



CRITICAL RESISTANCE



2011

ANNUAL REPORT

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Cover image: STIC block party, photo by Melanie Cervantes

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Akonadi Foundation, Dolphin Foundation, Fund for Nonviolence, Women's Foundation of California,
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GAINING GROUND

In 2011, CR's primary campaign work was aimed at eliminating the use of civil gang injunctions in Oakland and building momentum for a prison and jail moratorium across California. Because of the clear connections to our ongoing campaigns, we responded quickly and effectively to requests to support a mass hunger strike in the California prison system in the summer and again in the fall. Early in 2011 we were also able to halt the expansion of the Orleans Parish Prison in New Orleans. While the level of organization and political gains of each of these campaigns is certainly not uniform, we have derived substantial lessons from each of them. Working on these campaigns illuminated connections and opportunities that may not have been as visible otherwise. We were able to see and understand the impacts of CR's work in our coalitions and in the skills and leadership development of our members.

Prison Moratorium in California

The US Supreme Court's condemnation of California's prison crisis and its mandate to reduce the California prison population by more than 30,000 people, have generated battles between lawmakers and local communities. While the mandate generates both opportunities and threats for opponents of prison expansion, it also leaves organizing work located on frequently shifting terrain. While it's easy to get lost in the maze of changing policy and law, the fight is still to definitively dismantle one of the planet's largest prison systems and its attacks on California's poor, working, and communities of color.

Currently, California's realignment plan is shifting tens of thousands of prisoners from the state to the county level, leaving the door wide open for hundreds of millions of dollars of



AB 900 money (California Assembly bond legislation authorizing over \$7 billion in funding for prison and jail construction and expansion) to expand county jails, and keep prison construction on the table. Our work within the Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB) alliance has encouraged CURB to pursue a moratorium on prison and jail expansion in California as a response to reversing this trend.

By taking leadership in strategic communications and coordinating political pressure on decision makers, CR has helped CURB to present moratorium as the only viable option to address the critical social and economic crisis caused by California’s prison system. CR members have played key roles in CURB’s Legislative, Grassroots, and Media Workgroups and we have worked hard to unite communities from Southern California to the Central Valley and Northern California and to consolidate our energy into launching a statewide prison moratorium campaign. Because there are so many moving parts to California’s prison system, we co-authored and designed CURB’s *Budget for Humanity*—a straightforward organizing tool suggesting a comprehensive vision of a state that prioritizes the wellbeing of all its residents, not the longevity of a brutal punishment system.

Stopping Gang Injunctions

In 2010, faced with increasing rates of surveillance, harassment, violence, and arrest in poor communities of color, CR helped establish the Stop the Injunctions Coalition (STIC) to craft a campaign to eliminate the use of civil gang injunctions in Oakland—a policing approach spreading rapidly nationally and internationally. This campaign has activated the participation of thousands of residents including defendants named in the injunctions, youth, immigrants’ rights and



Image: Megan Selby

LGBTQ organizations, and neighbors from Oakland’s most economically and politically marginalized areas. To date, the fight STIC is waging in Oakland is the world’s most successful grassroots campaign against a gang injunction. No grassroots effort has so effectively halted the implementation of these injunctions and the campaign’s legal arm has provided one of the most comprehensive legal challenges to gang injunctions ever waged against them.

CR has contributed campaign strategy, savvy media work, and tireless outreach to galvanize thousands of Oakland residents and dozens of community organizations to articulate clear and consistent demands and messaging, and to keep STIC member organizations and workgroups engaged and excited. This campaign has not only attacked the particulars of gang injunctions, but also exposed their connections to wider police violence, racism, imprisonment, poverty, anti-immigrant sentiment, disenfranchisement,

Image: Scott Braley



and gentrification. During 2011, CR helped mobilize hundreds of Oakland residents to City Hall on a consistent basis, as part of an effort that won an independent review of gang injunctions in Oakland, prevented their spread into East and West Oakland, and crushed proposals for day and night youth curfews and loitering ordinances. By the end of 2011, 12 gang injunctions were slated to have been implemented in Oakland. Based on strong and strategic organizing work, to date

Oakland still has not imposed a permanent injunction anywhere in the city.

The fights in City Hall and in the courtroom have been intertwined with marches, teach-ins, cultural events, and rallies that have allowed us to maintain momentum in this campaign while building community participation and power for future campaigns. As a member of STIC, CR has also been able to share strategies with communities in other parts of California through writing and speaking engagements in the US and internationally.

Hunger Strike

On July 1, 2011, prisoners in California's notorious Pelican Bay State Prison Security Housing Unit (SHU) launched a hunger strike to win an end to institutionalized malnutrition and medical neglect, compliance with basic international standards on solitary confinement, access to education and basic amenities, and to abolish the use of group punishment and vicious "gang validation" and "debriefing" policies.

Two massive waves of strikes were powered forward by more than 12,000 prisoners throughout the California prison system, and joined by others in prisons outside California. The strikes were some of the largest US organized prisoner actions in over a generation.

CR was brought into the Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity coalition in the early stages of its formation to coordinate the strike's media campaign. Of particular concern to the strike leaders was the *de facto* media blackout that had hampered strikes in Georgia and Ohio earlier in the year, as well as the media ban throughout the California prison system. Through daily planning and assessment, dogged phone, email, and in-person press outreach, and strategic use of social media, we helped blow up the story internationally and got daily coverage in everything from independent community media outlets,

international powerhouses like *Al Jazeera English*, to corporate giants like the *New York Times*. More than merely place articles, we crafted the story and became the authoritative source for information on the strike, including being contacted by reporters doing fact-checking on California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's (CDCR) information.

Most importantly we helped ignite the participation and amplified the voices of striking prisoners, former prisoners, and their family members. It was their passion and too often ignored experience and expertise that helped re-focus national attention on questions of solitary confinement, long-term and life sentences, political imprisonment, and torture inside US prisons. The strike established gains for SHU prisoners, lifers, and all prisoners in California, while building solidarity within prisons and across prison walls.



Imprisonment & Impoverishment in New Orleans

As part of the Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition, CR kicked off 2011 by securing a major victory against the Orleans Parish Prison, cutting back expansion plans and winning a cap on the overall size of that notoriously violent, decrepit jail. This was no small feat given the breakneck pace of economic and social devastation in post-Katrina New Orleans. Once again, CR played a critical role in the coalition's media, outreach, and mobilization efforts while offering political clarity in a decidedly murky setting.

Translating this policy victory into actual reduced imprisonment in New Orleans, especially with the continued attacks on poor communities of color through the use of such polices as imprisonment for failure to pay fines, will be a substantial and continued fight.

Staying Connected

Amidst the pitched fever of our campaign work are also our slow and steady day-to-day projects. Our ability to stay connected especially to people inside prisons is inextricably linked to the gains we make on the campaign front. After producing an issue that included a commemoration of the work and life of political prisoner and long-time contributor, Marilyn Buck, the *Abolitionist* newspaper spent the rest of the year assessing which way forward for the publication. As a tool that reaches thousands of prisoners throughout the US, it has been important for the editors of the paper to make it as sharp as possible. Just as 2011 was coming to a close, a new issue of the paper was going to print—bringing with



it renewed clarity, focus, and sense-of-purpose that will surely have a positive impact on its readers.

Meanwhile, the day to day flow of mail to and from prisons throughout the country continues. CR's prisoner mail workgroup in turn continued manage the volume of communication, but how to use these communications for political discussion, struggle, and support for organizing work across the walls. And when we exhausted our postage due to the explosion of prisoner-communication work in support of the hunger strike, allies and supporters like you, jumped into action for an end-of-year stamp drive that allowed us to send thousands of holiday greetings to people on the inside during one of the most difficult times of year. Thank you for helping us to remind imprisoned people that they are not alone.

SHIFTING COMMON SENSE

A fundamental part of our work is to spread abolitionist politics as far and wide as possible. Even as we work on the ground, a relationship between theory and practice helps us to both envision and build a world beyond the prison industrial complex. In 2011 we were able push abolitionist analysis in new ways.

As noted above, our communications work within our coalitions allowed us to place over 1000 stories that not only advanced our campaigns but also carved out larger and larger spaces for us to question the logics of policing, surveillance, and imprisonment themselves. Our communications helped us highlight the ways communities are working to free themselves from the violence of these institutions while dislodging the assumptions that they are natural and necessary. By coordinating more than a dozen spokesperson and media trainings with our members and allies and producing as many short video pieces, the struggles against the PIC and the visions of self-determined communities are strengthened as they get articulated and outlined by people who are also those most impacted by the system's violence, and fighting hardest for their liberation.

Bolstering our campaign analysis has been a series of powerful events that have brought community members together across the county and have celebrated our collective histories



and charted paths forward. One important event was “The World We Want is the World We Need,” an event at Harlem’s historic Riverside Church in May. Along with our close ally the Brecht Forum we brought together 2000 people to hear the uncompromising words and rallying cries of thinkers and activists Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Vijay Prashad, and Angela Y. Davis, who in no uncertain terms connected worldwide upsurges such as the Arab Spring to ongoing work in the US against policing, imprisonment, and economic and social violence.

Similar events in Chicago and Los Angeles incorporated the unique contributions coming out of those regions into an understanding of abolition on an international scale. CR's Oakland chapter packed the house at Eastside Cultural Center to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Attica Rebellion and the assassination of George Jackson, highlighting to legacy of these historical events through the work of today's younger artists, cultural workers, and organizers. Meanwhile, academics, students, and scholars gathered at UC Berkeley, taking an explicitly abolitionist approach for the "Abolition Pedagogy: Critical Prison Studies and the Neoliberal University" conference during which participants explored how those working within the academy could make contributions to the wider struggle against the prison industrial complex.



Not insignificant to all these events was the generosity of those who attended in contributing financially to Critical Resistance. Through these events we were able to raise much needed funds and advance abolitionist analysis which, in turn, fueled our campaigns and projects.

GROWING AND REBUILDING

In early 2011, Critical Resistance faced the kinds of financial challenges that have been ravaging movements for social justice for the past several years. We experienced shifts in funding that compelled us to make hard choices about cuts to staffing and office infrastructure, as well as scaling down our campaigns and projects. While these choices were very difficult, particularly in the case of staff cuts, we were able to draw on our remaining resources and infrastructure, as well as the creativity and determination of our membership, to sustain our core work in 2011. We ultimately emerged from 2011 stronger than we went into it, in large part because of the overwhelming support we received from our members, donors, and supporters.

We put our heads down and consolidated our energy for fights against prison and jail expansion as well as the expansion of policing powers, and in solidarity with prisoners on hunger strike across California. We also used this moment of financial tightening to assess where we are as an organization, take stock of our strengths and opportunities, and chart a course for rebuilding the organization that is strategic, well-paced, and rooted in the strengths we bring to the fight against the PIC. While we still have a long path ahead and much room to grow, our ability to respond to last year's challenge so effectively gives us confidence to keep taking strong steps forward.

As a result of the difficult choices made last year, CR is smaller than we have been for some time. As we all know, however, size and strength are not the same. As you have already seen, our core campaigns and projects flourished as a result of focus and a sense of urgency. In collaboration with our Stop the Injunctions Coalition partners, for instance, we made substantial gains in opposing the use of gang injunctions in Oakland. We helped provide much needed amplification for voices of prisoners on hunger strike in protest of California prison policies through our media and communications efforts. And we have put tools in local communities' hands to counter the impacts of California's realignment scheme at the county level. We have also seen our membership show greater and greater political unity and unity of purpose across the organization.

In 2011 CR completed our first-ever strategic plan! The plan is designed to help us strengthen our organizational unity, build our leadership development capacity, and fortify our membership and accountability processes. The plan has been rolling out since July 2011 and we've already seen some great impacts.

CR saw a number of staff transitions in 2011. We saw long-time staffer and co-founder, Kai Lumumba Barrow move on to organizing work with Southerners on New Ground (SONG), while another long-time staffer, Ari Wohlfeiler, transitioned out of his position at the turn of this new year. Both Ari and Kai's contributions to CR's growth and development over the years have been invaluable. Their leadership on staff will definitely be missed.

PAVING THE PATH AHEAD

As we enter into a phase of rebuilding for CR, our eyes stay firmly on our goal of ending the prison industrial complex. And we intend to continue moving strongly in 2012 with a focus on steady, sustainable rebuilding for our organization. We intend to keep advocating for the elimination of the use of civil gang injunctions in Oakland and similar expansions of policing power. We will move forward in executing our campaign for a moratorium on prison and jail construction in California and spread the fight against imprisonment nationwide. We will continue to provide support in solidarity with prisoner hunger strikers in California. And we will persist in facilitating communication across prison walls through our prisoner mail project and *The Abolitionist*. We will also keep maintaining our strong foundation: doing media and communications work to make PIC abolition common sense and applicable; supporting leadership development; and building strong alliances here in the United States and internationally.

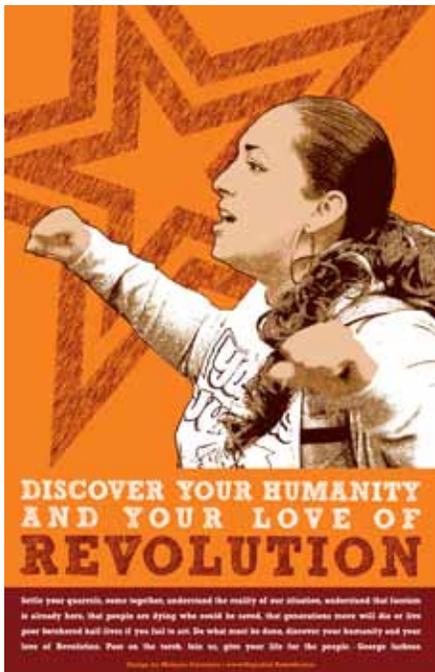


Image: Melanie Cervantes

While 2011 saw two staff members transition from their positions, 2012 sees a former staffer return in a new role. Rachel Herzing re-joined the staff as the Development Director in early 2012. We are excited that Rachel, in her staff role, will continue to carry and share our organizational history, draw on and strengthen her relationships with our members and allies, and carry forward our political vision, analysis, and skills.



2011 was a year of substantial challenges for us at Critical Resistance. We were compelled to scale back our infrastructure and streamline our work during a political period marked by global uprisings, economic depression, and increasing state repression. We took up these challenges by building up strong internal structures that have increased member participation, leadership, and stability. As we look forward to our work in 2012, we also look forward to continuing to develop our internal national unity, the strength of our anchor campaigns, our leadership roles in key coalitions, and the success of our communications work. None of this would be possible without you.

FUELING THE MOVEMENT TO ABOLISH THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

Thanks to all our donors for investing in CR's sustainability last year. You came through for us when our future was not certain and demonstrated that you believe CR plays a vital role in movements for social justice. You donated more than you ever had before, many of you donated multiple times during the year, many of you encouraged others in your lives to give for the first time. Many of you donated time, knowledge, skills, and experience, in addition to money. We cannot do our work without you. Your effort and energy are at the heart of our fight against the prison industrial complex. We look forward to continuing to work together this year.