



POST OFFICE BOX 110034 BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11211

Updates for January 26th

10 Jan - "I am Maroon!" The Historical and Political Importance of Freeing Russell "Maroon" Shoatz

"Maroon is in need of proper medical treatment. We can only ensure this with his immediate release... particularly with the steady surge of COVID-19 in the prisons and jails across this country. It is impossible to social distance in prison. He is our elder. Our hero."

MORE:

by Irik Robinson (*Red Voice*)

School just let out. After hugging and kissing my girlfriend, which I learned quickly was protocol, I emptied my locker to meet up with a couple of my homies. We attended a small Christian high school situated in the heart of North Philly. Typically, we would catch the 15 bus to Broad and Girard where we would then catch the subway. However, we had just missed one and it was nice outside, so we decided to walk. As we were making our way along the massive Girard College wall (a wall that I had no understanding of then but would come to find out was a famous wall of racial segregation and police violence against Black citizens, particularly under the administration of Frank Rizzo) we were swarmed by a slew of police cars. The three of us all had on our school uniforms, white-shirt, blue-tie, blue pants, and black shoes. Yet, we were ordered to "stop! And get on the fucking wall!"

We froze, looking back and forth at one another, as if deciding what to do. We were scared to death, but if we chose to run, we would be presumed more guilty than we already were, although we did not do anything, and promptly, most likely, shot in the back. So initially we didn't move. This non-action, however, seemed to incite these pigs even more, I suppose because we did not actually follow their directives. They ran to us, gripped us up by the collar, and drove us to the wall.

"I said, get on the fucking wall!"

"For what, we didn't do anything?!" I asked, naively.

"Shut up! Ya'll fit the description of a burglary that just occurred at a store."

"Huh?! We're coming from school."

Our faces pressed against the hard brick wall; we were then aggressively patted down, threatened, mocked, and harassed. We were held like this for a few minutes, which to us felt like forever, until we heard a radio dispatcher say, "we think we have the suspects." And just like that the pigs got back inside their cars and sped off. We were left without so much of an apology or explanation, though none of that would've mattered to us anyway. Instead we were left confused, scared, angry, traumatized.

As I grew up, coming to age in the 90's and early 2000's I had many similar experiences with the police. When the police appeared or arrived, I never felt safe, secured, or protected. I always wanted to be protected from the police. I never understood why they were so aggressive and violent towards people in my community and why they hated us so much. I did not know my history nor the history of this country. How could I? It was never taught or talked about in the schools I attended or the communities I lived in. I was left to assume that this was just the way things were, how things would always be. I would later become even more indoctrinated into believing and accepting that the police only brutalized us and killed us because we were always doing something wrong or bad, and, justifiably, needed to be corrected and/or punished for it. I knew nothing about resistance. I knew nothing of freedom or rights or power. I did not

know anything about social oppression, colonization, or what it meant to be politically dominated. I lived in Philly my entire life, and knew next to nothing about the original Black Panther Party, MOVE, Mumia Abu Jamal, RAM, and so many other formations and revolutionary organizations within the city that had organized not only against police brutality but fundamentally was serving the Black community, including the Black Unity Council (BUC) created and founded by Russell "Maroon" Shoatz.

Shoatz prior to being politicized was never on a "respectable kick." He was a product of his social and cultural environment and of his times – the 1950's and 60's. He enjoyed hanging out on the corners, talking his shit and drinking his wine. He was a member and active participant of his neighborhood gang. This basically entailed ripping and running the streets of Philly looking for rival gangs to intimidate and press. Russell, never one to cower or back down, always demonstrated tremendous heart and skill whenever he had to scrap or fight local gang members, separated, often, only by a few blocks. Back then, rarely, were there guns involved; how one displayed or showcased or proved their masculinity was through hand to hand combat. And Russell could fight. The majority of his day to day routine involved the gang culture, drinking wine, hanging out with the homies, fighting, engaging in lascivious acts with a variety of different women, and going in and out of juvenile facilities. Inside the youth study centers, as they were called back then, not a lick of studying was happening in those places. Consequently, Russell would come out and continue along the same path as if nothing ever happened. The system was not designed to radically change people, but to keep them fundamentally the same or make them worse. It was more beneficial and profitable for the State this way.

Russell would continue along this path until a chance encounter with Malcolm X. Malcolm was holding and speaking at a rally in Harlem. Russell at the time was staying with an aunt who suggested he attend because "the Nationalists would be there and there would be trouble." Always one to get into some trouble, Russell decided to go. And it changed him forever.

The transformation did not occur immediately, however. His girlfriend became pregnant and he soon married her. He acquired a job at the steel mill that paid well, and he was able to comfortably support his family. However, he began drifting back into the streets, hanging out with his old corner boys. His marriage started to deteriorate due to his own admitted failures and immaturity. Russell was at a crossroads in his life. However, he was directly in the middle of the emerging Black Liberation Struggle.

Within a few weeks the newly formed group held a meeting and produced a Statement of Principles. In short, BUC wanted to provide services to the Black community. These services included a food collection drive, a daycare center and liberation school for toddlers and youth, gang intervention courses, and paramilitary forms of community self-defense. These programs were established without prior knowledge to what the Black Panther Party (BPP) were doing in regard to their "survival" programs and the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), with their paramilitary formation, the Black Guards. However, each of these groups would become known to BUC as they started organizing more extensively. As BUC was establishing themselves within the community, a police murder of a young black male sent the community in an uproar. A simple youthful display of joyriding would result in a police officer shooting the young man in his own home while his mother was in the kitchen. The boy attempted to flee and was shot by the cop inside his home. As the two grappled in another room, his mother grabbed a knife and cut the officer. The boy managed to exit the home but was shot again by the cop. This last bullet killed the boy and he was subsequently left in the middle of the street for a long period of time. The Black community was furious. It was all too familiar. The community wanted justice but knew it would not come from the system. They looked to BUC.

Russell and a few of his comrades determined that enough was enough and planned to retaliate.

Russell Shoatz went underground.

During his time underground, Russell, for about two years impressively continued to politically organize the Black community. He engaged in several bank and food expropriations during this time to help fund the Movement. Banks are institutions which exploit and ruthlessly take from the people. And poverty and food scarcity are ingrained necessities in capitalist society. There is no reason for anyone to be homeless or hungry in America or anywhere else for that matter, unless there is an economic system that is in place that requires and demands it. Russell would never hurt anyone. It was a human rule that he always stuck by. Russell, unfortunately, would eventually get caught on a failed expropriation attempt. Once captured, he was brought up on the charges of the police shooting in Philadelphia. This was in 1972. He has been a prisoner of war ever since, well, not exactly. Russell acquired his nickname “Maroon” because he made several attempts to liberate himself, and successfully did so, twice!

The lengths Maroon took to stay free are incredible and truly inspiring. While foraging in the woods, he was alone, cold, hungry, yet, determined. He bore the elements of nature, sipping unclean water, here and there from the surrounding area, even consuming a raw turtle as a much-needed source for his physical nourishment. When he was recaptured there was a lot of media present, as only one could imagine, and they asked if he had anything to say. Maroon responded by saying, “Tell everyone that the slave has been caught, and I’m going back to the plantation.”

It is particularly important to contextualize Maroon’s imprisonment and escape within a long continuum of social Movement and political resistance of Black African people against the ravages and bitter forces of European slavery, settler-colonialism, capitalist exploitation, and racialized oppression. We are still not a free people in this country. We are still very much enslaved, subjugated. We are still routinely hunted down, shot down, and slaughtered with vicious impunity in this country — be it through the auspices of State violence, or by any regular white person who simply has an itch or an urge at any given moment to lynch a nigga. We are still castrated economically in this country, still mass incarcerated. Our schools are closed in mass; our communities are gentrified in mass; our homes our foreclosed in mass; our water and food supplies poisoned in mass; our children are being kidnapped in mass; we are being exterminated all across the world, in mass. There is no justice for us in this country. Therefore, the bravery and courage of organized mass resistance against such concentrated elements of repression by our Freedom Fighters such as Russell “Maroon” Shoatz and The Black Unity Council, The Black Panther Party, The Black Liberation Army, The Revolutionary Action Movement, MOVE, etc. cannot be understated or overlooked. These revolutionary organizations and freedom fighters stood up, placing their lives and futures on the line, in order to protect our barren, neglected, ravaged, and dominated communities from imperialistic forces. And we love, respect, and honor them for it. We are honored and proud and grateful to have warriors of Black resistance such as the implacable Russell Maroon Shoatz.

Maroon has been a routine victim of cruel and unprecedented political repression since his failed liberation attempts, placed in solitary confinement and control units for well over 30 years. The United Nations has already determined that only 15 days of such forms of isolation constitutes psychological and inhuman forms of torture. Maroon has suffered beyond that. The consequences of sensory deprivation, poor diet and nutrition, a lack of fresh air, exercise, and medical treatment, among many other crippling aspects, are designed fundamentally to strip one of their dignity and ultimately their humanity. However, despite being physically and psychologically brutalized, Maroon has managed, extraordinarily, to write some of the most amazing and thought-provoking pieces on a variety of topics, including eco-socialism, capitalism, imperialism, the prison industrial complex, maroon societies, African history, matriarchy, eco-feminism, food security and sustainability, Anarchism, Marxism, and so much more. His writings have traveled across the world, educating and inspiring a new generation of radical thinkers and young activists. His book,

Maroon the Implacable, is an incredible work and a must read for everyone who is serious about real social and political change in this world.

Maroon is 77 years old. Not too long ago he was diagnosed with stage 4 rectal cancer. He managed to successfully endure a series of consecutive chemotherapy treatments. The therapy, though physically taxing on Maroon, was helpful, meaning that he was now in a position to receive the proper surgery needed to attempt to remove the tumor. However, on November 13th, right before his surgery, he tested positive for COVID-19. Maroon was immediately sent to a gymnasium where other victims of COVID were being quarantined inside the prison. It wasn't a safe, let alone comfortable, environment for anyone to be quarantined in, particularly someone of Maroon's age and existing health complications. In fact, there was only one bathroom for 30 men. Maroon went to the bathroom on himself because there was no light in the area, and he did not want to risk getting up and falling. It was only after Maroon's family, friends, and other community members mobilized on his behalf that he was finally transferred to the infirmary.

Maroon is in need of proper medical treatment. We can only ensure this with his immediate release. He is not a danger or threat to anyone, and certainly not to his family and friends or the community that he would be released to. We love Maroon. And we wish to take care of him in his later days. We want him home. He deserves to be home. Doctors, various medical experts, community activists, and well over 140 organizations are calling for his immediate release, particularly with the steady surge of COVID-19 in the prisons and jails across this country. It is impossible to social distance in prison. He is our elder. Our hero. Our courageous, loving, and beautiful champion of freedom and resistance, justice and equality, love and humanity.

11 Jan - "from FCI Danbury" + KBP7 Updates

We've got the first writing from Kings Bay Plowshares 7 political prisoner Martha Hennessy and updates on the other KBP7 folks below.

MORE:

The last day of the year is relatively quiet behind razor wire and chain link fencing surrounding these metal buildings on top of a lovely hill. Three oranges sit on the table as we pass the 17th day of a quarantine here at Danbury Federal Prison. Thank God for some fresh fruit and the occasional vegetable, and the drinking water isn't so bad. We are reduced to a hyperfocus on the little things that become lifegiving in such a controlled setting. The first nine days were spent locked in a 10×10 cell with the toilet outside the mesh and cinderblock walls. Prisoners passed through who were being discharged. One woman danced out the door and ran to the parking lot into the arms of family or friends. Awakening on the first morning was the most difficult, the morning sun glinting off the razor wire outside the small window. Utter desolation washes over one's heart, thinking of the days, weeks, months ahead. One of the first books to come in was Alfred Delp's *Prison Writings* where he describes a 3×3 step cell, hands manacled in cold iron as he narrates his last days. He writes of the Church's desperate mission today (1944) of returning us to humanity. In Nazi Germany "The dishonesty and injustice blinds our spirituality," this condemned priest tells his unknown readers, even future prisoners.

My dear readers, supporters, family, community and friends, tremendous thanks to you for your love, support, prayers and thoughts. It is good to be in a state of repentance in these times of pandemic, economic dysfunction and life in a godless culture. Isaiah's Christmas Day reading proclaims "Your Savior comes...They shall be called the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord, and you shall be called 'Frequented,' a city that is not forsaken." This Advent was spent in a spirit of surrender and renunciation, attempting to stay alert to the message of Mary's Son, a new law brought to those who can hear and see, listening for the word of love as reconnection. Delp's reflections bring a beam of light into this season

despite the reality of his time and ours. May we be able to love one another more fully in this coming year as the empire continues to crumble.

The COVID situation here has caused disarray in all the programs; both prisoners and staff are facing the uncertainty and chaos that it has brought to this self-contained system. The three of us who came in around the same time have no phone, stamp, envelope access and we worry about our families not hearing from us. Two of us are self-surrender and one was transported from Maine. The stories of why women come here are full of absurdity and injustice. It is a fearsome thing to be caught up in this machine of courts, judges, indictments and prison sentences. Retribution for the “faults” of poverty, addiction, impulse or simple incapacity to fit in to the dictates of our capitalism of individual appropriation of wealth.

A friend sent the book, Jackson Rising where the vision of eco-socialism and real democratic processes gives a breath of such fresh air, patterned on Peter Maurin’s “building a new world within the shell of the old.” The solutions are at our fingertips to obstruct the 1% ruling class from forcing a global dystopia onto us all. The new language is one of “regenerative economy, self-determination through democratic transitions from fossil dependent monopolies” to a model of cooperatives, credit unions, small scale agriculture, public utilities, childcare centers and composting systems. All so simple and amazing, we wonder how we have tolerated for so long such a racist, wasteful, violent way of living. May what blossoms in Mississippi spread throughout the country, even as we know “legal” barriers are being put in the way of these so needed efforts of change coming from the Black working class. My dozen books will be university reading in the next few weeks.

Meanwhile 3 prisoners are moved to our hall who are COVID positive and we are forced to share a bathroom. And the courts, police, judges, prosecutors continue to feed the prison pipeline, creating an “optimal spreader situation.” All the prisoners of Federal Satellite have now contracted the virus, prompting a lawsuit earlier in the year. We are headed to “Camp” where the numbers are lower. The corrections officers are exposed as well, many have contracted COVID over the months. Their outfits echo military/private security features, all black, Kevlar vests, two-way radios, bangles of keys, knit skullcaps, heavy boots. Most are quite professional in interactions with prisoners. Warehousing and forced bed rest are strange ways to punish and “rehabilitate” the disposables and least among us. Re-education programs could be very creative. The consumption of plastic, water, electricity, food in this complex boggles the mind. What is the end product of this enterprise, into who’s pockets goes any sort of profit? Meanwhile, we retain a semblance of order through meals, exercise, writing, reading, praying. All in God’s time.

January 13th - Local Garner Activist Patrick O’Neill Reports to Federal Prison

by Margaret Damghani (*The Garner News*)

During his most recent stint in jail in Woodbine, Georgia, the result of actions he will soon report to prison for, longtime Garner resident Patrick O’Neill threw parties for the men on his cell block.

He remembers saving up peanut butter, tuna packets, jelly, crackers and powdered drink mix, and enlisting the help of two friends he’d made in jail to set up the food and drinks. He took a piece of tape he found in an old book to hang up a flyer, inviting the entire cell block, making sure to include the guards so that it wasn’t torn down as contraband.

“It was fun to do that, and to give dignity and a loving encounter to people that are in the most oppressive situation you can basically be with in this country,” he reflected.

One gathering loudly sang “Freedom” by Richie Havens, and O’Neill remembers reading from Isaiah and sharing a reflection on the Pharisees.

“Jesus was always with prostitutes and tax collectors, the outcasts. I said ‘Guys, He’s here with us, at the jail. This is exactly where Jesus hangs out, here with us,” O’Neill recalled saying.

THE PATH TO PRISON

That was over two years ago, and O’Neill has been on house arrest since then. He was sentenced to report to prison in Ohio on January 14 for 14 months and ordered to pay \$33,503.51 in restitution for charges stemming from an act of anti-nuclear protest at the Naval Submarines Base Kings Bay. The offenses can be summarized as trespass, conspiracy and destruction of property.

The coordinated action took years of planning and saw O’Neill and his collaborators, called the Kings Bay Plowshares 7, stealing onto the base in Georgia on April 4, 2018, the 50th anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. They engaged in acts of vandalism, ultimately providing a written statement of their opposition to nuclear weapons and peacefully accepting arrest, and resulting in jail and prison time for all seven.

Much of what the group did was symbolic, following in the tradition of other Catholic Plowshares peace actions, part of a decades long movement in the Christian pacifist community. O’Neill, for his part, brought with him a hammer made out of melted down guns to use against a statue of a Trident missile on the base, but did not ultimately do much actual damage.

The action statement from day of arrest read:

“We come in peace on this sorrowful anniversary of the martyrdom of a great prophet, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Fifty years ago today, April 4, 1968, Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee as a reaction to his efforts to address “the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism.” We come to Kings Bay to answer the call of the prophet Isaiah (2:4) to “beat swords into plowshares” by disarming the world’s deadliest nuclear weapon, the Trident submarine.”

PROGRESS THROUGH RESISTANCE

At 64, O’Neill is a prolific freelance writer, devoted father of eight, and co-founder of the Catholic Worker House in Garner with his wife Mary Rider. He also volunteers time in the hospital ministry at WakeMed. Sprinkled throughout, a lifetime of actions to bring awareness to various social issues add up to over 25 arrests, 7 at the Pentagon protesting war, and over 2.5 years in prison.

He served 90 days after his first arrest in 1982 for impeding traffic, when he participated in a sit-in at Fort Bragg protesting the overthrow of democracies abroad.

In federal prison in Atlanta in the mid 1980’s, O’Neill got the chance to know many among the group of Cuban refugees known as the Marielitos. Many wrote ‘Libertad’ on their bedsheets as a form of nonviolent protest, and when a mattress was set on fire, the guards reacted in retaliation to the entirety of the Cuban men there by seizing anything deemed flammable, including personal photos, letters and bibles and burning them in a large bonfire. O’Neill, working on the landscaping crew, saved as many personal items as he could.

He ended up finding ways to slip information to the press about the treatment of the Marielitos on the inside, resulting in more than one story in the Atlanta Constitution, and solitary confinement for him. It would be the year after he was released that an announcement about a deportation agreement led to what is commonly referred to as the ‘Atlanta Prison Riots’, though it is doubtful that O’Neill would agree with that characterization.

He was in jail for 15 days in Alamance County in 2009 for participating in a dramatic scene in front of the doors to the jail. Dressed as an ICE agent, he demanded the police arrest a woman costumed as the statue of liberty to call attention to issues in immigration policies and detainment.

PROGRESS THROUGH COMPASSION

O’Neill’s experiences have made him far more familiar with many realities many do not think about; the reasons people end up in jail, the cycles that previous offenses and poverty make it hard to escape, and the treatment of inmates.

“I’m not gonna go into the stories about guards beating them and people suffering with withdrawal,” O’Neill said. “It’s just kind of a place of despair. We are basically dealing with the same moral issues Jesus spoke about 2000 years ago, and a lot of people don’t really think about that.”

O’Neill is inspired by other Christian pacifists who engaged in non-violent civil disobedience such as Philip Berrigan, a personal mentor, and Thomas Merton, a well-known Catholic theologian and activist, but his upbringing also influenced his life’s work.

PROGRESS: THE ROOTS OF JUSTICE

His mother, a resourceful woman who raised O’Neill and his brother after his father died, was not an activist but made it clear that she would not be sacrificing her children to the ‘war machine’.

His father died in a preventable construction accident when he was pre-school aged, and his mother was able to provide for her two sons by paying off the mortgage on their home with life insurance, and successfully winning in trial against the company his father had worked for.

And, of course, underlying all is his Faith. All four of his grandparents that immigrated to this country were Catholic, and O’Neill met his wife in 1977 when he was doing pastoral work at St. Gabriel Catholic Church in Greenville and she was a student at ECU.

That pastoral work is what brought him to North Carolina from where he was raised in Queens, and opening the first Catholic Worker house in North Carolina in 1991 brought him to Garner.

“My wife and I started an intentional community that does hospitality to women and children in crisis. It’s a pacifist community,” O’Neill said. “We have times that people will stay for a short period of time, we’ve had people stay for years.”

Rider, a home health care and social worker, supports her husband’s actions and often takes part as well, having been arrested similarly for nonviolent civil disobedience throughout the years. She was also raised in the Catholic Faith, and was influenced by being in a military family, born at Marine Corps Base Quantico.

“I think I had a heightened awareness to a lot of these issues. Even at 14 or 15 I was opposed to war,” Rider said. “I could see what it did to the people of Vietnam, and I could see what it did to my father.”

Catholic Workers model their lives after the Works of Mercy from Matthew 25, and O’Neill can also speak at length about the spiritual disciplines and practices of St. Ignatius and mysticism, and notes that preparing to go to jail has a spiritual aspect to it.

PROGRESS THROUGH SACRIFICE

“It’s going to be hard for my wife. Taking care of the kids. Jail is just another address for me. I’m going to be lonely in jail. But I’ll make the best of it. That’s what I’ve always done whenever I’ve been in,” he said. “It’s unfortunate that we so easily accept this kind of suffering we impose on others, and it’s done with a cavalier attitude. ‘You get what you deserve’.”

There is a cohesiveness to the stories O’Neill tells from his life. The last work of mercy, to bury the dead, is one that many do not find themselves having to fulfill. During that time in the prison in Atlanta, when many of the Marielitos were suffering depression and away from their families, the suicide rate in the prison was, sadly, higher than usual.

“They were detained because they had no rights, just like the guys in Guantanamo had no rights. You can’t go into a court of law and defend your rights. A lot of them were despairing. I supervised over a half dozen burials while I was there,” he said.

PROGRESS THROUGH PRISON

This time, the stress of the pandemic is weighing heavily, but O’Neill said he will make the best of it as he always does. A request to not report to prison until after getting a Covid-19 vaccine was denied. His penchant for getting involved, such as with the Marielitos, often results in consequences for him, and he doesn’t count on having any days served for good behavior taken off of his sentence until it’s granted.

“Sometimes I get the feeling of ‘Lord take this cup from me’. I wouldn’t mind just going to prison and doing my time, and not finding a cause to have to get involved in again, it just seems like that’s the way the spirit leads me. I kind of go into things kicking and screaming. When there is an issue of injustice involved, I feel like I have to speak up. it’s scary to do that. I’m not going to say it’s easy,” he said.

O’Neill spent the last few days before he’ll travel to Ohio with his large family, and he already has concrete plans to run a book club, starting with Gilead by Marilynne Robinson, and may host a prayer group as well. It certainly wouldn’t be in character for him if he didn’t find some way to be of service while he’s there.

January 15th - Update – Patrick O’Neill Enters Prison with Hope

Driving through Ohio, about to begin a 14-month sentence for his part in the Kings Bay Plowshares 7 disarmament action Patrick O’Neill didn’t sound like someone about to enter federal prison within minutes. “I’m going in there with hope. There’s cause for optimism right now.”

At 2 pm today, January 14, Patrick O’Neill walked into the Federal Correction Institution (FCI) Elkton, in Lisbon, OH. He has already served 7-1/2 weeks pretrial. He should be released in 11 months with good-time credit. He might also get an early release to a halfway house. This father of eight, grandfather of 2, and devoted spouse of Mary Rider may be there until November.

Patrick called Steve Dear, his good friend of 40 years, to share his thoughts on what’s ahead. “I’m ready to make some new friends, to tell you the truth. I want to start a book club reading Gilead by Marilynne Robinson. I’m going to join or start a prayer group right away.”

“Another hopeful sign is January 22 when the Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons goes into full force. We have the rule of law banning nuclear weapons. And Pope Francis has completely and totally established the church’s position that nuclear weapons are sinful. He’s basically saying what (Jesuit Father)

Dick McSorley said: 'It's a sin to build a nuclear weapon.' He's not talking about deterrence and some timeline. He's saying these things have got to go. I feel empowered by all that. We have some of the most important moral figures in the world speaking our language and now the law is on our side. I'm going to take a copy of the treaty in there with me and share it with the guys and maybe have a study session on it." (To find out about local US actions to plug into on Jan. 22, visit the NuclearResister.org website)

"I run every day. I might be running in place for a few weeks. It might be weeks before I get outside and get some sunshine. I might be in solitary (for COVID quarantine – 2 or 3 weeks). I'm not really fearful. I'm going in there with hope."

"One of the things that makes going to prison manageable and easier for me is the support of my family and friends. Thank you to everyone who is sharing in this journey with me."

The Festival of Hope for Patrick which was held last Sunday, January 10, is viewable on the Kings Bay Plowshares Facebook page and will also be put on the KBP Youtube channel which can be accessed through the website.

Clare Grady is planning a Festival of Hope on Sunday, Feb. 7th, sometime in the afternoon, before she begins her sentence on Feb. 10th. Her guests, including possible Irish Parliamentarians and First Nation Women working to stop nuclear weapons and dumping, are to be announced soon. Watch for the next update.

She's been assigned FCI Alderson, West Virginia, to begin a 12 month and 1-day sentence. She's already served 3-1/2 months pretrial and with good-time, she may be released after 6 or 7 months. She'll be traveling from Ithaca, NY with her family to report. Clare served 1 1/2 years at Alderson in 1984-85 for her part in the Griffiss Plowshares Action in Rome, NY with co-defendant Liz McAlister.

Carmen Trotta and Martha Hennessy began their sentences on Dec. 14. They were quarantined for first three weeks but are now settling into the prison routine. You can send our friends letters on white paper with blue or black ink but no drawings or colors. Use your full name in the return address. We are checking what else they may receive.

Fr. Steve Kelly is still in the process of being transported in federal custody from Georgia to Tacoma, WA to appear in court for a probation violation. He completed his 33-month sentence for the Kings Bay Plowshares action in county jails prior to sentencing. We do not have any current address for him at this time. He sent this message from jail on Dec. 9, "Let's go back to the bedrock basics. We have the Isaiah 2:4 imperative of conversion. Let's continue to be open for inspiration and help each other to be God's instruments, in going from war to peace." He also said that he feels things are moving along slowly but satisfactorily.

Mark Colville is the only defendant not sentenced yet. He has already served 15 months pretrial in Camden and Glynn county jails. Mark received word from Judge Lisa Godbey Wood on Dec. 8th that she has granted him another stay of sentencing until Friday, Feb. 19 at 10 am. Mark will not waive his right to be sentenced in person before Judge Wood. Due to the pandemic, if Mark leaves Connecticut he must quarantine for 14 days upon return. Mark can't afford that time now as he's been the medically designated driver for his nephew Alexander, taking him 3 times a week for dialysis from New Haven to Hartford.

Liz McAlister was sentenced in June to the 17 months she had served pretrial with Mark and Fr. Steve in the two Georgia county jails. She just celebrated her 81st birthday in November. She participated in the Griffiss Plowshares action at the AFB in Rome N.Y. on Thanksgiving Day, 1983 and was sentenced to 3

years in FCI Alderson, W. Virginia. Liz is doing well despite living under 3 years of supervised probation restrictions in New London, Connecticut with her family.

13 Jan - The Freedom Campaign for Sundiata Acoli

A former employee of NASA and a civil rights era Freedom Rider, Sundiata Acoli turned 84 on January 14.

MORE:

The college graduate and grandfather of two has been incarcerated for over forty-seven years. Acoli has been consistently denied parole for more than twenty-five of those years, going all the way back to 1994.

The Sundiata Acoli Freedom Campaign (SAFC) is the largest coordinated campaign to free Acoli since his incarceration and follows years of behind the scenes advocacy and legal filings. The campaign will use the hashtag #BringSundiataHome and kicks off this week. There are media appearances planned throughout the week as well as a major social media push on Thursday where individuals, advocates and other organizations and religious institutions will join in the wishes of love and support for the soon to be 84 year old.

Following his conviction in the murder of New Jersey State Trooper Werner Foerester in 1973, Acoli was sentenced to life. In the Garden State, those convicted and sentenced to life are eligible for parole after twenty-five years.

"Sundiata Acoli has had a near perfect disciplinary record for 40 years, with no violations of any kind for the past twenty-five years," explains Acoli's attorney, Bruce I. Afran. "I have come to know Mr. Acoli well over the past nine years. He has emerged into a useful, law abiding and productive member of the community, albeit while incarcerated. He has evolved so far in his life and thought that he has been approved to teach the Federal Bureau of Prisons's course in Avoiding Criminal Thinking, the program to teach younger inmates how to avoid recidivism."

Sundiata's health is deteriorating in his late stage of life and is now being treated for advancing dementia, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, emphysema and glaucoma. The frail senior citizen also lost 30 pounds during a long battle with the Covid-19 virus; he was one of those blessed to survive the health scare. He should be released before his health is further compromised.

Nearly fifty religious leaders across New Jersey said the following in a joint statement to New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy last June when asking for a commutation of Acoli's sentence:

"Mr. Acoli had to be rushed to a hospital in Maryland when he fell ill from the COVID19 virus. For several days he was maintained on oxygen," says the group of faith leaders across multiple denominations and thirty-nine religious institutions. "Recently, he was bedridden for a week due to intestinal complications. For all of the reasons stated above, we unconditionally call upon you to release Mr. Acoli from prison immediately. When he is released, we pledge to support you and champion your just and humane decision," the statement concludes.

"As his daughter, I can say that the Sundiata Acoli Freedom Campaign means so much to me and our entire family," says Sunni Middleton, an executive in finance. "The death of officer Foerester was a tragic event and we grieve for that loss and pray for the healing of all families involved. My dad is in his twilight years and he has paid for that terrible incident while showing us how to be accountable for one's actions.

Our family is so grateful for this outpouring of support from members of the community and the Freedom Campaign," adds Middleton. "It gives us the strength, and faith, to see this through and to know that our prayers may one day be answered and my father will be in his family's care to live out the remaining years of his life."

There is also a new interview from SAFC with Soffiyah Elijah, an advocate, attorney, scholar, and educator: [youtube.com/watch?v=UPUb7RO3pis](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPUb7RO3pis)

14 - Letter From Eric King + Updates

We're publishing a letter from Eric originally posted to Anarchist News as well as other updates (most significantly the reinstatement of his main ban) about him below.

MORE:

I am in no position to tell people what risk to take or how to direct their energy...but I have to ask...why are we not protesting/barricading/calling out federal prisons and their regional offices?

Fed. Prisons are state violence on a national level. We are beaten by staff and charged for it, our mail thrown away or lost on a regular basis, shipped away from our families then only allowed 300-expensive-minutes per MONTH to call home. We are all under the boot of the federal government.

When the uprisings occurred, our prisons were put on lockdown and BOP officers were sent to add federal muscle in squashing the movement. The same guards that beat us, hose us w/ poisonous chemicals, were in the streets doing the same to you.

If George Floyd hadn't been killed, he still would've been a victim of state brutality. He would've been stolen from his family, another victim of State Human Trafficking. He would've been buried for one or two years pretrial, charged extortion rates to hear loving voices. He'd have seen his lawyer once or twice, bullied into accepting a ridiculous plea deal. He would've been swallowed by the state, placed in violent situations, forced to work for slave wages. This is police brutality.

Can we stop ignoring fed. Human Warehouses? Every single person in fed. prison has been kidnapped by a government who says our lives aren't valid, that we aren't humans deserving dignity. Not every city has a fed. prison or FDC, but a lot do, or their morbidly corrupt private partners, like CCA or GEO.

In KC, my own backyard, is the N. Central Regional Office. The director there is J.E. Kruegger. This scummer is in charge of all the brutal policies that devastate the lives of thousands of convicts. The ADX, Death Row, CMU's, Florence, Leavenworth, Englewood & more. When pigs beat us w/ out consequence, it's Kruegger allowing it. When the admin violates policy in devastating ways (like blocking someone -me- from having a single phone call for 2 yrs), he allows it. can we not protest and bring attention to this bastard and his Office of Torture? Shit rolls down hill & he can't quit shitting on us.

W/ the Covid outbreak, we've seen both the fragility of the BOP & their indifference to our lives. W/ William Barr trying to fill the feds w/ protestors, let's give the Bureau the treatment it deserves. Let's bring the spotlight on these bastards. If this is Class War, then these are war criminals, these are our enemies, these are slave houses, let's treat them accordingly.

January 17th - Eric is given yet another 6 month correspondence restriction

On January 5th, 2021, Eric was once again placed on a 6- month communication restriction in response to a New Year's Eve noise demo that was held outside of FCI Englewood by various groups in Denver, a demo

that happens every single year at prisons worldwide. After being accused of organizing the demo, the BOP finally admitted that they are aware that Eric had nothing to do with the noise demo. Despite this fact, the BOP North Central Regional office instructed Englewood to restrict Eric's communication.

Apparently, in the BOP prisoners will be held responsible for anything anyone may do. It is interesting though that in 2017 when the right-wing Bundy family attempted to force their way into the prison to visit a prisoner they stood in solidarity with, driving around the parking lot, evading guards, blasting music... there were no disciplinary actions or restrictions enforced on the prisoner. This must be another special BOP rule that only applies to anti-fascists.

Eric can no longer correspond with anyone outside his family and lawyer. He is again cut off from communication from anyone that might offer him support and strength and solidarity during a global pandemic. He is again isolated from all contact with friends that matter deeply to him.

If folks want to help, he can receive books. These can be a great distraction for him and all of the prisoners he passes them onto, especially during this next level federal lock-down: tiny.cc/EK_Books

Donations to the bad ass lawfirm who has stepped up for him in a real way—the Civil Liberties Defense Center, can be made, to help ensure they have the resources to continue to stand behind folks who are fighting oppression in real ways: cldc.org/donate

January 24th - Keep Us Alive and Vibrant Out There: An Interview with Political Prisoner Eric King
by Black and Pink Seattle-Tacoma (*It's Going Down*)

In this time when authorities refuse to keep people safe from COVID-19, when rebellion is a fresh on our minds, and when the abolition of police and prisons is becoming a clear necessity to more and more people, we've got something to learn from an anarchist political prisoner like Eric King. Eric vandalized the office of a government official in Kansas City, MO, in solidarity with the Ferguson uprising, was arrested in September 2014, and then was sentenced to ten years for the window he broke in June 2016. Such a sentence is horrible, but not shocking. Prisons, after all, do more to keep hierarchies safe than people.

Eric is now facing a bogus charge of assaulting an officer that could land him another 20 years inside. At the time of writing this, he has been hit with a mail restriction and can't receive letters of support. But we can make ourselves aware of his case and learn from his words.

The following is an interview with Eric conducted through snail mail by the Seattle-Tacoma chapter of Black and Pink, a queer/trans abolitionist group that focuses on building community across prison walls.

Black and Pink Seattle-Tacoma: How would you characterize FCI-Englewood's response to COVID-19?

Eric King: Dreadful! At least in the SHU. People were brought in without being tested, staff was never tested. Our tiers were not cleaned more than once a week, we were only given 3 showers a week. No bleach was used anywhere. We were given masks, but staff/admin was so slack with their usage. Now we have a massive outbreak. The entire SHU was ill and staff refused to acknowledge or test us, until on Thanksgiving when things were so bad a med officer had no choice but to test 3 of us... all positive. A few days later they test everyone else, ALL positives. Then, AFTER we all are very sick, they institute a SHU lockdown, they start bleaching the showers between use, etc. Warden Greilick failed. None of us have been given anything for it, not even info about symptoms and how to make it less. Greilick failed, 600+ cases, all preventable.

B&P: What's something about being in prison that you feel like people outside don't understand, and need to know? Were there expectations you had about prison that shifted once you were incarcerated?

EK: I'm not sure people realize or care about the amount of psych games these people play. It is violent. Withholding mail for weeks or months claiming you don't have any, searching your cell and vandalizing your family photos. Placing you intentionally around people who wish to harm you. I've seen cops lie and tell a group a certain person is a rat just to get that person fucked up. Happens all the time and isn't limited just to unit cops. Medical will see you on your death bed and say you just need more water. People die because of this gaslighting. You file your grievances as you're supposed to and get told they never got filed, that YOU are lying. It's a miracle there aren't staff murders every day. Instead people internalize this bullshit and give up, or turn anger on fellow convicts instead of toward the system baring down on them. It's an effective spirit breaker. I honestly thought in prison it'd be "us vs. them" ... it isn't... it's us vs. us while they laugh and manipulate us. Devastating.

B&P: What do you notice about how different populations in the prison are treated? How has your position affected your treatment?

EK: Different groups get treated different for sure, usually to stir resentment and violence. Gay and transgender people get treated abysmally by all races/gangs AND staff. They are demonized and treated as less than scum, often left vulnerable to attack or staff harassment.

My position as an anti-racist / anti-fascist person has been used to create divisions and separation. At USP-McCreary while in the SHU, staff mocked my "Antifa" face tattoo and assured me they were going to get me jumped... and they did. Mail is ALWAYS horribly delayed and often arbitrarily rejected, email has to be read and approved before being sent out – which can take days. I've been denied phone calls for 2 years after a website posted about me and my wife was denied visiting access due to her "ideology." Staff talks big shit trying to instigate violence, subject you to a large amount of searches and property confiscation... you get targeted.

B&P: What sustains you while you're inside? What support are you getting that is really making you feel supported?

EK: The support that feels the "most," is when people/groups do things outside of me, on their own. Things like banner drops, fundraising, getting writings or info published to various sources. Being kept relevant and alive. In the near future it will be trial support: either showing up, posting about it, encouraging others to come, things like that. I have an amazing family who is outlandishly loving and supportive, I am very present in their lives. I have great friends and supporters who look out for me super tough. These things sustain me. Also, I am very secure in myself. My ethics and my belief in myself, in my future. These things carry me throughout the day. They won't beat me.

B&P: What is the relationship between your incarceration and your political education? How has the experience of being incarcerated changed how you think about the world?

EK: Prison has reaffirmed all my anarchist beliefs and helped teach me further about what oppression really is. Prison has shown me, just like Congress or insurance companies have shown me, that governments do not give a shit about marginalized people, that our come-up will be through solidarity and unity. I lived in a bubble, knowing racism, homo/transphobia existed and needed to be fought, but surrounding myself with like-minded people, having the privilege to encounter these things on my terms, at rallies or fights. Prison has introduced me to new levels of hate, bigotry and violence. It has taught me the

fear I face in prison for being different politically, is similar to what folks feel like in their homes or communities and this is devastating.

B&P: What did your life look like day-to-day before COVID? What does it look like now?

EK: My life pre-COVID and post-COVID are not vastly different. I am in the SHU pending trial for “assaulting an officer,” I’ve been in this pre-trial SHU 16 months. COVID has caused burdens for all of us. They cut visits, including legal... so although I’ve got trial in 4 months, I’ve yet to meet my new legal team, although we are allowed a couple 15 minute legal calls per month... smh. They also decided to cut our food portions by a third, which is logical and definitely not the stupidest shit imaginable. For breakfast, bagged food. For lunch and dinner, styrofoam trays. It’s a farce. People back here with phone access decided to finally follow policy, so I’ve been getting my monthly one call, that’s been amazing.

The people in charge of the prisons are bad people, it’s important folks know this. They are pieces of shit who need to be publicly outed as enemies of the people. J.E. Krueger – Regional Director wouldn’t let tests be taken to keep numbers low. Put him (and his office) on blast! Now-retired Warden Greilick and his lackey Ms. Thomas ensured pre-trial prisoners have no access to their lawyers. Our “rights” are toilet paper to these bastards.

B&P: How important has it been to have people writing you while you are in prison?

EK: Letter writing is beautiful for a plethora of reasons, including showing the prison that we aren’t invisible, we are loved and supported. It also helps us to stay human, having real friendships in the world. That said, for prison support groups, or abolitionists, letter writing should never be the end-all. We need real support. We need phone-call ins, we need fundraisers for legal support or just so we can write you back or call our families. We need people to get our words out there, to spread awareness, we need books or magazines, we need people to look in on our families, to protest for us, to act in solidarity, to dox our torturers, to write about us, to keep us alive and vibrant out there. Support is support. Letter writing as a means to show kindness or build friendship on an individual basis is a beautiful thing, though; it’s a way to maintain reality and a sense of who we are as people, instead of “King 27090045.”

Much love to the FireAnt Collective, Rob, Nadiya, M. Kimble, J. Rose, S. Swan, Thomas, and all anarchist and revolutionaries inside. Comrades, we are together. Fight 2 win. Thank you 2 all those who fight 4 us: Certain Days, all the ABC and ABCFs, B&P, all those fighting for us.

14 Jan - Jericho Boston/Jalil Muntaqim - We Are Our Own Liberators Seminar

In this educational series, Jalil Muntaqim will cover his book, We Are Our Own Liberators, in six parts.

MORE:

Jalil will lead each class, on either Tuesdays or Thursdays, via zoom. Please sign up for the day of the week you wish to participate in the seminar. Once you have signed up, the zoom link will be emailed to you for the day you chose. The first of six classes begins on February 9th or February 11th 2021 and reoccurs every other week. A detailed schedule and event registration are available at tiny.cc/Jalil_Seminar. There are six classes total included in the ticket price.

A limited number of hard copies of the book can be purchased for \$10 + shipping by emailing kellie.jerichoboston@gmail.com.

The e-book can be purchased for \$9 online via pmpress.org

15 Jan - FBI Sniffing Around Philadelphia

On January 15 2021, a comrade was visited by two FBI agents at their home in Philadelphia. Another visit was attempted the next day.

MORE:

The agents said they had questions about the recent events at the Capitol. The comrade refused to answer questions & immediately got in touch with legal & anti-repression support. We don't rely on the state to address fascist threats. The FBI has roots in repressing anarchist and Black liberation movements. We do not trust that they are only investigating the events at the Capitol. We challenge their attempts at repression with our collective refusal to speak to law enforcement.

A second antifascist was visited by the FBI in Philadelphia January 16th. Well, sort of. The weird thing is the FBI wasn't even looking in the right 'state' as the person they were seeking out lives in New Jersey. That's some real Grade A police work! Anyway. The state is up to something – possibly in collaboration with far right conspiracy theories that 'antifa' had something to do with the right wing violence on January 6th. News flash: 'antifa' had nothing to do with that whole shitshow, that scene was a wholly white supremacist riot. Be safe friends, MAKE SECURITY CULTURE YOUR #1 PRIORITY. They are only trying to intimidate us – don't let them – be brave!

January 16th - Up Against The Law On FBI Visits

If the FBI visits your home asking to identify far right perps in DC, remember you don't have to answer any questions. Our networks say this is a pattern all over the country. You do not know what they're actually looking for. Ask for their business card and contact us <upagainsthelaw.org>.

Not in Philly? Contact your local anti repression network or a lawyer familiar with federal cases. Your lawyer will be able to contact them safely. Do not answer any questions without a lawyer present.

20 Jan - Dispatch from Leonard Peltier + Updates

We're including highlights from Leonard Peltier's support crew newsletter and the latest by Leonard himself.

MORE:

I'm not sure if this is such a good morning but i don't know how to open this letter to everyone.

Yes i heard the loser did not sign my clemency, i had this strong feeling yesterday that I wasn't going to get it, i don't know why i had it? I guess it was the spirits telling me so i sat down trying to write you all a letter but my tears of self pity must have overwhelmed me as i could not see to finish it so i had to stop for a while, thought about my family friends and people's how it must be for them too . so i pulled myself together. and thought to myself well I'm not going to give up.

It's been a hard 45 yrs, and it will get a lot harder I'm sure as I aged and in the moments when hopelessness over takes me, but at my age all i can do is ask so many of you to stay with me and let's try again. b/cuz we have the only weapon we can use and that's the constitution and the laws of this so called free democracy EQUAL JUSTICE FOR ALL, and must get everyone to know what the laws was that they violated not just the lawyers, But what a joke that is,!! IT HAS never has been this way for my people. and more then likely will never be. BUT I welcome all who will stay with me and fight on until i take my last breath.

January 21st - January 2021 Leonard Peltier Newsletter

The International Leonard Peltier Defense Committee (ILPDC) Board and Directors share everyone's disappointment that Leonard did not receive Executive Clemency or Commutation of his sentence in the final days of the Trump administration. We know everyone and especially Attorney Kevin Sharpe worked diligently and extremely hard to secure Leonard's freedom and the disappointment is shared by us all.

However, the fact is that Leonard Peltier remains unjustly in Federal Prison and the work to have him released must continue. In addition to now pushing the Biden administration for the possibility of clemency-we are working hard towards a diversity of options to gain Leonard's freedom and will be calling on you, his supporters, to dust off and renew the struggle to gain Leonard's freedom. We will, in coming days, be pursuing a push for a transfer from the United States Penitentiary at Coleman to the Federal Correctional Facility at Oxford, Wisconsin, which is a lower security level and is closer to Leonard's family. We will also be pushing for an interim parole hearing as well as for release under the Covid Release to Home Confinement option that the Federal Bureau of Prisons currently has and pending Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland has already stated her support for.

As the attorneys develop the priorities and strategies, we will let you know and we will need your help. Stay strong and be ready to push for those things for Leonard through your prayers, calls & letters to appropriate government officials, et cetera.

Leonard shares everyone's disappointment relating to the lack of a pardon/clemency/commutation but he remains determined to carry on the struggle as should we all.

22 Jan - Covid Cases Up Three Percent In Prisons

Since March, The Marshall Project has been tracking how many people are being sickened and killed by COVID-19 in prisons and how widely it has spread across the country and within each state.

MORE:

by Katie Park and Tom Meagher (*The Marshall Project*)

Here, we will regularly update these figures counting the number of people infected and killed nationwide and in each prison system until the crisis abates.

This reporting was undertaken in partnership with *The Associated Press*.

Cases

By Jan. 19, at least 355,957 people in prison had tested positive for the illness, a 3 percent increase from the week before.

New infections in prisons reached their highest peaks in mid-December. In the weeks since, the numbers have dropped, though new cases in some states remain high. California, Kentucky, Nevada and Pennsylvania each reported more than 1,000 new cases.

Reported cases first peaked in late April, when states such as Michigan, Ohio and Tennessee began mass testing of prisoners. Those initiatives suggested that coronavirus had been circulating among people without symptoms in much greater numbers than previously known.

There have been at least 355,957 cases of coronavirus reported among prisoners. 277,441 prisoners have recovered.

Deaths

The first known COVID-19 death of a prisoner was in Georgia when Anthony Cheek died on March 26. Cheek, who was 49 years old, had been held in Lee State Prison near Albany, a hotspot for the disease. Since then, at least 2,231 other prisoners have died of coronavirus-related causes. The week of Jan. 19, the number of deaths reported rose 4 percent in a week. The coronavirus has killed prisoners in most systems. Two states—Vermont and Wyoming—have yet to report the death of a prisoner attributed to COVID-19.

There have been at least 2,232 deaths from coronavirus reported among prisoners.

Methodology

Since March 26, reporters from *The Marshall Project* and the *Associated Press* have been collecting data on COVID-19 tests administered to people incarcerated in all state and federal prisons, as well as the staff in those facilities. We request this data every week from state departments of corrections and the federal Bureau of Prisons; however, not all departments provide data for the date requested. These numbers have been grouped by the week the data was collected.

For six states with unified prison and jail systems—Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Rhode Island, Vermont—we count testing and case numbers from both detainees awaiting trial and sentenced prisoners. Similarly, in Maryland, several pre-trial facilities in Baltimore City are included in the figures.

To estimate the rate of infection among prisoners, we collected population data for each prison system before the pandemic, roughly in mid-March, and in April and June. Beginning the week of July 28, we updated all prisoner population numbers, reflecting the number of incarcerated adults in state or federal prisons. Prior to that, population figures may have included additional populations, such as prisoners housed in other facilities, which were not captured in our COVID-19 data. In states with unified prison and jail systems, we include both detainees awaiting trial and sentenced prisoners.

We calculate the rates of infection and death to allow for the easiest comparison across prison systems. Because population snapshots do not account for movement in and out of prisons since March, and because many systems have significantly slowed the number of new people being sent to prison, it's difficult to estimate the total number of people who have been held since March. To be conservative, we calculate our rates of infection using the largest prisoner population snapshots we had during this time period.

The overall U.S. rate of infection was calculated using case counts from The COVID Tracking Project and population data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Corrections departments in Indiana, Kansas, Montana, North Dakota and Wisconsin report coronavirus testing and case data for juvenile facilities; West Virginia reports figures for juvenile facilities and jails. For consistency of comparison with other state prison systems, we removed those facilities from our data that had originally been included prior to July 28. Pennsylvania's coronavirus data included testing and cases for those who had been released on parole. We removed these tests and cases for prisoners from the data prior to July 28. The staff cases remain. Until early November, West Virginia's Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation did not disaggregate its staff numbers by type of facility. After they began providing itemized numbers on staff cases on Nov. 3, we only included staff numbers from prisons and work release sites. We have gone back to past weeks and estimated the staff breakdown based on the total number of staff in each sector.