

NEVER ALONE

A zine about supporting prisoners
by those on the outside



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to 'Never Alone'. This publication was created to give a voice to those that support people in prison. Often invisible, unsupported and unrecognised, thousands of people in the UK, and millions internationally, support friends, family, partners and comrades in prison.

Their support, love, money and solidarity help people survive their time inside. They directly experience the harm of the prison system; separated from the people they love and losing their lives to give time and energy to support people behind bars.

This publication, while not distracting from the acknowledgement that those behind the walls are the centre of our struggles, seeks to amplify the voices of those on the other side of the fence, and share their experiences of interacting with the prison system. We hear from mothers, nephews, lovers, friends and organisers of support campaigns, about how it feels to know those you care for are behind enemy lines.

Bristol Anarchist Black Cross is a prisoner support organisation based in the South West UK. While commonly focusing on

supporting prisoners of political struggle, we should never forget that all prisoners are political. Human beings are in cages because of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, because they are poor, and it serves the state and capital to exploit and control them.

The Empty Cages Collective is a new collective launched in 2014, which aims to bring prison abolition to centre stage in the UK. We are fighting against prison expansion and connecting people in the struggle to resist and dismantle the prison industrial complex.

We have worked together to produce this publication and hope it is the first of many so that those impacted by the ever-growing reach of the prison industrial complex are not forgotten.

If you have any comments, criticisms or would like to submit articles for future editions please contact us. We welcome stories of your direct personal experience, the harm the prison system causes and how you have got through, or continue to get through. Political commentary is also more than welcome, as well as ideas of how we can better support each other to cope with the emotional, practical and financial challenges of supporting someone we care about through their time inside.

Until Every Cell is Empty,

Bristol Anarchist Black Cross &
Empty Cages Collective
September 2014

www.bristolabc.wordpress.com
www.prisonabolition.org



BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

An article expressing the experience of supporting a family member through a 20 year prison sentence in Spain.

I was five years old when I realised that the place where we used to go to see my uncle was indeed, a prison.

I didn't understand the operation of that dark and grey place. I didn't know why those people were holding my uncle there. My mother told me: "He is there for all of us".

He was all alone, with his girlfriend and son only allowed to see him for no more than one or two hours a week.

At the time he was in Cádiz (in the south of Spain), ten hours away from his home. Too far from his beloved friends and family. I remember the long trips for just one hour with him. Driving the arid Spanish landscape for a smile. The first smile in the visit made it worth it.

The glances, laughs and abuses of jailers were constant. I soon learned who was the enemy because justice doesn't come from the legal or illegal. It is all about what is right or wrong.

I like to think that he wasn't alone in as much as he was part of the EPPK, Collective of Basque Political Prisoners. He, along with his comrades, were supported by the Collective of Prisoner's Families, a huge tide of solidarity in the streets and what is more important, us, his family and friends; always there willing to help and bring him all our love and solidarity.

**EUSKAL
PRESO ETA
IHESLARIAK**



ETXERA

He spent the first six years in isolation so it was difficult to see him or keep in contact.

Due to the fact that my Aunt (his girlfriend) didn't used to have a driving license, if anyone could take them there, she and their young boy would go by bus or by train which made the trip longer and more tiring.

It was always a very long weekend. I used to be very dizzy on our way back due to the smell of the jail. After a few years I realised that every single prison smells the same. It's a mix of tobacco, humidity and rusty iron. Too hot in summer and freezing in winter.

Years went by and we got to know five different prisons all over the Spanish geography. He served 20 years inside. As I got older, I understood what my uncle went through.

Over the years I've seen how my friends and comrades have been imprisoned. Some of them have been released. They've experienced abuse and torture by those who are paid by the State. Some of them are still inside facing long sentences or seeing how their convictions are being elongated with no reason other

than vengeance.

Others are dying; victims of terrible diseases, killed by jailers or because they couldn't bear it anymore and have taken their own lives.

In any case, it's a direct consequence of the prison system; murders committed by people with names and surnames. Democrats willing to take their revenge to the last stage. Playing with the lives of thousands of people in the name of freedom, their freedom.

I've met many families in the same situation and their strength is greater than any prison bars. Greater than any Judge's Hammer deciding judgement. It's the rage of the people fighting for their freedom. Our pride and continued struggle is the best way to honour those who are not among us.

Love and rage until all are free!

One of thousands.

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For more information about prisoner support in the Basque Country:

www.herrira.org/fr
www.eppk-bt.net
www.etxerat.info/index.php?lang=es

Right: Demonstration of more than 200 thousand people for Basque political prisoners, January 11th 2014, Bilbao

"I've met many families in the same situation and their strength is greater than any prison bars. Greater than any Judge's Hammer deciding judgement. It's the rage of the people fighting for their freedom. Our pride and continued struggle is the best way to honour those who are not among us."



INSIDE AN ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS GROUP

An interview about the many roles of an ABC organiser.

Please describe yourself and the prison-related organising you have been involved with.

I got involved in Edinburgh Anarchist Black Cross which was set up in about 2010. I used to spend most of my time organising around ecological issues but through reading a lot of prison-related articles and speaking to a friend who has spent some time in prison I realised how oppressive the prison system is and how important it is to work in solidarity with prisoners. I am also involved in solidarity work with migrants, many of whom experience incarceration in detention centres so I think there are useful links to be made with prison-related organising and other struggles.

What attracted you to this work? (When its not the sexiest or easiest in terms of political struggle!)

I've always been keen on building relationships with people and I've increasingly seen the importance of working in solidarity with people who face more oppression than I do. I am in a really privileged position to be able to politically organise relatively freely and so I feel it is really important to use my freedom to support others to liberate themselves. The prison-related organising that I have done has mainly focused on supporting people one on one which makes it easier in my opinion to see the impact of your work. I am lucky enough to find myself amongst

a group of people (Edinburgh ABC) who share a political analysis about the prison industrial complex and that has made it easier for me to work on these issues.

What have you learnt doing prisoner solidarity & prison abolition work?

It sounds stupid but I really had no idea quite how oppressive the prison industrial complex is until I started doing prisoner solidarity work. The many different ways in which prisoners are controlled, through enforced medication, family access restrictions, work programmes and violence became really clear to me when I started having conversations with prisoners and ex-prisoners about their experiences.

I've learnt that prisons have no place in the world I want to see and that prison abolition work is imperative. I've learnt that looking at the whole prison industrial complex and how it connects to all forms of oppression is a necessary, if overwhelming, step on the way that will empower us to recognise how different struggles connect, and imagine the stages we need to work through, to make prison abolition a reality. I am learning day by day to be able to support people who are in deep pain and to use my 'pain at their pain' as an impetus for action.

What have been your experiences in supporting individuals through the prison industrial complex/criminal justice system or general repression?

I have been totally shocked to see first hand the completely institutionalised

patriarchy within the criminal justice system. I was aware of this before I sat through a high court trial but I had no real understanding of quite how completely fucked it is. Until that trial I had not experienced a friend, a woman, being so systematically abused by a system that presents itself as the means through which women can seek justice against perpetrators of abuse. I felt completely and utterly powerless, silenced, like my arms and legs had been taped together, that I was filling with a rage that knew no limits and had no space to explode into or process to wash out of me. I think I sit with that rage even now. The prosecution used the words 'rape' and 'sex' interchangeably, as though they are the same thing. Evidence of rape was systematically rejected as 'not good enough'. The woman who'd survived several horrific ordeals was branded a 'liar'. I will never forgive those men.

What does prison abolition mean to you personally?

This is such a challenging question for me because as my experiences of doing prisoner solidarity work multiplies my view of how we reach prison abolition morphs and shifts.

My world without prisons would look like a place that values solidarity, that nurtures physical and mental well-being, that resists capitalism and all the oppressions that feed it and are fostered by it. People would practice consent in all their relationships so that good consent would be instinctive rather than the subject of one workshop put on at an anarchist gathering.

For me this world would embrace difference and use creativity to develop collaboration and recognise community self-determination. There

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would be accountability processes that support survivors of violence and recognise the autonomy of perpetrators to change their behaviours.

Where do you place prison abolition in your political worldview?

Prison abolition is central to the world I want to see and sits right in the middle of my political worldview. If resistance to capitalism, ecological devastation and all other forms of oppression becomes more effective it will be increasingly repressed. We need to work on prison abolition now because the prison industrial complex is a horrendous and brutal embodiment of oppression, but also to make space for other struggles to be successful. We need to live prison abolition to develop alternative models for community accountability and to practice the ways in which we want to live in the future.

Can you share any particular highlights/lowlights in your prisoner support work generally.

I think a highlight was when I was told about a moment of resistance by a friend I will be visiting in prison, probably for the next 26 years. She has always prioritised others before herself, putting her own needs last and was raised in a culture that insisted she comply with all demands



made of her. On a visit she told me about an interaction with a guard when she had said no to a demand. She said 'In here I have learnt to answer back'.

What is the role and purpose of the Anarchist Black Cross?

The Anarchist Black Cross was started in Tsarist Russia to organise aid for political prisoners. In the 1960s it resurfaced in Britain and there are active local ABC collectives in a number of different cities internationally.

The Edinburgh group supports people in prison, anarchists or not, by letter-writing, visiting and fund-raising. We also organise and support demonstrations of solidarity for people in prison.

Do you distinguish between political and social prisoners and how does this affect your work?

The more prisoner solidarity work I do the more I hate the distinction that is sometimes made between political and social prisoners. Sometimes I think that people who make the distinction and work with people they might brand political prisoners (incarcerated for their political activism) are making a pragmatic

decision to mobilise solidarity and support from groups that recognise these prisoners as 'one of us'. However, I think this distinction can be extremely damaging to the struggle for prison abolition and can dangerously reproduce the systems of oppression based on rank and power which it is our job as prison abolitionists to smash. As my analysis has shifted I spend more time trying to articulate the argument that all prisoners are political prisoners and I support people in prison no matter why they are there.

Where do you see prison abolition movements heading?

In terms of Edinburgh ABC we will continue to support people in prison through letter writing and visiting, as well as trying to support international ABC groups through fundraising and solidarity. It would be great to see prison abolitionists gathering and figuring out a more coherent strategy for action.

With increasing privatisation of the prison system in Britain we have a big fight on our hands and it will be difficult to avoid slipping into reformist rhetoric along the way. I hope prison abolition movements can retain their radical demands at the same time as making real change happen. As the prison system gets more powerful and less transparent it feels important to me that other struggles incorporate prison abolition analysis into their perspectives and we fight all forms of oppression together. We need to make spaces for people to see these connections and realise their power in this struggle.

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More info about Edinburgh ABC contact: edinburghabc@noflag.org.uk

VISIT

VM9385,
my daughter's prison number.
I clutch my visiting order.

The procedure; we stand in line,
my photo id and proof of address,
index finger print checked.

Belongings in a locker, nothing to be taken in
except the locker key and ten pounds in coins.
No paper hankies, plenty inside.

Guards in dark navy trousers, starched
white shirts, black shiny flat shoes.
Hair short, or tied back.

Her name is called.
Then, the body search, coins placed in a dish
arms out in the crucified position,

no sniffer dogs this time.
Sliding doors open, mechanically programmed,
keys rattle on a chain.

Then, into the huge room, feels like
an airport lounge with a sense of delay
no flights, all grounded.

She emerges from a door,
all smiles
and we hug like never before.

The inmate has the red chair, visitors
have the blue. The inmate has the white mug,
visitors have the blue.

I buy her vegan chocolate, herbal tea,
and we listen and laugh as the hands on the
ever ticking clock move round in circles.

After nearly two hours a guard walks past,
"Ten more minutes."
I shift in my seat, begin to say good-bye.

"Thanks for coming"
"See you next month"
The last words hang in the air.

Her sentence is my sentence.
Loved ones are the silent sufferers.
We are all doing time.

Michele DR
April 2010

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SUPPORTING SAM

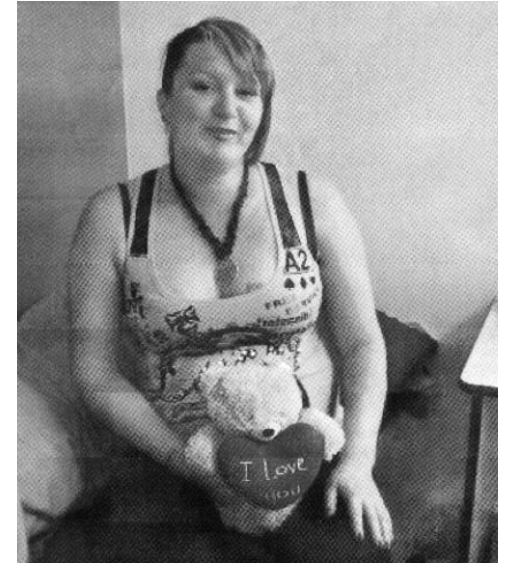
An article about the roller
coaster ride when your best
friend is doing a life sentence
& fighting for appeal.

This article aims to share my experiences
of supporting my best friend in prison over
the last four years. She is a 'social'
prisoner, that is, in the weird world of
radical politics, someone that doesn't
achieve the same global support for being
in prison as those inside for political
organising. However there is no such
thing as a non-political prisoner.

She was sent down for 'life' after being
accused of murdering one of her
closest friends. The police couldn't wait
to prosecute their favourite alcoholic, sex
worker, junkie for an easy conviction. Her
legal-aid solicitors didn't stand a chance
and she has been fighting for an appeal
ever since.

I met her on the first day of my sentence
in the 'sweat box'. She laughed at my
youthfulness, thinking I would be eaten
alive in prison. We were both assigned
to work in the garden, and from day one
became inseparable. Sam is bipolar, and
during our time inside together, she had
the medication she needed. She still had
a hilarious sense of humour and was
often up and down, but nothing like the
coming years ahead. Every day we put
the world to rights, shared our histories,
tears and laughter, and became closer
than most could imagine.

On the day I left, I wept for saying
goodbye, but our journey continued with
me being 'on the out' and her remaining
inside fighting for freedom. This wasn't



the first time I had supported a loved one
in jail, but for some reason it felt different.
She had no one else on the outside, she
didn't really have anyone else inside and
so 'the weight' was felt in a different way.

Its hard to explain what it's like. It's like
the feeling of constantly watching the
phone waiting for her call, or racing
through traffic to make sure I get to the
landline. Its like a scream of frustration
when you miss the phone, and a deep
sense of a relief when you open a letter
and hear she's ok.

The visits are the worst. They never get
easier. Time and time again the screws
talk to you like shit, and bellow at you
when you've hugged for 'too long'. We're
nearly always on the observation
tables, so the officers are never far away.
The visits booking line is potentially the
biggest stress trigger ever! Being on hold
for sometimes over an hour at a time,
and then getting told the visits are full, or

the VO number isn't right, or despite the fact I've had a double visit a million times before 'the prison doesn't do it'.

For me, I leave home between 7-8am, to make it in time for an afternoon visit, and I get home around 10 – 11pm. The trains are too expensive so I take a bus or drive to the coach station, and scramble for sofas or mate's floors to put me up in-between.

I costed it out for 4 months and worked out that I spend about £400 a month, at least. The cost of the travel every week, the money on the visit for a drink & snacks, the cost of coffees or food when I'm on the go and need somewhere warm and dry to wait. The monthly postal order and stamps, so I can hear her voice every day and know that she doesn't have to go without. Before they were banned I would also buy books, CDs and clothes, at least every three months for her 'prop exchange'. She would never ask for a thing, and will never tell me when she's struggling, but because I know how it is inside I will always do it anyway. Anything I can possibly do to take the weight and make her smile.

Because I'm not on benefits, and she is not a 'political prisoner', there is no financial support available. I work three jobs at the moment and never say no to work for fear of not having enough to support her. She doesn't know my real financial situation because I know it would destroy her thinking I was working all hours under the sun for her.

In October 2012, she was moved to another prison, separating her from her long-term girlfriend (and only other source of emotional support) and putting her in a drug-filled, corrupt jail full of short-termers and young offenders. Not long

"Its like a scream of frustration when you miss the phone, and a deep sense of a relief when you open a letter and hear she's ok."

after her transfer, the healthcare department told her she wasn't bipolar and that she didn't need medication (despite 40 years of medical opinion saying the opposite). Over night her mental health deteriorated fast. With bipolar you have the highs, the manic stages, where you can be silly and funny, but also be manic, unable to sleep, bouncing off the walls. With it you have the lows, the depressed vacuum and spiral of despair.

Despite numerous complaints and advocacy from a mental health team, the prison forcibly withdrew her medication over a short period because of its 'tradeability' and her new diagnosis of a personality disorder, which 'didn't need medicating'. Soon she would be the lowest I'd ever seen her. Suicidal thoughts crept in, when she had always been able to cope with jail and keep going until her appeal.

At the end of October, she tried to kill herself. She had saved up the remaining meds she had and traded with others to attempt an overdose.

The same day I was traveling to London, with a heavy heart worried about her mental health. I was processed through visits and sat in the visiting hall waiting for her to walk in. Every other visitor was with their prisoner and I sat and waited and waited. I watched as a small group of officers started to talk in a separate room. I was invited in. "Ms Faulder is in hospital and we will have to terminate your visit."

"She is the strongest person I have ever met in my life, but the prison system has a way of breaking spirits. It is a slow war of attrition, the degradation of hope, the extraction of resources and denial of nourishment."

I asked, "Is she alive?"

"We cannot disclose that information". I pleaded with them, as her next of kin, to tell me what had happened. They refused and escorted me to the exit. The whole day I was sick with fear thinking she was dead. Six hours later I received a call from an officer telling me what had happened, and that she was alive.

When she was out of hospital I came to visit her and held her in my arms. Ever since, she has battled with suicidal thoughts, and every day I still sit with an anxiety in my chest that she may not be alive. Sometimes its hard to breathe in and out.

With her mental health deteriorating so badly, and all attempts at accessing medication prevented by the prison, I encouraged Sam to self medicate, and do what she could to stay alive and keep the suicidal thoughts at bay. So despite not using drugs for over 5 years, she is now begging and borrowing for what she can.

Eight months later I see another unknown number on my phone. Sam is in hospital again, following a second overdose attempt. I scream in distress as a wave of guilt rushes over me, having sent money to various people so they could swing meds her way. A friend comforts my sobbing and reassures me

its not my fault. I would still have never forgiven myself if she had died.

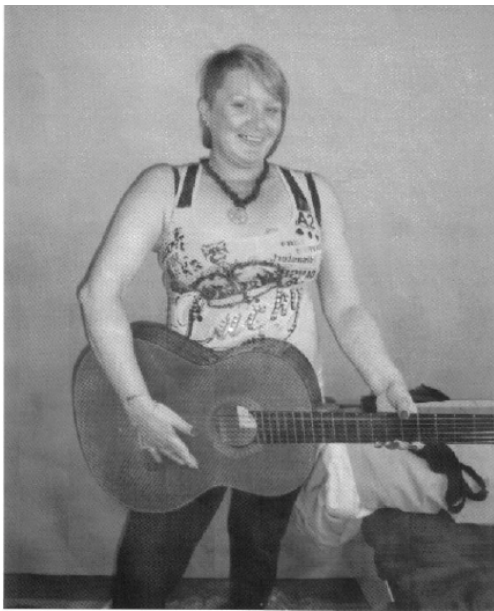
A few months later again, I hear her weary voice on the end of the phone. She has found out her partner of 4.5 years has been having an affair with another woman. I can feel the heartbreak in her voice. And so the next few months, fighting clinical depression and bipolar, it's my weekly visits that keep her alive.

She is the strongest person I have ever met in my life, but the prison system has a way of breaking spirits. It is a slow war of attrition, the degradation of hope, the extraction of resources and denial of nourishment.

Finally, one year after being in this new prison, she loses it. She 'kicks off'. She can no longer tolerate the abusive behaviour from staff, the lies, the corruption, the unending legal process that never delivers justice. She watches the screws bully a young girl on her wing and she flips. She fights back, throws fists and chairs. Barricades her self in a room. Six officers beat her and then drag her to segregation.

She spent nearly two months in isolation, listening to her best friend get beaten in a 'British prison where this never happens'. She starts to put cigarettes out on herself. I visit and see a large red bump on the side of her face. She won't say what happened, until she finally admits she has been banging it against the wall. My beautiful Sam now black and blue.

Its the powerlessness that tears you apart. The calls to the Governor that never get answered. The institutional abuse that you can't see and can't change from the outside. All I can do is be there. Be constant. The flowers, cards, letters, visits



can only go so far. I know she has gone to depths I cannot imagine and that she barely shares because, like me, she fears burdening anyone.

After lots of listening, and crying, and more listening, she knows deep down on 'main block' she is safer and 'happier'. She starts to interact with people again on her landing and I breathe a sigh of relief that she is no longer 'in seg'.

In the summer last year I had planned a trip away, 10 days in Europe going to a music festival and camping with friends. About a month before I could feel anxiety rise in my chest again, an unsettled feeling not sure if I can go or not. It builds and builds. Three days before I'm meant to go, I visit Sam. I burst into tears and say I'm too worried to go. She bursts into tears in relief. I stay in England and visit her as much as I can instead.

A part of me closes that door to travel and adventure. To turning off my phone and forgetting my responsibilities. This year

I left the country for four days, I saw her either side and just about managed it, but the subconscious worry was unreal.

The hardest part is the loneliness. Like having a secret inside of you that no one knows. A chronic layer of stress just right under the surface, triggered whenever you miss a call, or when the visits hall is full. Every beautiful moment you see, whether a sunset or a ladybird on a leaf, you ache for them. All you can do is ache.

I work hard, not just for the money, but to forget. To repress. Busy-ness takes the pain away of feeling the separation. Sometimes you will meet someone that understands. It might be the person next to you in the visits queue, or a friend who grew up with a loved one inside. Finally there is no need to explain.

I have met a lot of friends and families of prisoners, and these experiences are not unique. The challenges of bipolar however, of keeping the hope alive for an appeal of a life sentence, and finally just missing someone you love so much, makes the experience a rollercoaster.

I would never change a thing though (other than Sam's situation of course). I have a friendship deeper than I ever believed possible, a heart full and heavy with love. She is there for me so much too, listening and caring and believing in me. I know she is a constant in my life, and I am in hers.

We are still working on her case, fighting for legal aid, and have finally found a half-decent firm willing to put the work in, but more solidarity and support is always welcome. For more information about Sam's case visit www.freedomforsam.org

Until All are Free

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CLOSE DOWN ALL MIGRATION PRISONS

This article shares what it can be like supporting human beings held in detention centres.

It feels like it takes years to finally be in front of the person you want to visit in the detention center. When one door opens, another one closes. There are so many security doors to go through to be able to finally reach the visiting room.

When one door closes you get a sense of how it must feel when the freedom of leaving the building is taken away. Our freedom, our lovely freedom, is stolen from us. We are then completely dependent on the security officers for letting us in and out. After four years of being a visitor detainee, I never got used to this sense of losing my freedom.

But I was a visitor. I was free to leave whenever I wanted.

Each time I left that horrible building, all I wanted to do was to take all the people that were detained away with me and burn the whole place! I was so angry every time I left that migration prison.

There were so many people behind bars, behind those locked doors. I could do little to get them away from that horrible place. So much rage and frustration grew inside of me.

I have heard so many people say that migration prisons are not really prisons. From what I witnessed they are worse. In migration prisons you can be held

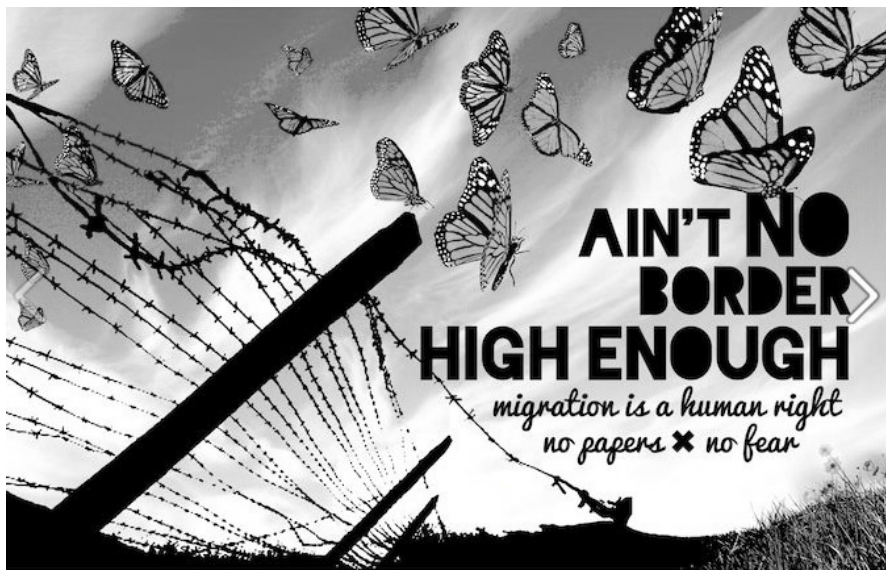
indefinitely. Children and babies can be detained. Whole families can be detained, just because they want to relocate to a place where they are not from. The only 'crime' these people have committed is to think that they deserve a better life away from their homeland.

The sad reality is that many people in the detention centers do not know the reason why they are locked up. Many have little money and support, and speak little English. Many have a lack of knowledge about migration laws, this coupled with social and political isolation, means that many do not know they can apply for bail.

Even if migrants do apply for bail it is often, if not always denied. Many are not allowed to leave those migration centers. And many face a terrible future and possibly death if they are deported back. They are punished for wanting a better life. This punishment serves as a constant reminder of the horrible future they face.

Detainees often wonder why they are





locked up. All they wanted was to find a safe place, a sanctuary, a better place to live, a warm and welcoming place to stay. They thought Britain was that place. Rather than finding a safe, better place, they find themselves locked up. Many of them were at their new homes, when the UKBA officers took them away in the early hours of the morning.

All of this, impacts upon a detainee's mental health. After a few days in the detention center, those that come in with no previous mental health problems, develop anxiety, depression, and feel hopeless.

Many detainees have been in prison before. They have been tortured, raped, or witnessed loved ones being killed, raped or tortured. Many feel so despairing that they try to kill themselves

“Many feel so despairing that they try to kill themselves or self harm to cope with the situation”

or self harm to cope with the situation. Healthcare is non-existent in the detention centers. Hospital appointments are almost impossible. Detainees are just given paracetamol to heal almost everything! As if these tablets have the magic to take away the symptoms of depression, the trauma of being tortured or raped, the frustration and anger of being locked up.

Most of the detention centers are run by private security companies. All they care to do is make profit. The majority of the staff are racist, they do not treat any detainees with respect or dignity. They don't even see detainees as human beings. And so they think that can treat detainees how they want.

Many of the women detainees have been raped. Most of the staff of the detention centers are men. Some women state they have been raped inside the prisons, but none of these complaints are taken seriously. After all, making a complaint like this is seen as a way 'to stay in the country.' No complaint, whether it be

“Each time I visited someone in a detention centre my hate for migration prisons grew”

about sexual abuse or mental health or anything is taken seriously.

The people detained expect to have their complaints taken seriously, a place to stay, a dignified life. If anyone does make a complaint, start rioting, or go on hunger strike, then the possibility of deportation grows. If they do not speak nicely to the Home Office officers that deal with their cases, then the possibility to stay in Britain is completely denied.

As many of the migration prisons are run by private security companies, the Home Office takes no responsibility over what happens inside, what happens to the detainees, and what happens to them should they be deported.

Each time I visited someone in a detention center my hate for migration prisons grew. My love from freedom, for the freedom of movement, for No Borders, pushed me to hate any place that allows

anyone to be locked up because of where they are from, for who they are, or what they have done.

Many people may say that some of these people in migration prisons are not 'genuine asylum seekers,' are 'economic migrants,' 'their stories are not true,' they are 'illegal.'

Who cares about bloody labels or reasons for locking anyone up? Freedom is the most precious thing that any human being has. And we are all human beings regardless of where we are from.

All I would like to say to these people is: We are all human beings and we should have the right to stay wherever we want. After all, the planet earth belongs to all of us, right?

No to all migrations prisons! For a world without nationalities, nations and borders!

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For more information:

www.noborders.org.uk
www.stopdeportations.wordpress.com
<https://network23.org/antiraids>



SUPPORTING A FRIEND, SUPPORTING A COMRADE

A text about organising a support campaign for those experiencing repression.

It was on the 17th of April of 2014 when our friend and comrade Debbie Vincent was sentenced to 6 years in prison. It had been 11 weeks since the trial started and 7 years since she was arrested. It was a blow to all of us.

The prosecution should have felt a bitter sweet victory due to the fact that the only thing they achieved was the unity of our movement. They were and still are very emotive months; the State sent another comrade to prison, that's the only way they know to stop something now unstoppable.

They took her away from us but we restored the confidence in ourselves. Confidence that solidarity is a weapon they cannot fight. She left surrounded by friends, loved ones and comrades and this is the same way we shall receive her when she is released.

However, to start such a big campaign is not easy. It was a moment when the Animal Rights movement was weak, so Bristol Anarchist Black Cross along with Bristol Animal Rights Collective, decided to take over this campaign against this farce-trial in order to resist against all kinds of repression.

It was not difficult to raise enough money thanks to all the people who organized gigs and info-nights, made t-shirts, or gave donations to help us with our commitment.



With this money we were able to finance all the travel costs our friend needed to work with the solicitors, attend court and access accommodation. The money also helped us to make the posters, t-shirts, leaflets or further finance she would need in prison and everybody's travel costs to see and support Debbie in court. That is what it's all about, making the defendants feel supported, so that they can see that there is plenty of people behind them and that no one will turn their back on them. That's why support from the smallest to the biggest campaigns is vital.

The contact with the other defendants, Natasha and Sven, was not easy as they both are in Holland waiting to be extradited, so the emotional support they received from Bristol wasn't that big, although we have met them in person more than once and we try to keep

“During these months.. so many solidarity actions have been made... All of this showed us that either Debbie or us were not alone. It showed us that there are more people against exploitation and willing to fight back against the system”

regular contact via letters, emails, visits etc.

Being in touch with the defendants is very important to check how they feel and how they want to get involved in the campaign.

The support in the street is as important as the personal because overall, they are friends and they are comrades.

The national and international response was great. During these months we have received numerous statements and so many solidarity actions have been made. World-wide demos, actions, talks, information... All this showed us that either Debbie or us were not alone, it showed that there are more people against the exploitation and willing to fight back against the system.

All this was thanks to an effective information campaign, something necessary when we seek people's engagement. People supported the campaign with hands and claws, filling the empty space of little support in England experienced by past defendants, with real solidarity.

After raising awareness, establishing the



base of the campaign and so forth, the trial started. Long weeks where people from all over the country came to go through the courts doors along with Debbie, head up and proud, more than ever, of what we are.

Chats, games and plenty of emotions emerged those days in the corridors of Winchester's court. A black solidarity tide surrounded by pathetic robots with gowns and hairpieces. Weeks passed and we created links that never will be forgotten. ABC organized the schedule every week to arrange the travels to Winchester for those ones who would want to see and support Debbie.

The day of the sentence, 18th March, the supporters of Huntingdon Life Sciences celebrated the fact that a person was going to prison. What can you expect from those who make wealth from others suffering and misery?

One month after, on the 17th of April, the judge sentenced how many years Debbie would spend behind those walls. Many people came to the court. The farewell was short but emotive and whereas some people went inside the court to be next to her, others made a protest in the door of the court. The cops couldn't miss such an event and they poked their noses to create not more than annoyance. When we all had the news from the court of 6 years of sentence, sadness came over us but we knew that we would not be alone in the court anymore.

What happened during Debbie's trial is something that we didn't see in England in recent times. It was a successful campaign, which could have been run better or worse, but it has been a turning point. The will and commitment of the people to support Debbie and all those ones who we have been working with and are still working are amazing.

The campaign is still alive, and we don't forget Debbie, Natasha and Sven. We don't forget the comrades from SOCPA7 case, a new attempt of stopping people from fighting for the total end of the animal exploitation.

Love, respect and liberation to everyone who participated in any way in the support campaign. See you soon,

Bristol ABC

...

For more information:
www.blackmail3.org

Write to Debbie:
 Debbie Vincent #A5819DE
 HMP Bronzefield
 Woodthorpe Road
 Ashford, Middlesex
 TW15 3JZ

PRISONERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

Introducing the Free Alabama Movement and prisoner organising in the United States.

For many in the anarchist movement, prisoner's rights and the abolition of prisons are vital issues. Many have realised that prisons serve the interests of the state and the bosses, and they use them as a means to eliminate dissent.

It is also a fact that unions and organised workers have also been on the wrong side of the law throughout their history and have been imprisoned, terrorised and murdered by the state for the simple offence of organising the working class for a better life.

Because of the threat of prison to deter activists and trade unionists from taking direct action against it, organisation in prisons and support for prisoners is vital to our movement, in order to make the threat of prison seem less daunting.

In April 2014, the Industrial Workers of the World were approached by a group of hundreds of people currently incarcerated in Alabama who were launching a prison strike to demand an end to slave labour, overcrowding and horrifying health and human rights violations found in Prisons throughout Alabama, and the passage of legislation they have drafted.

This was actually the second non-violent protest initiated by the folks of the Free Alabama Movement. This year the group was building on the recent Hunger Strikes in Pelican Bay and the Georgia Prison Strike in 2010.

Their aim was to build a mass movement inside and outside of prisons to earn their freedom, and to put an end to the racist, capitalist system of mass incarceration otherwise referred to as 'The New Jim Crow'. The Free Alabama Movement have waged and continue to wage non-violent and peaceful actions for their rights as workers and human beings.

The conditions in Alabama prisons have

"Their aim was to build a mass movement inside and outside of prisons to earn their freedom, and to put an end to the racist, capitalist system of mass incarceration otherwise referred to as 'The New Jim Crow'."



Pictures from some of the diverse solidarity actions that took place worldwide.



been disgusting. Examples include packing 32,000 inmates into a facility with a 16,000 capacity. Such accommodations also include many luxurious features ranging from black mould, brown water, cancer causing foods and insect infestations. They are also run by free, slave labour, with tens of thousands more receiving only pennies a day making products for the state or private corporations.

In response, the Free Alabama Movement drafted a comprehensive "Freedom Bill" (Alabama's Education, Rehabilitation, and Re-entry Preparedness Bill) which aimed to put an end to these horrors and create a much reduced correctional system actually intended to achieve rehabilitation and also to rid the place of its blatant racism.

To many this may seem to be an isolated struggle but in reality, the struggle that these incarcerated workers are fighting mirrors the same trials and life-long struggles that the millions of black, brown, and working class folk have been engaging with in order to survive. This is a system whose rules have been designed so that there can be no success.

This struggle will continue to be fought



Left: Melvin Ray, one of the organisers for the Free Alabama Movement



until all oppression ends!

The Free Alabama Movement in partnership with the IWW's Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee have now begun to spread the message to various IWW groups throughout the world. We hope to continue what will hopefully be a new union movement within prisons.

...

For more information:

www.freealabamamovement.com
www.iww.org/content/solidarity-incarcerated-workers-free-alabama-movement

FREEDOM FOR OUR MATE, FREEDOM FOR EVERYONE

An article about what happens when your mates get snatched by the UK Border Agency.

I work with a small and fairly close-knit group of asylum seekers and their allies to campaign for dignity and fair treatment for asylum seekers and offer practical support as they navigate the asylum process. We are a voluntary group that has been gradually growing in numbers and strength over the last few years.

This article is about my recent experiences as an ally of supporting people who were detained and threatened with deportation. It does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the whole group.

During this summer, two members of our group in rapid succession were detained while signing on with the UK Border Agency (UKBA) at the local police station (something all asylum seekers and

migrants are required to do on a weekly or monthly basis until their cases are processed). For both people, we were able to get legal representation for them and mount public campaigns for their release. This was the first time I had ever been so closely involved in this type of work, and was a very steep – and inspiring – learning curve.

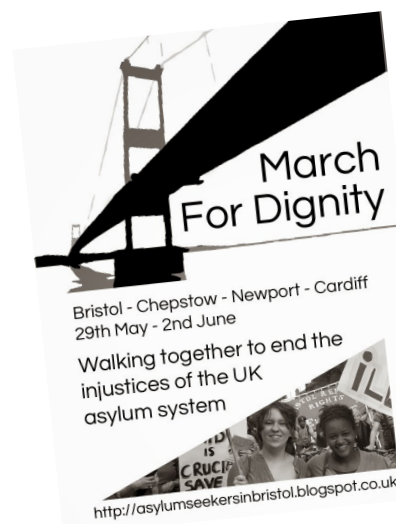
Suddenly one of the crew isn't there any more

My initial reaction to someone being detained was physical shock. I go with people to sign at the police station reasonably regularly, and it's pretty unusual to witness a detention. When you do, you come up very directly against the unfairness of the system and our powerlessness against certain parts of state power.

But it's not practical to stay in shock mode for long because there are things to do, like contacting the person's solicitor (if they have one) and friends, trying to find out from UKBA why they have been detained and where they are being taken, and picking up any belongings they want from their home.

In these recent cases, the detained people had friends and supporters who arrived at the police station very soon after the detention, so there was a little posse there for most of the morning.

If an asylum seeker has been in accommodation provided by the Home Office, they lose that home when they



are detained and their room is given to someone else. This means an immediate task is to get all their possessions and find somewhere to put them. Packing up somebody else's room, who you're not very close to and are now unsure whether you'll ever see again, is a pretty weird experience. Then it's a race to get back to the police station with any stuff you think they might need in detention before they are taken away.

Our group's relationship with the local police and UKBA staff is patchy: there have been times when supporters have been able to visit detainees in police custody, but the best response I have ever received was being allowed to hand over possessions and messages of support rapidly scrawled outside the police station.

Once we've done everything we can at the police station and on the phone, it's a case of staying in touch with the detained person and their legal representative, and, if you have the energy and the person wants it, mounting a public campaign to support them.

Although my experiences of trying to support someone practically and emotionally while in detention and campaigning on their behalf have been intimately linked, I'm not going to write about the legal details here; suffice to say that legislation is unfair, legal aid is severely limited, and solicitors who do a good job are always overstretched. For a really good rundown on what campaigning with people in detention can look like, check out <http://righttoremain.org.uk/>

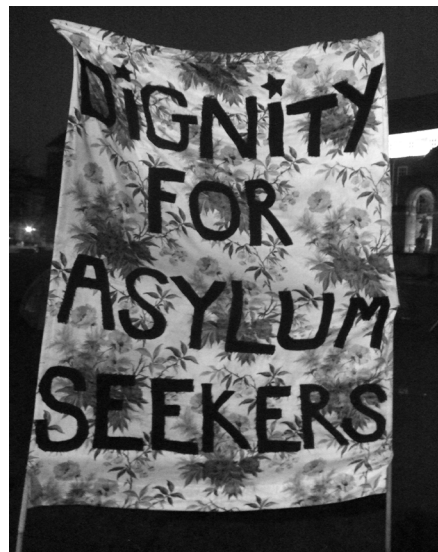
Freedom for our mate, freedom for everyone

Making the decision as a group to offer to

“A lot of the members of our group have been in detention, or live in fear of it, and they feel a strong compulsion not to let their friends go through the same thing alone.”

campaign on someone's behalf feels like a powerful thing to do before you've even started. A lot of the members of our group have been in detention, or live in fear of it, and they feel a strong compulsion not to let their friends go through the same thing alone.

Our meetings can be long, because they involve translation, or speaking so that non-native English speakers can understand; but they are underpinned by a feeling of strength and solidarity that you don't see enough in campaign groups. I realised in this process that sitting in a circle in the park until late at night, until you have finally finished your conversation, is a good use of time because it makes the group feel stronger and more cohesive and the people more engaged.



As a supporter (specifically, a native English speaker with the time, skills and computer access that mean I can do a lot of the necessary work, and the privilege of never having been a refugee) these times are especially important to keep it real.

A lot of the very 'visible' work of creating petitions and talking to solicitors is more easily done by supporters, but other people in the group have common language and experiences that make it possible to campaign from a position of understanding and solidarity.

If the group, and the wider movement for justice, is to get stronger, we need to be working closely together and hearing each other's stories.

Further, the long discussions we have are vital to build trust so we can work together in the future. I'm dreading the next time somebody is detained, but I do think we have learnt a lot recently as a group, both about what needs to be done in these situations and how best to work together and make use of everyone's different skills.

Campaigning on behalf of someone else is always difficult and relies on good

communication with the person; when that person is in detention, and English isn't their first language, it becomes more difficult.

Detention centres are unlike prisons in that inmates can have a mobile phone (as long as it doesn't have a camera) and limited internet access. But if you don't share a language with the person it becomes more difficult, and knowing that all phone conversations are probably listened to further limits what you feel able to say. Visiting the person in detention is the best way to plan campaigns and write any necessary documents, but this takes time and money.

Some of the campaign activities we undertook were things that I had never done before and, as an anarchist, had misgivings about, such as petitioning our local MP to ask the Home Office to release our friends. But sometimes, short of a jailbreak, you have no choice but to work within the structures that restrict our freedom, and still manage to retain your humanity. We set up petitions on 38 degrees, phoned the local MP's office, wrote blog posts, fundraised for legal fees online and took to the streets with a ramshackle drum band, petitions and free biscuits for anyone who talked to us.

When our second friend was detained, the support group was variously out of town, burnt out or fasting for Ramadan. This meant there were very few people able to take on all the work of supporting him. Aside from discovering the limits of my capacity, a big lesson for me was that legal support, emotional support and campaign co-ordinating are best kept as separate roles.

But it raised a bigger question for all of us – how much can we keep doing this, and what level of support can we offer people in our group who get detained? We know the asylum system is horribly unfair and everybody who is going through it deserves all the support they can get – but the level of support somebody gets is very much dependent on our collective capacity at the arbitrary time of their detention. And we work with a bunch of people who could be detained at any time.

We don't have an answer to this, but my personal feeling is that we need to get more skilled up and organised, and look after all of our mental health, so that we are able to offer each other the best support possible.

Another thing I learnt through this process is that campaigning works: both these people had their deportation orders cancelled – in one case, when he was at the airport with four hours to go before he was put on the plane. Neither of these people have refugee status in the UK yet and one is still in detention, but they both have a chance they wouldn't have had if nobody had worked with them.

After the drama of stopping a deportation, ongoing support is difficult. One of our friends is in temporary Home Office accommodation in another town,

“We need to get more skilled up and organised, and look after all of our mental health, so that we are able to offer each other the best support possible.”

waiting to see whether he gets rehoused back in our area or elsewhere, and the other is in detention a 3-hour drive away.

We stay in touch by phone and offer what support we can with visits and communication with solicitors, but it isn't the same as meeting in the park. Learning how best to support people through these processes, and how to dismantle the system that imposes them, is a long-term task, but it's one that we can do together.

...

For more information:

www.asylumseekersinbristol.blogspot.co.uk
www.righttoremain.org.uk

HOW TO SPOT AN IMMIGRATION RAID

ANTI-RAIDS NETWORK
network23.org/antiraid
antiraid@riseup.net
twitter.com/antiraid



HOW DO THEY ARRIVE?
In vans marked **IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT** or unmarked white, blue or black vans. Sometimes accompanied by a police car.

WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE?
Officers should be wearing UKBA insignia and numbers on their shoulders but they often hide them.



WHERE DO THEY GO?
Streets, train and tube stations. Buses.
Workplaces: shops, restaurants, markets. Homes.

HOW DO THEY ACT?
They come in a group, sometimes accompanied by plain clothes officers.
They often block entrances and exits.



WHEN YOUR BROTHER GETS SENT DOWN

The confusion, anger & upset when a close family member becomes imprisoned.

Me, my boyfriend and our mate went up to north Wales last year, I was going to say goodbye to my brother who was probably going to jail for a max of 8 years. The lads were driving up to this rave in Barmouth, on the way up we got hassled by the cops and had to sleep on a beach on a cold Welsh summer's night. After the eventful journey up, I phoned my Dad, or my Aunt, I can't remember who, and asked where my brother was. He'd already been remanded.

I started crying, we were in a take away. I went outside and started wondering what to do. I was angry that no one from my family had bothered to tell me anything about this. I had come up from Cardiff to see him, I was pissed off that we couldn't say goodbye before he went inside. I was used to arrests, and having the police in my life but prison was something new to the family.

Apparently he was remanded for breaching bail conditions. My cousin's car had broken down near the village he was not allowed to enter, my brother helped him push the car to the garage and the garage phoned the cops. The shop next door to the garage was the one that he had robbed almost a year before. He supposedly went in with a machete and robbed £200 and a load of cigarettes.

Confused, angry, upset after I heard of

the robbery (I broke down when I heard, this was a long time coming as he was always getting into trouble). I realised that we had been used to people threatening each other with knives at our house, for people to get their own way...

I guess for a lad that had felt that was normal in family life it explains why he thought it was ok to do that to a cashier in a nearby village. Not that I'm making excuses or that my opinion on what he did matters.

He had been taken to HMP Altcourse, luckily at the time I had a way to get from Cardiff to Liverpool for free. It was the week of the G8 protests in London (2013). The week I was able to visit him I went from Cardiff to London to Cardiff to Liverpool to London to Cardiff in the space of a few days. During this time the cops raided the house where I grew up and they used a helicopter to take aerial photos of the place my dad and uncle used to farm.

I went back up to north Wales for my brother's big court date. My mother was not well at all; she has severe mental health problems and has suffered hospitalisation and domestic abuse as long as I can remember. She was also a perpetrator of abuse so trying to support her at times is really difficult, almost impossible as everything you do seems to make her worse. She flipped at me quite a lot during this time; she was obviously stressed and upset at the situation.

Nevertheless I tried to support her. She



was an ageing, ill woman, physically and mentally, but it was difficult to stay restrained when she lost control and got abusive. The worst day was my brother's big court date, understandably. That day the older lad that got my brother into the shit he was in came up to me and my boyfriend as we had looked at him in the 'wrong' way.

I had argued with him on Facebook about something else to do with my brother. He threatened to smash my head into the pavement outside the court building in Caernarfon, and threatened to get his girlfriend to beat me up. I just shouted back at him, got right up in his face then and went back inside to the court building before I did something I'd regret.

My Mum and me didn't get a chance to see my brother in court, I can't remember why. Maybe because he pleaded guilty (a last minute change, apparently they had a recording of some sort - he never explained) or perhaps because he didn't want us there, I can't remember.

He got 5 years in prison and got sent to HMP Stoke Heath, as he was under 21. I tried to help him with an appeal; he was a little panicky on the phone at the beginning. He had settled into Altcourse so moving prison was disorientating. The

solicitor was a total dick and wouldn't speak to Rhodri or me about an appeal at all. The reasons he gave for not speaking to me about an appeal is because apparently my Dad made death threats to the solicitor on the phone, something he denies (the death threats were aimed at this older lad who got my brother into trouble, my Dad said).

Trying to think of something positive I could do I decided I would send him lots of postcards. We never had much to say to each other when we were grown up, at least with a postcard he can see I'm thinking of him without the pressure of writing lots like in a letter. He thought some were funny; he especially liked the prison hooch card I sent him at Christmas I bought off Brighton ABC. I visit him now and again, send him bits of money when I can here and there and we wrote letters to each other. Indeed we had a better relationship when he was inside than we had had for years.

That changed around March. He had told me that he wasn't allowed to watch S4C (the Welsh language channel) in Stoke Heath. Suspected it had something to do with prisoners losing their privileges such as TV channels and S4C being one that had been culled. I wrote letters about this to the relevant people, the Welsh Language

“Everyone copes in their own way and it’s important to try and understand.”

Commissioner and NOMS.

I got the opportunity to do research into the Welsh language and prison as part of my uni course. I sent my brother a questionnaire to fill in about this and he hasn’t spoken to me since.

I was really worried that I got him into trouble by sending him this, although when I had asked him in the past about being careful about what I sent him he said it was all fine, even “dodgy” anarchist postcards and leaflets. I kept on sending postcards and writing letters, although I haven’t had the money to visit him.

The next step is to visit him in prison, I’ve saved some money for it now, I just need the time, as it’s something that takes all day. I feel like I’ve made a few mistakes trying to support my brother in jail, but hopefully I can learn from them and maybe you can too in reading this. An

eye for an eye and we would all be blind – it’s hard not reacting to what happened, to my mother and father and my brother for all the fuck ups along the way.

My Mum visits him often-ish. My Dad has but is banned from the prison at the moment as he threatened to throw a chair out of the window when the screws wouldn’t let him see my brother when he arrived late. Everyone copes in their own way and it’s important to try and understand.

I hope my brother’s alright in there, he gets fed shit and is exploited with the shitty prison work – but on the upside it sounds like he has good mates in there, prison was his first time away from home and he said he likes living with his friends. Could be a brave face, he could be becoming institutionalised to that place... who knows what effect it will have on him... I hope knowing that we’re thinking of him on the outside will help somehow.

...

DEFENDANT SOLIDARITY IN BRISTOL

This article reflects on the experiences of Bristol Defendant Solidarity, that support people facing the system in the South West.

Bristol Defendant Solidarity (BDS) started shortly after the riots in Stokes Croft, Bristol, in April 2011. Leading up to the riots there had been lots of action and community opposition to the opening of a new Tesco’s in Stokes Croft which the media focused on as the cause of the riots. A straw poll during the riot would no doubt have revealed a variety of motivations for being on the street, though the botched eviction of a squat, “Telepathic Heights”, was the catalyst.

People were also rightly frustrated with business as usual... and so some stuff went down, (corporate) shop windows were smashed, hundreds of people were in the street, burning barricades and some people got arrested. A small portion were arrested and charged with a variety of offences relating to the ‘disturbances’. BDS came about for a multitude of reasons, but for me I didn’t want people to have to face the repression of the state alone.

While the riot was not all about the Tesco’s, the democratic process was revealed as a sham as most of the local residents didn’t want the Tesco’s in Stokes Croft. People had organised in a variety of ways to oppose it: community meetings, protests, squats and direct action. This was all ignored by the council keen to see the further

expansion of this big corporation, part of the big and messed up food industry in the UK that takes food sovereignty out of people’s hands.

The deck was stacked against those who were arrested, they were vilified by the mainstream media and a rogues gallery was published by the police. In response a “Don’t snitch” poster was fly posted and helpfully reprinted by the national press. Personally, I wanted to do what I could to let these rebels know that they weren’t going to face the situation alone. (1)

So we began to track people down. This seemed quite daunting as it was hard to know where to begin but gradually we managed to find a lot of the defendants. Often you find yourself saying, “We’re not professionals, but we’re here to help.”

Gradually we started meeting people who faced charges following the riots and formed relationships with them to support them through the legal process. Courts are a pretty alienating experience, and it often seems like they are speaking another language. Unfortunately this is how they decide what’s going to happen to you so it was really useful to be able to help prepare people for court, go through their options and help them to understand the next steps.

“I didn’t want people to have to face the repression of the state alone.”





There can be a lot of big decisions to make and the overall process is really stressful. So stressful that some people end up ignoring it because it's too much to cope with on their own. It was important to try to figure out ways to help people make good decisions about pleading guilty or not guilty, go through legal papers, do research and help them to remember everything their solicitor may have said.

Solicitors are always really "busy" and some are better than others. Sometimes it's good if you can support the defendant by pushing for stuff to be done on their case, bail conditions challenged, going through legal papers, and looking for holes in the argument against them.(2)

Tea and cake also can do wonders to make working through hundreds of pages of police statements easier. To be honest, I always envision courts as being a bit of a conveyor belt to a big

people eater... so it's best not to be on it at all, and if someone is, to pull them off as fast as you can.

Arrest and months of uncertainty about the future can lead to some post traumatic stress and so it's really important to make sure that people have support with that. There are activist groups that specialise with that and the better an individual's mental health the more resilient they are in general.

A lot of the defendants fought their cases and we worked through that with them. A lot of people who were arrested weren't explicitly anarchist, but unlucky youth who may or may not have engaged with making trouble in the streets. They were willing to rebel and push boundaries...

Some of the people arrested after the riots got off, but not everyone, unfortunately. Some people had really supportive families and friends, whereas

others were really on their own and for some the stress was overwhelming. Once you get to know someone it's hard to break off the relationship that you've formed with them. If people got sent to prison we tried to ensure that they had at least one person writing to them and checked in on how they were doing.

Prison abolition... I've always seen prisons as part of the capitalist system's way of managing people by locking up people that don't fit into 'mainstream' society. Prisons are full of people who are "disadvantaged". People who have mental health issues, had precarious housing and work, lower educational attainment, people of colour are over represented and so on. I also perceive prisons as sites of abuse that leave people traumatised, less able to cope, less able to be an active member of their community and home sick.(3)

As capitalism tries to tighten it's grip on our lives more people will be incarcerated, conditions inside prison will worsen, and legal aid is being cut so it's harder for us poor people to actually mount a defense. Yikes!

Since it's beginning BDS has supported lots of people and we're looking to broaden and reach out of the circles that we've traditionally worked in. We've worked with a lot of "activists" and I find it important to support them through the legal process, because the world is messed up and I want to see people keep fighting to change it. I also want to work more with other people who are over represented in the prison system and lots of whom face discrimination more regularly and systematically – reach across boundaries.

I can't think of a great way to conclude, because I feel like there's so much more

to be done... but I often find inspiration in Assata Shakur and particularly this part of her poem 'I believe in living':

I have been locked by the lawless.
Handcuffed by the haters.
Gagged by the greedy.
And, if i know anything at all,
it's that a wall is just a wall
and nothing more at all.
It can be broken down.

...

For more information:
www.bristolabc.wordpress.com/defendant-solidarity

(1) I have total respect for those who chose to not recognise the legitimacy of the courts, but I also want to support people to manage the legal situation as they see fit (obviously snitching and cooperating with the cops isn't on).

(2) In court the word of the police is always believed above just about anyone else. Clearly we know that police lie and fudge the truth... this is 'frustrating'. As it stands you have to figure out how to work around it – catch them out and keep poking holes in their argument...

(3) If someone has done something messed up, damaging and hurtful the perpetrator is locked away and temporarily erased from society and the wishes and feelings of the survivor are ignored and all agency taken away from them by the paternalistic state. Thanks superman!

THIS IS NOT ME

Written by a
prisoner's wife,
from Inside Time
Issue September
2014.



When you see the words 'prison' or 'prisoner' in the paper, you conjure up images of naughty evil men, purposefully hurting, abusing or stealing from others. You see barbed wire, cold stone and small cells. Or perhaps you see young boys sat in front of tellies avoiding finding work and living an easy life?

Look past those images, look towards the prison gate. Or look into the waiting room of the prison, or the waiting cars in the car parks. See that girl, late twenties, dark hair and holding onto two small children?

Can you see the dark circles under her eyes? Can you see her exhaustion? Can you even see the way that the light has entirely faded from her eyes?

That's prison.

That's the reality of it. Not groups of men in for drugs or rape or for accidental manslaughter. The reality is right underneath your nose, staring you straight in the face! The reality of prison is on the other side of the fence!

I am that girl. Hair not as dark and shiny as it was 2 years ago. A smile that has become nothing but a fake and empty way to simply carry on. A glimpse of

heavy camouflaged dark circles under my eyes from where I either do not get enough sleep or simply can't fall into it.

This is NOT me. I do not belong here but yet I am. I am treated like scum because I am the prisoner's wife, but yet on our wedding day did I knowingly marry him with the knowledge that at some point I would be abandoned into this life to become both parents and do the work of both? No. I didn't choose this. But yet it is my fate. Would you have me tell my two young daughters simply to never marry, in case this is their fate, or would you prefer I let them live the fairy-tale that I thought I had on that blissful day? Or do you simply want me to divorce the man that has been snatched from my life and from my children's lives? Because if I stay then that makes me a fool? That I am unintelligent? That I deserve the life I am living? Or would you expect me to continue the vows that I made, for better or worse, right?

The real punishment does not lie within your prison walls, it does not sleep in your bunks, and it does not eat your food

or work within your laundries. It lives within my soul, within my home. I am the one that tells the children not to cry, it is me that works 40 hours per week alongside school runs and holding the baby. For every job that my husband used to do, however small, now has become my life. There is no rest, there is no reprieve, my sentence is the same as the one given within that court except it is a million times harder then you will EVER understand.

You see, I have to be the hero. The supporter. The loving wife, the bread winner, the mother, the centre of the entire universe. Do you see how many roles I have upon my shoulders? You may have put my husband in a place separated from the rest of the world.

But some days when I'm sat on the cold kitchen floor with silent tears running down my cheeks, I would give you anything to be able to trade places.

What about all your support, all your family and friends you ask, all the organisations that are set up to help me?

Simply, there are none. The family that have their own lives, who expect you to 'deal' with it, to carry on for the sake of the children. The friends who now feel embarrassed of your shame, feel lost and helpless as no matter what they say they cannot take away the everlasting depression. The people on the other end of the phone who when you call can say all the things written in cheat sheets on the computer but never have a clue as to how you feel inside and how their rules and regulations make it that much harder to feed the children or to simply breathe. No, I am totally alone.

I am supposed to be the care giver for

"The people on the other end of the phone who when you call can say all the things written in cheat sheets on the computer but never have a clue as to how you feel inside and how their rules and regulations make it that much harder to feed the children or to simply breathe. No, I am totally alone."

the children lost without their fathers. The one who holds the whole piece together. The ones who protects them and keeps them safe. However I am now the monster that they fear. The one who shouts and is unreasonable. The one who is too dog tired to simply play or read stories. It's all about military precision and timings to get into bed on time and for god's sake eat those vegetables! It's down to that one person to ensure that the children are well fed with good nutrition, healthy and happy, instead of the pair who created them. If those kids end up being nuisances it will fall to the mother, it will be her fault for not giving them enough love or stimulation or attention during the prison years! That burden itself is enough to drive me into an early grave.

I am NOT saying that my husband has not done something wrong. I am NOT saying that he does not deserve the punishment that he has been set. He deserves it, and the next forty years of myself holding it against him, never letting him forget how he ruined our lives for a short while!

My point here is, and this is very much

aimed at each prison governor, every rule maker and especially Mr Grayling... lord supreme of the prison system, is simply every time you pass a judgement, it is me that you punish. Every time that the rules get changed the direct result falls to me to deal with.

You take away day release from an open prison. Your grounds for this are 'not an acceptable use for family ties', so allowing my husband to be with the children who love him but do not truly know him is no longer acceptable to you? To give me a few hours where I can sit back and watch instead of the 'everything' is not an acceptable family tie? Do you mean to tell me that a member of my family needs to die before you class that as an ACCEPTABLE family tie?

There are so many things written in the papers, so much to watch on the television about the prison system and how you need to be tougher, harder, nastier, no books, keep them in cells for 23 hours per day, take away their visits, make them work harder and longer hours, do not allow them to study, do not give them stamps make them pay for them! It's such a long list you set, but you see Dear Mr Grayling and all you Prison Governors, the buck does NOT stop with the prisoner that is now angry, sad or depressed. That ball of hot lava

“Your prison system has neither rehabilitated my husband, nor has it made the world a better and safer place. It has simply DESTROYED my heart and my soul.”

you just threw hit ME square in the face! It's on MY shoulders. Your prison system has neither rehabilitated my husband, nor has it made the world a better and safer place. It has simply DESTROYED my heart and my soul.

So next time dear sir that you take away a visit, listen to a phone call, pass a new rule that will change the prisoner's day for an hour or two.

Stop, and look quietly toward that gate.

She is still there, late twenties, dark hair, black circles under her eyes and still holding the hands of those innocent two small children. And she will stand there taking every second of hell that is thrown her way....because she simply has no choice!

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THE VISIT

She sits on her own at the back of the bus
Her stoical face masking tumult inside
An ordinary mum, she is any of us
“You ok, Mrs P?”, “I am fine love” she lied

The gossips made hay. The headlines they blared
“MAD COCAINE-CRAZED MONSTER GETS 17 YEARS”

Her heart was wrung dry, though nobody cared
Not least that crazed monster, the cause of her tears

“A Mother's for life” and “What's done is done”
To awful, trite clichés, a zombie she clings
She waits outside prison to visit her son
And can't comprehend he did all those bad things

An ordinary mum, she is any of us
Who sits on her own at the back of the bus

Stephen, HMP Liverpool
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