



POST OFFICE BOX 110034 BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11211

Updates for June 5th

14 May - Arraignment report for Pax

Paxana, arrested last month and initially facing 64 felonies, was arraigned on May 14th. We've pasted the reportback from his supporters below.

MORE:

Pax's arraignment this afternoon: Pax is now facing ten charges, one additional charge of criminal mischief and one additional charge of conspiracy to commit criminal mischief having been added. Bail was raised, but Pax was NOT taken into custody (needing to check-in with the authorities concerning this matter at some later date instead.) Next court date: July 2, at 1:30PM.

15 May - Latest 2010 G20 conviction - George Horton

On May 15th, Toronto G 20 protestor George Horton received the verdict from his trial. He was found guilty of Assault on a Police Officer and Intimidation of a Police Officer. He was found not guilty of Obstruction of Justice. George will be sentenced in August for the Assault and Intimidation charges, as well as multiple counts of Mischief.

21 May - Exhibit highlights plight of Puerto Rican political prisoner

Free Oscar López Rivera! That is the cry from supporters of the longest imprisoned freedom fighter for Puerto Rican independence. To make their point, friends and family of Mr. López Rivera along with community activists have sentenced themselves to "jail."

MORE:

In a show of solidarity, they are each spending 24 hours "behind bars" in a six by six foot cell to highlight the plight of Mr. López Rivera and other political prisoners currently languishing in America's prison industrial complex.

Mr. López Rivera was sentenced to prison in 1981 for seditious conspiracy and minor arms charges and has spent the last three decades incarcerated.

Advocates for Mr. López Rivera, 69, are showing their support through "31 Days for 31 Years," an interactive, multi-media art exhibit housed in Batey Urbano, a cultural youth center located in Chicago's predominately Puerto Rican, "Paseo Boricua" neighborhood.

His supporters said the continued imprisonment is unjust and starting April 29, 31 activists each began spending one day in a makeshift storefront prison cell with "guard" posted outside.

"All the campaign is saying is 31 years is a horrendous, disproportionate sentence for this man to have served when you have rapists, prisoners, pedophiles getting out in 12 to 15 years," said Alejandro Luis Molina of the National Boricua Human Rights Network that along with Batey Urbano and Latin@Coalition are coordinating the exhibit and fighting on behalf of Mr. López Rivera.

Many Puerto Ricans in the U.S. and Puerto Rico view Mr. López Rivera, a Vietnam Veteran as a hero and servant of his people.

Mr. López Rivera was well-known as a community activist in Chicago, helping to fund a halfway house for convicted drug addicts, founder of a high school, the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and other programs.

A vocal advocate for the independence of Puerto Rico, the U.S. government accused Mr. López Rivera and others of being behind a series of bombings in the 1970s in Chicago and New York, resulting in five deaths. Mr. López Rivera and the others were accused of belonging to Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (Armed Forces of National Liberation), described as a Puerto Rican nationalist group. The group was accused of trying to overthrow the U.S. government in Puerto Rico.

However, according to reports, during his trial, Mr. López Rivera was not linked to specific bombings. Offered conditional clemency by then President Bill Clinton in 1999, Mr. López Rivera rejected the offer because it did not include two other political prisoners. His sister Zenaida reportedly said on parole Mr. López Rivera said he would be “in prison outside of prison.”

“None of the prisoners including Oscar when they were arrested in 1980, 81 and 83 were charged with anything like causing a death, causing bodily harm, causing the spilling of a drop of blood. They weren’t charged with that,” Mr. Molina told The Final Call.

Each day of the exhibit, features a 31 second video clip of the “prisoner” voicing support for the freedom campaign. Each video can be seen online.

Shuffled around to several prisons around the country he is currently confined in a federal prison in Terre Haute, Ind., where he has been the past eight years and has a scheduled release date of July 27, 2027. Mr. López Rivera has had a perfect disciplinary record, although he spent a dozen years in solitary confinement his supporters point out.

The idea for the exhibit began six years ago said Mr. Molina. The concept for the symbolic cell was so young people, community residents, activists and family members of Mr. López Rivera could take one day staying in the mock cell to educate and familiarize the community about the freedom fighter he added.

Through the years the exhibit featured artwork and letters by Mr. López Rivera, art by former political prisoner Carlos Alberto and literature from the campaign to free others behind bars.

“The idea was that whoever walked in would be saturated in educational material as well as be able to walk out with reading material that addressed both the international legal aspects of the campaign as well as aspects of the campaign in Puerto Rico, Chicago and the Puerto Rican Diaspora,” said Mr. Molina.

“The project that we have here, 31 Days For 31 Years, is a way to build and learn upon historical memory. The reality of our youth in this community is they don’t know about their history because of the way CPS (Chicago Public Schools) history department is set up,” said Jessica Fuentes, director of Batey Urbano.

Ms. Fuentes said, as she began learning about her Puerto Rican and Afro-Caribbean history including the story of Mr. López Rivera, it moved her to become active in the community. Learning that Puerto Rico is a colonial property of the United States impacted her deeply, she added.

The 21-year-old activist spent day two in the mock cell and said young Puerto Ricans she comes into contact with go through a “culture shock” when they begin learning about their true history but become active once they learn.

“It’s a calling. You cannot learn about your history, understand the conditions that your people are in and not feel like you have to do something about that. Most of our young people feel that way. They feel like they have to be part of this transformative process,” said Ms. Fuentes.

Abel Muhammad is a student minister in the Nation of Islam and the National Latino Representative of the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan. Mr. Muhammad spent day 4 in the exhibit and has met several former Puerto Rican political prisoners.

“I personally wanted to do whatever I could to bring attention to it because it’s really an unjust sentence that has been given to him. Not so much because I’m Mexican. My brothers are Puerto Rican, my sisters are Puerto Rican, Black, Indigenous, all those who fight and struggle for justice,” said Mr. Muhammad.

“Hopefully we can do something to get our brother home because he’s already sacrificed more than should have

been sacrificed in terms of the time of his life, which he can't get back and he should be home with his family so that we can give him the honor and respect that he's due," added Mr. Muhammad.

According to Mr. Molina there are two other Puerto Rican political prisoners, Avelino González-Claudio arrested four years ago and his brother Noberto arrested in 2011. Accused of being members of a Puerto Rican independence group, "Los Machetero," the brothers were accused of participating in an armed robbery in 1983 of a Wells Fargo depot in Connecticut. Avelino is scheduled to be released in October due to a medical issue.

The independence of Puerto Rico is an important crusade for many in the Puerto Rican community. Claimed by Christopher Columbus in 1493, Tainos, the original indigenous inhabitants of Puerto Rico were enslaved by the Spaniards.

Now, a Commonwealth of the U.S., Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship in 1917. They elect their own governor. The president of the U.S. is also over Puerto Rico though Puerto Ricans are not permitted to vote in U.S. elections.

A debate has raged for years on whether Puerto Rico should remain a U.S. territory, be granted statehood or be independent. Puerto Ricans are scheduled to vote on their fate again Nov. 6, later this year.

"It's absolutely true the root cause of Oscar being in jail is that Puerto Rico is a colony. And it's absolutely true there have been succeeding generations since the 1950s of Puerto Ricans who have been willing to fight for Puerto Rico's freedom and that's the reason they're in prison," said Mr. Molina.

"These people were not social criminals, they didn't have criminal backgrounds. If anything, they were people who little by little became involved in the patriotic movement to decolonize Puerto Rico," he added.

"Over the years representatives from every political strata in Puerto Rico, the Statehood party, the Commonwealth party, the Independence party have signed letters and openly and vocally supported Oscar's freedom because his crime is that of wanting his country free," said Mr. Molina.

May 29 will mark the 31st day of the exhibit. Organizers will hold a press conference that day along with his family and friends.

22 May - The Case of CeCe McDonald: Murder—or Self-Defense Against a Hate Crime?

Here's a piece from Mother Jones about CeCe McDonald's case.

MORE:

Around midnight on June 5, 2011, a 23-year-old African American transgender woman named Crishaun "CeCe" McDonald was walking with four friends past Schooner Tavern in Minneapolis. A group of at least four white people outside the bar began harassing McDonald and her friends, calling the group, all of whom were African American, "niggers" and "faggots." One of the men in the group, who would later be identified as Dean Schmitz, said "look at that boy dressed like a girl tucking her dick in." As McDonald and her friends tried to walk away, Schmitz's ex-girlfriend Molly Flaherty [hit McDonald in the face with a glass of alcohol](#) [1] and sliced open her cheek, causing an injury that would later require stitches. The groups began fighting, and when McDonald attempted to leave the scene, Schmitz followed. McDonald took a pair of scissors out of her purse and turned around to face Schmitz; he was stabbed in the chest and died from the wound. Though she was injured in the scuffle with Flaherty and claimed the wound inflicted on Schmitz was [in self-defense](#) [2], McDonald was arrested that night and then charged with second-degree intentional murder.

Since her arrest last June, support for McDonald's case and her self-defense argument has been steadily growing. According to Katie Burgess, executive director of the [Trans Youth Support Network](#) [3], a Minneapolis organization that McDonald was also involved with, this is because many believe McDonald was "on trial for surviving a hate crime."

On October 7, the [Minneapolis Star-Tribune reported](#) [4] that McDonald refused to accept a plea deal of first-degree manslaughter. That's when prosecutors charged her with second-degree intentional murder, a charge that can carry a 40-year sentence. But as the jury was being selected for the trial on May 2, McDonald [accepted a](#)

[plea offer](#) [1] of [second-degree manslaughter](#) [5], which is likely to result in a 41-month prison sentence. In accepting the plea, McDonald had to give up her claim that she'd killed Schmitz in self-defense or by accident and had to forego a jury trial. At the plea hearing, Judge Daniel C. Moreno told McDonald that because she had a weapon and Schmitz was unarmed, "[the law requires](#) [5] that you have a duty to handle that weapon in such a way as to avoid...anyone being harmed."

Schmitz's family expressed grief at his death in a news report by the [local Fox affiliate](#) [6]. Jeremy Williams, his son, said, "He always used to go out of his way to help people...He would give the shirt off his back to help people. He was, overall, a great person." However, the victim's brother, Charles Pelfrey, [told the Star-Tribune](#) [7] he wasn't surprised at the allegation that Schmitz had used racist language. "At times he can be like that, yes...It depends on his mood, unfortunately," Pelfrey said.

During the process of jury selection, Judge Moreno denied several motions from the defense to submit details about the victim and his past as evidence, including a photo from the autopsy report showing Schmitz's swastika tattoo and his criminal record. According to Andy Birkey in the [American Independent](#) [8], "The judge ruled that his criminal history was sufficiently different from his actions on June 5 and therefore could not be shown to the jury."

The [judge also ruled](#) [8] that the defense could not call an expert witness who would testify to transgender people's experiences of violence in their everyday lives. For [supporters](#) [9] like Burgess and Lex Horan, the reports that Schmitz and his friends initiated the fight that night, shouted [racist and transphobic slurs](#) [8], and injured McDonald bring to mind [other cases](#) [10] of [violence against transgender people](#) [11]—a violence that's endemic and [likely underreported](#) [12], according to the Population Reference Bureau, a DC-based nonprofit that analyzes data on demographics.

On April 27, McDonald's friend Rai'vyn Cross spoke on [Democracy Now](#) [13] about the threats and harassment she and McDonald regularly encountered, saying, "We experience this on a day-to-day basis." [Recent research and reports](#) [14] on violence against transgender women have found that, in 2010, 44 percent of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and HIV-affected hate-crime murder victims were trans women. In 2009, trans women accounted for 50 percent of LGBTQH hate-crime murder victims. A transgender woman named Brandy Martell was [shot in her car](#) [15] in Oakland, California, on April 29, in what is being called a [possible hate crime](#) [16], and on April 16, a Chicago transgender woman named Paige Clay was found murdered [in an alley](#) [17].

For those who believe McDonald has survived a transphobic attack, the fact that she's now facing a felony sentence and prison time is particularly upsetting. Transgender people are arrested and incarcerated at a significantly greater rate than the general population. In a [2011 report](#) [18] by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force on discrimination and harassment facing transgender people, 16 percent of respondents reported they'd been sent to jail at some point in their lives. The numbers are higher for transgender women—21 percent—and black respondents, 47 percent of whom reported being sent to jail. As a point of reference, a 2003 report of the Department of Justice shows that 2.7 percent of the general American population is imprisoned at some point in life.

[In a statement](#) [19] released after the plea hearing, the Hennepin County Attorney's Office acknowledged that it had "received some criticism from the LGBTQ community regarding this case," but it defended the decision to charge McDonald, saying, "Gender, race, sexual orientation and class are not part of the decision-making process. The charges filed took into account the evidence in this case; this outcome is an example of the criminal justice responding proportionately to a tragic situation."

Still, Michael Friedman, the executive director of the Minneapolis-based [Legal Rights Center](#) [20], which represented McDonald, says that while it's not uncommon for murder charges to get reduced to manslaughter, the offer of a plea that could carry a much lower prison sentence is "perhaps a reflection that [the prosecutors] know there's a lot of culpability on the part of the victims and companions of the victim in the case." He also clarified that one-third of the sentence will be eliminated for "presumed good time" and the sentence will include the time she's already spent in jail since her arrest. After sentencing, this could mean McDonald serves around

18 months in prison. "We have a few people in our office with 20 years of experience, no one can think of any charge of murder where [the prosecution] agreed to an 18-month additional sentence."

The focus for McDonald's supporters and legal team is now on her June 4 sentencing.

Which raises the question: As a trans woman, where will McDonald serve the rest of her sentence? Prison is a particularly dangerous place for transgender women. If not in protective custody or solitary confinement, they often serve time in the general male population, leaving them [vulnerable to sexual assault and abuse](#) [21]. While awaiting trial, McDonald was held in segregated custody in jail and spent some time under house arrest wearing a monitoring bracelet. McDonald identifies and lives as a woman; however, Friedman says, "there's no way she's going to be sent to a women's prison." Solitary confinement, usually used as a form of punishment within prison, is far from ideal for trans prisoners, but Friedman says, "We haven't figured out what we're going to ask for yet. It's all brand new."

Though very little about the context of McDonald's life as a transgender woman would have been admissible during the jury trial, this case has become a rallying point for local leaders and national activists. On the *Melissa Harris-Perry* show on MSNBC in April, during a segment on social and economic challenges facing transgender people, author and performer Kate Bornstein [talked about the case](#) [22]. Comparing McDonald's actions to those of George Zimmerman, who wasn't arrested for shooting Trayvon Martin until nearly six weeks after the incident, Harris-Perry said, "In a certain way it feels like she stood her ground."

Over 18,000 people signed a [Change.org petition](#) [23], asking that Hennepin County Attorney Michael Freeman "honor his committment [*sic*], in his words 'to serve all of our citizens with understanding, dignity, and respect' by dropping the charges against CeCe McDonald."

Several local elected officials also commented on the case. Minneapolis City Council Member Cam Gordon [wrote on his blog](#) [24]: "Here is another example [of a] transgender women of color being targeted for hate- and bias-related violence. It is unfortunate that in this case, as in so many, the hate crime itself appears to have been ignored." According to [Minneapolis Public Radio](#) [25], Democratic Minnesota state Rep. Susan Allen wrote to Freeman, "urging him to remember the 'extenuating circumstances' of McDonald's race and transgender, which she said 'have cast unique question marks' over the case."

Lex Horan, a member of the "[CeCe Support Committee](#) [26]," says that approximately 30 supporters had been present in the court room each day. The judge prohibited supporters from wearing T-shirts and buttons that say "Free CeCe" and "Free Honee Bea," McDonald's nickname, so instead they wore purple. According to Katie Burgess, on the night after McDonald took the plea, there was a noise demonstration in which "hundreds of people marched around the jail and made a ridiculous amount of noise. CeCe said she heard us singing." Mara Keisling, the executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, who [attended the first day of the trial](#) [27], [told press that](#) [28], "People are being killed out there, and CeCe is being punished for not being killed."

[1] <http://www.motherjones.com/documents/356409-mcdonald-chrisshaun-11-16485-5-2-12-plea>

[2] <http://www.startribune.com/printarticle?id=149160775>

[3] <http://www.transyouthsupportnetwork.blogspot.com/>

[4] <http://www.startribune.com/local/minneapolis/131325654.html>

[5] <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=609.205>

[6] <http://www.myfoxtwincities.com/story/17594883/man-faces-murder-charge-in-minneapolis-bar-stabbing>

[7] <http://www.startribune.com/printarticle?id=124612343>

[8] <http://americanindependent.com/216037/the-trial-of-cece-mcdonald>

[9] <http://freececemcdonald.tumblr.com/>

[10] <http://www.todaysthv.com/news/story.aspx?storyid=147457>

[11] <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/02/us/02murder.html>

[12] <http://www.prb.org/Articles/2011/gender-based-violence-transgender.aspx>

- [13] http://www.democracynow.org/2012/4/27/cece_mcdonald_black_transgender_woman_faces
- [14] <http://www.avp.org/documents/NCAPHateViolenceReport2011Finaledjlfinaledits.pdf>
- [15] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/02/brandy-martell-california-transgender-woman-shooting_n_1471209.html
- [16] <http://oaklandnorth.net/2012/05/02/murder-of-transgender-woman-brandy-martell-raises-concerns-about-hate-crime/>
- [17] <http://chicago.cbslocal.com/2012/04/20/community-rallies-after-transgender-womans-murder/>
- [18] http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/ntds_full.pdf
- [19] <http://www.hennepinattorney.org/NewsPress/tabid/391/EntryId/106/Young-Woman-Pleads-Guilty-to-Fatal-Stabbing.aspx>
- [20] <http://www.legalrightscenter.org/News.html>
- [21] http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/3372/transgendered_behind_bars/
- [22] <http://video.msnbc.msn.com/melissa-harris-perry/47054424>
- [23] <http://www.change.org/petitions/free-cece-we-re-looking-at-you-michael-freeman-drop-the-charges-against-cece-mcdonald>
- [24] <http://secondward.blogspot.com/2012/03/cece-mcdonald.html>
- [25] <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/collections/special/columns/cities/archive/2012/04/minneapolis-murder-trial-rallies-transgender-community.shtml>
- [26] <http://supportcece.wordpress.com/>
- [27] <http://www.prettyqueer.com/2012/05/01/mara-keisling-attends-the-cece-mcdonald-trial/>
- [28] <http://www.fightbacknews.org/2012/5/1/chrishaun-cece-mcdonald-begins-jury-selection-judge-rules-exclude-contextual-evidence>

23 May - New Suspect Arrested in Slaying of Brad Will

For those who have been around New York for a while, you remember Brad Will and his murder in 2006. A new suspect has been arrested, but it's unclear whether or not this is another political frame-up, as the Mexican government has contended all along that it was a leftist protestor who who Brad.

MORE:

Mexican authorities have arrested a man they say shot an American freelance journalist to death at a 2006 protest, state media reported.

A man who lived near the area where [Bradley Will](#) was shot while filming a demonstration is accused in the killing, the state-run Notimex news agency said, citing a state prosecutor.

Human rights investigators, [forensic analysis](#) and witness interviews pointed to Lenin Osorio Ortega as the suspected killer, Oaxaca state prosecutor Manuel de Jesus Lopez said, according to Notimex.

Osorio's arrest is not the first in the case.

In 2008, a protester who had been participating in the demonstration was arrested and accused [framed] of killing Will. He was released in 2010 after a federal appeals court cleared him in the killing.

Will, a 36-year-old documentary filmmaker who had been living in New York, was among three people killed when gunmen opened fire on teachers who were protesting against the government in the southern state capital of Oaxaca.

He was covering the resistance by teachers and other workers who had protested for months in Oaxaca, barricading streets, occupying government buildings and calling for the governor to be ousted.

Will was shot in the stomach and died before reaching a Red Cross station.

24 May - Brief update on the NATO 3

***Brent Betterly, Jared Chase, and Brian Church** of Florida — known as the [NATO 3](#) — had a court hearing in Chicago on Tuesday, May 22. We've also included a corporate news piece about the isolation units they are being held in.*

MORE:

They have been held in isolation cells in Cook County Jail's Cermak Hospital since their arrest one week ago, and are still being held in isolation without any contact with each other or anyone, without reading or writing material, with nothing but the blank walls of their holding cells.

At the hearing, the prosecution asked for a three week continuance of the process as they do not want to formalize the charges yet and are going to a grand jury seeking an indictment. This is likely a ploy by the prosecution's desire to prolong the accused comrades' suspension in a lack of knowledge about their legal situation, with this together with the threat of long prison sentences for terrorism charges (unprecedented in the State of Illinois) and the total isolation, the prosecution surely hopes the torture might get a confession or snitch among the three, who the prosecution don't appear to have much evidence against.

The defense lawyers argued that the three should be released from the isolation cells. They also complained that the prosecution is deliberately trying to withhold evidence and charges, delaying the process. They say they expect the prosecutors to unseal a grand jury indictment at the next hearing date rather than go to a preliminary hearing, to avoid giving the defense a chance to cross-examine witnesses.

The judge granted a three-week continuance of the prosecution's period before the formalization of charges and presentation of evidence (which is also a time when the defense can question the prosecution's evidence and the case can get dismissed if the evidence is not sufficient). The argument of the defense that the isolation of the accused constitutes cruel and unusual punishment was dismissed.

The next hearing is set for June 12.

Cook County sheriff holding 3 anti-NATO protesters in isolation sensory deprivation cells

A spokesman for Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart says three anti-NATO protesters accused of planning terrorist actions have been held around-the-clock since Saturday in white-walled "observation" cells, where they are isolated from each other and the rest of the inmate population and kept from writing materials, books and all other media.

"It's for their own safety and the safety of the [jail] staff and other inmates," the spokesman, Frank Bilecki, said Tuesday afternoon. "Obviously we're concerned about their mental status and well-being."

A medical staff member checks on the three every 15 minutes, Bilecki said. The cells each have one window through which natural light passes and a larger window for the observation, he added.

Gary Hickerson, acting executive director of the office's Department of Corrections, ordered the observation because the defendants are young and because their charges are serious, Bilecki said. The decision had nothing to do with defendants' behavior since arrest, he added.

The sheriff's spokesman says the State's Attorney's office had no input into the protesters' jail conditions.

But a lawyer for one of the alleged terrorists says the conditions amount to "sensory deprivation" intended to hamper their defense. "This is a way to break someone's spirit and break their ability to cooperate with their attorneys," said the lawyer, Michael Deutsch, who represents Brian Church, 20, of Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Deutsch complained about the conditions in a court hearing about the case Tuesday afternoon. Defense attorneys said they were "negotiating" with jail staff members to improve the conditions.

Those talks may be paying off. Bilecki said the jail was planning to move the three protesters Tuesday evening into the general inmate population.

Church and the other protesters — Jared Chase, 27, of Keene, N.H; and Brent Betterly, 24, of Oakland Park, Fla. — face charges of terrorism conspiracy, providing material support for terrorism, and possession of explosives or incendiary devices. Cook County Judge Edward S. Harmening on Saturday set their bonds at \$1.5 million each.

Authorities accused the trio of possessing Molotov cocktails and planning or proposing attacks on targets including President Barack Obama’s campaign headquarters and Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s home. The three were among nine people arrested during a police raid last Wednesday at the South Side apartment of some Occupy Chicago leaders who helped organize protests against the NATO summit.

Church, Chase and Betterly appeared at Tuesday’s hearing in tan jail uniforms but did not speak. Judge Adam D. Bourgeois Jr. granted a request by prosecutors to continue the case until June 12.

At least two other anti-NATO protesters arrested last week face serious felony charges. Sebastian Senakiewicz, 24, of Chicago is charged with falsely making a terrorist threat. Mark Neiweem, 28, of Chicago is charged with solicitation for explosives or incendiary devices. A judge on Sunday set their bonds at \$750,000 and \$500,000, respectively.

Senakiewicz and Neiweem are scheduled for a status hearing Wednesday.

24 May - Chicago Solidarity Demonstration In St. Louis Ends With Arrests After Police Scuffle

In St. Louis, on the evening of May 24th, 30 to 40 people converged to voice their anger against the brutal repression of Anti-NATO protesters by the Chicago Police Department. We're including a couple of articles regarding the action and subsequent arrests. We'll keep you updated on the status of these arrestees.

MORE:

Protesters from around the world met in Chicago the weekend of May 19, to confront the NATO summit. During this three demonstrators were arrested for an alleged terrorism plot, what can be clearly seen to be a case of entrapment, while dozens of other protesters were bloodied and/or jailed. Those of us in St. Louis sought to express our solidarity with demonstrators in Chicago and with everyone everywhere who dares to resist the conditions of this world. Like the flows of Capital, repression knows no boundaries and neither does Solidarity.

NATO functions as a world police to insure the smooth plundering and exploitation of the population. The same is true of their local counterparts, the St. Louis Police Department for example. Along with NATO and the brutal acts of its state defenders, those marching last night had on their minds the many who have been killed by the SLPD. St. Louisans are harassed daily and murdered monthly. This is exemplified by many instances. By Scott Perry, killed in the downtown jail. Anthony Smith, shot in the streets. The attempted occupation of Compton Hill Reservoir Park was brutally evicted. Many homeless encampments along the river were meticulously removed. All of these examples stand to remind us that at every attempt to better our lives, outside of the logic of capital, we are met with the violent force of the Police.

The solidarity demonstration left from the formerly occupied Keiner Plaza and began to snake through the downtown area. A mobile sound system, banners, leaflets and chants were used to express a collective rage against the police and the system they defend accompanied it. The march continued for half an hour without incident, weaving through throngs of Cardinals fans passing by, many of whom honked or cheered in enthusiasm.

During the march “Solidarity with all who resist!” and “Burn the banks!” along other slogans were spray painted on various downtown banks. In response to this, an irate citizen, who later turned out to be the property manager of one of the banks, began to follow the march. He began to harass marchers and communicating with police. At one point, the property manager was confronted and struck in the head. He then quickly retreated to the safety of the police. Once the police were alerted, they mobilized quickly: cars, bikes, wagons and a helicopter rushed to the scene. In the following scuffle 10 demonstrators were arrested. According to corporate media coverage, two

officers were hit in the head, and another received treatment for a hand injury.

As it stands one comrade is charged with two felony assaults, one felony property damage, two felony resisting and interfering, one misdemeanor rioting, and one misdemeanor assault. Others seem to be charged with felony resisting and interference and misdemeanor riot.

Missouri anarchists beaten in jail, call for solidarity

We all saw the footage from Chicago. The phalanxes of police officers and frame after frame of bleeding head wounds. Our friends and comrades had just returned from those brutal city streets. Even those witnessing these scenarios unfold for the first time understood the necessity of response.

On May 24th 30-40 people answered the call for a Chicago solidarity demo through the downtown St. Louis bar district. The march wound its way from the once occupied plaza through a semi bustling nightlife scene and ran unchallenged for nearly half an hour.

During the march banks were tagged with "Solidarity with all who resist", "Burn the Banks" and other phrases. An irate cardinal's fan, who was later discovered to be the property manager at one of the banks, set himself against the march by following it, harassing the marchers and communicating with police. In the end, he received several blows to the head before retreating to the safety of the cop line.

The police do not pull punches here. The bodies of the routinely beaten, shot and assaulted by the STL Police are testament to that. And their responses are rarely proportional. This night was no exception. Cops on bike, foot, in cars and a helicopter descended on the small group. A scuffle ensued and ten arrests were made. According to the news, two officers were struck in the head and another ended up needing medical treatment for a hand injury. Even when the numbers are small our hearts can fill with the utmost solidarity our hands can deliver.

Of the ten arrested, five were released without charges, four are charged with misdemeanor riot and felony resisting and interference. One comrade received five felonies, two assault, two resisting and interference, and one property damage, and two misdemeanors, riot and assault. All charged are currently out on bail.

While in custody, the arrested faced the brutality of the STLPD, a fact that most in this broken city face daily. The killings by police on the street and in the jails are so recurrent that they barely make the news at this point. But we remember, and we remember the recent horror of our friends beaten and tortured last march. Our fears for those in custody this time were not unfounded.

Upon their release, we learned that while being interrogated one prisoner had a knife held to their throat, that they were choked and lifted off the ground and punched in the chest for non-compliance. One comrade, who is facing the most serious charges, was brought to the interrogation room where a detective repeatedly struck him in the face, breaking his nose while he was shackled to the floor. They continued to make threats of violence if he continued to "not comply"

We are well aware that this is a war, made of many small, endless battles. At no time are we safe from the thugs of the state. Our bodies are constantly under threat of attack. One of our only recourses is solidarity with those who bare the bruises of repression. This is the second time this year we are turning our gazes outward and hoping for a response. We last asked for shows of solidarity, it mostly fell on deaf ears. Let there be no questions or confusion now, this is a call for solidarity.

25 May - More "Homeland Security" Repression Against Activists

Another report of activist harassment at the border just in. This time from Canada.

MORE:

"I was denied entry into Canada yesterday after arrival. The Canadian Border Security Agency interrogated me for over an hour about my past and also about animal rights organizations they had information I was a member of a particular animal rights organization. After denying everything they took me into custody and held me for the next flight back to the US (which was in another 4 hours).

US Homeland Security Officials told the Canadians they wanted to interrogate me before I left Canada. They brought me in for interrogation, seized my phone and copied its contents, took 3 camera memory cards inside

my cameras and copied those, and took my laptop and copied the hard drive.

They then interrogated me on the contents of my phone (names, numbers, and pictures). They said if I continued not to be completely cooperative they would detain me for 3 days and no one would know where I was. They took photos of different items in my luggage (incl. a Walter Bond shirt) and a book entitled "Muzzling A Movement" and questioned me for over an hour and a half before releasing back to the Canadians.

Under escort of four Canadian Border Security Services Agents, they put me a plane bound for Chicago (not even close to where I live).

This just happened yesterday!
In solidarity!"

Please note that there is never a requirement for you to speak to any law enforcement agent about anything, other than possibly giving your name, and this includes the thugs at the border. They usually threaten you with prolonged detention, but in our extensive experience, this has not happened. Once they realize you are not going to talk, they can't wait to get rid of you. Sometimes you even get through the customs and immigration line faster!

Remember that the more effective we become in resisting the current culture, currently in the process of exploiting animals and destroying the planet, the more repression we can expect by those in power. Our mission is to stay strong, stay active, and get smarter and more effective, so that one day we will prevail against those who would destroy everything beautiful and wonderful about the planet we live on.

25 May - Support Site for Chicago NATO arrestee Chris French

We have an update and news of a support website for anti-NATO arrestee Chris French. Stay updated at freedomforchris.wordpress.com and we're passing around a card for him tonight.

MORE:

Christopher French 2012-0522081
Post Office Box 089002
Chicago, Illinois 60608

Like thousands of others from around the country, Chris traveled to Chicago this May and attended the anti-NATO protests.

In a demonstration on Sunday evening, Chris was arrested along with several others in a barrage of police violence. In keeping with the precedent set leading up to and throughout the summit, the City of Chicago is using Chris' political beliefs as an excuse to set his bail at \$250,000.

He is being charged with "aggravated battery on a police officer" and "resisting police." In light of all of this, **we need to raise \$25,000 simply to get Chris free.** Friends and loved ones from Atlanta are doing our best to coordinate the much-needed support for Chris.

More information will be coming soon, but for the time being we know very little. In the meantime, all donations will be used to provide Chris with stamps and other commissary funds.

Pre-trial hearing reportback – May 30th

Christopher had a second hearing today; however, this was a pre-trial hearing where lawyers & prosecutors make their case for/against the defendant & the judge decides whether there is enough evidence to proceed to a grand jury trial.

There was no bond hearing today.

Chris's defense requested another bond reduction hearing - Chris goes back to court Thursday, May 31st, 2012 at 2:30 PM (two days from now) at Branch 42 – 2452 West Belmont – Chicago, Illinois 60618. Lawyers said

that if a bond reduction is granted, it will likely be somewhere between \$50,000 – \$75,000 (which means we would need five to seven thousand to get him out – much more doable than 25k). They decided to wait to do the pre-trial hearing – neither prosecutor’s nor lawyer’s gave their cases, the judge decided to just reschedule it after the bond reduction hearing.

Although we do not seek to express support for the justice system, the judge from Christopher’s hearing today was relatively lenient. They will also be hearing the bond-reduction hearing in two days. 4 notarized character witness write-ups came in the mail today from some close friends and hopefully they will help in the coming days.

Bond hearing – June 1st

So Christopher’s bond hearing went well today!

His new bail is \$100,000 which means **we only have to raise \$10,000 to get him out!**

A fundraiser is being planned in Atlanta for June 8th and there should be t-shirts and posters in the coming days available for donation.

Please stay posted.

26 May - they call jail "corrections" but it's not correcting you by Mandy Hiscocks

2010 Toronto G 20 prisoner Mandy Hiscocks continues to deliver entries for her popular blog. We've pasted in the latest below.

MORE:

hi everyone,

i haven't written much about day to day life here in awhile so i thought now would be a good time for some updates. first of all, everything is fine and i'm feeling quite positive about the whole situation. so anyone who is worrying should stop! strangely enough i am finding myself quite busy these days and have caught myself a few times wondering how i'll manage to get everything done. old habits die hard. i've taken on a whole lot of projects – i won't get into the details here but let's just say that they involve a lot of reading in dim light and writing with tiny little pencils.

so what's been going on here lately? not much, really. yesterday we had a search. none of my stuff was taken this time. after the strip search as we waited to come back on the range we played a very entertaining game of “who am i imitating?” with some pretty hilarious guard impressions. there have been a lot of searches lately on this unit- we haven't had many but 2A and 2B seem to get them on a regular basis, and once they even brought in the sniffer dogs. it seems like a lot of people have been going home these past few weeks and there is a lot of turnover on the range now. i have new people at my table almost everyday and spend a lot of time getting to know them and answering questions. thankfully i've had the same cellie for a few weeks now and she'll be here for another week and a half. cellie turnover is way more annoying than table turnover. i've been playing a lot of chess, at least i was until my main opponent got out last week. now i am looking for people who play or want to learn. and i am really looking forward to the European Cup (i know, guilty pleasure) and hoping that the game times work out with our locked in/locked out of cells schedule. i've already started to set up strategic soccer alliances on the range in case we have to fight the jerry springer or music video die-hards for the TV.

hmmm... what else? i've been making some progress on one of the goals i set before coming in here. i told myself i would use this time to learn about Indigenous history and politics in north america, and to get a handle on the major treaties and the development of the Indian Act and other noxious legislation. i hit the jackpot with Peter Kulchyski's book “the red indian: an episodic, informal collection of tales from the history of aboriginal people's struggles in canada.” it's full of concise information and references to other books, treaties, articles, commissions and reports. if, like me, you want to learn this stuff but are feeling overwhelmed and unsure where to begin, you should check it out.

for obvious reasons, i'm feeling quite inspired these days. a huge shout-out to friends and allies in the streets of montreal! you're amazing! i've been comparing the Globe and Mail coverage to the stories i'm hearing from people on the ground and folks who are plugged in to alternative media sources. predictably, there is a lack of understanding of the extent of the student strike (the numbers of people involved, the level of community support) and the politics informing it. so if your main source of information is the mainstream media and you'd like a bit more in depth news and analysis i hear the following links are helpful: Ten Points Everyone Should Know About The Quebec Student Movement, CUTV, Spread the Red Square Everywhere)

this weeks my thoughts are with Kelly, who will be sentenced soon. i'm sorry for not knowing her court date had been changed when the last blog post went up. i believe it's now on May 28th but don't quote me on that. in other news, May 15th BYRON WAS AQUITTED OF ALL CHARGES! i wish i could have seen the crown's face. i am sure nobody apologized to Byron or his family for the loss of time and money and the emotional toll, but that's the "justice" system for you. the other day a guard poked her head onto the range to ask if anything needed fixing - "the criminal justice system!" i replied. i don't think she got right on that because as far as i can tell it's still shit.

so today is may 25 and it has been over two weeks since my last post. sorry. i'm working on the long anticipated one about food – it's coming, honest! if you have a suggestion for a topic or a question you'd like answered send it my way and i'll do my best. for now, here is something i wrote back in january and have been holding on to.

cheers,
mandy :)

They call jail "corrections" but it's not correcting you

On January 23 and 24, 2012 I conducted an interview with an inmate living on my range. She was serving a seven month sentence for breach of probation, fail to appear in court and indecent exposure. Her 2/3 release date (at four months and 20 days) was March 14, so she had just under a month and a half left to go. Many thanks to Kim, I hope you're doing well wherever you are.

* * *

Kim is 29 years old. She had her first run-in with the law at age 12 when she tried to break into a friend's house. She was put into foster care open custody for six months. Since then she estimates that she's spent over 1500 days in jail on charges ranging from mischief and theft under to indecent exposure and prostitution, possession of cocaine and assault. The majority of her convictions, however, have been for breach of probation – 32 of them. How did she breach? By not reporting to a probation officer because "I was too high."

She has been using drugs for the past 15 years. "Think of something you love most in the world. Now you smoke crack and that thought doesn't mean anything to you any more. It makes you forget about all the consequences." She's pregnant now, and clean. "It takes a very strong willpower and years of learning how to quit if you've been a long time user. So all my failures were actually successes, because I'm trying again, you know? I don't think I'll ever go back to smoking crack. In the last three months my whole perspective has changed, because of this baby and what my life has been and what I want it to become."

I asked her if she felt jail had helped her. "Yes and no. It's kept me off drugs, taught me how to stay clean and sober. I've learned some life skills through the programs. It's taught me not to come back to jail. But it's a lot of time wasted. I could've had my GED by now (it's too hard to do it in here). If jails were more like treatment centres it would've helped me more. They have groups, therapy. They address the underlying issues: addiction, depression, low self-esteem, abuse, trauma. Everybody has a problem, most crimes are committed because of these problems. They call jail "corrections" but it's not correcting you – it just teaches you not to get caught. There's not enough in-depth programming here. There are more opportunities in a federal pen. You can get a

welding license there, or become a lawyer.”

She's very familiar with jails - “I know the system so well I could run it!” - and has some advice for people starting their sentence. “Get on a work range, make sure you have money for canteen, and get involved in things. The more you get involved, the better it is for you. Make sure you have support on the outside and try to correspond with people on a regular basis. Getting mail is a huge thing.”

As well as advice, she has some horror stories to share. She recalls an incident that happened to her a few years ago while serving another sentence in Vanier. During a work shift cutting grass, a male guard propositioned her – a pack of smokes for a blow job. “It's sexual assault – he's a professional, he's in a position of power. There things are not supposed to happen, this is supposed to be a safe environment. I think the system is corrupt and fucked. I'm in jail for prostitution, and the guy made a proposition.” The guard no longer works at Vanier but it didn't end there for her. She received no counselling, although she asked. And then, upon her return to Vanier for her current sentence, she was moved after one month from the work range to Unit 2 “for my own safety”. Apparently this was because of comments other inmates had made regarding her accusations against this male officer. Since then she's been trying to get off the maximum security unit and back to a less restrictive environment. In fact, as I write this up, she is settling into Unit 4 (usually reserved for people remanded into custody) after a transfer earlier today. The process took three weeks.

Understandably she's excited to get out of jail and not be on probation. I asked her about her plans and she reamed off a long list. From jail she can enter a treatment centre for a 35 day program as long as she granted the Temporary Absence Program (TAP), which will allow her to leave Vanier five days early in order to make her March 9 bed availability. From there she'll live with her parents until she can find a place – she's on a waiting list for subsidized housing, with homeless priority status. She wants to get one-on-one counselling for trauma, grief and loss. And to finish her GED and get her driver's license. And then there's the baby, due to arrive in the summer. She plans to take a parenting course. Her cell is full of baby magazines and catalogues, and she talks about – and to – the baby constantly, so I'm not surprised when I ask if she's excited that her answer is an enthusiastic “YES!” Mostly, she's looking forward to “having a good life. I've had lots of abusive partners in the past. I know the difference between a healthy relationship and a violent one. I will no longer have a creep tie me down – no dirtbag will treat me like shit and bring me down to the whole I was in before.”

She's confident and determined, but still has some concerns. Money and housing – will she get a start-up allowance through Ontario Works? How long will it take to find an apartment? And of course, “Am I going to be strong enough that I won't relapse? I know I won't re-offend, but once a drug addict always a drug addict.” She worries about triggers, but feels the treatment centre will adequately prepare her to deal with them and that the after-care program will help.

I have my moments...

today i went to a program: Anger Management. it was my first and will probably be my last – a lot of programs are offered here but most of them don't apply to me or my current situation. i told myself i would do one while i am here so i can tell you all about it, and Anger Management seemed like the most useful option. it's one of four in the “Change is a Choice” Core Programming offered by Elizabeth Fry Peel-Halton. Change is a Choice programs have five or six hour-and-a-half long sessions and the other topics are:

- substance abuse
- connections (i think this one's also known as “anti-criminal thinking!”)
- taking control & making healthy relationship choices

according to a handout given to me by the social worker early on in my sentence all four are *introductory, educational, programs which are designed to help each woman decide for herself if she has a problem in her life and to give her the tools to start making changes, should she decide that she needs and/or wants to make those changes.* the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services also offers core programming through “Skills for Better Living”, *which are designed to allow participants to evaluate certain areas of their lives, to*

help them decide if they want to make any changes, and also to provide women with basic thinking and living tools to make those changes. [It] is designed to help women:

- Learn strategies to keep them grounded while in the institution, and when they leave*
- Recognize problems they may have that could be contributing to offending*
- Develop basic tools to aid in everyday living*

there are twenty one hour long stand-alone sessions:

- thoughts to actions (looks at how people's thinking effects their behaviour)
- introduction to self-care
- effective communication
- coping with the effects of trauma
- problem solving
- substance use
- goal setting
- planning for discharge
- supportive relationships (how to develop supportive relationships in life)
- anger management
- being an effective mother (focuses on healthy parenting skills)
- finding employment
- maintaining employment
- healthy body image
- understanding self harm
- understanding feelings
- recognizing abusive relationships
- changing habits
- setting up a budget
- it's a gamble

you can tell by the titles that the focus is on each individual's responsibility to change – as opposed to our collective responsibility to fight poverty, patriarchy and misogyny, the criminalization of marginalized communities and so on.

all programs are voluntary. sometimes we sign up by writing our names on a list posted on the range, sometimes a guard opens the door and yells “open call for (insert program here)”. there's usually a maximum number of participants and it's first come first served. while no inmate is forced to attend - whether or not you've participated in programs weighs heavily into the Ontario Parole Board's decisions to grant you early parole or a temporary absence. it's also possible that it plays into the jail's decision to move you from maximum to medium security and that it can effect discussions around housing, Children's Aid issues, probation, acceptance into treatment centres and so on – but i'm not sure about that, it's just something i've heard. so while the programs are voluntary some people feel they need to take them in order to get the certificate to show for it.

i don't care about the certificate. i'm missing five yard calls – three of them three days in a row – partly so i can share the experience with you and partly because i suck at managing anger. many people don't know this about me. as i was walking down the hall into the program room a guard looked at me quizzically

-hisockcs?

-yeah?

-anger management?

-yeah. What?

-you don't seem like the type.

-i have my moments. . .

i do indeed have my moments. for example i have been known to scream quite viscously at my lawyer when we

disagreed on legal matters, which during this case was most of the time. i once prepared to take a swing at a riot cop who grabbed me by the throat. yep, my bare fist in his helmeted head, luckily someone behind me grabbed my arm and gave me a what-the-fuck look. what the fuck indeed. the thing is, i hate bullshit and power tripping but there are smart and not so smart ways of dealing with it. here are some stellar not so smart Vanier moments, in no particular order.

-in my first month here, a guard refused to give me some mail (a printed out copy of the excellent book [Deep Green Resistance](#)) saying it was too much paper.

-show me the rule that says you can deny me my mail.

he shows me a stamp on the envelope that says "inmate to view then send to A & D" (A & D is where our property is kept).

-that's not the rule. show me the rule.

he walks away from me.

-SHOW ME THE FUCKING RULE!!!

nice, mandy. that should do the trick. . .

-once during lockup i asked a guard for some reasonable thing that i can't remember now, and was snottily refused, so as she walked away i kicked the door as hard as i could. no reason, just childish rage. and it really hurt my leg. fail.

-recently i was on the phone when the guard came in and called nighttime lockup ten minutes early.

-it's not 7:30 yet.

he responds with something along the lines of "bedtime is when i say it is".

-(into the phone) i gotta go. this is bullshit.

(to the guard) bedtime is 7:30.

-not tonight.

-yep, every night, in fact. this is fucking bullshit.

-months ago there was an issue with me calling a white shirt "fucking ridiculous" over a dispute about the underwear elastic that i was wearing in my hair. ff you missed that fascinating tale you can read it [here](#). so i got locked down for the rest of the day and the whole next one – i was Pissed. at dinner i expected my dinner to be handed through the cell door slot, which is what usually happens, but instead the door buzzed. i stayed at my desk since i'd been told in no uncertain terms i wasn't leaving the cell, but someone came to get me to get my food. as i approached the guard she starts talking shit:

-what? i'm not making a personal delivery.

without knowing i was going to, i snatched the tray from the guard's hand and gave her a nasty look. she screams at me, something threatening about how i'll end up in the hole. i did get some cred on the range for that little episode but i also almost ended up in seg. . .smooth.

the last two incidents were the worst because i felt like shit after. they are both really nice guards. and i found out later that the one i snatched the tray from wasn't the one who'd actually placed me on lock down, she was just the messenger. i apologized to them both for being an asshole, but ideally i wouldn't have been an asshole in the first place. this place does not always bring out the best in us.

not that i don't want to be angry, mind you. who was it that said "if you're not outraged you're not paying attention"? here are a few random things about this place – aside from the obvious – that make me angry:

-the number of people who just can't afford the time and/or money it would take to go to trial, or who don't have the right kinds of connections to get bail, who plead guilty just to get it over with

-knowing that people's pets have been left without caregivers indefinitely, and that one two occasions (that i know of) people's dogs were left behind on the street when they were arrested.

-the students who take tours through the units, gawk at us through the glass, and yet will never be allowed to ask our opinion on how this place is run.

-the fact that apparently a few nights ago someone on another range on this unit died. imagine dying in a place like this.

-people getting woken up at five am for court, packing up all their stuff in case they come back to a new range, barely eating and sitting in cold court cells bored and exhausted all day, only to return to say that there lawyer wasn't there.

-anything to do with Immigration Canada.

none of that will be fixed by me kicking doors and yelling at guards, however. hence the Anger Management Program. in which we talked today about what anger is, some responses to anger (passive, aggressive, assertive) and different anger styles (masked, explosive, chronic) and how to handle them more effectively. my favourite part was when i expressed my scepticism that assertiveness (described as "direct communication of one's feelings, needs, wants, and opinions. . .addressing problems or issues, trying to resolve them openly, honestly and directly") can really work in situations of extreme power imbalance such as, say, between inmates and guards or jail admin. the facilitator assured me it was completely possible. so i imagined a few possibilities:

- "i feel angry when you don't respect your own rules"

- "i feel hurt when you refuse to answer my questions about why i'm still on maximum security"

- "let's talk about ways you can tell my cellie not to sleep in her bra that don't involve banging on the cell door and waking us both up at 3am.

needless to say i remain sceptical.

today's session was a lot of listening to the facilitator, however we were told that future sessions would be more participatory. upcoming topics include the cycle of learned anger, and breaking the cycle; physical responses to anger; warning signs to anger and ways to avoid being aggressive; balance of changing anger patterns; anger and substance use and the impact; ways to cope with anger; next steps and what's out there. all in all i think that this program will be pretty representative of what's offered here at Vanier in terms of tone and content. and i feel about it they way a lot of people feel about the Unit Two programs: at the very least it's something different and a chance to get off the range, and maybe i'll learn a thing or two. but just in case, as a back-up, i'm learning and practicing some meditation techniques for when i lose my shit and get sent to the hole :)

27 May - Prisoners at Virginia's Red Onion State Prison on Hunger Strike

On May 22, brave prisoners at Virginia's Red Onion State Prison began a hunger strike. Their decision to starve themselves in an effort to be heard is the latest in a recent series of prison strikes, one of the very few forms of peaceful recourse available to prisoners to protest intolerable conditions.

MORE:

The series started Dec. 9, 2010, with a sit-down strike by thousands of prisoners in Georgia, tired of being forced to work for free like slaves, followed by Lucasville prisoners' hunger strike at Ohio State Penitentiary in January 2011 and the mass hunger strikes in California beginning July 1, 2011, that involved 12,000 prisoners in 13 prisons simultaneously refusing food at their peak. Hunger strikes worldwide, from Palestine, where prisoners acknowledged being inspired by their peers in California, to Kyrgyzstan, where prisoners literally sewed their mouths shut, have followed.

Red Onion State Prison in rural Virginia sits in the barren crater of a formerly lush green mountain whose top was blown off to remove the coal that used to be mined the old-fashioned way. Built in 1998, it's the new economic development model for Appalachia: mountaintop removal covered by prisons and Wal-Marts, now the only job options for out-of-work miners and their families, according to JJ Heyward, a veteran activist who volunteered at the Bay View before moving to the East Coast.

Now the miners who used to mine "black gold" – coal – mind Black prisoners. Heyward says that Washington, D.C., has no prisons, so anyone sentenced to five years or more is shipped out of state, often to Red Onion, culturally a world away. Creative activists to the rescue, the staff of [WMMT Mountain Community Radio](#) in

Whitesburg, Kentucky, broadcast a show connecting prisoners and their families back home that can be heard in Red Onion and seven more state and federal mountain prisons plus many regional jails and detention centers.

“Red Onion State Prison was opened a dozen years ago amid a major prison-building effort in Virginia. It was designed to confine the most dangerous criminals – often in solitary cells where they have almost no interaction with others,” reads the caption published with this photo by The Virginian-Pilot newspaper.

“In recent years, central Appalachia has seen a boom in prison construction, and many of those who have subsequently been incarcerated in our region’s growing prison system come from places far, far away from the coalfields,” explains WMMT. “Due to this distance and the often prohibitive cost of phone calls in prison, many have no contact with their friends and family, being far outside of a travel range that many loved ones can afford. In response, WMMT began the Holler to the Hood project 10 years ago in an effort to connect those in prison to their families, friends and the outside world.”

The show, now called [Hot 88.7 – Hip Hop from the Hilltop and Calls From Home](#), airs Mondays 9-10 p.m. Eastern Time (6-7 p.m. Pacific Time). Go to [WMMT](#) to listen live. This week’s show will focus on the Red Onion hunger strike. Call 1(888) 396-1208 to record your message between 7-9 p.m. (4-6 p.m. PT) on Monday for broadcast that night.

A statement released by one of the hunger strike representatives says: “Regardless of sexual preference, gang affiliation, race and religion, there are only two classes at this prison: the oppressor and the oppressed. We the oppressed are coming together. We’re considered rival gang members, but now we’re coming together as revolutionaries. We’re tired of being treated like animals.”

After exhausting legal and administrative remedies, the Red Onion prisoners issued 10 demands (printed in full below) and vowed to starve themselves until their demands are met. They include the right to have fully cooked meals, the right to clean cells, the right to be notified of the purpose and duration of their detention in segregation and a call for an end to indefinite segregation. Red Onion has been repeatedly criticized since it opened in 1998. A 1999 Human Rights Watch report on Red Onion concluded that the “Virginia Department of Corrections has failed to embrace basic tenets of sound correctional practice and laws protecting inmates from abusive, degrading or cruel treatment.”

Torture, Red Onion style

I first heard of Red Onion when Kevin “Rashid” Johnson, a nationally known prison writer and artist often compared to George Jackson, designed what became the symbol of the California hunger strikes. It shows black, brown and white arms clasped together indicating racial unity around a fork and spoon on a map of California crossed out as in a “no smoking” sign.

Rashid Johnson is a founding organizer of the New African Black Panther Party-Prison Chapter (NABPP-PC) and author of the book “Defying the Tomb.” With a foreword by Russell “Maroon” Shoats and afterword by Sundiata Acoli, renowned political prisoners, the book has been banned as “gang literature” by Pelican Bay State Prison.

Rashid’s acclaim did not protect him at Red Onion, where, in one of countless episodes of torture, he was [assaulted by staff on Dec. 12, 2011](#). They dislocated his shoulder and pulled a 3-inch by 7-inch swath of his dreadlocks out by the roots. This occurred when he refused to turn his back on an officer as he came out of the exercise cage.

Mac Gaskins, a prisoner at Red Onion for 14 years released only last June, was interviewed May 22, the day the hunger strike began, on Voices with Vision on Pacifica station WPFW in Washington, D.C. Listen to the show here and read the transcript of the entire interview below, following the 10 demands.

Mac discusses torture at Red Onion: “having your fingers broken inside of these places, being bitten by dogs,

being strapped to beds for days, as we've talked about many times, being forced to defecate on yourself – I mean all of this has led to these men demanding to be treated as human beings. It's like if you are put inside prison, you forfeit that right to be treated as a human being. ...

“Access to adequate medical care inside of prison, especially in supermax prison, it's almost nonexistent. You have men there, they have chronic illnesses that aren't being treated. There was one guy when I was at Red Onion, he died from undiagnosed advanced diabetes. This guy had diabetes for years and he was never diagnosed. ...

“So maybe your fingers were broken, as mine were multiple times at these places, and then you're denied any sort of medical care. Your bones are never reset, any of that. It's like they don't even have medical staff at the prison.

“They come in with riot gear – I'm talking about jump boots, shields, dogs, pepper spray – to assault you. Maybe eight men come in. They wrestle you down.

“You're totally subdued – handcuffed, shackled – and then they proceed to break your fingers. They bend them back one by one, trying to break as many of your fingers as they can. They try to break your toes. And the whole time they are yelling out, ‘Stop resisting! Stop resisting!’ to make it look like you're the one who is escalating the situation.

“When you're taken out, they put the spit mask on your face 'cause they usually bust your face up pretty bad. They put the spit mask on so the camera can't see the damage that has been inflicted. The nurses come over allegedly to assess the damage.

John “Mac” Gaskins, a prisoner at Red Onion State Prison for 14 years, was released just last June. “My hand looked like a volley ball. I mean you couldn't even see the definition of my hand. My whole hand was like a ball. The nurse told me I had full range of movement and no bones in my hand were broken. ...

“I have watched men eat feces in prison; I've watched men throw feces on each other. I would hear men in their cells screaming at night, basically just escaping to some place of insanity. They are driving men insane. ...

“At Red Onion, all of the light is artificial in your cells – there are no windows in the cells – and it's total sensory deprivation. So they asked this guy Ron D'Angelo, how do you justify sending men here? There are no educational programs, no vocational programs, men are just rotting and deteriorating in these places. ...

“He said, ‘We didn't bring these guys up to the mountains to rehabilitate them; we brought them to the mountains to die.’ ...

“Now at Red Onion and Wallens Ridge, they are taking away books for guys that are in segregation. You have to meet a certain behavioral criteria to receive books. So, for guys in the old days like George Jackson, that was their only escape. Now you don't even have that. They have taken that away.”

How you can help

Call WMMT's Calls From Home show to give a shout out of support to the hunger strikers. The Monday, May 28, show is especially critical; it's the first since the strike began and will air the 10 demands of the hunger strikers. Prison officials are likely to respond by removing all prisoner radios before the next Monday show, so this will be the last chance to let these brave men know we are out here standing in solidarity with them and doing our best to make their voices heard.

In order to preserve the longevity of the show – which is an important method by which men receive messages weekly from their loved ones back home – WMMT is asking everyone calling in to be conscious of some

constraints on what you say:

- Don't mention the pending ROSP hunger strike directly.
- No cursing!
- Don't mention any of the men by name.
- Don't make your statement a call to action; this is considered inciting a riot by officials and will give them fuel to impose restrictions on access to the show in the future

They suggest that you:

- read a quote from a hunger striker in California, Ohio, Palestine or elsewhere.
- offer vague solidarity and support for the "struggle"; those who need to know will know what you're talking about.
- read a short quote from George Jackson, their most beloved revolutionary, or other revolutionary figure.
- keep it short; 50 short messages will be a more powerful display of support than fewer long messages. The men need to know that there are many people out here standing in solidarity.

Calls are taken and recorded from 7-9 p.m. ET (4-6 PT) and then these calls are aired from 9-10 p.m. ET (6-7 p.m. PT). The number to call is [\(606\) 633-1208](tel:6066331208) or [1\(888\) 396-1208](tel:18883961208) to give a shout out. You can listen to the show live at <http://appalshop.org/>.

Write to Virginia prisoners to spread the word. Red Onion is a supermax prison; prisoners are isolated and communication among them is difficult. Supporters are calling for volunteers to send short, personal, creatively written letters into everyone in the Virginia prison system they have contact information for to inform them of what's going on. Email katherinecolespiper@gmail.com or JJ Heyward at tortakin@gmail.com for prisoners' names and addresses. The VDOC (Virginia Department of Corrections) will try hard and fast to silence this and keep the hunger strike from spreading as it did in California. We need to be harder and faster.

Call Virginia officials who have the power to meet the hunger strikers' demands:

- Gov. Bob McDonnell, Robert.F.McDonnell@Governor.Virginia.Gov, (804) 786-4273
- Virginia Corrections Director Harold W. Clarke, Harold.Clarke@VADOC.Virginia.Gov, (804) 674-3118
- Red Onion State Prison Chief Warden Randall Mathena, Randall.Mathena@VADOC.Virginia.Gov, (276) 796-7510
- Western Region Corrections Operations Chief G.K. Washington, GK.Washington@VADOC.Virginia.Gov, (804) 674-3612

Sample phone call or email: Hello, I'm calling to express my support for the hunger strikers in Red Onion State Prison. These men are on hunger strike to call attention to inhumane conditions at Red Onion, from fully cooked meals and medical attention to sanitary living conditions and an end to solitary confinement. We demand an immediate response to the strikers' demands. Red Onion has a long history of public scrutiny for conditions, and we, the broad movement to support the Red Onion hunger strikers, won't let up until their demands are met and until Red Onion guarantees that there will be zero retaliation on the hunger strikers.

Sign the petition in support of the Virginia hunger strikers at <http://www.change.org/petitions/grant-the-ten-demands-of-the-hunger-strikers-at-red-onion-state-prison> . Sign and share!

Stay updated at <http://virginiaprisonstrike.blogspot.com/> and, on Facebook, [Solidarity for Virginia Prison Hunger Strikers](#).

The Red Onion hunger strikers, like those who preceded and will inevitably follow them, are dead serious. Their support website, [Solidarity with Virginia Prison Hunger Strikers](#), reports the participants are in good spirits and are encouraged by the outside attention and response to their call for solidarity and support from their

communities.

In addition to refusing to eat, the men are also refusing the three weekly showers they are allowed and the one hour of recreation they are permitted each day. They do not want to leave their cells until they are able to talk with a third party outside observer.

On the first day of the strike, strikers in one of the segregation pods were informed that the phone in their pod had “broken.” The same day, one striker was moved from his pod to a different pod in segregation and was threatened with losing his prison job and being charged with a false charge if he did not stop striking.

Strikers expect they will soon be split apart into separate pods (or cell blocks) in an attempt to break the strike. While being separated is not ideal, strikers also realize this could help them to spread word about the strike.

In the words of veteran prisoner advocate Marpessa Kupendua, “We must support these courageous comrades who are actively revolting against the incarceration nation. Go to <http://virginiaprisonstrike.blogspot.com> and take action!”

Ten demands of ROSP hunger strikers

We (prisoners at Red Onion State Prison) demand the right to an adequate standard of living while in the custody of the state!

1. We demand fully cooked food and access to a better quality of fresh fruit and vegetables. In addition, we demand increased portions on our trays, which allow us to meet our basic nutritional needs as defined by VDOC regulations.
2. We demand that every prisoner at ROSP have unrestricted access to complaint and grievance forms and other paperwork we may request.
3. We demand better communication between prisoners and higher-ranking guards. Presently higher-ranking guards invariably take the lower-ranking guards’ side in disputes between guards and prisoners, forcing the prisoner to act out in order to be heard. We demand that higher-ranking guards take prisoner complaints and grievances into consideration without prejudice.
4. We demand an end to torture in the form of indefinite segregation through the implementation of a fair and transparent process whereby prisoners can earn the right to be released from segregation. We demand that prison officials completely adhere to the security point system, insuring that prisoners are transferred to institutions that correspond with their particular security level.
5. We demand the right to an adequate standard of living, including access to quality materials that we may use to clean our own cells. Presently, we are forced to clean our entire cell, including the inside of our toilets, with a single sponge and our bare hands. This is unsanitary and promotes the spread of disease-carrying bacteria.
6. We demand the right to have 3rd party neutral observers visit and document the condition of the prisons to ensure an end to the corruption amongst prison officials and widespread human rights abuses of prisoners. Internal Affairs and Prison Administrator’s monitoring of prison conditions have not alleviated the dangerous circumstances we are living under while in custody of the state, which include, but are not limited to: the threat of undue physical aggression by guards, sexual abuse and retaliatory measures, which violate prison policies and our human rights.
7. We demand to be informed of any and all changes to VDOC/IOP policies as soon as these changes are made.
8. We demand the right to adequate medical care. Our right to medical care is guaranteed under the Eighth

Amendment to the Constitution, and thus the deliberate indifference of prison officials to our medical needs constitutes a violation of our constitutional rights. In particular, the toothpaste we are forced to purchase in the prison is a danger to our dental health and causes widespread gum disease and associated illnesses.

9. We demand our right, as enumerated through VDOC policy, to a monthly haircut. Presently, we have been denied haircuts for nearly three months. We also demand to have our razors changed out on a weekly basis. The current practice of changing out the razors every three weeks leaves prisoners exposed to the risk of dangerous infections and injury.

10. We demand that there be no reprisals for any of the participants in the Hunger Strike. We are simply organizing in the interest of more humane living conditions.

Interview with recently released Red Onion prisoner John ‘Mac’ Gaskins

This interview was broadcast on Pacifica station WPFW’s Voices with Vision, Washington, D.C., May 22, 11 a.m. It was transcribed by human rights advocate [Kendra Castaneda](#).

Ryme Katkhouda: Good morning, Naji. Share with listeners what has been going on with the mobilizations about prisoners?

Naji Mujahid: As we speak, there’s a press conference going on in Richmond, Virginia, to announce the beginning of a hunger strike at Red Onion State Prison. Red Onion State Prison is a maximum security Virginia state prison down in the southwestern corner of the state where there has been a longstanding problem of abuse. While in the torturous Red Onion State Prison in Virginia, Rashid Johnson drew what became the symbol of the California hunger strikes.

The prisoners, I would assume, have been inspired by other hunger strikes that have been going on around the country for the past year. We’ve seen them in Ohio, California; there was the work stoppage in Georgia. Also the Palestinian prisoners in Israel have been on strike for some time now. So it’s activity that has been gaining traction; what it seems to be is an attempt at the folks down there to tap into that.

In the studio with us we have John “Mac” Gaskins of the D.C. chapter of SPARC, Supporting Prisoners and Acting for Radical Change, and also somebody who has first-hand experience, having been at Red Onion, and he can speak further to that.

There is a list of 10 demands and the headline of them reads: “We the prisoners at Red Onion State Prison demand the right to an adequate standard of living while in the custody of the state.” And running down the list of demands is real basic stuff; it’s stuff that people shouldn’t have to ask for.

I guess, Mac, you can begin by explaining some of the demands; and one thing that strikes me, having known you and having discussed some of the things going on at Red Onion, you know, this list is kind of tame. It could be miles long but it’s just this basic stuff like toothpaste.

John “Mac” Gaskins: Right, in those prisons, not only in Red Onion, Wallens Ridge, in all those prisons in Southwest Virginia, you’re denied access to basic necessities such as toothpaste, soap. The toothpaste they sell is such low quality they actually sell it in a packet – it’s like a packet of ketchup – and it’s like a dollar. It will last you a couple of days – two days tops. That’s maybe brushing once a day.

All these things from having your fingers broken inside of these places, being bitten by dogs, being strapped to beds for days, as we’ve talked about many times, being forced to defecate on yourself – I mean all of this has led to these men demanding to be treated as human beings. It’s like if you are put inside prison, you forfeit that right to be treated as a human being. So this list is pretty basic. I feel that on this list, medical should be up at the top.

Ryme: What do you mean exactly by medical, Mac? For some listeners, they don't have a clue about how bad it can be on the inside.

Mac: Access to adequate medical care inside of prison, especially in supermax prison, it's almost nonexistent. You have men there, they have chronic illnesses that aren't being treated. There was one guy when I was at Red Onion, he died from undiagnosed advanced diabetes. This guy had diabetes for years and he was never diagnosed.

The guards, which is common practice, they abuse prisoners. One of the demands on here is better communication with prisoners and higher ranking guards. They are demanding that the guards, the higher ranking officials, at least take prisoners complaints into consideration. Because right now they are basically forced to act out in order to get these guys' attention.

So maybe your fingers were broken, as mine were multiple times at these places, and then you're denied any sort of medical care. Your bones are never reset, any of that. It's like they don't even have medical staff at the prison. It's totally nonexistent.

Ryme: We always see in the movies, Mac, and for some people that's their only reference, that there is an infirmary, that there are nurses that are very well dressed and ready to serve you, doctors, and everything looks fine. And we always have this scene – until there is a major uprising – of a really smoothly running prison.

And here you are talking about broken bones and whatever. Where was everybody when your bones were broken? What was going on? Still, give people the story. I know it's painful, but we need to hear painful. This idea of sugarcoating the world so we don't see blood about the wars, we don't hear the pain about what goes on in the prison keeps people complacent and they are not giving support on the outside.

Mac: Yes, yes, I totally agree. So one scenario: Maybe some guy is denied his tray at Red Onion, his meal tray, so he asks for a complaint form, which is totally denied to him. You have to go through the sergeant. They're not accessible in the office or anything like that. You have to go through the sergeant, and he determines if your complaint is valid or not, which most of the time he's going to say it isn't. So maybe this guy floods his cell, which I've done, floods his cell or kicks his door to bring attention on himself.

Naji: About flooding his cell, what do you mean, like clogging up the toilet?

Mac: Clogging up the toilet, yeah, and like flooding his cell.

They come in with riot gear – I'm talking about jump boots, shields, dogs, pepper spray – to assault you. Maybe eight men come in. They wrestle you down.

You're totally subdued – handcuffed, shackled – and then they proceed to break your fingers. They bend them back one by one, trying to break as many of your fingers as they can. They try to break your toes. And the whole time they are yelling out, "Stop resisting! Stop resisting!" to make it look like you're the one who is escalating the situation.

When you're taken out, they put the spit mask on your face 'cause they usually bust your face up pretty bad. They put the spit mask on so the camera can't see the damage that has been inflicted. The nurses come over allegedly to assess the damage.

My hand looked like a volley ball. I mean you couldn't even see the definition of my hand. My whole hand was like a ball. The nurse told me I had full range of movement and no bones in my hand were broken.

The medical staff at the prison, they lie to protect the higher ranking officials at the prison. They would not allow me to go out to see an outside doctor. I never had an x-ray done on my hand, any of that.

So the medical staff there, I mean it's like they are totally in cahoots with the corruption that's going on inside the prison. There was another guy where the bone in his hand had been totally snapped in half, and only because of that where they forced to take him to the hospital. His family had come in, they saw it, they made a big fuss about it; but only in extreme cases do you have access to doctors or any sort of adequate medical care in prison. At Red Onion, it's nonexistent.

They have this guy Ron D'Angelo – they asked him once how do you justify keeping a man in these sorts of conditions? Taking them outside to recreation cages that are like dog kennels. If you are about 6 feet tall, you have to duck down to get inside of this cage – very small, maybe half of this booth, not even that. And you go out there maybe four times a week, for about 45 minutes. And that's at the discretion of the guards, since they have to get two officers, stripsearch you, handcuff you, both walk you outside, so maybe they don't feel like giving you rec, so they don't give you rec that day.

Ryme: And this means time to be in the yard outside your cell, right?

Mac: Yes, but not a yard, not a yard. They have this illusion that you're outside on the yard. At Red Onion there is no yard; they have dog kennels which are inside of the building. They do have the roof cut off where it looks like you are outside, but you are in this plexiglas enclosure that is surrounded by fence, so you're not outside. This drawing by Rashid is called "Control Unit Torture." To see a mind-blowing display of his work – all of it done while he himself is being tortured in a control unit – go to <http://rashidmod.com/art/>. Rashid encourages the use of his art for free. You'll find a drawing on almost every topic you care about. – Art: Kevin "Rashid" Johnson

At Red Onion, all of the light is artificial in your cells – there are no windows in the cells – and it's total sensory deprivation. So they asked this guy Ron D'Angelo, how do you justify sending men here? There are no educational programs, no vocational programs, men are just rotting and deteriorating in these places. He said in response, "We didn't bring these guys ..."

Ryme: What does that do to men mentally?

Mac: It destroys them. I have watched men eat feces in prison; I've watched men throw feces on each other. I would hear men in their cells screaming at night, basically just escaping to some place of insanity. They are driving men insane. I think all of us, I don't think you can live under those sorts of conditions and not be damaged by that to some degree, so I think you slip in and out of insanity. For someone like me, I just happened to escape and still have some sense of sanity but ...

Naji: What were you about to say about what Ron D'Angelo said?

Mac: He said, "We didn't bring these guys up to the mountains to rehabilitate them; we brought them to the mountains to die."

There's this good video – if anyone listening hasn't seen it, they need to see it – it's called "Up the Ridge." They have this footage of when they are doing the ribbon cutting for Wallens Ridge State Prison; there's this big sign on top of it that says something like Future Home of Virginia's Exiles, basically meaning all of the guys who can't fit in the legitimate framework of society, this is where we exile them to, a supermax prison

Ryme: You are listening to Voices with Vision on WPFW, Washington D.C., 89.3FM on your dial. We have with us Mac, who is talking to us about the prisoners' strike and about Red Onion. This was heavy, so you said there are the medical conditions and there's also the mental pressure that's put on the men?

Mac: Yes, and there's nothing. At one point you couldn't be sent to Red Onion because they didn't have any sort of services that accommodated someone with a mental illness. But, in the interest of money, even though

it's a state prison, it's pretty complicated, because Virginia is building prisons to hold prisoners from other states. That's what this video "Up The Ridge" is all about.

They have one prison called Green Rock, which only has Pennsylvania prisoners. They don't hold Virginia prisoners. And Red Onion, Wallens Ridge, was doing that to some degree for a while. They had prisoners from New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Wyoming, Virgin Islands, so they wanted to fill those beds.

When they first built the prisons, there was a criteria: You had to be one of the most violent prisoners in the state. But the guys weren't really meeting that criteria to fill 1,500 beds or something, so they just started lowering what the required criteria was to be sent to a supermax prison so anyone could go.

Naji: I saw the Wallens Ridge documentary; if I remember correctly, like you said it is supposed to be for the worst of the worst. But you ended up having people come in there for nonviolent offenses and so forth. I think there was a kid from Connecticut, you know they were bringing guys all the way down from Connecticut to Virginia with relatively minor charges. You know, poor fellow ended up committing suicide from the stress that was put on him. I think you told me before, suicide – successful suicides and suicide attempts – is not at all uncommon.

Ryme: There is also a masquerade around suicides that all of us all know just too well, which is when somebody just needs to disappear, there's suddenly a so-called suicide. This is pretty sad and intense. What besides these two conditions, Mac, are the demands of the prisoners that are on strike?

Mac: The prisoners' first demand is the demand for fully cooked food and access to a better quality of fresh fruit and vegetables, in addition to increased portions on their food trays. This is a minimal request just to meet their basic nutritional needs as defined by the Virginia Department of Corrections. The food that you get – I can't explain in words the poor quality of this food – you probably wouldn't feed this food to your dog, not that a dog is anything less than a human being, that a dog deserves less. You wouldn't even feed to an animal the food they are feeding to prisoners.

The second demand is that every prisoner at Red Onion State Prison have unrestricted access to complaint and grievance forms and other paperwork they may request. They will give you a grievance form but not a complaint form, and you have to have a complaint form in order to write a grievance form. So if you write the grievance, send that out to the regional director or whatever, he's going to send it back saying you didn't take the proper steps first. You've got to go through the warden first, but if they are denying you access to complaint forms, then it's useless to have a grievance form.

Third, we talked about better communication between prisoners and guards.

The fourth, which is very important: "We demand an end to torture in the form of indefinite segregation through the implementation of a fair and transparent process whereby prisoners can earn the right to be released from segregation." When you go to Red Onion State Prison, it's not like the typical solitary confinement situation. When you go to Red Onion State Prison, we are talking years no matter what you go there for; everyone goes to segregation. You have to stay in segregation for multiple years. There are guys that have been in segregation since they built the place in 1998.

Naji: Can you explain what segregation is for those who are unfamiliar with it?

Mac: Segregation is, I guess we could, to make it easier, call it solitary confinement, where you are placed in a cell all by yourself for a minimum 23 hours a day, sometimes 23½. You have restricted access to books, media. Your food choices are a lot worse; you get the worst of the food that they serve at the prison. Even though all food they serve at the prison is horrible, in segregation it's worse. You are only able to take showers three days a week. Your visits are restricted.

You are in this box and the conditions are horrible: sensory deprivation, no windows in the cell. When I came out, Naji, not to get released from prison but to go into a general population setting, it felt like I was getting released from prison.

One, because I had not smelled fresh air in six years because I had been in this cell for six years straight. I had not seen a tree or anything related to nature in years. It doesn't mean that much until it's taken away, where you are in some box 23½ hours a day in five or six years.

You haven't seen another person other than guards that come to the door, and they are totally hostile towards you. Every time that you move from your cell, whether it's from a visit or to go see a doctor or go to the dog kennels, whatever it is you have to strip naked to go through this humiliating process, bend over, spread your buttocks, open your mouth. They are going to make you do this multiple times until they're satisfied with your level of humiliation.

Then they are going to chain you up – your wrists, your ankles – and put this belt around your waist, then put this dog leash on – that's literally a dog leash – to the handcuffs wrapped around your hands. So it's about a 2- or 3-inch span between you and the officers, like right up on your back, and they march you outside typically at a speed faster than you can walk, so the shackles scrape your legs. It's horrible conditions, man; that's solitary confinement.

Now at Red Onion and Wallens Ridge, they are taking away books for guys that are in segregation. You have to meet a certain behavioral criteria to receive books. So, for guys in the old days like George Jackson, that was their only escape. Now you don't even have that. They have taken that away.

Ryme: So much is going on and so much is going on without us realizing it, while really it's our tax dollars and other countries' goods and assets that are being pulled to do these things. When we learned that it was happening in Abu Ghraib in Iraq, we said that it is torture and we said it was unacceptable. And here we are in the backyard of the United States, where we sit comfortably in our houses looking at TV and crying over what happens to prisoners abroad, and this is going on.

The strike started this morning. Can you tell the listeners what exactly they can do to support it and for how long is it going to be going on?

Mac: It is going to be going on for a minimum of four days, about four days, Naji?

Naji: I'm not certain.

Mac: In any case, in any hunger strike we want it to be as brief as possible. These are men's lives we are talking about here. After a couple of weeks, organs start to shut down and men start to die. The hunger strike in any case is a short campaign. It can't go on forever.

Ryme: How can people get to know more about what's going on?

Mac: Well, there is some contact information.

Naji: is the website up?

Mac: Yes, contact Virginiasonsolidarity@gmail.com and the website is Virginiaprisonstrike.blogspot.com.

Naji: There is also a group on Facebook dedicated to solidarity and support of the Virginia hunger strikers. There are tweets coming out at hashtag VA hunger strike.

Ryme: And also, for full disclosure, all the producers and hosts of this show and co-hosts are with the prisoner solidarity movements in different ways. I'm with Stop Mass Incarceration. Naji and Netfa [Freeman] also work on that. This issue is so serious that you've got to cross the line, and is there really a line? We are people and this is Voices with Vision.

Mac: I want to add something else. I want folks to, even in your personal space, start to humanize prisoners. There's this widespread belief that most prisoners are in prison for some heinous violent act, and that is totally untrue. Most of these guys are in prison for drugs and drug related offenses, property crimes.

I was having a discussion a couple nights ago and I said that for me, I want to redefine what it means to be a political prisoner. Not just because you are in prison because of a political act, but most folks in prison are political prisoners because the basis of their incarceration is all built around a political agenda: The war on poverty, that's a political agenda. The war on drugs, that's a political agenda. So these guys are political prisoners. Even though they don't know it, they are political prisoners.

So the way we stay in solidarity, man, is getting involved with whatever efforts folks doing on the ground – standing in solidarity with that – maybe even doing a hunger strike ourselves out here on the outside. Contact your legislators. Wherever you are, man, do whatever you can to show support to prisoners, because this isn't a Virginia issue; this is a human rights issue.

This thing with Wells Fargo is still going on, so we've got to ramp that up a little bit.

Ryme: Well Fargo funding private prisons?

Mac: Wells Fargo, the biggest funder of Geo Group, the second largest provider of private prisons in this country.

Ryme: Thank you, Mac. This is really important to keep in the consciousness in the people.

Naji: Mac mentioned to contact the legislators. You can contact the state legislators in Virginia, or even if you don't live in Virginia, the state legislators here. In Washington, the senators. Also send this out to different media outlets. Just support by getting the word out and by getting in touch with people whom you know to be possibly influential and helpful in this situation.

29 May - Reinstate PP Eddie Conway's Friend of a Friend Prison Youth Mentoring Program!

Members of Friend of a Friend, Students Against Mass Incarceration and other organizations are meeting with a Public Safety commissioner on Tuesday, June 5th to demand reinstatement of their program at the Jessup Correctional Institution.

MORE:

We are asking folks to come out to show community support for FOF and community based programming in MD. prisons. FOF was founded by political prisoner Eddie Conway and other concerned men in the prison system to provide mentoring to young prisoners. It is currently in 5 prisons around the state, but the program was shut down at JCI in April with no explanation. Let's show Public Safety and Corrections that Baltimore and DC support our folks inside! We will gather in the parking lot before the meeting at 9am. We want as many bodies to be present at that meeting to force their hand, but we also want to provide another way of showing support. Please sign the petition so that we can effectively fight and win against this unethical closure of a positive and powerful program.

An online petition is available at:

<http://www.change.org/petitions/departments-of-public-safety-and-correctional-services-reinstate->

[friend-of-a-friend-at-jessup-correctional-institution](#)

29 May - Message from Oscar Lopez Rivera on the Anniversary of His Capture

Oscar Lopez Rivera wrote the following to be read on the anniversary of his arrest, now 31 years ago.

MORE:

Greetings with Much Respect and Love

i want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Puerto Rican people in PR and in the diaspora for the support you have given me during the past 31 years. i also want to express the same gratitude to the freedom and justice loving people in the u.s. and in different parts of the world for the solidarity they've shared with me. The support i've received has been a fountain of strength that has helped me face and deal with the difficult challenges i've experienced in prison during the past 31 years, and to remain morally and spiritually strong to continue struggling and resisting.

The 31 years seem to have passed fleetingly. Many radical changes have occurred all over the world during this period of time. In Latin America progressive presidents rule in Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Uruguay, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Brazil and Argentina. In the last two countries the presidents are progressive women. And in Puerto Rico the us navy is no longer present in Vieques. Unfortunately, the most important change Puerto Ricans need has not taken place. Because colonialism seems to be more entrenched now than ever.

It was Jose Martí who said that for a people to be free they needed to be cultured. i believe Puerto Ricans are a cultured people. Yet we still are a colonized people. We are also a morally, mentally, spiritually strong people. But we haven't been able to make Puerto Rico a free and sovereign nation.

It was Albert Einstein who said that by repeating the same experiment the results were always going to be the same. Doing that is nothing else than an exercise in futility. And Puerto Rican independentists have been repeating the same experiment for decades and obtaining the same results without being able to achieve their goal of an independent and sovereign nation. The celebration of plebiscites has been such an experiment. So why do we continue engaging in Sisyphean tasks? What should we do? Let's pay heed to Einstein's wise warning.

My proposal is a simple one. Let's work on the problems we can resolve with the means and resources we have at our disposal. For example, let's take one problem related to the health issue we are facing - obesity. To resolve this problem a simple change in lifestyle will do. Eat a healthy diet, exercise and create a support network. We can also start programs of urban gardening. There's space for such a program in the 78 municipalities in Puerto Rico. And in those spaces we can grow healthy products that can help with a nutritional diet. We can look for alternative sources of energy and of transportation. Let's start thinking of changes we can make in our lifestyles and we can resolve some of the difficult problems we face. Problems shouldn't intimidate or scare us. They should produce ideas in our heads and challenge us to find solutions. Finding solutions to problems give us confidence, and help us transcend our colonized mentality. And that transcendence gets us closer to our goal of achieving an independent and sovereign nation and a better and more just world. We are intelligent enough to know what needs to be done. We can change lifestyles in Puerto Rico and in the Puerto Rican diaspora and by doing so we will grow stronger morally, physically, spiritually and mentally. We can make Puerto Rico a free and sovereign nation. En resistencia y lucha, OLR.

29 May - Amnesty International Launches New Angola 3 Action as Albert Woodfox's Court Hearing Begins

On May 29th, Albert Woodfox began his third evidentiary hearing. We're pasting in relevant news below.

MORE:

Today Albert Woodfox will appear in court in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, seeking his conviction to be overturned for a third time. As we start this three-day evidentiary hearing, Amnesty International has released a statement

about the significance of this hearing for Albert and everyone else's "right to trial, in full equality and free from discrimination, before a competent, independent and impartial tribunal." A3 supporters are invited to attend the May 29-31 hearing.

Determined to secure justice for the Angola 3, today Amnesty will simultaneously launch the second stage of their campaign demanding Albert Woodfox and Herman Wallace's immediate release from solitary confinement. Amnesty's new online petition is calling for James M. LeBlanc, the Secretary of the Department of Public Safety and Corrections to account for his comments that Herman and Albert were being kept in solitary to protect prison employees, other inmates and visitors. Amnesty asks "where's the evidence?"

40 years in solitary confinement could end

A three-day evidentiary hearing into a claim of racial discrimination in the selection of the grand jury foreperson prior to the 1998 retrial of Albert Woodfox is due to begin in a federal court in Baton Rouge, Louisiana tomorrow (29 May).

A ruling in his favour could result in Albert Woodfox's conviction being overturned for the third time, and could secure his release from prison after being held in solitary confinement for 40 years.

Albert Woodfox was convicted in 1973 - along with a second prisoner, Herman Wallace - of the 1972 murder of a prison guard called Brent Miller. Both men, who have vigorously denied involvement in the crime, were placed in solitary confinement in Closed Cell Restriction at Louisiana State Penitentiary (known as Angola prison). A third man, Robert King, who was accused of a different crime, was also held in these conditions and the three were jointly known as the "Angola 3". King was released in 2001 after serving 29 years in solitary.

Meanwhile, Woodfox's conviction was overturned in 1992, but he was re-indicted and convicted again at a 1998 trial. In 2008, a federal District Court judge ruled that Woodfox had been denied his right to adequate assistance of counsel at his 1998 retrial and ordered the state to re-try or release him. The District Court had also found that his lawyers had made a prima facie case of discrimination in relation to the selection of the grand jury foreperson, and that this warranted a federal evidentiary hearing to give the state an opportunity to rebut the claim. The state appealed against the District Court order for a retrial and in June 2010 a three-judge panel of the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit overturned the decision. The case was remanded to the District Court for an evidentiary hearing on the grand jury discrimination claim: it is this hearing that is about to begin.

The foreperson of the grand jury that indicted Albert Woodfox for his 1998 retrial was white. Woodfox's lawyers have presented evidence of the consistent under-representation of African Americans serving as grand jury forepersons compared to their numbers in the general population of the parish in which Albert Woodfox, who is himself African American, was tried.

Amnesty International considers the issue of discrimination in the selection of the grand jury foreperson to be a significant one. The right to trial, in full equality and free from discrimination, before a competent, independent and impartial tribunal lies at the heart of due process of law and requires that justice must not only be done, it must also be seen to be done. Actual impartiality and appearance of impartiality are both fundamental for maintaining respect for the administration of justice. The organisation will continue to monitor developments in this case.

On 17 April, Amnesty submitted a petition to the Governor of Louisiana with over 67,000 signatures from individuals in 125 countries urging that Albert Woodfox and Herman Wallace be removed from long term isolation.

Days 1 and 2: Evidentiary Hearing for Albert Woodfox of the Angola 3 DAY TWO: Wednesday, May 30

Midday the State rested their case, and both sides requested that the judge rule that the other had not met their burden and end the proceedings then and there. To avoid another delay in the proceedings for him to consider these motions, Judge Brady instead asked Albert's legal team to proceed with the presentation of their case for

the record while everyone was already assembled and promised to decide the pending motions sometime later.

Albert's first expert witness was Dr. Marx, a statistician with a mountain of unimpeachable credentials who very artfully and clearly explained the heart of why the State's numbers don't show discrimination in the selection of the grand jury foreperson but Albert's do. The different results stem from a fundamental disagreement about not just the methodology and methods, but the very population to be examined in the first place.

The baseline group the State is using to calculate whether there was discrimination in the selection of the grand jury by race is based on broad census numbers of eligible voters, minus illiterates, but without adjusting for any of the other many factors used to qualify and seat voters for jury duty. In contrast, Albert's expert relied upon the actual numbers of people who were called and found willing and able to serve as jurors as his base data pool for analysis. He made a credible and compelling argument that this more exact, case specific base number provided the only accurate, reliable result and demonstrated a strong, statistically significant pattern of racial discrimination in the selection of the forepersons in West Feliciana during the time of Albert's retrial that simply cannot be explained by chance.

Testimony continues tomorrow as the third and final day of Albert's third bid for freedom continues.

DAY ONE: Tuesday, May 29

Today the State set out to disprove the notion that there was any statistically significant, intentional discrimination in the selection of the grand jury foreperson. All three State witnesses: a mathematician, a judge, and a demographics expert, saw their offerings almost surgically diminished and dismantled by Albert's expert defense. By the end of the day, the bulk of their testimony was either contradicted or ruled inadmissible or irrelevant and there was some question as to whether to recognize the demographics professor as an "expert" at all. Tomorrow promises more of the same as witness by witness Albert fights for justice, and his freedom. Stay tuned.

29 May – Bradley Manning Mondays at the Brecht Forum

Bradley Manning is facing life in prison or the death penalty for alleging leaking information to WikiLeaks. Learn more about his case. Join organizers at the Brecht Forum on June 11, 18 and 25.

MORE:

June 11th – Bradey Manning's "Dangerous Data" with Birgitta Jónsdóttir, Alfredo Lopez & Trevor Timm
Old-fashioned government opacity and secrecy face new challenges from online media and activism. Since the leaks of numerous diplomatic cables and Iraq and Afghanistan war logs, a massive legal, political, and financial campaign has targeted progressive Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and activists, social media like Twitter, and publishing enterprises such as WikiLeaks.

29 May – Upcoming Sundiata Acoli parole hearing

From Sundiata:

The NJ Parole Board notified me 2day that my Parole Hearing will be conducted by teleconference at FCI Cumberland, MD on Friday, June 15, 2012. They say it will be a teleconference hearing becuz my previous parole hearing was only a short while/2 years ago. Take good care, stay strong, i will too. L, S, Sundiata

MORE:

To contact the Sundiata Acoli Freedom Committee and receive a form letter that you can use to write-in on behalf of the release of Bro. Sundiata, please write to TheSAFC@gmail.com. Please know personalized letters are far more effective than form letters. Please look at this for ideas, but write the letter in your own way.

The main points to emphasize are:

- Sundiata is 72 years old - the recidivism rate for elderly prisoners is almost non-existent therefore he is not a "threat" to the community
- He has served 39 years in prison - he has done his time
- He has been a model prisoner with a discipline free record
- He has served as a mentor and educator, to young people across the country, and to young prisoners inside who want to further their education
- He has a strong support system of family and friends

You can learn more about Sundiata and his case at www.sundiataacoli.org.

Do not send letters directly to the parole board. They need to go to Sundiata's lawyer, so they know all the letters that have come in, and they can be organized. **They need to be received by June 10th.**

Letters should be mailed to:
 Florence Morgan
 120-46 Queens Boulevard
 Kew Gardens, New York 11415

31 May - NY judge hears arguments over 2004 RNC arrests

From the corporate news shapers at the Associated Press...

MORE:

A judge considering the merits of dozens of lawsuits against the city for 1,800 arrests during the 2004 Republican National Convention was critical of some of the actions of police as he listened to arguments Thursday from lawyers for those arrested and the city.

U.S. District Judge Richard Sullivan seemed particularly disappointed by some of the actions he saw police take on videotapes he reviewed prior to several hours of arguments in a packed Manhattan courtroom. He questioned whether police did enough to separate people who were doing something illegal like blocking traffic from bystanders or people walking to work, a process he called "separating the dolphins from the tuna."

He said police allowed one sidewalk march by protesters in downtown Manhattan to proceed until a police official who "loses his head" suddenly stopped the march after less than a block, trapping the protesters with anyone else on the block and setting off mass arrests.

"I mean the rest of the cops looked utterly confused as to why" the police official "is going nuts," Sullivan said.

"You disagree with that?" the judge asked city attorney Peter Farrell. "If you are going to insist that it was magnificent police work the whole way, I just think you are going to run up against facts that are difficult to square."

Sullivan questioned Farrell repeatedly as to whether the city's police department tried hard enough to separate people violating the law from people on the street doing other things. The New York Civil Liberties Union contends police randomly arrested hundreds of people on at least two occasions by rounding up everybody in a city block.

Farrell defended the city, saying 800,000 people demonstrated during the convention and only 1,800 were arrested.

The judge questioned whether the police department believed it had the right to arrest all 500 people on a city block if it believes 200 of them are part of a cohesive unit doing something illegal.

"The police took reasonable steps ... to make sure they only had individuals involved in illegal conduct," Farrell said. "The police department's efforts to make sure they only arrested those engaged in illegal activity were successful."

The judge, though, said he saw little evidence of those steps in the record.

The NYCLU has asked the judge to find police didn't have probable cause to make mass arrests during the convention, at which President George W. Bush was nominated for another term. The city has asked the judge to throw out the lawsuits because police have qualified immunity.

Christopher Dunn, associate legal director of the NYCLU, told Sullivan that the legal arguments represented "a moment that has been a long time coming" about constitutional issues that were no less important because of the passage of time. He said the city sent a "very loud and destructive message" by sweeping up so many innocent people in large-scale arrests, the most ever at a national political convention.

Sullivan was critical as well of some of the NYCLU arguments, noting the difficulty that police had keeping streets and sidewalks moving in a city where someone in need of an ambulance could not be helped if protesters shut down traffic. "Overall, the city did a good job. Nothing blew up," he noted.

The judge did not immediately rule.

The NYCLU has said documents already in evidence prove its claims that deliberate police policy decisions led to long detentions of thousands of protesters arrested for minor offenses.

The convention was policed by as many as 10,000 officers from the 36,500-member department, the nation's largest. They were assigned to protect the city from terrorism threats and to cope with tens of thousands of demonstrators.

31 May - Snake Oil Medicine Show: John Graham appeal, denied

On May 31, 2012 the South Dakota Supreme Court denied the appeal of John Graham.

MORE:

Graham's story is complex, and deserves a proper trial, hearing and consideration. Not a junket of lies scripted and delivered like some voodoo snake oil peddler in a wild west medicine show. No. The appeal Graham's lawyer, John Murphy, created was thorough and demanded Justice. Justice has yet to be served, in this case. The charlatan practices of promised remedy. Remain rampant. The dust behind the wagon blinds all traffic.

Because of the importance of this loss of appeal and it's implications for both Canadian and U.S. citizens, i believe it is important to REVISIT the words of John Graham, about this entire "set up". Here, then a summary of an [INTERVIEW with John Graham](#), from Spring 2004, before he was wrongfully extradited to the United States. (The FULL interview can be found [click here](#)...and on infoshop news, soon!):

"She was my friend. I did whatever she needed me to do back then." This a quote from the second man indicted for the murder of Annie Mae, John Graham. The man accused of pulling the trigger. According to him, Graham was Annie Mae's close friend, confidant and brother. He and his family insist on this truth, his innocence.

In an interview I did with John Graham in April 2004, his connection to Annie Mae is explained. And the painful irony of his being accused of her murder revealed: "She was strong and taught me a lot about how to survive and live. She asked me to help her hide from the FBI and I took her to where she thought she would be safe". He was inside a ride on [Ghost Rider Roads](#).

Graham took Annie Mae from Denver, Co. to Rapid City, South Dakota and claims he never saw Annie Mae alive again. Graham insists that he was only accused of killing his friend AFTER he was visited by FBI agents. According to Graham the agents found him the Yukon and asked him to name as her murderers leaders of old AIM. The agents gave him some choices: Dennis Banks, John Trudell, the Bellecourt brothers perhaps?

Those were some of the names suggested to him as those he could claim killed Annie Mae. "Special U.S. agents kept coming up to Canada, looking for me. Several years ago they found me telling me testify against these AIM leaders or we'll say YOU killed her. I refused to lie."

According to Graham he was threatened with a murder indictment if he refused to co-operate. He never named anyone and apparently the agents made good on their word. Graham is serving a life sentence in South Dakota, and though he just lost his appeal to the S. Dakota Supreme Court, he and his lawyer will CONTINUE to fight.

That is, as it should be. These [decades of deceit](#) can only be undone. With truth. And refusal to believe any

scamming peddler selling remedies to death. There are no easy answers. And. The truth is always. Free.

1 Jun - Never Alone Tour Video

This past April, folks from Because We Must were able to meet up with the folks doing the "Never Alone tour for Eric McDavid, Marie Mason & long-term anarchist prisoners." They were able to videotape and edit the talk and have made a great video available online. You can see it here: <http://www.becausewemust.org/never-alone-tour-video>

MORE:

We were really excited about this tour, as we believe prisoner solidarity and support should be the core of any movement of resistance. Since we like to film and make videos for all of you to watch, share and use as a resource, we offered to film the Eugene, OR tour stop for them so it could be put online. Here is a little background info explaining what the tour is about.

“Never Alone is a nationwide tour in April 2012, featuring Sacramento Prisoner Support and Marie Mason Support Crew speaking about long-term anarchist prisoner support. Focusing specifically on the cases of Eric McDavid and Marie Mason, the tour will mark the spots where the events of these cases unfolded, using multimedia presentations to bring the facts of these cases to light.

As well as raising awareness and support for Eric and Marie, the tour will also feature strategizing about how to more effectively grow a culture of resistance that can breach the prison walls and sustain us and our friends for the long term, a security culture beyond 101 workshop (updated for 2012, now with extra tech!) and some awesome guest speakers. Truly, you won't want to miss this.

2 Jun - Sekou Odinga is now at Clinton

We just heard that Sekou was moved a week ago. Send him a card or letter to let him know he's in our hearts.

**Sekou Odinga #09-A-3775
Clinton Correctional Facility
Post Office Box 2001
Dannemora, New York 12929**

2 Jun - Fernando González has been transferred to a new prison in Safford, Arizona

Fernando González has been transferred to a low-level security prison in Safford, Arizona in the southwestern United States.

**Fernando González* #58733-004
FCI Safford
Post Office Box 9000
Safford, Arizona 85548
Address envelope to Rubén Campa**

11 Jun - Punk Rock Karaoke Benefit for Marie Mason and Eric McDavid

Along with the NYC Anarchist Black Cross, [Punk Rock Karaoke Chicago](#) will be hosting their first ever night in NYC! We'll be throwing down for [Marie Mason](#), [Eric McDavid](#), and other long-term anarchist prisoners in honor of the annual [June 11th International Day of Solidarity](#).

MORE:

WHAT: Benefit in solidarity with Marie Mason and Eric McDavid

WHEN: 8:00pm-midnight, Monday, June 11th (8pm Sharp! Not punk time)

WHERE: [Fontana's Bar](#) (105 Eldridge Street, Manhattan)

COST: \$7, plus vegan baked goods (cookies, cupcakes, empanadas) at reasonable prices

Every penny raised will go directly towards support efforts for Marie, Eric and others. Come out and support our prisoners by shelling out some cash and singing your heart out to one-of-a-kind Punk Rock Karaoke tracks! Seriously, it is a win/win.

Up The Punx/Prisoners!

june11.org

supportmariemason.org

supporteric.org

punkrockkaraokechicago.com

nycabc.wordpress.com

Featuring songs from:

Against Me!, Bikini Kill, Black Flag, Blatz, Buzzcocks, The Clash, Circle Jerks, Crass, Dead Kennedys, Descendents, Devo, Dickies, Fifteen, Fugazi, Gang of Four, Jawbreaker, Joy Division, Los Crudos, Maldita Vecindad, Minor Threat, The Misfits, NOFX, Operation Ivy, Pixies, Ramones, Rancid, The Rezillos, Screaming Females, Sex Pistols, Sleater-Kinney, The Skids, The Smiths, Siouxsie and the Banshees, The Specials, Sonic Youth, The Stranglers, Stiff Little Fingers, Ultrasonicas, Undertones, Weakerthans, Wire, X, X-Ray-Spex + More!!!

P.S. Be sure to like us on Facebook!

facebook.com/facebook.com/punkrockkaraokechicago

facebook.com/nycabc

22 Jun – Sekou Odinga Birthday Celebration

WHAT: Birthday party and fund raiser for Sekou Odinga

WHEN: 6:00-11:00pm, Friday, June 22nd

WHERE: Maysles Cinema – 345 Malcolm X Boulevard Harlem, New York

COST: \$15 at the door

MORE:

We celebrate Sekou Odinga's commitment to Afrikan people's right to self-determination, justice, and liberation and work towards his FREEDOM by partyin' and raising money in his honor.