



POST OFFICE BOX 110034 BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11211

Updates for March 9th

21 Feb - Help put 'The Jamal Journal' in print!

We are excited to see the release of issue #1 of this newly restarted newspaper.

MORE:

The *Jamal Journal* was last published in the mid-1990s by the uncompromising International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal (ICFFMAJ).

We have begun a 48 hour fundraising to print as many newspapers as we can. If we can raise \$3000, we will be able to print 15,000 copies this week and still have over \$500 for postage costs. If you donate \$10 we will send you a newspaper. If you donate \$50 or more, we will also send you a gift copy of Mumia Abu-Jamal's new book, *Murder Incorporated, Vol. 3: Perfecting Tyranny*. Donate at bit.ly/JamalJournal

February 25th - Petition Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner: Stop Defending Mumia Abu-Jamal's Unjust Conviction

Sign petition for Mumia Abu-Jamal at campaigns.organizefor.org/petitions/to-da-krasner-stop-defending-mumia-abu-jamal-s-conviction

We, the signers of this petition, declare:

Mumia Abu-Jamal's 1982 conviction is a travesty of justice, obtained through a combination of police, prosecutorial, and judicial misconduct, as documented by Amnesty International. Abu-Jamal has suffered from extreme injustice at all levels of the criminal justice system. These numerous improprieties have tainted Abu-Jamal's conviction beyond repair.

Mumia Abu-Jamal is currently represented by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. We the petitioners are not his lawyers and do not speak for them. Instead, we are the grassroots movement of people united by the fact that we care about the fate of Mumia Abu-Jamal.

We are outraged by the many different ways that racism and institutionalized white supremacy have irreparably harmed Mumia Abu-Jamal's civil and human rights, and his rights to the fair adjudication of his case. The District Attorney's continued defense of the 1982 conviction & subsequent appeals process only affirms the longstanding racial injustice that has marred this case.

Today, Mumia Abu-Jamal is in poor health, now suffering from cirrhosis of the liver, the result of a recent near-fatal bout with Hepatitis C, which went unattended until attorneys sued the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections for failure to meet his most elementary healthcare needs. Abu-Jamal's continued imprisonment clearly endangers his health.

DA Krasner, you have the authority to secure the release of Mumia Abu-Jamal. You have secured release of over a dozen persons whose unjust convictions were based on evidence of innocence deliberately ignored through improprieties by police and prosecutors. Abu-Jamal deserves the same level of fairness. If law has plain letter meaning, then please adhere to the 1889 directive from the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania that the District Attorney's Office "...seeks justice only..." Also remember that same Court's 1959 reminder that regardless of a DA's belief in guilt, all defendants are "...entitled to all safeguards of a fair trial as announced in the Constitution..."

Therefore, we respectfully urge you, in the strongest possible terms, to stop defending Mumia Abu-Jamal's conviction. Please secure the release of Mumia Abu-Jamal as soon as you possibly can.

March 1st - Urgent Alert: Mumia Abu-Jamal has COVID-19

Yesterday Mumia Abu-Jamal called from his cell block at SCI Mahanoy, reaching Pam Africa , and letting all of us know that he is seriously ill. He has had difficulty breathing and chest pain, symptoms of COVID. We will continue to closely monitor his health, and provide updates.

At a demonstration this afternoon, his grandson spoke:

“We have to each one teach one, and we when we teach one we teach more. They are trying to bury my grandfather... freedom is the only solution in Mumia Abu-Jamal’s case’. They have have built careers off of trying to convict and kill Mumia Abu-Jamal. I need Larry Krasner to do what he was elected to do, give Mumia a fair trial, and let the evidence be heard in court. We have to shout from the roof tops.”

As a survivor of chronic hepatitis C, and medical neglect, Mumia Abu-Jamal is an elder and at a heightened risk for serious complications.

The prison must immediately test Mumia Abu-Jamal, and it must provide him with treatment, monitoring of his oxygen levels, and hospitalization if his oxygen falls below safe levels.

Every action matters. It is time for our political prisoners and elders to return home to their families.

Please call these 4 phone numbers now, and tell them: The prison must immediately test Mumia Abu-Jamal, and provide him with treatment, monitoring of his oxygen levels, and hospitalization if his oxygen falls below safe levels.

Superintendent SCI Mahanoy, Bernadette Mason: 570.773.2058

SCI Mahanoy Prison: 570.773.2158

Pennsylvania DOC Secretary, John Wetzel: 717.728.2573

Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner: 267.456.1000

22 Feb - Daniel Baker pleads not guilty

Daniel Baker, accused of plotting to incite violence at the Florida Capitol in January, pleaded not guilty on February 22nd to multiple federal charges. As always, please read this corporate news article with a critical eye.

MORE:

by Jason Delgado (*Florida Politics*)

Daniel Baker is charged with two counts of transmitting a communication in interstate commerce containing a threat to kidnap or injure. He faces a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison, a \$500,000 fine and six years of supervised release.

Baker, a self-described “hardcore-leftist,” planned to arm himself and attack protesters at the Capitol Complex ahead of President Joe Biden’s inauguration, according to a criminal complaint. He encouraged others on social media to join him with “EVERY CALIBER AVAILABLE.”

FBI agents, however, arrested Baker on Jan. 15 after an investigation involving the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Leon County Sheriff’s Office and Tallahassee Police Department.

According to court documents, the FBI had been aware of Baker’s social media threats since October.

Baker’s YouTube channel contained dozens of videos. Some included hand-to-hand combat tutorials, while others displayed proficiency with weapons. One video lamented President Donald Trump and his “terrorist Trump supporters.”

According to the criminal complaint, Baker has a “history of expressing his belief in violent tactics” and taught others how to “incapacitate and debilitate law enforcement officers” via his social media accounts.

He also encouraged the killings of U.S. military officers, the criminal complaint alleges.

Baker previously served as a former U.S. Army Airborne infantryman before receiving an other-than-honorable discharge in a year’s time.

His channel also contained combat footage from his time with the People’s Protection Units — a non-state group fighting in Syria against ISIS and the Turkish government.

More recently, authorities said Baker participated in numerous protests over the summer of 2020.

According to the criminal complaint, Baker was part of the CHOP/CHAZ movement in Seattle.

CHAZ refers to the “Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone” and CHOP refers to the “Capitol Hill Organized Protest.” CHOP & CHAZ were self-declared autonomous zones made during the 2020 summer protests.

Baker’s trial date is April 14.

23 Feb - Updates on Water Protector Steve Martinez

On February 23rd, water protector and grand jury resister Steve Martinez was ordered released. Under two weeks later, he was ordered back in jail for “civil contempt.”

MORE:

February 23rd - Water Protector Steve Martinez Ordered RELEASED

Water Protector Steve Martinez, who was confined for his principled refusal to participate in a federal grand jury investigation, was ordered to be “released from custody forthwith” late in the day on Monday, February 22. District Court Judge Daniel M. Traynor agreed with the arguments of counsel that the finding of contempt and associated “coercive confinement” at Burleigh Morton Detention Center were imposed by a Magistrate Judge who lacked authority to impose such sanctions. He ordered Mr. Martinez’ confinement immediately terminated, and confirmed that all other litigation related to grand jury proceedings must take place before a District Court Judge.

The Government served Mr. Martinez with a new grand jury subpoena prior to his release.

“Unlike all other legal proceedings in the U.S., federal grand juries are secret, and are almost entirely controlled by the prosecutor,” said Martinez’ attorney, Moira Meltzer-Cohen. “As such, they are ripe for abuse and have a history of being used for politically-targeted harassment.” She continued, “This ruling terminates, but does not remedy, three weeks of categorically unlawful incarceration endured by Mr. Martinez. That the Government’s response was to resubpoena him speaks to the perversity of this process.” The new subpoena demands his presence on March 3, 2021, before the same Grand Jury, which is ostensibly investigating injuries sustained by Water Protector Sophia Wilansky.

Wilansky, then only 20 years old, nearly lost her arm on November 20, 2016, when law enforcement unleashed projectiles and fire hoses on people gathered in freezing temperatures to peacefully voice their opposition to the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (“DAPL”) on sacred and environmentally sensitive land. Wilansky sued Morton County for their role in her injury; Morton County has implied, in the

apparent absence of evidence, that Ms. Wilansky was harmed by other Water Protectors, and even that she is responsible for her own injuries. Curiously, the critical evidence in her case – shrapnel removed from her arm after an initial 16-hour surgery – was immediately seized by the FBI in 2016. Despite Ms. Wilansky’s continued attempts to retrieve that evidence, the government refuses to disclose it – whether due to irregularity in evidence-preservation, or to shield Morton County from liability remains unclear.

In 2016, the Government withdrew an identical subpoena after Mr. Martinez refused to testify on the basis that the grand jury was an attempt to displace blame for Ms. Wilansky’s injuries onto innocent Water Protectors. A second subpoena was served four years later, on November 10, 2020 – four days after the judge in Ms. Wilansky’s civil case authorized parties to compel disclosure of the critical physical evidence withheld by the FBI since 2016. Martinez argued the subpoena was a hasty attempt by the Government to give the appearance of an ongoing criminal investigation, in order to justify their continued refusal to disclose the central evidence in the case against Morton County. He was jailed February 3, 2021, for his refusal to testify, and released yesterday on the Judge’s Order, after service of a third subpoena.

Mr. Martinez and his counsel remain skeptical of the subpoena and intend to challenge its validity. “This grand jury certainly appears to have been convened for the primary purpose of manufacturing an ‘ongoing criminal investigation’ such as would justify the Government’s refusal to hand over definitive evidence in a related civil proceeding,” said Ms. Meltzer-Cohen. “Mr. Martinez has no obligation to comply with a subpoena that was issued in other than good faith, and we will use every lawful means to demonstrate to the Court that, at the very least, the circumstances surrounding this grand jury deserve serious scrutiny.”

Mr. Martinez was released from confinement around 7 p.m. Central time, on Monday. He looks forward to continuing to support Indigenous-led environmental movements.

March 4th - Steve Martinez Jailed Again After Refusing to Testify Before a Federal Grand Jury

by Ryan Fatica (*It’s Going Down*)

Steve Martinez, a North Dakota activist who participated in the protests at Standing Rock, was taken into custody Wednesday after refusing to testify during his appearance before a federal grand jury in Bismark, North Dakota. Martinez is being held in the Burleigh County Detention Center and could face up to 18 months in custody on charges of contempt of court if he continues his refusal.

In addition to ordering him to be incarcerated, Judge Daniel Traynor also ordered Martinez to be fined \$50 per day for each day he maintains his refusal to testify.

The grand jury is investigating a November 2016 incident in which a Standing Rock protestor, Sophia Wilansky, was gravely injured during an encounter with the police on the Backwater Bridge in rural North Dakota, about 50 miles south of Bismark. Wednesday’s proceeding marked the *third* time the US Attorney’s Office has subpoenaed Martinez to appear before the grand jury, which was first convened in late 2016.

Martinez was previously incarcerated for nearly 3 weeks following his February 3 appearance, but was released after his attorney filed a motion citing procedural irregularities in his contempt hearing.

“After having my rights stripped from me, I was imprisoned with no charges for 19 days,” Martinez said in a Facebook post after his release. “Even with the work of our legal team, the chances are high that I will be imprisoned once again for up to 18 months or the duration of the grand jury.”

Before 2016, Martinez, a former oil worker in the Bakken fields of Western North Dakota, would have never suspected he’d be facing a subpoena before a federal grand jury investigating pipeline resistance.

Martinez grew up in Pueblo, Colorado in an Indigenous and Chicano family, and moved to North Dakota to work in the oil fields amidst the Bakken oil boom. Workers from all over the country flocked to the barren region beginning in the mid-2000s to help pump ancient crude from nearly two miles beneath the earth's surface.

But in 2016, Martinez saw the historic resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline project and decided he wanted to be a part of it.

Chava Shapiro, a non-attorney legal worker and former member of the Water Protectors Anti-Repression Crew worked with Martinez during his first grand jury subpoena in 2017. "He heard about what was happening at Standing Rock in the summertime and was just moved by it and loaded up his truck with water and supplies that people had been asking for and drove from the Western Plains, the Bakken oil fields, the four hours to Standing Rock kind of on a whim," said Shapiro. "And then he never left. He went from working in the oil fields to being a pretty integral part of a social movement and Indigenous resistance against the desecration of ancestral lands."

"It was a pretty big turnaround for someone in a really short amount of time," said Shapiro. "He didn't consider himself a super political or 'woke' person. He just considered himself a regular guy who, even though he himself had worked for the oil company, didn't like to see what was happening to Native people's lands and identified with that."

Shapiro recounted the first time they met Martinez at one of the resistance camps set up at Standing Rock in 2016. "At the very beginning of December, I was in camp and a friend of mine came to me and said 'Hey, my uncle is having a problem—he received a letter from the government and we don't really know what it is. Could you talk to him?'"

The letter, it turned out, was a prelude to his subpoena before a federal grand jury. "And so then he came and brought Steve to my tent and Steve showed me a request for his appearance."

It comes as no surprise to those familiar with the history of repression against political movements in this country that the powerful resistance to the DAPL project would be met with powerful repression. "Repression is nothing new," said Lauren Regan, executive director of the Civil Liberties Defense Center in Oregon.

"It is expected that when we challenge the status quo, when we push against capitalism and the profit-sharing mechanisms of the state, that they're going to come at us with everything they've got, and they've got quite an arsenal to fight back against us."

Federal grand juries have long been used as a way of punishing activists and gaining information that law enforcement can use to charge those participating in social movements with crimes. In recent years, they've been used in high-profile attempts to elicit information from hacker Jeremy Hammond as well as whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

Hammond served a ten-year federal prison sentence for computer fraud after he participated in the release of documents mapping the efforts of the private surveillance firm Strategic Forecasting, Inc. (Stratfor) to surveil social movements. He was called before a federal grand jury in the Eastern District of Virginia in September 2019 and was held in contempt of court after he refused to testify. The grand jury, which was convened to investigate Wikileaks and its founder Julian Assange, also subpoenaed Chelsea Manning, a

former intelligence analyst turned whistleblower who also refused to testify. Both Hammond and Manning were released from prison last year.

“The process is meant to wear you down,” said Katie Yow, an activist from Durham, North Carolina who was subpoenaed to a federal grand jury in 2017. “Steve’s commitment and consistency throughout this, especially facing another subpoena years later, takes great strength and support. Bearing the many costs of not only incarceration but the overall abusive legal process demonstrates how solid his resolve is.”

Yow was subpoenaed before a federal grand jury investigating a bombing at the Republican Party headquarters in Orange County, North Carolina just three weeks before the election of Donald J. Trump in 2016. “Nazi Republicans, Leave Town or Else” was spray-painted on the outside of the building. Photos of the burned-out headquarters showed charred Trump 2020 signs amidst the wreckage.

But federal grand juries are not limited to the investigation of specific events and can be used to question those called to testify about a variety of matters. According to The Grand Jury Resistance Project, “The grand jury operates in secrecy and the normal rules of evidence do not apply.” In the proceedings, prosecutors are given broad discretion in their questioning and neither judges nor defense attorneys are present.

In Yow’s case, the US Attorney leading the grand jury expressed interest in investigating “other events” and “other people” according to Yow.

“I don’t know anything relevant to a criminal investigation of the alleged incident at the GOP headquarters,” Yow said in a statement at the time. “The broad nature of the government’s interest in other information makes clear the way that this and other grand juries are used as fishing expeditions to attempt to coerce testimony on 1st amendment protected information.”

The current grand jury investigation in North Dakota is just the most recent event in a years-long effort on the part of federal law enforcement to target those who participated in the resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) project at Standing Rock in 2016 and 2017. According to Lauren Regan, executive director of the Civil Liberties Defense Center in Oregon, law enforcement has gone out of their way to target those involved. At Standing Rock, Regan said, “the whole playbook of standard activist repression was present.”

According to Regan, those efforts involved surveillance, infiltration, psychological profiling of activists, false arrests, grand juries, and criminal charges—a few of which have led to federal prison sentences.

The Water Protector Legal Collective (WPLC), a group formed to defend those facing repression for their participation in the protests at Standing Rock, has tracked over 830 state charges against Standing Rock protestors and 5 federal charges. All of those who faced federal charges are Indigenous, according to the WPLC.

Despite the huge wave of repression that Standing Rock protestors have faced, the movement continues to remain strong in supporting people like Martinez who are being targeted.

“Steve’s first subpoena in 2017 happened only months before mine,” said Yow, “and I was much better prepared for my fight because of the resources from his campaign and his example, as well as other grand jury resisters before him. It can be a terrible and isolating experience, but believing in this interconnectedness and being part of this collective strength is powerful.”

“Every one of us that refuses to cooperate,” said Yow “and stands strong with our communities makes the next one stronger.”

24 Feb - Health and Legal update from Family and Friends of Dr. Mutulu Shakur

After a month in transit, supporters received a health and legal update from Dr. Shakur.

MORE:

On October 14th, the stem cell irrigation started. On October 20th, I had a mandatory parole hearing, which I was again denied. I was notified of this denial on January 12th, and my next hearing will be in 2022. The final stage of the stem cell transplant took place from October 28th until November 14th, during which I was hospitalized. Upon my return from the stem cell procedure in November, I received the denial of compassionate release by the sentencing judge. Two days later, I was infected with COVID-19, in light of my immune system being compromised from stem cell replacement. I was put in quarantine in an unfavorable isolated area of the unit. I survived and won the battle to overcome the virus– now I am in the recovery period.

We are still waiting on a district Judge ruling on the Ninth Circuit habeas corpus petition and a response from the BOP on the renewed compassionate release petition in light of COVID-19. Not surprisingly, all past decisions have referred to a pre-trial motion filed in 1988 as a consideration in denying my release. This I believe is contrary to the spirit and intent of pre-trial motions, but more importantly offers no facts or law pertaining to the relief requested, from the manipulation of constitutional right filed in 3 federal jurisdictions over the 30-odd years of carrying out this sentence. Again I want to thank you all. There are still some avenues for release to explore available and I’m requesting your support.

I continue to hope that you are all healthy and using your wisdom to stay so. This virus is no joke, and clearly apolitical.

Mud and Water,
Dr. Mutulu Shakur

25 Feb - New Massachusetts Rules Would Eliminate Handwritten Letters in Prison

Similar to a pilot program for federal prisons initiated under Trump that converts mail to electronic scans (which Biden hasn’t reversed), the Massachusetts Department of Corrections is ramping up its capacity to remove physical mail from reaching prisoners.

MORE:

by Ella Fassler (*Truthout*)

“Paper mail is precious,” Black and Pink Massachusetts Communications and Outreach Coordinator Elijah Patterson testified on January 29 against rules proposed by the Massachusetts Department of Correction (MADOC). The rules would, if approved, formally substitute physical mail for an electronic, scanned copy or photocopy through a third-party vendor.

“It means so much to me to touch the same paper as people suffering in prisons, and when I trace my hand and they place theirs over it, it means a lot for them, too. In that moment, we are together,” Patterson said during the Zoom hearing.

Prison mail serves as a primary lifeline between the two worlds separated by barbed-wired walls and guard towers. Handwritten letters, oftentimes made special by imperfections or a doodle, are cherished and highly anticipated by many incarcerated people, particularly in the era of pandemic-inspired visitation bans.

Yet in May 2020, MADOC discreetly formalized an intent to set up a pilot program at Souza-Baranowski Correctional Center for one year that would eliminate physical mail. The notice outlined the agency's intention of expanding the program to include all MADOC facilities following the pilot. Smart Communications, a company founded by former prison guards, has been contracted to implement this new system.

Under the Smart Communications-patented "MailGuard" system, mail intended for incarcerated people is generally addressed directly to the Florida-based company for scanning into a searchable database. Smart Communications advertises that the process will open "a whole new field of intelligence" for authorities. Scanned letters, cards and photographs are then sent back to kiosks or tablets within prisons for viewing, or are mailed back to the prison as photocopies.

MADOC had already been photocopying incarcerated peoples' mail at Souza and at least six other facilities, according to DigBoston. The practice came to light primarily because of a lawsuit filed by Edward G. Wright, a man incarcerated at Souza-Baranowski. He alleged that the department violated the Massachusetts Administrative Procedures Act when it changed mail policy without holding a public hearing. The court sided with Wright, which has effectively delayed the full implementation of paperless mail.

Eliminating Paper Mail Could Increase Surveillance

The communications between incarcerated people and their loved ones are already subject to intrusive scrutiny, but Smart Communications' online database presents an increased risk, Patterson told *Truthout*. "Many of our members, who are LGBTQI2S+ and/or living with HIV, are not able to be out in prison," they said. "Scanning letters means creating an electronic copy that lives somewhere on the DOC servers. We do not have faith that the DOC will respect our members' privacy and not access these files, or even simply keep them safe.... Truly, these regulations establish an expansive surveillance system with really alarming implications."

While the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) says it will not scan legal mail, MADOC's proposed rules allow for photocopying privileged correspondences in the presence of the incarcerated addressee.

Photocopying mail has already led to increased delays in some prisons, Lauren Bellis, co-founder of Massachusetts Incarcerated Individual Advocacy, told *Truthout*. And tablets are not accessible for some people with disabilities, such as some types of traumatic brain injury and visual impairment. "It really creates a problem for reasonable accommodation or equal access for incarcerated individuals with disabilities to be able to have the same experience of connecting with their loved ones," Bellis said.

Bellis's partner, a formerly incarcerated man who preferred anonymity, said that communication with the outside world is especially imperative for people in solitary confinement. But, since tablets are forbidden or restricted in solitary confinement, the new policy would disproportionately impact the most isolated and marginalized people.

Questionable Contraband Claims

Officials claim the elimination of paper mail, supported by mail privatization, will mitigate the introduction of drugs into the prison system. However, an analysis of the introduction of contraband in county jails in 2018 by the Prison Policy Initiative indicated staff are at least partially responsible for smuggling forbidden

items. It found “20 jail staff members in 12 separate county jails were arrested, indicted, or convicted on charges of bringing in or planning to bring in contraband.”

Fentanyl smuggled into the Orleans Justice Center by jail staffers killed an incarcerated man in December 2018, a lawsuit filed on behalf of his family alleges.

Meanwhile, during a 16-month period in Florida, search teams identified a greater number of correctional staff with contraband cell phones than visitors.

Furthermore, we should question whether eliminating “contraband” — including items like cell phones that make life slightly more bearable for incarcerated people — should be a primary objective that overrides the importance of physical mail.

If the proposed regulations are approved, Massachusetts will be the second statewide carceral system to adopt Smart Communications’ MailGuard. In 2018, Smart Communications landed its first statewide contract with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections at a price tag of around \$4 million per year.

About two years later, the BOP began experimenting with photocopying mail. In response to a request for comment, the agency’s press office told *Truthout*: “The Bureau has conducted a pilot project at two sites to have general correspondence scanned off-site by a vendor and transmitted as an electronic file to staff who print and distribute these documents to the inmate population.” The BOP said it partnered with Smart Communications in March 2020 and “is considering the expansion of mail scanning pending funding.” The agency noted that its regulations forbid the photocopying of legal mail (such as correspondence with lawyers).

According to the BOP, the mail scanning program “reduced the number of synthetic drug introductions via general postal mail to effectively zero over the pilot project period.” When *Truthout* asked for underlying data to compare contraband introduction before and after the pilot programs, the press office did not send any statistics.

A 2016 Department of Justice report on “contraband interdiction efforts” highlighted BOP staff’s role in smuggling contraband and did not reference mail as a site of drug introduction. The report recommended that the BOP “develop uniform guidelines and criteria for conducting random staff pat searches across all institutions...” and to “restrict the size and content of personal property that staff may bring into BOP institutions.” The Federal Labor Relations Authority obstructed past attempts to implement more strict searches of staff.

Since the report was published, however, fentanyl, which can be sprayed on paper, has become increasingly trafficked. But there is not publicly available robust data suggesting mail is the primary culprit for introducing the drug into the prison-industrial complex.

Still, local jails across the country have been quietly contracting with Smart Communications since at least 2017. Virginia began photocopying mail in-house around the same time. Several jails — including Crawford County Justice Center in Arkansas and Roanoke City Jail in Virginia — had already switched to the MailGuard system by the time the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections changed its policy. And since then, at least four local jails have struck similar deals. While the company doesn’t typically charge jails for MailGuard, it profits by installing kiosks that offer other costly services, such as video visitation.

Before MailGuard, mail was one of the few aspects of prison life that hadn’t fallen into the clutches of the market. Worth Rises, a nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to dismantling the prison industry, found

that over 4,100 corporations profit off mass incarceration. “Private corporations helped build our punishment system and continue to support its expansion by donating to tough-on-crime political candidates, shifting costs onto those it targets, offering agencies lucrative partnerships, recruiting former government officials, and more,” it wrote in a report. However, the report notes, “Tackling the private industry will not alone end mass incarceration, but it is an essential step.”

As the Biden administration moves to sever contracts with some private prisons (notably not privately operated Immigration and Customs Enforcement confinement camps), activists rightly note that ending those contracts will not free a single person. Meanwhile, the growth of the prison mail industry serves as a reminder that the distinction between private and public prisons is increasingly trivial. The rise of in-house photocopying shows how public institutions can undermine prisoners’ rights without relying on private companies, too.

Advocates Speak Out Against Photocopied Mail

While many contracts between jails and Smart Communications have flown under the public’s radar, incarcerated people, activists and people with loved ones behind bars in Massachusetts are pushing back against the new proposed mail policy. More people joined MADOC’s January 29 hearing regarding the proposed regulations than the department’s Zoom subscription could handle.

Cassandra Bensahih, a coordinator of Massachusetts Against Solitary Confinement Coalition who was formerly incarcerated in Massachusetts, drew from her experiences to testify against the new proposed policy. “Mail makes us feel more normal and like we are a part of the world,” she said. “There is nothing like being able to touch a letter, reread it, go back over it. I still have a Christmas card from my daughter and I was incarcerated in 2007.... I cherish that card.”

Advocates in Massachusetts seem to have good reason for concern: In Pennsylvania, people with loved ones behind bars have reported unexplained mail rejections, severe delays in processing time and mind-numbing bureaucratic runarounds in online discussion boards. A moderator of the forum Prison Talk wrote that a majority of the 10 letters he sent per week were sent back to him without explanation in 2018. “There is no pattern as to which ones were delivered and which ones were returned even though my PC addresses all the envelopes the same way,” he wrote.

Another user based in Pennsylvania reported two-week delays in mail processing time, complicating an already tragic circumstance for their family. Their incarcerated loved one did not have an approved phone list, they wrote, “so sadly they learn of a relative’s death two weeks plus later, all alone, with no way to call home.” Many direct messages and emails sent to Smart Communications have gone unanswered, according to the user.

Claire Shubik-Richards, the executive director of Pennsylvania Prison Society, told Slate that her organization received complaints about mail not getting delivered, severe delays in delivery and misdeliveries. Scanned photocopies of photographs provided to Slate revealed blurry, low-quality images.

When asked for his thoughts on the department’s motives, Bellis’s formerly incarcerated partner said he thinks it’s a function of maintaining a grip on the prison population. “That’s where they hit somebody, with their mail, their communication. If something happens there, that’s what they do. Boom. Shut down mail, shut down emails,” he said. “Because they know we are going to need to communicate with our loved ones and make phone calls to complain about what’s going on, how we are being treated ... that’s what I think is most important [to them]: control.”

26 Feb - Kings Bay Plowshares 7 Updates

Many of the now-imprisoned Kings Bay Plowshares 7 are writing while serving their sentences and we are including some of those writings below.

MORE:

February 26th - “Different Rules Apply” by Patrick O’Neill

Kings Bay Plowshares 7 Support are with Patrick in Spirit and in prayer, now in month 2 of his 14-month sentence. From his tightly scrawled letters, we know that he is currently being housed in a cellblock with 110 fellow inmates. A successful ACLU lawsuit mercifully reduced the population. Earlier, the Bureau of Prisons had crammed 170 men in there.

“It is a drab place with little or no privacy and noise of some kind is omnipresent...The bathroom is primitive with no locks on toilet doors and not great showers – but the water is hot! It’s a generally dreary place because of monotony and the long sentences most of the guys have. It’s not unusual for a guy here to have been locked up for more than 10 years and others with 10 years to go. It’s very sad.”

The guys are locked down 24/7 except for outside recreation 3 times a week. “There is no schedule, so I have to be ready at a moment’s notice to be called for Rec or I miss it.” This is Patrick’s only opportunity to get sky, fresh air, and a chance to run. He fell 7 times on his first run, but he’s mastered running on snow and ice and ran 4 miles last week.

Unlike the minimum security federal prisons Patrick has been in before, he’s in a “very much more restricted” so-called “low security” prison. Reminiscent of the Panopticon, the 18th c. English prison where prisoner movements were observed at all times and institutionalized control was maximized, prisoners are “behind double-fencing and under ‘controlled movement’, which means all movement in the prison is under watch and only at certain times (even when there is no lock down).” Patrick describes FCI Elkton as “definitely a much tougher place to do time.”

In the prison economy – “this fine hell hole” – \$1 postage stamps are the same as cash, but are only worth 75 cents each on the FCI Elkton Exchange. “I guess my stamps, which were the 55 cents variety, can be used for commerce as well.”

Patrick reports that many of the guys in his dorm are sex offenders, and they are “the bottom feeders,” the lowest caste in the prison:

“My bunkmate, Mark, has a 14-yr. sentence and about 4 or 5 years left. Most of the guys here have computer-generated sex charges. While looking at child porn on your computer is horrible, these men are receiving sentences that are not in line with the charges, and this place offers no programs that treat sex offenders (who are usually sex addicts). It’s a complex problem, but surely “the system” is doing nothing to help these guys get well. For them, prison is very difficult because it’s usually their first time in trouble with the law, and they also face ridicule (at times) from guards and other prisoners. Still, I feel drawn to these guys because, at least here, they are the outcasts. Some are dealing with their addictions, others are bitter. I don’t have a sense what can be done to help them, but I feel certain sending them to prison is not the solution. Because of the lock down there are no visits, no programs, no church services, and no Eucharist or Mass, and it’s been that way for more than a year. I do plan to write about this issue in depth.”

Different rules apply inside:

“Unlike most of the world where white males hold power, here we are at the bottom (actually the white male sex offenders are at the very bottom)...Here, in an ironic reversal of fortune, whites are 2nd class citizens, so I have to learn and follow the rules...rules are made by the inmates, which I’m learning as I go

(sometimes with stern warning)...it's all about the last shall be first...I see it as my required affirmative action...There is a lot of arrested development and macho-swaggering...men like power."

Reflecting on Plowshares peace witness:

"During my 1984-86 sentence for my first Plowshare action, I turned 30 in the Atlanta Federal Prison. Next month, I'll turn 65 in here! I hope I have one more Plowshare action in me. Of note, FCI Elkton was where Phil Berrigan was on 9-11-01. He was immediately sent to solitary (the SHU – Special Housing Unit). And it's possible we were in the same cell or at least on the same block, so I was on hallowed ground during my time in the SHU."

The Lenten journey has begun:

"Today is Ash Wednesday, so I am fasting – the group who got my food trays were happy. You can really develop an appreciation for the Spirit of Lent in a place like this. God is really giving me a good tour of Purgatory on Earth. God is good. I really am appreciative of the gifts of Grace I'm getting in this journey. I will never be the same. Spiritual Growth Is a Gift and Redemptive Suffering is a Gift as well."

Let us continue to hold Patrick and his family, his fellow prisoners, and indeed all who are incarcerated, in our thoughts and prayers. May grace and mercy abound!

February 27th - Ash Wednesday by Martha Hennessy

Father Iwaji came to the camp this morning for Mass. The crucifix, chalice, and candlesticks were a sight for sore eyes. Seeing the white altar cloth and purple vestments after weeks of institutional grey and beige, along with unpainted concrete and razor wire, was a rich treat.

Of course the beginning of Lent is about abstinence and self-transformation, but the wine-dipped host tasted like a feast. The priest reflected on Jesus' instructions in Matthew 6: 1-6 and 16-18, urging us not to make a public spectacle when performing the pillars of alms-giving, prayer and fasting.

The priest also admonished us, in our prison setting, for our sins that brought us here. He said that penance is required of us.

My ego-centered perceptions immediately took umbrage at this in light of protesting nuclear weapons.

A Romanian attorney who was raised Greek Orthodox now teaches us in a class called "Positive Thinking."

I failed in this practice before 7:30 this morning as I was waiting in line for breakfast. I walked off before receiving food because I didn't want to listen to the C.O. chastising us for there not being an organized food crew to serve, that another C.O. was supposed to set up.

Today should be a day of fasting on top of it all.

Prison is a perfect setting in which to learn how to practice love and positive thinking, creating positive energy. Joel 2:12: "Return to me with your whole heart." "Rend your hearts, not your garments."

What does this look like in daily practice? I'm forced to discern this question over and over, throughout the day. And for the rest of my life, no matter where I find myself.

Transformation requires a different way of thinking, without pursuing resistance, attachment, judgementalism.

My teacher here says guilt is a negative energy and religion tends to use it as a means of controlling people's behavior.

Does a Plowshares action create more negative energy than positive?

Dear readers, my apologies for carrying you along with me on this torturous discernment process.

The letters of gratitude from you for this action are deeply affirming, and yet...I am not who the world may think I am, all evil, or all good.

We tend toward thinking in dichotomous ways. In Matthew 6: 1-6, Jesus tells us "do not blow a trumpet before you" in the practice of performing righteous deeds.

My mind goes to all the long time Catholic Workers in the houses of hospitality, cooking, cleaning, serving food all their days for many years. They are the mothers of the many.

The daily reading of one's hurt is to see, feel, entering into the suffering of those around us, those we choose to be with as we strive to see Christ in their distorted yet beautiful faces.

It is all in our perception. What we see before us is based on what is in our hearts and minds.

"Those who fast for God's sake receive beauty of face."

Perhaps those who love for God's sake receive beauty of heart, reflecting it back onto the world.

When we fasted and prayed in Washington, D.C. with "Witness Against Torture" calling for the release of prisoners in Guantanamo, the faces of fasters became more beautiful each day. More lean, radiant, calm, yet beseeching.

One of the women here who arrived a month ago with a twenty four month sentence received notice that she will be released to home confinement in two days. Such joyful and unexpected news. She was sent into confusion and gratitude in a flash. Others responded with happiness for her, while some felt fear and resentment regarding their own cases.

The process for how cases are handled is never clear or easily understood. A persistent element of arbitrariness leaves people feeling off balance and unfairly treated.

In our small lectio group the question often arises: how does God come into the picture as one's life unfolds?

The woman to be released was part of our prayer group. We all said, "This is a miracle!"

Of course my mind then went to my case. I have served four out of ten months so far. An unresolved charge relating to the protest of drones at Hancock Air Base in Syracuse, NY, keeps me here.

Do I patiently serve my time or make efforts for home confinement? After serving five months here as an elderly inmate, I am eligible for mid-May release but not with this outstanding case. Otherwise it is a late August release. We will see what the DeWitt court judge has in his heart in this time of COVID.

Our Georgia judge was content to send us in to jail despite the pandemic.

It is all an exercise in patience, positive thinking, and prayerful reflection

Someone reminded me that God will spare us all as long as there are 10 good souls praying to save the world. This surely must be the case concerning our avoidance of nuclear holocaust over the last 75 years.

A recent meditation that has caught my attention is a discussion in the Abingdon “Interpreter’s Bible” series. Christian service is very acceptable in two forms, both involving sacrifice: that of Thanksgiving and of sharing.

The three readings recommended for study are Hebrews 13: 15-16, Romans 12: 1-2, and James 1:27. In Hebrews we read: “do not neglect to do good and share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” Christ’s passion was his access to God. We must settle, in our human limitations, for praising and giving thanks as opposed to plundering one another.

We are unprofitable servants, and yet we continue to receive the gift of Divine love.

James 1 warns against holding religious ceremony as more important than compassionate caring for others. Beware of worldly pressures that seduce us into denying mercy and love.

The “stains” of our failure to love are what made the Crucifixion possible: “Cooperative guilt with limited liability, cowardice in our leaders, dishonest clerics, traitor disciples, a thoughtless mob, and callous executioners.!” These conditions sound all too familiar and applicable in our own times.

The reading from Romans warns against conforming to the worldly influences that grind down our capacity to discern good and evil. A slippery slope. To transform is to hold on to our capacity to use practical reason and moral consciousness and see what is proper service.

The world watches an entire country, Yemen, being starved and bombed.

Will we save ourselves without gratitude and sharing? It looks grim.

I have too much time on my hands to contemplate the history, the writings, and the dynamics of prison life. Feeding chickens, caring for young children, cooking a big pot of soup for others seems so much more feasible and attractive.

Doctrine must come with a connection to our emotions and self-will.

The visible signs of life are so vibrant, how can we deny them!

A small bag was found on the staircase as everyone walked to the chow line; inside a dildo, contraband of course. Abstinence during Lent is not for everyone.

March 1st - “Hard Time” Prison Reflections from Patrick O’Neill

In this most recent reflection, Patrick shares his conversations with fellow prisoners – mostly sex offenders who are facing long prison sentences – and how they deal with time behind bars.

“A lot of guys in here have their days numbered, as in ‘I’m getting out in blank 2026 or 2031.’ While I’m counting days, these guys are counting months and years. As a Western nation, the U.S. has the longest

sentences by far both on state and federal levels. There are few nations on earth that have life without possibility of parole; we have thousands of people with that sentence. How did Ben Franklin's idea of penance (as in penitentiary) go so far afield? How did our nation become so punitive and unforgiving? I have to be careful in here and not get into the day-counting game. Too many people view their time incarcerated as a stolen part of their lives, as if time in prison is valueless and should be subtracted from the total of years one lives. Counting days always has a person looking off (sometimes very far) into the future, and thus they fail to live in the present moment, which is all we've got."

The plight of sex offenders, the lowest caste in prison society, has captured Patrick's attention:

"I plan to write some stories about the conditions sex offenders face because of their long sentences and how they are treated so poorly in the "filthy, rotten system." It is hard to imagine – especially at my age – to spend 10 years living in this warehouse-like room of 64 cubicles, but that's what's happening to many of the guys here. Gene said he thought about half of all guys here are sex offenders. This is unbelievable and unjust. This place has only one purpose – that's punishment. There is no effort at all being made to help people better their lives – nothing...Most of the guys who have long sentences have not been convicted of 'touching' a child or 'manufacturing' the pornography, but only viewing it or sharing it on their computer: 'I am here on pornography charges. I had something on my computer and that was it. They maxed me out,' one guy told me – he has 30 years....A lot of guys are hoping for the return of 65%, which used to be the percentage of time a person had to serve in the federal prison system. Biden got rid of 65! (full given sentence and no parole), and now there's pressure on him to reverse his cruelty from 1995. If he does go back to 65%, many guys will get year off their sentences, which is the great hope."

A very difficult human problem – sexual addiction/child pornography – is made much worse by "the system":

"Part of the problem is the system – the prison-industrial complex – that serves only to punish the "offender" rather than nurture them toward a better future. Hence, many guys leave here in far worse shape than when they arrived. They have all the baggage they came in with and leave as a convicted felon/ex con. Here at Elkton, we are doing time for the sake of doing time; judges pretend the people they send to prison are being helped in some way, but in truth we're just being warehoused for an arbitrary period of time with little of no rehabilitation. So these circumstances lead guys to 'count the days' because it's hard to find anything to bring you hope or joy in the present moment."

There is no escaping the absurdities of the prison system:

The first week I got here I was brought in handcuffs to a steel cage in an open, cold room with lots going on all around me. I was locked in the cage – still in handcuffs – for a "psych eval", as it was called. I tried to point out the absurdity of this picture to the young woman psychologist who asked me a few questions: Were you ever sexually abused? Do you have suicidal thoughts? Do you abuse substances?, etc. It didn't seem to occur to her that asking these questions to a man handcuffed in a steel cage might be 'unprofessional.' (I was told by another female psychologist that she did not have to take the Hippocratic Oath. 'Well, it seems that should still be the guiding principle,' I said.)"

In the midst of so much dehumanization, perhaps it is wise to close this prison reflection with two images that incline the heart toward brighter, more hopeful messages: The first was a scene Patrick saw through his barred window outside – a large gathering of birds on the snow being fed by the inmates. The second was a phrase from a prayer offered by one of Patrick's clergy friends, which sums up what is so greatly needed in our world – "May God break the stone coverings off of our hearts." AMEN!

P.S. Patrick has expressed concern about fellow inmates who rarely, if ever, receive any communication with the outside world. For those who would be interested in forming a pen pal relationship with one of

Patrick's fellow prisoners, please be in touch with him so he can help facilitate that life-giving human connection.

27 Feb - Vulnerable Inmates Left in Prison as Covid Rages

This article zeroes in on FCI Danbury, where political prisoners Martha Hennessy and Marius Mason are imprisoned.

MORE:

by Roni Caryn Rabin (*New York Times*)

Shacarey James was six weeks pregnant when she reported to the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury, Conn., last summer to serve a sentence for a parole violation.

At risk for severe illness if infected with the coronavirus, Ms. James kept her mask on at all times, except when she was sleeping. In December, a woman assigned to the next bunk developed a hacking cough.

Ms. James, 25, suspected a coronavirus infection, but officers at the prison at first dismissed her concerns, saying pregnancy "hormones" were making her anxious, and they refused to test her bunkmate.

Four days later, the woman's temperature spiked, and a diagnostic test came back positive. "She was three feet from me — we were eye-to-eye," said Ms. James. "I thought she was going to pass away in front of me."

Ms. James escaped infection, but whether she should have been in the prison at all remains a pressing question. When the pandemic erupted last spring, federal prisons were told to move quickly to grant home confinement to medically vulnerable inmates who did not pose a risk to the public.

Inmates like Ms. James, who was convicted of cashing fake checks, were to serve out their sentences at their residences, with an electronic bracelet monitoring their movements. The goal was to protect them, reduce prison overcrowding and minimize the risk of outbreaks. But the Federal Bureau of Prisons has been slow to act.

The coronavirus has infected more than 620,000 inmates and correctional officers in the nation's prisons, jails and detention centers, according to a *New York Times* database. Nearly 2,800 inmates and guards have died, making correctional facilities among the most significant battlefronts of the pandemic, along with nursing homes and schools.

Yet just 7,850 of the 151,735 people serving federal sentences right now have been granted home confinement — about 5 percent. State prison populations have fallen by 15 percent since the pandemic began, according to the Prison Policy Initiative, but not because inmates are being released to home confinement. Instead, many state prisons simply have stopped accepting transfers from county jails.

The Danbury compound, one of 122 federal prisons, offers a prism into the bureau's failure to contain the virus. Though Danbury was singled out for prompt action by former Attorney General William P. Barr because it had seen an outbreak, only about 100 inmates have been granted home confinement so far, many as recently as December. At least 550 are still under consideration, most of them convicted of nonviolent offenses like fraud or drug possession.

In December, cases at Danbury rebounded as more than one in 10 inmates at the complex tested positive for the virus. In a minimum-security women's facility called the Camp, where Ms. James was held, 34 of the 50 inmates were infected.

Court declarations and interviews with inmates who were granted home confinement shed light on the missteps that contributed to the outbreaks.

Symptom checks were cursory in the prison, and suspended altogether for a period of about a week after Thanksgiving for no apparent reason, inmates said. Virus tests were administered only when inmates were acutely ill, which is the Bureau of Prisons' policy despite the fact that people without symptoms are most likely to spread the disease.

When inmates felt sick, they often had to chase down medics and plead to be tested, and later beg for the results. Inmates weren't removed from the general population until the results came back, which could take five days. When prisoners were secluded in groups after testing positive, they were left largely to fend for themselves, without basic supplies like acetaminophen or extra fluids. To call for help, they banged on the windows.

Under a settlement reached last July with inmates who sued, prison authorities agreed to re-examine the cases of some 600 prisoners with medical problems like diabetes and obesity who had been denied home confinement. They face a Friday deadline to report back.

"What's frustrating about our case is that we have a settlement agreement and the Bureau of Prisons is disregarding it," said Marisol Orihuela, co-director of the Criminal Justice Advocacy Clinic at Yale University, who is representing the inmates, along with attorneys from law schools at the University at Buffalo in New York and Quinnipiac University in North Haven, Conn., and the firm Silver, Golub & Teitell in Stamford, Conn.

"They knew what they needed to be doing in order to mitigate another outbreak, and they simply didn't do it," she added.

Neither the former warden named in the lawsuit, Diane Easter, nor the federal lawyers representing the prison in the case responded to repeated requests for comment.

Justin Long, a spokesman for the Bureau of Prisons, said federal facilities have taken steps to control the spread of the coronavirus, including educating inmates and staff about preventing transmission, maximizing social distancing to the extent possible, and providing surgical and cloth masks, soap and cleaning supplies to incarcerated people.

"We understand these are stressful times for both staff and inmates," Mr. Long said in an emailed statement. "It is our highest priority to continue to do everything we can to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our facilities."

Because of crowded conditions and vulnerable populations, prisons and jails have long been known to be breeding grounds for infectious diseases like tuberculosis, influenza and hepatitis C.

Prisons are more densely populated than nursing homes, according to the Prison Policy Initiative; one study found that the coronavirus spread almost four times as quickly in a large urban jail as it had aboard the Diamond Princess cruise ship, which saw one of the most terrifying outbreaks of the early pandemic.

Minimum- and low-security settings like the federal prison at Danbury, where many inmates live in large dormitories separated by partitions that don't reach the ceiling, are even more conducive to the spread of the virus than maximum-security prisons with cells that house only one or two inmates.

Many incarcerated people are medically vulnerable, suffering from conditions like obesity and Type 2 diabetes that increase the risk of serious complications or death should they be infected with the virus and develop Covid-19. "They're like sitting ducks," said Elizabeth Blackwood, an attorney with the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

At the same time, medical care for chronic conditions has been disrupted by personnel shortages — Danbury had seven vacancies on its medical staff last summer — and delayed access to specialists outside the facility.

Throughout the fall, Ms. Orihuela and her colleagues warned that the prison was in danger of becoming a hotbed of infections, documenting their concerns — including a lack of hand soap in the women's bathrooms during the Covid-19 outbreak in December — in a series of letters and affidavits addressed to the court.

Prisoners' requests to be seen by the medical team, known as sick call slips, weren't being collected, the lawyers wrote on Oct. 30. Screening for Covid-19 symptoms, which was supposed to be done every day, was inconsistent.

Several inmates who complained of Covid-19 symptoms, like cough, chest pain and loss of smell and taste, said in interviews with *The New York Times* that medical personnel dismissed their symptoms as a cold or flu. When they were finally tested, getting the result could take a week.

Joseph Heim Jr., a 45-year-old inmate in the men's prison, submitted a sick call request on Nov. 28, when he started coughing, lost his sense of taste and smell, and developed chest pain "that felt like a heart attack," he said in a declaration filed with the court.

A nurse told him it was "probably the flu," and Mr. Heim was not seen by a doctor or tested for the coronavirus until Dec. 4. When Mr. Heim, who has chronic lung disease, was found to be infected and placed in isolation, he told staff he couldn't breathe.

"They said there was nothing they could do for me," he said in a declaration to the court. "The first four days I was in isolation, I laid there thinking I was going to die." He remained there for 20 days, during which he was seen only three times by a physician, he said.

Isolation is critical to curbing the spread of infections, but almost a full year after the pandemic started, the prison did not have appropriate isolation quarters prepared for women who became infected.

In December, when dozens of women tested positive, they were housed in makeshift quarters in the prisons' visiting rooms, according to the accounts of seven female inmates provided through written court declarations and phone interviews.

The rooms had no beds, only rudimentary restroom facilities, and no showers. (Temporary shower units were eventually installed.) The women were moved hastily; many said they did not have time to pack important items like medications, asthma inhalers and feminine hygiene products. Several said they were without their prescriptions for days.

On arrival, the infected women taken to the visiting room of the men's prison, some of them visibly ill, were told to assemble metal cots to sleep on. Mattresses were not available at first, and bedding was scarce, according to numerous accounts. The room was cold, especially at night.

"I was freezing, actually, and they didn't want to give us extra blankets," said Stacy Spagnardi, 53, who was recently granted home confinement. She is serving a sentence for tax evasion and insurance fraud.

"Some women were so sick they couldn't eat and could hardly move. One woman could not stop coughing," said a written declaration by Jasmir Humphrey, who had spent nearly two weeks in the visiting room but was recently released for home confinement.

Mr. Long, of the prisons bureau, said in an email statement that all inmates who test positive or have symptoms are "provided medical care in accordance with C.D.C. guidance."

That guidance says Covid patients recovering at home should rest, get plenty of fluids, take over-the-counter medicine for symptoms, stay in touch with their doctor and be alert for warning signs that the disease was getting worse.

But infected women who were placed in a men's visiting room said they were not given over-the-counter drugs like acetaminophen for fever and body aches, despite their requests. Bright overhead lights were turned on at 6 a.m. every day, and inmates said that the guards threatened disciplinary action if anyone turned them off.

There was a water fountain in the room, but cups were not provided until numerous requests were made, and the women were not given tea, soup or any other hydrating foods, they said.

"It was about a week until we got Tylenol," Ms. Spagnardi said. She said she got some acetaminophen after asking for it repeatedly, but it was not distributed to all the sick inmates.

Temperatures were checked daily on weekdays, but not weekends. Staff "didn't check our other vital signs or listen to our lungs," Ms. Humphrey wrote.

Mr. Long said that the isolation area was appropriately heated and that inmates had medical care, but he declined to comment on the other conditions described by inmates and their lawyers.

Sick women who were placed in another visiting room, at the women's prison, said that once the guards left the room and locked the door behind them, they had no way to call for help in the case of an emergency. There was a phone, but it was useless.

"A sign by the phone said, 'In case of emergency, dial this number,' but the number didn't work," said Jacqueline Torres, 33, whose complaints of shortness of breath and body aches were ignored for several days in early December. She was finally given a rapid test on Dec. 7 and tested positive.

"The only way we could get in touch with anyone was if a guard walked through the hall, and we banged on the wall to get their attention," she said in an interview.

On Dec. 9, Rae Haltzman, who is 65 and has high blood pressure, started vomiting but was unable to summon help. She lay down by the locked door of the visiting room with a blanket "waiting for someone to come," she wrote in a statement filed with the court. When she spotted a psychologist leaving the building, "I banged on the door and asked him to get a medic."

Ms. Haltzman was eventually hospitalized for nine days. After being discharged on Dec. 18, she was placed alone in a locked room "that is usually used for suicide watch, or drug withdrawal cases," she wrote.

She was kept there until Jan. 2, even though the hospital's infectious diseases specialist had said it was not necessary for her to be isolated.

"I had panic attacks from being left in the room alone for so long," she said. "I felt as though the whole time I was being punished for getting sick."

Another inmate, Denise Bonfilio, also became acutely ill in the visiting room of the men's prison. Her lips turned blue, and she was sent to the hospital. She was found to be dehydrated but was not admitted, and she returned to the room.

Because of her food allergies, Ms. Bonfilio often could not eat the meals that were provided, which may have contributed to her dehydration. In an interview, she described the treatment in the isolation room as "physically and emotionally brutal."

"It was like survival of the fittest," Ms. Bonfilio said.

The inmates had to order items they needed from the commissary, recalled Ms. Torres, who was granted home confinement on Dec. 23. "We literally bought Halls, ibuprofen and hot tea," she said.

"We were all scared," Ms. Spagnardi said. "We were all thinking we were going to die in there, and nobody would know until count."

It's not clear why prison officials have been so resistant to granting home confinement to inmates in the middle of a pandemic.

Most people incarcerated in federal institutions are nonviolent offenders. The minimum-security facility for women at Danbury, the Camp, is not even surrounded by a fence.

Yet experts say the bureau has an aversion to home confinement because of the "Willie Horton effect," a reference to the infamous case of a convicted murderer who raped a Maryland woman and stabbed her fiancé while on furlough from a Massachusetts prison. The crimes served as the basis for attack ads that helped derail the 1988 presidential campaign of former Gov. Michael Dukakis.

Last March, the day after a former inmate was released from a prison in Florida to alleviate overcrowding and prevent an outbreak, he shot and killed a man in Tampa.

"Everybody's worried that if they make a mistake, and someone gets out and commits a heinous offense, they will be blamed," said Shon Hopwood, a law professor at Georgetown University. "They all live in fear of that one horrible case."

1 Mar - Prison Break: COVID-19 Continues to Spread to Political Prisoners

Below is our condensed version of the monthly column by the Certain Days collective, including the call for parole letters urgently needed for Xinachtli.

MORE:

by Certain Days Collective (*It's Going Down*)

Though a short month, much indeed went down in February. We mourn the passing of activist and musician Anne Feeney as well as former Chicago 7 defendant Rennie Davis, both of whom fought tirelessly to create a better world. In early February, detainees at the St. Louis "Justice Center" took control of the facility for several hours, while reports emerged of officers at a jail in Oregon pepper-spraying

prisoners who were being isolated for possible COVID-19 exposure. It was revealed in early February that political prisoner Bill Dunne had contracted COVID-19, and in the last days of February it was publicized that Mumia Abu-Jamal has also contracted the virus. Meanwhile, the crisis in Texas prisons and jails—and in Connecticut—continues to deteriorate.

On a brighter note, there are only a few 2021 *Certain Days: Freedom for Political Prisoners* calendars left, so get one now while they last at the discounted price of \$10. The essay for the month—a close look at the pandemic from one who was incarcerated during the AIDS crisis—is written by longtime political prisoner and *Certain Days* founding collective member David Gilbert. The artwork for the month, by Aaron Hughes and entitled “Free Our Elders,” was inspired by a Leonard Peltier poem.

Ongoing Cases

Letters of support are needed by the end of March for political prisoner and Certain Days collective member Xinachtli, who has a parole hearing in July. Learn how and why to send your parole letter at his new support website: freealvaro.net

On February 4, NoDAPL Water Protector Steve Martinez was held in contempt of court for refusing to testify before a Grand Jury. He is facing 18 months in jail for his principled resistance. A judge ordered Martinez’s immediate release on February 22, though upon his release he was served with yet another Grand Jury subpoena. If you can offer support, fundraising is needed.

In other NoDAPL news, Catholic Worker climate activists Ruby Montoya and Jessica Reznicek have pleaded guilty to a single charge of conspiracy to damage an energy facility. Both are due to be sentenced in May.

Anti-authoritarian protester and former YPG volunteer Daniel Baker remains in prison in connection with calling for a counter-protest against pro-Trump Inauguration protesters.

In Portland, Oregon charges are being brought against another person counter-protesting right-wing Inaugural protesters. You can learn more about Alexander Dial and join in the struggle to drop the charges at actionnetwork.org/petitions/drop-all-charges-against-alexander-dial

Certain Days to Keep in Mind

As you’ll see in your 2021 *Certain Days: Freedom for Political Prisoners* calendar, March is packed full of radical dates in movement history and abolitionism. We commemorate the losses of Black Liberation political prisoners Mondo we Langa (2016) and Merle Africa (1998), Indigenous rights protector Wolverine (2016), Palestinian-rights activist Rachel Corrie (2003), and the three Weathermembers who died in lower Manhattan in 1970. We also rejoice in remembering the liberation of George Jackson Brigade member John Sherman from jail (1976), and the exposure of COINTELPRO in 1971. March 1 also marks the 40th anniversary of the 61-day hunger strike that led to the death and martyrdom of IRA political prisoner Bobby Sands.

2 Mar - Eric King Updates

We’re happy to share a new poem by and updates about Eric King.

MORE:

March 2nd - Can you feel the heat rising?

“This is a wee poem I wrote at golly-heck 3:30 AM. It may be all internal but I feel the climate changing. The protest really got to me, all the letters and books and magazines really got to me. We aren’t alone in this, even tho the Bureau is very proficient at isolation tactics. We’re all a part of the same fist, and same garden. Antifa everywhere, anarchy always.” -EK

Can you feel the heat rising?
Where there’s smoke, there’s fire
Eyes in the scope
Watching from the guard tower
Taking back our lives
Seems like the time is now
Do you think they can feel the tides
Shifting on the ground?
Do you think they can hear
As our voices got louder?
Alarm bells sing
We’re not ready to disperse
Despite what they preach
They’re not ready for the worst
Hit em’ in the wallet
Hit em’ where it hurts
Hear the people chanting
No justice in the courts
We’re rocking in the streets
On our way to the feast
Time to hold steady
Strapping on our cleats
Policing is a disease
And we are the vaccine
They’ve got too much blood on their hands
And they wont come clean

March 5th - Legal Update

We wanted to let you know that Eric King’s trial has been pushed to October 12th in the U.S District Court of Colorado in Denver. This was granted by the Judge because Eric’s lawyers requested a continuance, in part, based on gaps in the discovery (legal documents shared between both parties) and that FCI Florence is closed to legal visits (the site of the incident in question needs to be inspected).

Eric continues to be held in segregation at FCI Englewood and has been held there a minimum of 23 hours a day for 551 days or over 1 year and 6 months. The United Nations has stated that being held in solitary confinement/segregation over 15 days constitutes ‘torture’ and we fully agree. Eric has not only been held in segregation but has experienced near constant harassment, many incident reports and is now not allowed to receive mail from outside (other than his immediate family) for the second time, for sketchy reasons. Eric wrote a pretty amazing description of life in segregation recently. Read it at solitarywatch.org/2020/09/30/voices-from-solitary-flipping-the-script

While you cannot write Eric directly, you can still send him books and magazines. In fact, when Eric was last allowed to write, he expressed how much he appreciated the deluge of books he received from supporters. Please check out Eric’s list at tiny.cc/EK_Books and order 1-2, or what you can! He is a voracious reader and helps him deal with the situation before him.

Eric's lawyers continue to plow through discovery and prepare for trial. The Civil Liberties Defense Center, who represents Eric, is a non-profit organization that relies on donations to fund its solid work. You can donate to them at cldc.org/donate and note "Eric King legal defense" in the memo section.

Eric is facing up to 20 years for an incident in which he was actually assaulted. He needs your support. Please follow us on social media and continue to hold him in your hearts. We will let you know when there are more concrete requests.

March 5th - Words from Eric

Hello friends, comrades & government voyeur (sic) creeps!

Recently the fucking puker at the bureau decided it'd be best to cut off my mail again...this along with the telephone ban, essentially strangling my contact with the outside world... all this while pre-trial...ugh. Really it's fucking exhausting and it gets really old, This is systematic and intentional and a vindication of both my revolutionary spirit/actions inside, and the AMAZING Support from our community.

It was really amazing throughout December, getting to reconnect with dear friends...And getting to meet so many great new people. Truly I felt so loved and supported coming off the first mail ban, It blew me away to have so much solidarity and support. Unreal love.

I'm hoping to have the mail shit overturned before six months, in the meantime. We have trial in early October. I'm asking everyone to keep me in mind, to encourage trial attendance, to call out the BOP (at every level), to pls keep in touch with the site-either checking for updates or dropping a line.

To all the folks that have sent magazines and books holy fuck thank you! You've spoiled me endlessly. To everyone who came out on New Year's eve to make some noise. Job well done we have got to be vocal and visible and put a spotlight on the Bureau.

Ok friends, I'll update again soon. Thank you for everything

12 Mar - Metropolitan Anarchist Coordinating Council (MACC) General Assembly

WHAT: General Assembly

WHEN: 6:30pm, Friday, March 12th

WHERE: Online (details below)

COST: FREE

MORE:

We will be hosting another "Virtual" General Assembly—lookout in your various Working Group platforms, e-mail listservs, Loomio, et cetera for details on how to join in.

General Assemblies are the most ideal place for new folks to plug-in to MACC, learn about our projects and ongoing efforts, and connect to organizers. We encourage everyone to come with ideas about what they would like to see for future campaigns or actions and what direction they'd like MACC to take to build a more powerful anarchist movement. Especially in our current context, when renewed attention has mixed repression with struggles for racial justice, abolition, and a humane economy. There will be a 6:30-7PM orientation for new folks that would like to get connected and learn more about MACC's structure and history.

Please review these documents before coming: macc.nyc/organizing macc.nyc/safer-spaces

21 Mar - Anarchists Care About Books: “Red Pill” by Hari Kunzru

WHAT: Book club

WHEN: 4:00pm Sunday, March 21st

WHERE: YOUR HOME/Zoom

COST: FREE

MORE:

Join Metropolitan Anarchist Coordinating Council (MACC) to discuss “Red Pill” by Hari Kunzru.

Zoom info TBA. Join our listserv to stay in the loop gaggle.email/join/acabooks@gaggle.email

MACC events are open to all anarchists, antifascists, anti-authoritarians and those interested in anarchist ideas and organizing.

21 Mar - Go and Anarchist Strategy

WHAT: Discussion

WHEN: 7:00pm, Sunday, March 21st

WHERE: YOUR HOME

COST: FREE

MORE:

The game of Go is another struggle for power and influence, a strategic game where opponents try to expand and hold onto their areas of power and use them to limit the other's. We can learn from and apply strategies from the game of Go to adapt and make our struggles more effective. Details on how to join this call will be sent after you RSVP at tiny.cc/MACCGoStrategy