York defense attorney Matt Daloisio, one of Trotta's activist team of pro-bono lawyers, said he would also pursue getting 50 days knocked off Trotta's sentence for the time he spent in a Georgia lockup after his arrest at King's Bay, plus possibly more credit for good behavior and additional credit for his history of nonviolent protests.

"We also plan to fight the government on restitution —Carmen doesn't have any money," added Daloisio. He was alluding to Judge Godbey Wood's ruling that Trotta must pay his share of about \$33,000 to cover the Navy's cost for cleaning up the damage caused by the defendants at King's Bay. Trotta is also subject to three years supervised probation after his release. He said he will be required to wear an ankle monitor.

Given all Trotta has suffered thus far, with serious challenges ahead, would he do another Plowshares protest after he leaves the Orange County joint?

"I really can't answer that," he said. "Everything occurs in a context. Who knows what will happen in a year or decade?"

In the meantime, he seems pleased that Pope Francis has condemned nuclear weapons and that there's a renewed interest in anti-nuclear causes here and abroad. However, he believes that while Catholic Workers in America may support the Plowshares movement, "some are opposed" and the majority won't participate in the group's "non-Ghandian" style of protest.

"They respect Ghandhian pacifism and Plowshares protests typically involve property damage. Dorothy Day didn't support that," said Trotta, who undertook religious studies at the private Grinnell College in Iowa and played football for its team, graduating in 1984.

One Catholic Worker volunteer at St. Joe's may not be counted out from connecting with the controversial actions of the Plowshares movement.

"I'm not thinking about it now, but I support [Plowshares] and might consider joining a protest," said James Murphy, 48. A divorced former high school French teacher, he previously had been living in a Rochester C.W. shelter after his daughter graduated from college and is now one of 120 residents, mostly men, at St. Joe's.

A Wall St. corporate banker in his younger days, Murphy said in a phone conversation that he hasn't been close to Trotta. He noted that the pacifist leader "has been all wrapped up" in his legal issues and dividing his time between his case, his causes — which have included organizing a weekly vigil at Tompkins Square Park to protest the war in Yemen — and caring for his father in Long Island, who died this year at age 93. Trotta inherited his father's car, which he turned over to the Catholic Worker community.

Even so, Murphy said Trotta's forthcoming prison stint would leave a void at St. Joe's "because he's been here so long and provided so much stability. But we'll hold down the fort."

December 28th - Longtime Anti-Nuclear Activists Face Prison, Again, After Breaking Into Naval Base
by Emma Peaslee (NPR)

Dressed in black, the seven intruders cut through a fence and stole along the perimeter of the naval base, trying to avoid detection from the guards, as a loudspeaker overhead blared: "Deadly force is authorized!"

Patrick O'Neill, who had a GoPro strapped to his head, tried to reassure himself by remembering a scene in the Bible where Jesus escapes unscathed from a wrathful mob that wants to throw him off a cliff.

When O'Neill and the others reached their target, they poured their own blood on the shield of the Kings Bay naval base in Georgia and attached a poster of Martin Luther King Jr. to a mock-up of a Trident II D5 ballistic missile at the welcome area.

The anti-nuclear activists — Roman Catholics who call themselves Plowshares, from the Biblical passage about "beating swords into plowshares" — followed the metaphor quite literally and took a hammer to the replica of the warhead.

"When you think of idolatry, that's exactly what I think of: statues of nuclear weapons," O'Neill said later. "I mean, my God, you're gonna build a statue for something that if it's used would blow up a whole city full of people. This is your idea of welcoming people? I mean, it's sick."

The break-in on the night of April 4, 2018, ended with the arrest and conviction on charges of trespassing and destruction of property for the seven activists aged 58 to 81.

And in the midst of a pandemic that's wreaking havoc on prisons and disproportionately affecting older people, six of them have been sentenced to up to 33 months in prison. The seventh is scheduled to be sentenced in February.

The Plowshares activists were seeking to revive the anti-nuclear movement by committing acts of civil disobedience.

They are part of a larger faith-based movement that has been around since the 1980s, when anti-nuclear protests used to draw millions into the streets.

Those days are long gone, but the threat of nuclear warfare isn't. According to some atomic scientists, the threat may be even greater now, and the activists are frustrated that hardly anyone is paying attention.

Which is one reason why they have broken into military bases and sometimes succeeded in doing damage to actual nuclear armaments. In a highly publicized protest in 1980, Plowshares activists hammered two missile nose cones at a General Electric complex in King of Prussia, Pa., causing tens of thousands of dollars worth of damage. In 2012, another group that included an 82-year-old Catholic nun defaced a bunker holding weapons-grade uranium at the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tenn.

"People are always astounded that a bunch of old people or unarmed people or whatever people can gain access to these weapons at all," said O'Neill, 64.

Martha Hennessey, 65, had already been to prison three times before beginning her sentence at a federal prison in Danbury, Conn., on Dec. 14. She is the granddaughter of the journalist-turned-activist Dorothy Day, who founded the pacifist Catholic Worker Movement in the 1930s.

Rather than dwell on her own sentence, she drew attention to the mass incarceration of people who have committed minor offenses.

"I mean, there are people being thrown into prison for years for, you know, things that are not even crimes," she said in an interview before reporting to prison.

Members of the Plowshares group prefer not to talk about the risks they might face in prison, but their families are worried.

"I'm afraid that my dad might die in prison," said Maura O'Neill, 26, one of O'Neill's eight children. "I worry that he might contract COVID and get really sick, and it feels like a real possibility."

17 Dec - FOP Loses for Now: Ominous Split Decision by PA Supreme Court

The Philadelphia Fraternal Order of Police Lodge Five & Maureen Faulkner have lost this fight. But the rematch is going to be brutal.

MORE:

by Noelle Hanrahan (*Prison Radio*)

On December 16th the Pennsylvania Supreme Court dismissed the FOP's King's Bench petition to remove Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner as the prosecutor in Mumia Abu-Jamal's criminal case and replace him with Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro.

Mumia is contesting his first-degree murder conviction for the shooting death of Philadelphia Police Officer Daniel Faulkner on December 9, 1981. His default opponent in court is the lead prosecutor for the city of Philadelphia: DA Larry Krasner. The recently-dismissed King's Bench petition argued unsuccessfully that Krasner is biased in favor of Mumia and should be removed.

In reality, Krasner has made clear, both through statements made in deposition and through legal action, that he will vigorously work to uphold Mumia's conviction. The FOP's problem with Krasner isn't that he won't fight to keep Mumia in prison; it's that he's not willing to blatantly shred the constitution to do it.

Krasner was elected DA on an anti-corruption campaign platform, and he made history when he brought to light 6 boxes of exculpatory evidence from Mumia's original trial that had been suppressed by the DA's office for decades. Krasner's drawn a line in the sand. He'll use every legal avenue available to prevent Mumia's freedom, but he won't violate the letter of the Constitution: that sets him apart from every previous prosecutor to face Mumia in court.

To the FOP, that's unacceptable, and they're betting that Attorney General Shapiro will fight this battle the way they want it fought: dirty. Maureen Faulkner, who worked with the FOP to bring this petition to the court, has stated on the record that she believes Mumia Abu-Jamal will be freed if he ever gets a new trial. The FOP's strategy is to get AG Shapiro to file every imaginable petition against Mumia and his defense team—including against the use of the recently-uncovered exculpatory evidence—to forestall his inevitable release. The original trial was so outrageously corrupt at every stage that there is little hope for a win in retrial. They simply want to delay a new trial until Mumia dies in prison.

Mumia Gets the Decision: Justice Reveals Rematch Strategy

The special master, Judge Cleland, appointed by the PA Supreme Court to gather evidence for the justices on the question of Krasner's bias, reported to the Court that Krasner's office showed "no bias and no appearance of bias" in favor of Mumia Abu-Jamal. The Court accepted the special master's recommendation, ruling in a 3-1 (Donohue, Dougherty, Wecht for and Mundy against)—with 3 abstentions (Baer, Saylor, Todd) to retain Krasner's role as prosecutor. Justice Wecht wrote in his concurring opinion that the petitioners "had failed to present any evidence of bias".

But Justice Dougherty—who voted to keep Krasner on the case—published a concurring opinion that provides a treacherous potential roadmap for the FOP to undermine this victory. Dougherty states specifically 4 ways that the FOP can prevail in getting Krasner off the case and Shapiro on:

- Josh Shapiro can file an intervention in the Philadelphia Common Pleas Court (although Shapiro has stated that he cannot do this without invitation from DA Krasner).
- Idee C Fox, the President Judge of the Common Pleas Court, can decide to remove Krasner.
- Krasner can voluntarily withdraw.
- The PA Supreme Court can choose to alter their decision and intervene to remove Krasner.

Curtailing Appellate Relief per Williams v. Pennsylvania

Also ominously, Justice Dougherty notes that the Court's ruling in Commonwealth vs Reid this year precludes Mumia from any relief granted by the U.S. Supreme Court decision in Williams v. Pennsylvania. The Williams decision had reinstated Mumia's appellate rights based on the well-documented bias of former PA Supreme Court Chief Justice Ronald Castille. When the US Supreme Court chastised Castille for his literal and potential bias, his previous decisions were thrown into question. New evidence of bias uncovered by Mumia's legal team was uncovered during their Williams litigation. This should provide the necessary grounds for relief in the superior court. Justice Dougherty also had to acknowledge that the "exculpatory evidence questions" will provide additional grounds for Mumia to successfully get back in court. Abu-Jamal's current appeal is in front of the Superior Court right now, who have designated it to a "merits panel." It ultimately should be remanded to the Common Pleas Court.

This Train Is Still Headed Towards Freedom

In April 2020 Mumia's criminal case won a massive victory: Common Pleas Court Judge Leon Tucker ordered an evidentiary hearing based on the 6 boxes of long-buried evidence that DA Larry Krasner uncovered in 2018. Now, after a 9-month delay, this evidence that DA Ed Rendell and his cronies suppressed for decades will finally be heard in open court.

This evidentiary hearing is the first step to a new trial.

Mumia has always said that he will be in prison until the people won't accept his imprisonment anymore. We are the people, and we have to make clear our refusal. We know that it is police, prosecutorial, and judicial misconduct that has unjustly imprisoned Mumia and so many others. We must demand that corruption be revealed, and that the voices of it's victims must be heard. We know that Mumia was imprisoned because he was a Black Panther, and we know that is unjust, and we cannot allow the truth to be buried, or for voices like Mumia's to be silenced.

18 Dec - 1 in 5 prisoners in the US has had COVID-19, 1,700 Have Died

One in every five state and federal prisoners in the United States has tested positive for the coronavirus, a rate more than four times as high as the general population.

MORE:

by Beth Schwartzapel & Katie Park of The Marshall Project and Andrew Demillo of The Associated Press (*SF Gate*)
In some states, more than half of prisoners have been infected, according to data collected by *The Associated Press* and *The Marshall Project*.

As the pandemic enters its 10th month — and as the first Americans begin to receive a long-awaited COVID-19 vaccine — at least 275,000 prisoners have been infected, more than 1,700 have died and the spread of the virus behind bars shows no sign of slowing. New cases in prisons this week reached their highest level since testing began in the spring, far outstripping previous peaks in April and August.

“That number is a vast undercount,” said Homer Venters, the former chief medical officer at New York’s Rikers Island jail complex.

Venters has conducted more than a dozen court-ordered COVID-19 prison inspections around the country. “I still encounter prisons and jails where, when people get sick, not only are they not tested but they don’t receive care. So they get much sicker than need be,” he said.

Now the rollout of vaccines poses difficult decisions for politicians and policymakers. As the virus spreads largely unchecked behind bars, prisoners can’t social distance and are dependent on the state for their safety and well-being.

Donte Westmoreland, 26, was recently released from Lansing Correctional Facility in Kansas, where he caught the virus while serving time on a marijuana charge. Some 5,100 prisoners have become infected in Kansas prisons, the third-highest COVID-19 rate in the country, behind only South Dakota and Arkansas.

“It was like I was sentenced to death,” Westmoreland said.

Westmoreland lived with more than 100 virus-infected men in an open dorm, where he woke up regularly to find men sick on the floor, unable to get up on their own, he said.

“People are actually dying in front of me off of this virus,” he said. “It’s the scariest sight.” Westmoreland said he sweated it out, shivering in his bunk until, six weeks later, he finally recovered.

Half of the prisoners in Kansas have been infected with COVID-19 — eight times the rate of cases among the state’s overall population. Eleven prisoners have died, including five at the prison where Westmoreland was held. Of the prison employees who have died in Kansas, two worked at Lansing Correctional Facility.

In Arkansas, where more than 9,700 prisoners have tested positive and 50 have died, four of every seven have had the virus, the second-highest prison infection rate in the U.S.

Among the dead was 29-year-old Derick Coley, who was serving a 20-year sentence at the Cummins Unit maximum security prison. Cece Tate, Coley’s girlfriend, said she last talked with him on April 10 when he said he was sick and showing symptoms of the virus.

“It took forever for me to get information,” she said. The prison finally told her on April 20 that Coley had tested positive for the virus. Less than two weeks later, a prison chaplain called to tell her Coley had died.

The couple had a daughter who turned 9 in July. “She cried and was like, ‘My daddy can’t send me a birthday card,’” Tate said. “She was like, ‘Momma, my Christmas ain’t going to be the same.’”

Nearly every prison system in the country has seen infection rates significantly higher than the communities around them. In facilities run by the federal Bureau of Prisons, one of every five prisoners has had coronavirus. Twenty-four state prison systems have had even higher rates.

Not all states release how many prisoners they’ve tested, but states that test prisoners broadly and regularly may appear to have higher case rates than states that don’t.

Infection rates as of Tuesday were calculated by the *AP* and *The Marshall Project*, a nonprofit news organization covering the criminal justice system, based on data collected weekly in prisons since March. Infection and mortality rates may be even higher, since nearly every prison system has significantly fewer

prisoners today than when the pandemic began, so rates represent a conservative estimate based on the largest known population.

Yet, as vaccine campaigns get underway, there has been pushback in some states against giving the shots to people in prisons early.

“There’s no way it’s going to go to prisoners ... before it goes to the people who haven’t committed any crime,” Colorado Gov. Jared Polis told reporters earlier this month after his state’s initial vaccine priority plans put prisoners before the general public.

Like more than a dozen states, Kansas’s vaccination plan does not mention prisoners or corrections staff, according to the Prison Policy Initiative, a non-partisan prison data think tank. Seven states put prisoners near the front of the line, along with others living in crowded settings like nursing homes and long-term care facilities. An additional 19 states have placed prisoners in the second phase of their vaccine rollouts.

Racial disparities in the nation’s criminal justice system compound the disproportionate toll the pandemic has taken on communities of color. Black Americans are incarcerated at five times the rate of whites. They are also disproportionately likely to be infected and hospitalized with COVID-19, and are more likely than other races to have a family member or close friend who has died of the virus.

The pandemic “increases risk for those who are already at risk,” said David J. Harris, managing director of the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at Harvard Law School.

This week, a Council on Criminal Justice task force headed by former attorneys general Alberto Gonzalez and Loretta Lynch released a report calling for scaling back prison populations, improving communication with public health departments and reporting better data.

Prison facilities are often overcrowded and poorly ventilated. Dormitory-style housing, cafeterias and open-bar cell doors make it nearly impossible to quarantine. Prison populations are sicker, on average, than the general population and health care behind bars is notoriously substandard. Nationwide, the mortality rate for COVID-19 among prisoners is 45% higher than the overall rate.

From the earliest days of the pandemic, public health experts called for widespread prison releases as the best way to curb virus spread behind bars. In October, the National Academies of Science, Medicine, and Engineering released a report urging states to empty their prisons of anyone who was medically vulnerable, nearing the end of their sentence or of low risk to public safety.

But releases have been slow and uneven. In the first three months of the pandemic, more than 10,000 federal prisoners applied for compassionate release. Wardens denied or did not respond to almost all those requests, approving only 156 — less than 2%.

A plan to thin the state prison population in New Jersey, first introduced in June, was held up in the Legislature because of inadequate funding to help those who were released. About 2,200 prisoners with less than a year left to serve were ultimately released in November, eight months after the pandemic began.

California used a similar strategy to release 11,000 people since March. But state prisons stopped accepting new prisoners from county jails at several points during the pandemic, which simply shifted the burden to the jails. According to the state corrections agency, more than 8,000 people are now waiting in California’s county jails, which are also coronavirus hot spots.

“We call that ‘screwing county,’” said John Wetzel, Pennsylvania’s secretary of corrections, whose prison system has one of the lower COVID-19 case rates in the country, with one in every seven prisoners infected. But that’s still more than three times the statewide rate.

Prison walls are porous even during a pandemic, with corrections officers and other employees traveling in and out each day.

“The interchange between communities and prisons and jails has always been there, but in the context of COVID-19 it’s never been more clear,” said Lauren Brinkley, a professor of social medicine at UNC-Chapel Hill who studies incarceration and health. “We have to stop thinking about them as a place apart.”

Wetzel said Pennsylvania’s prisons have kept virus rates relatively low by widely distributing masks in mid-March — weeks before even the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began recommending them for everyday use in public — and demanding that staff and prisoners use them properly and consistently. But prisoners and advocates say prevention measures on the ground are uneven, regardless of Wetzel’s good intentions.

As the country heads into winter with virus infections on the rise, experts caution that unless COVID-19 is brought under control behind bars, the country will not get it under control in the population at large.

“If we are going to end this pandemic — bring down infection rates, bring down death rates, bring down ICU occupancy rates — we have to address infection rates in correctional facilities,” said Emily Wang, professor at Yale School of Medicine and co-author of the recent National Academies report.

“Infections and deaths are extraordinarily high. These are wards of the state, we have to contend with it.”

21 Dec - Detroit is Suing Black Lives Matter Protesters for “Civil Conspiracy”

The city’s lawsuit came after protesters won a restraining order against Detroit cops for their violent response to the George Floyd protests.

MORE:

by Chris Gelardi (*The Intercept*)

At the end of August, activists in Detroit, like those in dozens of U.S. cities, sued their local government for its police department’s reaction to this year’s Black Lives Matter mobilization. Their complaint alleges that Detroit cops “repeatedly responded with violence” when they took to the streets and includes photos and descriptions of some of the gruesome resulting injuries: bruised and broken ribs, concussions, a collapsed lung, a fractured pelvis. In light of this brutality, the protesters asked a federal judge to bar the police from using “tools of excessive force,” like chemical weapons and rubber bullets, against them.

Less than a month later, after the court issued temporary orders restricting the cops’ use of force, the city filed its official response. It includes a line-by-line denial of every brutality accusation — and a countersuit.

Detroit’s demonstrators are part of a “civil conspiracy,” the city’s countersuit alleges, “to disturb the peace, engage in disorderly conduct, incite riots, destroy public property,” and resist police orders, among other “illegal acts.” The countercomplaint asks the court to issue judgments declaring that the protesters engaged in this conspiracy and “defamed” the mayor and police, and to award the city damages.

The countersuit against Black Lives Matter protesters is a novel move in the post-George Floyd moment, and it has lit a fire under already boiling local tensions. The city has tried to portray it as a routine legal tactic, but many see the counterattack as an effort to suppress the right to protest and to shift the public

narrative away from the police department's violence. Rep. Rashida Tlaib, D-Mich., whose congressional district includes much of Detroit, has lambasted it as "an unthinkable assault on constitutional rights."

The protesters are fighting back on two separate tracks: one in court, with the backing of national legal groups, and another in the city council, which has the power to cut off funding for the city's litigation. One council member has already vocalized her opposition to the countersuit, and the activists are working to lobby others ahead of a vote early next year.

The situation highlights how officials across the country have weaponized the legal system to suppress the Black Lives Matter movement — like with the overuse of felony charges against protesters, something the Detroit activists have also experienced. When activists gathered in a suburb in October to march in defiance of racist policing, local cops in riot gear attacked them minutes after they took the street and eventually charged five with felonies. The prosecutor has not dropped the charges, despite pressure from community members, activists, and members of Congress.

"These attacks against us are a way of attempting to minimize our ability to go on the offensive and call for transparency and accountability," said Tristan Taylor, a protest leader and plaintiff in the demonstrators' original lawsuit. "This is just a way of saying to people, 'This isn't a place you can raise your voice.'"

In Detroit, the reckoning over policing that swept the nation after the cop killing of George Floyd in May has been a struggle between two deeply entrenched sides. On one is the city's protest movement and its umbrella collective, Detroit Will Breathe, the lead plaintiff in the original suit. On the other is the Detroit Police Department and its head, Chief James Craig.

Craig has been clear about his strategy in dealing with Detroit Will Breathe: "We don't retreat," he told host Tucker Carlson on Fox News, where he has appeared several times since this year's movement began. While rarely offering specifics about the group's wrongdoing, Craig has labeled Detroit Will Breathe a group of "criminals" and "misguided radicals" who "incite violence." "I absolutely am not going to allow them to take over our city streets," he told another Fox News host. He has also lobbed conspiratorial accusations at the Black Lives Matter movement at large, telling "Fox and Friends" that it is "coordinated," "planned," and "financed" by "a Marxist ideology" trying to "undermine our government as we know it."

As Craig has bragged on Fox News, he has the support of Detroit's Democratic mayor, Mike Duggan, who has called Craig's protest policing "beautiful" and "outstanding." According to protesters, the city's countersuit is an extension of Craig's pugnacious response to their activism.

"It's just another blatant attempt to silence and intimidate us," said Lauren Rosen, an organizer with Detroit Will Breathe and a plaintiff. "Except now ... they want to do it through the courts instead of in the streets."

The city's countersuit claims that Detroit Will Breathe activists made false statements about cops — evidence, the city says, of a "civil conspiracy" and that protesters "defamed" Detroit police (though the city clarified in a recent filing that it isn't suing outright for defamation). But many of the assertions to which the city points seem to be political statements rather than factual inaccuracies. In one instance, the city claims that Nakia Wallace, a Detroit Will Breathe leader, "falsely characterized [Detroit police] officers" by posting on Twitter about the "murderous and brutal nature of the Detroit Police Department." In another, it claims that a Detroit Will Breathe member "falsely" described the "'mentality'" of Detroit police as one of "'the wild, wild West.'"

The countercomplaint also accuses Detroit Will Breathe of peddling a "false narrative to rile the public" about the fatal police shooting of 20-year-old Hakim Littleton in July, noting that body and dashcam

footage released the day of the killing “shows the man fire a gun at an officer before police shot him.” Missing from the city’s account is the key reason people are still protesting the incident: Video suggests that police landed most of their shots on Littleton, including one apparently to the head, after tackling him to the ground and kicking his gun away.

The city’s lawsuit also nitpicks Detroit Will Breathe members’ characterization of the police violence they’ve endured, like when an officer placed Wallace in a chokehold during a protest on the day of Littleton’s killing. Despite a photo showing a helmeted officer with her flexed arm wrapped tightly around Wallace’s throat, the countercomplaint and an earlier filing take issue with the use of the word “chokehold.” The city claims that, while arresting Wallace, the officer “lost her hold, which caused her arms to momentarily touch Wallace’s neck.” The amount of time the officer’s arm was around Wallace’s neck “was far too brief” to fit the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of a chokehold, the city asserts, and Detroit Will Breathe’s “improper use of this incendiary term demonstrates their desire to falsely alarm the public and the Court.”

“She took me down with very clear intentions — I couldn’t breathe,” Wallace told *The Intercept*. The chokehold denial is just one of many “ridiculous arguments you would not expect somebody who works for city government to make.”

An organization called the National Police Association has filed the only friend-of-the-court brief in support of the city’s arguments. Despite its official-sounding name, the National Police Association is a small “Blue Lives Matter” ideological group with no apparent law enforcement connections. (Association President Ed Hutchison told *The Intercept* he was unaware that “law enforcement backgrounds are required to operate” a nonprofit.) According to the association’s website, it aims to “fight back against cop-haters,” implement “‘Broken Windows’ policing policy for all state and local agencies,” and authorize “local law enforcement officers to perform federal immigration law enforcement functions.” The Bopp Law Firm, a Terre Haute, Indiana-based practice “dedicated to the advancement of conservative Republican principles,” assisted with the brief.

“I think [the countersuit] is much more political than legal,” said Julie Hurwitz, an attorney representing Detroit Will Breathe on behalf of the National Lawyers Guild. “The city is seeking to do whatever it can to discredit the extremely effective organizing that’s been going on in the city of Detroit.”

In response to a list of questions about the countersuit, the city of Detroit’s principal attorney, Corporation Counsel Lawrence Garcia, told *The Intercept*, “We prefer not to comment on active litigation.”

In asserting a “civil conspiracy,” the city’s countersuit also alleges that “the protests in Detroit have repeatedly turned violent, endangering the lives of police and the public” — and because of this, Detroit Will Breathe’s demonstrations shouldn’t be considered First Amendment-protected activities.

The city claims that, during four protests, activists injured Detroit police officers by throwing objects at them and resisting arrest; an earlier court filing claims that the injuries include “cracked vertebrae, lacerations, and concussions.” But the documents provide no details on how each injury occurred, and whom among the protesters caused the injuries. The filings also repeatedly claim that protesters were “destroying and defacing public property,” but give only two examples: a police car window shattered on an unspecified date and a statue of a slave owner spray-painted in September. The countersuit’s most detailed accusations of Detroit Will Breathe’s “unlawful” behavior center on activists repeatedly ignoring police orders to disperse.

Detroit Will Breathe's complaint, by contrast, includes extensive details on the violent actions of Detroit police officers. One protester named in the suit claims that she was shot in the chest with a rubber bullet, which pierced her skin and tissue, after being tear-gassed and beaten with a riot shield without provocation; she experienced panic attacks for months after. Another protester claims that she suffered a head injury after being pushed to the pavement and trampled; she experienced migraines for weeks. Another had her pelvis fractured when a cop hit her with a baton; a doctor advised her not to walk for several months. Another suffered a broken rib and collapsed lung when an officer beat him over the back. Two got concussions when an officer hit them over the head with their baton. Others describe being tackled, beaten, pepper-sprayed, and tear-gassed on multiple occasions.

Rosen, the Detroit Will Breathe organizer, suffered ear damage after police blasted her with a Long Range Acoustic Device, or LRAD, also known as a sound cannon. "I experienced vertigo, dizziness, nausea, tinnitus," she told *The Intercept*. For days she had difficulty sleeping and eating, "and because of not being able to really eat and the stress, I lost a significant amount of weight."

Based on the disparity between the city's open-ended allegations of unlawfulness and the protesters' detailed complaints of police brutality, Detroit Will Breathe filed a motion to dismiss the city's countersuit at the end of October. That motion is still being litigated.

"The law is very well settled that when you're going to bring a claim, you need to be able to back it up, and you need to be able to back it up on its face," said Amanda Ghannam, another lawyer representing Detroit Will Breathe on behalf of the National Lawyers Guild. "They're just going with these really broad brush strokes trying to paint the entire movement as lawless and violent."

A fight over the countersuit is currently brewing in the Detroit City Council's internal operations committee, which oversees and issues recommendations on city funding decisions.

In order to continue work on the Detroit Will Breathe lawsuit, Garcia, the city's attorney, has asked the council and the committee to approve an extension and expansion of a contract with the private law firm, Clark Hill, assisting his office with the litigation. The proposal would add the Detroit Will Breathe case, an additional year, and an added \$200,000 to a preexisting five-case, \$150,000 contract, according to a memo from the city council's legislative policy division obtained by *The Intercept*.

During a November 18 internal operations committee meeting, nearly 20 people, many organized by Detroit Will Breathe, called in to denounce the city's countersuit and oppose the contract.

"This is an attack on racial justice movements, and it's a really egregious thing to spend public money on," said one of the callers. Garcia responded to the concerns by portraying the counterclaim as a routine move. "The city files these types of countersuits when it's legally advisable to do so," he said.

Council Member Raquel Castañeda-López then asked Garcia whether the city had ever countersued activists protesting against police brutality, prompting him to admit that he believed this was a first. But he maintained that the protest movement is also an unprecedented situation. "I'm not aware of another occasion where there's been a concerted effort to block city streets and assault police officers," he said. To this, Castañeda-López called his bluff, pointing out that Detroit is famously known for its history of insurrections, riots, and civil rights demonstrations.

"The claims in the countersuit are ludicrous," Castañeda-López told *The Intercept*. "If we as a city begin countersuing residents for protesting, it's setting the first stone on the path of making it even more legally permissible to violate people's First Amendment rights."

Several of the callers during the committee meeting brought up the civil rights movement and painted the countersuit as a “segregationist” tactic, echoing an argument made by Detroit Will Breathe leaders.

“That’s what King went to jail for, right?” said Taylor. “Because [Birmingham] wouldn’t give him permits for doing civil rights demonstrations.”

Legal advocates agree with the analysis. Detroit’s “counterclaim is dangerous and it is chilling,” the American Civil Liberties Union wrote in a brief. “The theory behind it could have been used to justify imposing ruinous liability on generations of civil rights protesters.”

The internal operations committee adjourned the November meeting, against Garcia’s objections, with a decision to revisit the contract proposal at a closed session in late January, an idea suggested by Council Member James Tate, before it’s reconsidered by the committee and sent to the full council. A spokesperson for Tate, a former second deputy chief at the Detroit Police Department, said that he will “reserve his opinion on the contract” until after the closed session and that he is “troubled by the allegations levied” by both sides of the lawsuit. The seven remaining members of the Detroit City Council did not respond to *The Intercept*’s inquiry about their position on the contract proposal and the city’s countersuit.

“They’re trying to send a message to the Black Lives Matter movement, to anybody standing up against state power and trying to hold them accountable,” said Wallace. But the movement has an “opportunity,” she said, “to bring forth meaningful change, and the responsibility to not allow ourselves to be co-opted or silenced or bullied off the streets.”

22 Dec - A Tribute to Ricardo Flores Magon, Created by the Xinachtli and the Central Texas ABC Collective

[W]e consider it absurd that a few people should possess the Earth, and the many not have a place to lay down their heads for rest. We want land to be accessible to all...

Ricardo Flores Magon (Regeneracion)

MORE:

Ricardo Flores Magon was born in San Antonio Eloxochitlan, Oaxaca, Mexico, in 1873, to Nahuatl parents. In 1900, he founded the revolutionary theoretical journal *Regeneracion*, that protested the policies of Mexican President Porfirio Diaz and the military dictatorship that oppressed the Mexican masses. His organizing and literary writings and denunciations of government and society resulted in his political imprisonment in Mexico for a number of years. Ricardo and his brother Enrique went into exile in the US to flee extreme government repression of Mexico’s working-class movements. In 1906, Ricardo founded the “Partido Liberal Mexicano” in St. Louis, Missouri.

In January 1911, the Magon brothers inspired the insurrection in Baja, California, that took over Mexicali and Tijuana into the hands of workers’ councils, with the support of the workers’ movement, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Ricardo and Librado Rivera produced a manifesto entitled “To the Workers of the World” in 1918 in Los Angeles, widely circulated and distributed around the world. Addressed to “Anarchists of the World,” they called on working class unity, and control of the means of production and distribution in the hands of the workers themselves, and for the elimination of all patriarchal, oligarchical forms of ruling class domination of the poor and for the freedom of working class labor power from the shackles of wage-theft slavery, which they considered as an immoral, criminal system of exploitation and illegal expropriation.

For their political activism, Ricardo, Enrique and the other “Magonistas” were arrested, tried, convicted for “seditious conspiracy” and imprisoned at McNeil federal prison in Washington State, and later at the Leavenworth federal prison, then being used by the U.S. government to house revolutionaries, anarchists, socialists, communists and anti-fascists, at the height of the “Red Scare” fascist right-wing frenzy in the U.S., designed to suppress, destroy, and imprison resistance fighters and their social liberation movements, criminalizing all militancy and dissent.

Ricardo, inspired by the manifesto “The Conquest of Bread,” written by the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin, produced many revolutionary theatre skits, and wrote many profound essays, poems, commentaries, and other revolutionary satirical writings denouncing Mexico’s ruling class. Ricardo also denounced the robbery of Northern Mexico through white settler colonial wars of plunder and annexation, that today comprise the states of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, California, Colorado, and parts of Utah and Nevada, and forcing Mexico into illegal treaties, such as the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and the Gadsden Purchase of 1853, at the point of a gun, and threats of further war to steal all of Mexico, while the U.S. Marines sat in the port of Vera Cruz, awaiting orders from the U.S. ruling class government to invade all of Mexico or retreat with its territorial land-grabs.

Repression against the *Regeneracion* editors grew more intense after the journal published essays related to the 1915 Revolutionary Plan of San Diego, Texas, that called for an uprising in the occupied territories stolen from Mexico, and called on all African Americans to join the armed struggle for their own liberation from the plantation slavery of the South, and for the creation of their own African Republic in the South.

A U.S. anarchist political prisoners support movement to free Ricardo, Enrique, and the other imprisoned “Magonistas” was born, led by Emma Goldman, Eugene Debs, the IWW and other working-class and labor movements, in spite of repression against the movement by the governments of Mexico and the U.S., who joined forces to destroy the working class movements in both countries. Ricardo was assassinated on November 21, 1922, in Leavenworth prison.

Today, Ricardo Flores Magon lives through his ideas and his writings, such as *Tierra Y Liberta*, and other of his writings published in *Regeneracion* that remain valid today, as adopted by Emiliano Zapata during the Mexican Revolution, the anarchist indigenous resistance movements in Mexico, and the social tremors initiated by Sub-Commandante Marcos and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Chiapas, and the Chicano Mexicano Movement for independence, for self-determination, and for national liberation revolution, from within the belly of the beast’s occupied territories and its concentration camps for the poor, neo-colonial plantation prisons of mass incarceration in Texas.

This November 21, 2020, we pay homage to our Comrade, our mentor, our hero, our martyr, and our Brother and Teacher, and remind the rest of the world that the Chicano Mexicano movement for National Liberation has never died, for a people, a nation, a movement will never die as long as our indigenous homeland remains in the hands of racist, war-criminal, foreign invaders, who will never lay permanent claim to the stolen lands in the U.S. Southwest, for those who occupy these lands can never be truly free, nor enjoy human happiness, and freedom of conscience and dignity, until these lands are returned to their legitimate owners, and victims of these colonial war crimes are awarded reparations for their human suffering and loss, to make them whole again, that must begin at a convened International Truth Commission and Reparations Tribunal, as our healing of these historical traumas begins...

By Xinachtli, Chicano POW, political prisoner, now going on 19 years in consecutive solitary confinement at the James V. Allred Unit Control Unit Prison in Iowa Park, Texas, November 21 2020

22 Dec - Holy Land Foundation Five Prisoner Abdulrahman Odeh is released

Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network warmly congratulates Abdulrahman Odeh and his family on the occasion of his release from 15 years of unjust and illegitimate imprisonment by the U.S. government as part of the Holy Land Foundation 5 (HLF5) case.

MORE:

The persecution of the HLF5 is a clear anti-Palestinian attack by the U.S. government, a case that persisted for years upon years, on the slimmest of evidence, involving practices that undercut the very premise of justice and accountability, including anonymous testimony by Mossad agents. On this day of celebration for the Odeh family, we urge the immediate release of his fellow HLF5 political prisoners and all political prisoners in U.S. jails and the broadest possible mobilization to obtain their liberation.

Abdulrahman Odeh and his family were deprived of 15 years of their time together due to the malicious prosecution of the HLF5 in a concentrated, anti-Palestinian campaign designed to devastate the Palestinian community in the United States, destroy institutions that had been built over years of work and struggle and spread fear and repression among the community, especially amid the post-9/11 imperial war drive in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the rising Intifada in Palestine.

The Holy Land Foundation was a charitable institution that had provided millions of dollars in aid, fundraised largely from Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities in the United States, to orphans, widows and marginalized people in need in occupied Palestine. It comes as no surprise that the Israeli colonial occupation and the imperialist power that arms, funds and sponsors the Zionist project would want to see such an institution, strengthening the steadfastness of the Palestinian people to live, survive and persist under occupation and colonialism, defunded and destroyed.

It may be shocking that Abdulrahman Odeh's 15-year term was the shortest of the five sentences imposed on these Palestinian community leaders. Mohammed el-Mezain was also sentenced to 15 years; Mufid Abdelqader to 20 years; and Ghassan Elashi and Shukri Abu Baker to 65 years each in prison, for their charitable support for Palestinians. Their families and communities continue to work tirelessly for their freedom, despite exhausting almost all avenues for justice in the U.S. legal system.

The HLF5 were convicted on false charges of "providing material support to terrorism," despite the fact that they were never even accused of funding the legitimate armed resistance to Israeli occupation and colonization. Indeed, the same charities funded by the Holy Land Foundation were also funded by the International Red Cross and even USAID, the US Agency for International Development. However, the U.S. government, after failing to convict the HLF5 in their first attempt, was allowed to bring in an anonymous Israeli intelligence agent to offer even more dubious, torture-produced "evidence" against the Five, alongside pure sensationalism and anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab racism.

The case reflects the purpose of the designation of Palestinian resistance organizations as "terrorist" groups by the U.S., EU, Canada, the UK and other imperialist powers. Such designations aim to quell Palestinian organizing and community development, posing a constant threat of surveillance, persecution and repression that seeks to undermine the capacity of Palestinians in exile to play an active role not only in their national liberation movement, but even in charitable support for their brothers and sisters inside Palestine and in the refugee camps.

Just as the use of the "terrorist" label is used to propagandize for imperialist wars, invasions and global domination around the world, it is also used to repress communities, peoples and nations organizing for justice and liberation, whether inside their homelands or in exile. The persecution of the HLF5 was and is

an extension of the same imperialist agenda that provides over \$3.8 billion in military aid every year to the Israeli colonial project in Palestine. They are Palestinian political prisoners in U.S. jails.

Of course, the U.S. is not alone in this regard, nor in the continuing imperialist persecution of Palestinian organizers and strugglers for Palestine; we see the 36 years of imprisonment of Georges Ibrahim Abdallah in France – fully supported and demanded by the U.S. – as well as today's persecution of Dr. Issam Hijjawi Bassalat alongside Irish republicans by the British state, the original promulgator of the Balfour Declaration and the colonial division of Palestine.

The imprisonment of the HLF5 comes alongside the repression of Palestinian organizers – from the Los Angeles 8 to Sami al-Arian to Rasmia Odeh – to the use of police and FBI spies and agents to infiltrate and attack Palestinian and Palestine solidarity organizers in Chicago, Minneapolis, New York and elsewhere. It also comes hand in hand with the ongoing targeting of Black Liberation, Puerto Rican, Chicano, Indigenous and revolutionary organizers and strugglers for violent repression, police assault and assassination and long-term political imprisonment. We note that the "terrorist" label has been used against the Black Liberation Movement, Puerto Rican independentistas and Indigenous strugglers challenging U.S. imperialism and settler-colonialism.

Today is a day for celebration, but even Abdulrahman Odeh is not yet fully free. He must still spend time in a "halfway house" before truly returning home to his family. The fellow four members of the Holy Land Foundation 5, Mohammed el-Mezain, Mufid Abdelqader, Ghassan Elashi and Shukri Abu Baker, remain behind bars in an ongoing, violent injustice perpetrated against them and their families. We salute Abdulrahman Odeh and his family today, renew our demand for the immediate freedom of the HLF5, all political prisoners in U.S. jails, & all Palestinian political prisoners around the world—in Israeli, imperialist, & reactionary prisons – and emphasize the urgent need to mobilize in support of their liberation.

22 Dec - Reversing course, feds say some US inmates get virus vaccine

The Federal Bureau of Prisons says it has started to give the coronavirus vaccine to some high-risk inmates but won't say how many inmates have been vaccinated or how it selects those to receive the vaccine.

MORE:

by Michael Balsamo (*Associated Press*)

The revelation, in a statement to *The Associated Press* on Tuesday, contradicts the agency's previous policy that initial doses were for staff members. The AP reported last month that internal prison documents detailed that initial allotments of the vaccine "will be reserved for staff," even though sickened prisoners vastly outnumber sickened staff.

"At this time, we can confirm high risk inmates in a few of the BOP facilities in different regions of the country have received the vaccine," Bureau of Prisons spokesman Justin Long said in a statement.

Earlier on Tuesday, the agency said the vaccine had been delivered last week to four Bureau of Prisons facilities that had been among some of the hardest hit during the pandemic: the Federal Correctional Complex in Butner, North Carolina; federal medical centers in Carswell and Fort Worth, Texas; and FCI Seagoville, a low-security prison in Texas.

In the same statement, the agency said it initially planned to offer the vaccine to full-time bureau staff members, saying that vaccinating them "protects the staff member, the inmates at the facility, and the community." The agency said about half of the staff at each of the four facilities had received the vaccine.

But later in the day, Long said that some inmates had also been vaccinated. The agency would not answer questions about how many inmates had been vaccinated, where they were housed or how it determines the criteria for who qualifies as a "high risk" inmate to be vaccinated. It is unclear how many doses of the vaccine have been delivered to the Bureau of Prisons.

The Bureau of Prisons said that the remaining doses sent to the four prisons "were provided to inmates based on priority of need in accordance with CDC guidelines."

The agency has struggled for months to combat the exploding number of coronavirus cases in federal prisons across the U.S.

As of Tuesday, 5,929 federal inmates and 1,620 staff members had confirmed positive test results for COVID-19 nationwide and 29,313 other inmates and 2,718 staff had recovered from the virus, according to federal statistics. Since March, 171 federal inmates have died of the coronavirus.

At least two inmates scheduled to be executed by the Bureau of Prisons next month have also tested positive for coronavirus.

25 Dec - Donate to the ABCF Warchest this Christmas

The Anarchist Black Cross Federation (ABCF) is launching a holiday campaign to booster the Warchest this holiday season.

MORE:

The funds donated goes right to political prisoners. We give monthly stipends of \$50 to 20 political prisoners and donate generously to release funds for political prisoners like Jay Chase , David Campbell, Zolo Azania, and Red Fawn Fallis.

You can donate at fundly.com/abcf-warchest-fund

The Anarchist Black Cross Federation (ABCF) initiated the Warchest program in November 1994 to send monthly checks to Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War who have been receiving insufficient, little, or no financial support during their imprisonment. Its purpose is to collect funds from groups and individual supporters and send that money directly to commissary accounts of vetted Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War (PP/POW) via monthly checks. Since its inception, we have distributed over \$130,000 in funds.

Other ways to donate: **Cash App:** \$Timabcf | **Venmo:** @TimFasnachtABCF | **PayPal:** paypal.me/abcfwarchest

26 Dec - New Year's Eve Noise Demonstrations Across North America

Responding to a call from the NYC Anarchist Black Cross, communities across the so-called US and beyond are calling for noise demonstrations outside of jails, juvenile halls, prisons, and detention centers.

MORE:

via *It's Going Down*

Seattle, WA: Cal Anderson Park, 8PM; **Los Angeles, CA:** South End of Los Angeles Historic Park, 10 PM; **Littleton, CO:** Harriman Lake Park, Engelwood Federal Prison, 7: 30 PM; **Omaha, NB:** 14th and Farnam, 6 PM; **Rockford, IL:** Hashkell Park, 10:30 PM; **Chicago, IL:** Cook County Jail, Division 10 2700 S California Ave., 9: 30 PM; **Cleveland, OH:** Corner of West Lakeside + West 3rd Street, 7 PM.;

Minneapolis, MN: Park Ave and 4th Street; **Asheville, NC:** Pack Square Park, 6:30 PM; **Durham, NC:** 217 Mangum St, 8PM; **New York, NY:** Metropolitan Correction Center, Pearl Street, 9 PM

31 Dec - NYC/NYE – Noise Demo Against the Prison Industrial Complex, In Solidarity with PPs and POWs

WHAT: Noise Demo Against the PIC, for the Liberation of PPs + POWs

WHEN: 9:00pm, Thursday, December 31st

WHERE: Metropolitan Correction Center (MCC, the federal prison in downtown Manhattan); Pearl Street, between Cardinal Hayes Place and Park Row (J to Chambers Street or 4/5/6/ to City Hall; **NOTE: *we are not encouraging folks to take public transit or other risks. Please recognize your comfort level with attending this event***)

BRING: Noisemakers, air horns, drums, anything that is loud, ***but does not require mask removal!***

MORE:

On the noisiest night of the year in New York City, come help us remind folks locked up that they are not alone. NYC Anarchist Black Cross, in response to an international call for noise demonstrations outside of prisons, is asking folks to join us outside of the Metropolitan Correctional Center (MCC) in lower Manhattan. Come, not to appeal to authority, speak truth to power, or any other contrivance, but rather to stand with comrades, at a safe distance, and show direct solidarity to those on the other side of the wall.

The state, writ large, is targeting anarchists all across the United States and abroad. This will be both protest and celebration.

6 Jan - "Hollow Water" by Bonnie Dickie

WHAT: Screening

WHEN: 8:00pm, Wednesday, January 6th

WHERE: Details sent when you RSVP

COST: FREE

MORE:

In conjunction with the next meeting of the Strategic Action Reading Group (SARG) on transformative justice, we will screen "Hollow Water" by Bonnie Dickie (2000).

This documentary profiles the tiny Ojibway community of Hollow Water on the shores of Lake Winnipeg as they deal with an epidemic of sexual abuse in their midst. The offenders have left a legacy of denial and pain, addiction and suicide. The Manitoba justice system was unsuccessful in ending the cycle of abuse, so the community of Hollow Water took matters into their own hands. The offenders were brought home to face justice in a community healing and sentencing circle. Based on traditional practices, this unique model of justice reunites families and heals both victims and offenders. The film is a powerful tribute to one community's ability to heal and create change.

We'll gather on Zoom at 8 pm, share a link to the film at 8:05 and go off video/audio to watch, then return to the Zoom room to check in with each other and share our feelings on the subject and content of the film.

Please RSVP <tiny.cc/SARG_Hollow> to the event to get a link to the Zoom room. We expect to wrap up by 9:15 and save a deeper discussion on topics of transformative justice and healing on January 9th. If you cannot make this time or prefer to watch the film on your own, you can watch the film online: nfb.ca/film/hollow_water