Welcome to Issue 16 of The Abolitionist! Much work and re-structuring has happened since Issue 15 came out in Summer 2011. We want to thank you for your patience while we went through these changes. The goals of this re-structuring are to reach out to more of Critical Resistance’s allies inside and outside, bring more analysis, and to make the paper more politically sound and cohesive. One of the ways that we are doing that is by using themes to help shape the paper. Issue 16 considers the theme of Life After the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC)—something we hope strikes a chord in everyone.

Throughout 2011, uprisings across the world from Libya, Egypt, Greece, California State Prisons, to the Occupy Movement exposed the state’s power and tools of oppression. Within our society, most of us have been conditioned to expect punishment as a solution to many issues. A school with sub-par test scores? Shut it down. A homeowner who can’t pay their mortgage? Kick them out. A parent that can’t afford to feed their kids? Take the kids away and put the parent in jail. As schools continue to close, homes are foreclosed, and prison funding is increased, we can see that the priorities of the state are clearly not aligned with what we know is needed to create a healthy and safe society. The connections that link this issue of The Abolitionist together are no coincidence: community accountability, providing resources and support to those that need it, challenging power dynamics, validation and acknowledgment of the voices that are so often ignored—the list goes on and on. These are the things that we know we need, and once we get them, what will our world look like?

We challenge you to take the breadth and connections between each piece into consideration when creating your own vision for a world without the PIC. Because we have all been impacted in different ways by the PIC and learned to survive within a capitalist framework we should also ask what new opportunities, and challenges for you, your loved ones, and allies await in a world without the PIC? In addition to responding to harm and violence, how will families stay connected? How will our relationships to labor change? What needs will be prioritized financially so that our needs are met and our society has an opportunity to thrive rather than just survive? Abolitionist editor Zachary Ontiveros, poses some of these questions and explores what a new economy could look like in a world without prisons in his editorial.

For “A World Without Walls: Stopping Harm & Abolishing the Prison Industrial Complex,” we touched base with individuals and organizations across the country, including CUAV (Communities United Against Violence), Creative Interventions, the Challenging Male Supremacy Project, and Philly Stands Up, to ask them what their work would look like in a world without imprisonment. Philly Stands Up also provided us with a visual tool it uses to guide its accountability process (see page 17).

Members of Project WHAT!, a group comprised of youth with currently or formerly imprisoned parents, share with us their needs, expectations, and experiences of living without and reuniting with their parents. Their perspective gives us an opportunity to think about what their experiences would look like if their needs and expectations were met, in a world without prisons, while Rights for Imprisoned People with Psychiatric Disabilities (RIPPD) explores community-based strategies to address the needs of people living with mental disabilities who are systematically isolated from society and often imprisoned.

In an effort to begin to use graphics more effectively in the paper, Abolitionist editor Toshio Meronek explores the possibilities for redistribu-
Yet without exception, over the long-term the Beast/Machine feeds on positions of authority within oppressive systems and “reforms” are made. It is true that occasionally people of good will can be in polemics. The sooner that we stop buying into the dominant paradigm of our time that calls for ever-more reliance upon top-down systems and the delusion that reform is the goal, the better off we all shall be. What I find particularly disturbing was the suggestion that the PIC established a “Psychological Department”. Does anyone really imagine that a well-funded psychology department will not be fully assimilated into the Beast/Machine feeds on the PIC within a decade? Providing the “system” with vast amounts of data about its prisoners is tantamount to the establishment of a psychological department. Does anyone really imagine that a psychological department will be prisoner organizing, and Fall 2012 will be focused on particular themes such as the relationship between the social toxicity of the PIC and the environmental hazards prisons pose to help highlight how important PIC abolition is to creating and maintaining healthy environments.

Having pieces written by our readers is an important part of what The Abolitionist is all about. The theme for Summer 2012 will be prisoner organizing, and Fall 2012 will explore surveillance as a tool of the PIC. By focusing the paper on particular themes we still have the ability to work with our long-time allies and connect with new ones, but hopefully in a way that makes our work more cohesive. Your insight and perspectives will help make this possible. We hope this issue awakens new ideas, visions, and energies in both your and the collective struggle to create the new world that we all know is possible.

In solidarity,
The Abolitionist Editorial Collective

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Dear Editor,

A friend shared his copy of issue #16 (my first exposure to The Abolitionist). I fully support the political philosophy and all means necessary required to achieve the stated goals of the removal of the scourge of the PIC. I did have concerns about one particular article: “Strategies for a Successful Re-Entry Plan” by Mr. Robert Dellelo.

I see a contradiction inherent in seeking all means to rid ourselves of the PIC while simultaneously advocating an approach that would over time serve to vastly increase the scale of material inputs (i.e. money) into the system that is to be dismantled. All measures that increase system inputs increase system scale. This is a material fact. It is true that occasionally people of good will can be in positions of authority within oppressive systems and “reforms” are made. Yet without exception, over the long-term the Beast/Machine feeds on pieces written by our readers is an important part of what The Abolitionist is all about. The theme for Summer 2012 will be prisoner organizing, and Fall 2012 will explore surveillance as a tool of the PIC. By focusing the paper on particular themes we still have the ability to work with our long-time allies and connect with new ones, but hopefully in a way that makes our work more cohesive. Your insight and perspectives will help make this possible. We hope this issue awakens new ideas, visions, and energies in both your and the collective struggle to create the new world that we all know is possible.

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The Abolitionist
C/O Critical Resistance
1904 Franklin St., Ste. 504
Oakland, CA 94612

Please be sure to let us know if we have permission to print your full name and address along with your submission. See p. 5 for more instructions on submitting writing or artwork for publication.

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Critical Resistance seeks to build an international movement to end the Prison Industrial Complex by challenging the belief that caging and controlling people makes us safe. We believe that basic necessities such as food, shelter, and freedom are what really make our communities secure. As such, our work is part of global struggles against inequality and powerlessness. The success of the movement requires that it reflect communities most affected by the PIC. Because we seek to abolish the PIC, we cannot support any work that extends its life or scope.

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<th>Rights for Imprisoned People with Psychiatric Disabilities People with Intellectual Disability There are no limits to our support. Please contact us to learn more.</th>
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<th>MARSHA P. JOHNSON,” BY JASON FRITZ-MICHAEL (JASONFRITZMICHAEL.COM)</th>
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Prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition shuts down prisons and frees caged people, but abolition is also the work of re-imagining and transforming other supposedly democratic institutions that have locked out too many. Building for PIC abolition requires a radical imagination to believe that institutions, particularly education, could be otherwise.

How could an abolition politics re-imagine higher education?

Erica receives a monthly stipend to attend her local post-secondary educational institution—a community college. All education is free, public, and open. The open classrooms, colleges, and universities have been nationalized and their endowments redistributed. Some of the classes she takes are at night, and she has ready access to an excellent, free, and flexible childcare program at the college. Healthcare is provided for everyone, so she isn’t concerned that not working will cancel out her health insurance. A part of a free student housing co-operative, she lives in a bright and airy three-bedroom condo with a yard in the back. Her tuition has her own study.

Erica takes classes in the vibrant Economics Department that is full of a range of theorists, including new faculty from South America who study histories of collectivization. She is also taking classes in the Gender and Women’s Studies program and is curious about relationships between labor movements and immigration policies. Next fall she and her girls will travel to Mexico for a semester to learn about migration. Writing has been a struggle for Erica, but she meets with her writing mentor, a graduate student and a local poet, at least twice a week. She expects to finish her undergraduate degree in six years, in part because of her double major and her part-time work in the college’s student publishing press and associated library.

Is this wildly extravagant, laughably utopian, and simply impossible? Why? Why can’t public community colleges be free, offer housing and health insurance for students, an economics department staffed by full time faculty (including scholars from Venezuela with expertise on nationalizing natural resources), stipends to students to study full time, and free and consistent tutoring? Why not?

Bent by the landscapes of capitalism and white supremacy and by decades of a learning-style that shames audacity, praises pragmatism and punishes dissent, to imagine is to open oneself up to the possibility that everything could be otherwise. This is risky, but what we have now is unacceptable.

The Pell Grant, a federal subsidy that has historically supported many individuals to afford tuition, now covers less than 32% of a student’s annual college costs. Being a student increasingly means amassing debt with little hope of paying it off. There is now a trillion dollars of student debt—research tells us about other intimate connections. Those who are locked up have been pushed out of free world formal education (according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, approximately 63% of those in state prisons have not earned a high school diploma). This should be no surprise. Lack of education (especially a high school diploma) increases the likelihood of imprisonment to such a high degree that some social scientists are identifying imprisonment as a “life-stage” event, like marriage or the military, for low-income Black men. Files of research also testify that receiving formal (or credentialled) education while locked up reduces recidivism and therefore shrinks the need for more detention centers. This too, should be no surprise. Many make the link that carceral expansion directly corresponded with revolutionary movements by people of color, queers, and/or women across the U.S. that centered liberatory education—teaching and learning that was not readily available in schools. The growth of prisons, policing, and punishment was one way to suppress and halt these strong revolutionary movements that were, to borrow from Brazil—ica justice worker Paulo Freire, about linking people to power through education that leaves no one behind.

The relationships between imprisonment and education are not complex. Beyond the neoliberal ties—both prisons and universities are public pathways supported by our tax dollars—research tells us about other intimate connections. Those who are locked up have been pushed out of free world formal education (according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, approximately 63% of those in state prisons have not earned a high school diploma). This should be no surprise. Lack of education (especially a high school diploma) increases the likelihood of imprisonment to such a high degree that some social scientists are identifying imprisonment as a “life-stage” event, like marriage or the military, for low-income Black men. Files of research also testify that receiving formal (or credentialled) education while locked up reduces recidivism and therefore shrinks the need for more detention centers. This too, should be no surprise. Many make the link that carceral expansion directly corresponded with revolutionary movements by people of color, queers, and/or women across the U.S. that centered liberatory education—teaching and learning that was not readily available in schools. The growth of prisons, policing, and punishment was one way to suppress and halt these strong revolutionary movements that were, to borrow from Brazilian justice worker Paulo Freire, about linking people to power through education that leaves no one behind.

Continued on next page
Although it is clear that increasing access to high quality education would reduce the number of people locked up and cost the nation less and that there are stacks of research pointing out that our education and carceral policies are expensive, unjust and racist, we have not been able to effectively push back. Not yet. In 1998 the U.S. banned Pell grants for those in prison and made it thorny, if not impossible, for those with drug convictions to get access to federal financial aid after they had served their time. Educational privatopias continue to hoard resources and concentrate power along race and class lines. In addition, our nation continues to funnel young people from our prison prep high schools, complete with on-site cop-shops, to juvenile detention centers. An abolitionist politic reminds us that these institutions are not broken; they are functioning precisely as designed.

We must identify a broader range of other institutions and enhance our ability to re-imagine and challenge the belief systems that naturalize their practices. Or, as theorist Fred Moten writes, PIC abolition requires transformations: “the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage.” We only have to look a decade or so back, or one or two countries over, to generate ideas of how education should and could be different: high quality and accessible, unionized faculty and students, low or free tuition. Letting a few people out of prison or admitting a couple of the “better and best” into college is not enough. Public safety is the right to a high quality education that leaves no one behind.

Erica R. Meiners lives, works, and teaches in Chicago Illinois. She can be reached at e-meiners@neiu.edu or by mail through CR’s National Office: Critical Resistance, attn.: Erica Meiners, 1904 Franklin St. Suite 504, Oakland CA 94612.

What If

BY MUSTAPHA, CENTINELA STATE PRISON

If I had a million records, what would they say? If I had a million thoughts, what would they be?

If there wasn’t such a thing as love, what would equal to hate; if there wasn’t such a thing as being rich, then would we not dream big?

What if all the things in this world that are important today didn’t spark the least bit of interest tomorrow?

What if you woke up today and realized the things you stood up for yesterday was the opposite of what you believe in today?

What if you realized that our nation is flawed, simply because men are flawed?

What if we looked in the mirror and embraced our flaws without blame or prejudice or complaint, but instead, began to change it?

What if we as a world realized that it takes only one man or one woman to affect the course of direction, but it takes everyone to be heard?

What if we realized that with war comes sacrifices and not every sacrifice will see a gain, but leave an impression?

What if we learned to expect casualties by utilizing them as a stepping stone, and not letting up but increasing resistance?

What if we realized that the things we fight for today are not for us but for the benefit of our children tomorrow?

What if we realized that together we can overcome anything because we are the people, and without the people you have nothing?

What if you realized that all it took was a stand, and then took a stand?

What if we realized that self-abuse wasn’t the conflict, but self-exploitation?

What if we started with the trash in our backyards, instead of complaining about the smell of our neighbors?

What if we just realized that together we can do anything?

This is to all my comrades and civilians, those that believe and those that don’t, if you don’t believe in you, you’ll fail for anything.

Show me a hero, and I’ll write you a tragedy. Show me a coward, and I’ll pick out a head stone.
The PIC wants us to believe that police, prisons, and surveillance are necessary to maintain the social order. What could “safe spaces” or “safety” mean? How do we understand the importance of our abiding with the PIC and the consequences of this for our community’s core skills: witnessing and sitting with pain, vulnerability, and risk. How do we transform these spaces into a lasting framework for the repair and restoration of our communities? How can we craft something like a state, what would collective reparations look like for victims of the PIC? How can we establish principles and practices for confronting harm and violence that do not rely on policing and imprisonment.

The Abolitionist posits five questions to several organizations leading this work throughout the U.S.—Creative Interventions, Communities United against Violence (CUAV), Challenging Male Supremacy Project and Philly Stands Up. These organizations are developing practices, principles, and terms that directly respond to the need to develop abolitionist strategies of responding to harm. The work of these groups illustrates that abolition is not only possible, but practical, necessary, and within our grasp.

What is the role of community accountability/transformation justice in abolishing the prison industrial complex? How do we make accountability systemic or community-based rather than focused on individual people or harms?

Morgan Bassichis, CUAV: Building up transforming accountability is a piece of a larger cultural transition from a way of life that values profit to a way of life that values life. We are not developing a replacement for the PIC, but instead infusing our communities with skills to create resilient, honest, loving relationships. As our movements struggle to redistribute resources and dismantle violent institutions, we have the opportunity to imagine how we want to be with one another. Real accountability—doing what we say we will do, and being able to get back on track when we get off—is a chance for us to show ourselves we don’t need the kind of “security” that will foster our wellness. Some of these strategies we can use to reconnect and heal are prioritizing well-being over productivity, such as something like a state, what would collective reparations look like for victims of the PIC? Perhaps fully subsidized healing and health remedies include being able to have loving, direct conversations, being able to ask ourselves and others open-ended questions instead of assuming we already know the answer, and being able to center ourselves in intense times. We will see fostering safety as a shared practice that we are all in together, not a destination or set recipe. We will come to understand safety less as a product and more as localized experiments in interdependence.

Once we abolish the PIC, we will need to continue to address the trauma the PIC has caused our communities. What are some strategies and approaches we can use to respond to this trauma & promote mental, physical, and emotional health?

Bench & Jenna, Philly Stands Up: After the PIC is abolished we are faced with a number of structures that are often ushered in after collective or individual trauma by finding ways to productively fold the memories of trauma and consequences of it into the ways stories are told and our remainders are made. We can learn from our empowered legacies of trauma and build cultures of resistance out of our previous ideas that have afflicted us. It is important to name, celebrate, and sometimes mourn the tools of survival that those most directly targeted by the PIC have developed. Equally necessary is cultivating the discernment to determine when those survival strategies—such as not being able to communicate our needs or trust ourselves to be kept safe—will no longer be necessary. There is so much to learn by asking how we got here. These inspiring and often tragic legacies that ground us in our own vibrant history of struggle cannot be overlooked when we live in a world free from prisons.

RJ Maccani & Gaurav Jashnani, Challenging Male Supremacy Project: We need to cultivate resilience, our ability to bounce back from trauma and oppression. This could come in the form of talking, singing, praying, or dancing together. What are our ways of coming together that feed our resilience? What are our ways of coming together that get us resonate with what we are most certainly practical concerns.

Felipe Hernandez: The strategies we use supposing our previously incarcerated peers are connecting with their histories and spirituality are strategies we can use to reconnect and heal once we no longer have prisons at all. We call these torture programs—our connection to Mother Earth, our connection to our indigenous history. We take that culture—the art, the care, the love that has had to have been deeply disconnected, not only physically, but mentally & spiritually. We create a

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HE PIC wants us to believe that police, prisons, and surveillance are necessary to maintain the social order. What could “safe spaces” or “safety” mean? How do we understand the importance of our abiding with the PIC and the consequences of this for our community’s core skills: witnessing and sitting with pain, vulnerability, and risk. How do we transform these spaces into a lasting framework for the repair and restoration of our communities? How can we craft something like a state, what would collective reparations look like for victims of the PIC? Perhaps fully subsidized healing and health remedies include being able to have loving, direct conversations, being able to ask ourselves and others open-ended questions instead of assuming we already know the answer, and being able to center ourselves in intense times. We will see fostering safety as a shared practice that we are all in together, not a destination or set recipe. We will come to understand safety less as a product and more as localized experiments in interdependence.

On a societal level, a big piece would also be prioritizing well-being over productivity, such as none of us having to put all of our energy into work just to make ends meet. If we still have something like a state, what would collective reparations look like for victims of the PIC? Perhaps fully subsidized healing and health remedies include being able to have loving, direct conversations, being able to ask ourselves and others open-ended questions instead of assuming we already know the answer, and being able to center ourselves in intense times. We will see fostering safety as a shared practice that we are all in together, not a destination or set recipe. We will come to understand safety less as a product and more as localized experiments in interdependence.
shared sense of spirituality inside the walls in order to bring back that power Native brothers and sisters had, that they continue to have but has been removed from them. We make art, draw pictures, or identify where we come from. It’s almost like magic sometimes when you see a young prisoner drawing a picture that dictates that has to do with Aztec history. It awakens something they probably have never tapped into. It draws back memory and feeling.

Growing up in a really harsh community we aren’t taught to show love, understanding, compassion, and recognize that destruction in a way. So we support folks from tough communities by asking them: Do you find yourself a spiritual person? Do you have compassion for others? Do you have compassion for Mother Earth? Where do you want to take your spirit? We’re opening those doors for people who have never been able to express those feelings. Something really comes down to basic reconnection, realigning with where we come from: How do I sit on the floor and touch the ground for the first time again?

Once we abolish the prison industrial complex, what processes or strategies can we use to respond to serious harm, including murder, rape, and assault?

Morgan Bassichis, CUAV: To respond to high levels of harm in ways that are not derivative of the PIC, we must first and foremost get rid of the notion that there are “good” and “bad” people—that people who murder, rape, and assault people are “bad” and that people who don’t are “good.” All harm people and are harmed ourselves, in different contexts and conditions and with different levels of power behind us. Accepting this does not minimize violence but actually empowers us to be able to face violence clearly. We can support the wellness of people who have been seriously harmed. We can witness their grief, rage, and sorrow and resource their healing. We can support people who have hurt others to address the real issues underneath their actions, with both people’s dignity intact. When dealing with high levels of violence, our impulse is to want to fix and save and resolve. This jumping to resolution can rob people of feeling, which is critical for healing. Although it may not sound the most satisfying, sometimes the best thing we can do is listen.

Mimi Kim, Creative Interventions: We are building our capacity to create community principles, skills, and institutions that not only respond to violence but also prevent and intervene in violence in all of its stages. Violence does not usually begin with a ball to the head. It begins with signs or smaller violations that, if unchecked, lead to larger violations. We have to come up with processes of intervention that can address a person at its early stages — not zero tolerance approaches that slam people with punitive measures or ban them from spaces immediately, which often encourage people to go underground rather than talk. We need measures that are appropriate to the level of harm and that have more possibilities that we can address and stop violence as we see it occurring.

Felipe Hernandez: We need to bring the responsibility to the community-based back to our communities. We need to show responsibility for people who are serving time to get back into society and as a community have these folks come back and be supported, to have services, to have places where they can go get answers and healing. Where people can come in and say, “Hey, we need some type of family intervention. My son and my husband don’t know how to talk to each other. Is there anyone who could help them talk to each other?” or “I heard you speak about struggling with this earlier, and it’s a similar thing for me. How did you get through it?”

We need to act with the understanding that every person is a valued member of our community and it is responsible for what goes on in our community. I grew up in Los Angeles during a very difficult time of LA history with the crack epidemic, sky-high murder rate, violence, and other things. The only reason I survived was because I did have that supporting community. We had the neighbors that were involved in our lives; that addicted person in the corner; the so-called “gang member” that was supposedly nothing but trouble. It was our community and that person that kept me out of trouble. That person that took the blame. We reopened the doors for people who have been served to go back and live with and the people we harm.

Bench & Jenna, Philly Stands Up: When the structures that perpetuate violence have been dismantled, we imagine the levels and frequency of interpersonal harm will be at a much smaller scale and will look radically different than they do now. When conflict and serious assaults/violence happen, then we can use a model of Transformative Justice that is rooted in building close community, naming positions of power and oppression, and using creativity and honesty to fuel accountability in an effort to empower the survivor(s) to claim and feel justice and offer the person who perpetrated the harm a way to make appropriate restitution.

We need to answer to the people we grow and live with, and the people we harm.

Once we abolish the prison industrial complex, what could supporting survivors of violence look like?

ART BY LYDIA CRUMBLEY, JUSTSEEDS COLLECTIVE

Mimi Kim, Creative Interventions: Although healing may be a different experience and process for each survivor, we believe survivors are responsible for creating alternative spaces to support the process of healing. The act of communities coming together to take interper- sonal or intimate forms of harm seriously can in and of itself make healing more possible. For many survivors the fact that support is not available is doubly traumatic. We make available to support survivors immediately and long-term. Support can look like emotional care, believing survivors, offering material support such as companionship, transportation, financial support; allowing them to go through the full process of grieving and healing. It also includes the process of support full accountability and responsibility for people directly responsible for harm. It means that communities have to understand our own role in creating harm and find a way to happen, to tolerate it, or even to actively support it. We have to practice our own forms of accountability and take action to change it.

RJ Maccani & Gaurav Jashnani, Challenging Male Supremacy Project: We can establish sufficient support mechanisms so that survivors don’t have to deal with wanting accountability/transformation for the person who harmed them unless they want to, and so that they can choose to do so in ways that are healthy for them.

Morgan Bassichis has been a staff member at Community United Against Violence (CUAV) since 2007. Founded in 1979 and based in San Francisco, CUAV supports local and immigrant LGBTQ survivors of violence to create individual and community wellness. Morgan is also a volunteer with the Transgender, Gender Variant, and Intersex Justice Project (TGJIP) and an organizer of Transforming Justice. Morgan can be reached at morgan@cuav.org. / Jennie Peters-Golden, Mimi Kim, & Gaurav Jashnani work with The Challenging Male Supremacy Project, which was launched by generationFIVE, an organization in Santa Cruz County working to prevent and curtail violence by reclaiming and restoring the way we think about justice while promoting unity amongst families and neighbors through community building efforts. Felicia brings his passion for peace through liberation and experience of forming and running what is known as a street-based youth in Los Angeles to his work as a mentor to young men in juvenile hall. / Mimi Kim is a long time anti-violence organizer and educator. Working in the domestic violence sector for over 20 years, Mimi co-founded Oakland-based Shrinut: Korean Domestic Violence Program of Community United Against Violence (CUAV). In 2004 founded Creative Interventions, a community resource dedicated to establishing healthy individual, community, and family relationships. Currently, Mimi co-founds the Challenging Male Supremacy Project (TGIJP) and an organizer of Transforming Justice. Morgan can be reached at morgan@cuav.org.
Accountability Road Map

An Accountability road map sketches out a process to give it structure while clarifying intentions, goals and allowing you to get a sense of the trajectory and the big picture. Because accountability processes are never linear or clear cut, we use a road map instead of an agenda; Road maps have ample room for construction, road blocks and detours. They help you maintain sense of your over all goals, while remaining flexible and open to re-routing paths and re-imagining the journey once you’ve started.

The Five Major Phases of Accountability Processes

1. Identifying Behaviors
   The first step in a process is that a person must have an awareness and understanding of the actions and behaviors for which they are being called out. This is foundational and can sometimes take longer to accomplish than you might imagine.

2. Accepting Harm Done
   Building on the understanding of what specific behaviors led them to this accountability process, the next step is to acknowledge in what ways these behaviors were harmful—even if harm wasn’t their intention. This is the seed of one of the most frequent goals in a process: building empathy.

3. Looking for Patterns
   Making Comprehensive change to prevent future assault requires broadening the focus beyond the isolated incident(s) that precipitated this process. This means identifying and naming the person’s history of abusive/harmful actions and contextualizing these behaviors in their underlying assumptions and socialization.

4. Unlearning Old Behaviors
   The process of breaking habits starts with identifying harmful dynamics and then deepens beyond naming to analysis and understanding. Gaining an awareness and determining the kinds of situations that trigger or enable abusive or harmful behaviors and then having clear strategies to avoid and diffuse the potential path for harm.

5. Learning New Behaviors
   Building new positive/healing patterns of behavior goes hand in hand with breaking down the old harmful patterns. One of the tools in this stage is role play, where a person can rehearse their consent practices, graceful acceptance of criticism, disclosure strategies, etc. Also important is becoming familiar with their resources to support positive and new behavior (affordable therapy, sites to find jobs, a clearly defined network of supportive friends, membership to the gym, etc.). This phase is very much about understanding the ways to build new behaviors so this skill becomes sustainable and fueled by self reliance.

Imagining Alternatives

The following is an excerpt from A World Without Walls: Critical Resistance Abolition Organizing Toolkit, created by members in 2003. After the PIC is abolished, we will need to work together to resolve conflict and harm when they take place. Here are two examples of conflict resolution that have been used successfully without involving the PIC. If you would like a copy of our toolkit, please write to us and we will send you one.

Exercise 1
Alternatives to Punishment Role Play

Come up with a situation where harm has happened in your community. For this role play you need a person to play the harmer, one to play the person being harmed, and others to play friends and family for both people. Remember that friends and family can be connected to both people—especially if the harm in question is in the setting of a family or neighborhood.

As a group, figure out:
1. How you’re going to meet. Who will facilitate, especially when emotions are high? How will decisions be made?
2. What is the harm that happened, and how is it still felt?
3. How can you resolve the issue without police or prisons?

The point of challenging our individual and collective common senses isn’t to point out whose ideas and instincts are wrong or need to be corrected and changed. The exercise is meant to help us see not just what we think about safety, but how many things we think about safety. This again makes the point that abolition is about building a world that is safe in multiple and lasting ways. Spending time working through what we think and how we came to think in those ways about safety is an important step in that work.

Exercise 2
Circles

The circle is a well-known and successful transformative justice practice that comes from the aboriginal communities of the Yukon in Canada. At the very least, circles are usually made up of two discussion facilitators, the person who inflicted the harm, the person harmed, family members, and members of the community affected by the harm. In circles conducted under the direction of the state, lawyers and officials in the punishment system are also involved.

Following a set of core principles on which everyone involved agrees, the circle goes through a process to think about the problem. First, the circle tries to understand the harm done. What happened? Why did it happen? Next, as much as possible, the circle designs a tailor-made response for repairing the harm and addressing some of its causes. The person who did the harm can volunteer to compensate the person who was harmed if damage to physical property happened. If a history of interpersonal conflict led to the incident, the facilitator can help come up with an understanding between the people involved, disagreements can be mediated, and disputes can be resolved. Neighbors and peers can form support networks for assisting the recovery and transformation of both the person harmed and person who inflicted the harm. If the appropriate resources exist, counseling and drug treatment can also be provided.

Circle Role Play Exercise

Use a circle to address a specific incident. First, think of an example of harm, such as an a-
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It brings the victim and the wrongdoer together as human beings, in some measure, it corrects the wrongdoer and keeps the lawbreaker in the community to bring the wronged and the community, permitting him/her to correct the discomfort and inconvenience caused to prisons are economic crimes: theft, fraud, bribery, and embezzlement. Though restitution can be utilized in practically all wrongdoings, it is most obviously appropriate for economic crimes. If a loan, freely made with honest intent to return it, is not repaid, the lender has a legal right to proceed against the borrower. It would seem to make sense to apply that same procedure in economic relationships where the loan is of involuntary or fraudulent nature. It is important to think creatively about what tools we would use instead of imprisonment, policing, and surveillance, it is important to think creatively about what tools we would use instead of incarceration, not only in non-violent crimes but also in violent crimes today and in the future. Some terms used in this piece, such as “lawbreaker” and “wrongdoer,” are not terms that CR uses because they criminalize and label people based on an action. Reading this piece gives us an opportunity to see how language has changed since 1976 and to imagine the possibilities for new terms and meanings in a world without the PIC. The potential for broad, creative use of restitution as an excarceration model excites the abolitionist’s imagination. Most offenses for which people are committed to prisons are economic crimes: theft, fraud, robbery, bribery, and embezzlement. Though restitution can be utilized in practically all wrongdoings, it is most obviously appropriate for economic crimes. If a loan, freely made with honest intent to return it, is not repaid, the lender has a legal right to proceed against the borrower. It would seem to make sense to apply that same procedure in economic relationships where the loan is of involuntary or fraudulent nature.

Abolitionists believe restitution makes a great deal of sense as an alternative to incarceration, not only in non-violent crimes but also in those involving violence. The idea of advocating restitution where loss of life is involved should not startle Americans. It is not without precedent. For generations the U.S. government has made restitution to survivors of members of the armed forces killed in combat or by accident. Similarly, survivors of citizens killed by auto accidents are monetarily reimbursed by insurance companies or through civil suits. While restitution options are welcome alternatives to prison at any point after a wrong has been committed, it is most meaningful in the pre-arrest or pretrial period when handled in community settings, bypassing the system entirely. Abolitionists recommend dispute and mediation centers as the most desirable places for restitution agreements to be negotiated by conflicting parties. There, settings and goals are more consistent with the purposes of restitution as a reconciliatory process. However, settlements can also prove effective when arranged in court at presentencing or sentencing procedures.

Restitution need not be only in the form of money. If the wrongdoer is wealthy and can “buy” his/her way out of taking responsibility for wrongs committed, a sentence or mediation agreement can utilize the lawbreaker’s skills or training to benefit the victim or society in general. Contributing services is superior to the extravagant costs and damaging effects of the prison sentence and a better use of time.

Presently, the criminal (in)justice system’s selection process usually leaves out the poor and minorities as candidates for restitution as an alternative to prison. Restitution options should be available to all lawbreakers, not only those who can afford the money or possess the skills to contribute services. Statutes must be uniformly protective of the rights of the poor to make restitution in whatever way possible, given their life situations, and a wide range of options should be included for them to do so.

Outside the System Restitution is an ideal community mediation and excarceration mode:

- It keeps the lawbreaker in the community, not as stereotypes.
- It lessens the community’s need for vengeance and contributes to needed reconciliation and restoration.
- It saves the community, the state, and the affected individuals the economic and psychic costs of trial and probable imprisonment.
- It reduces the role of criminal law.

Alternatives, Continued

Instead of Prisons: Restitution

BY THE PRISON RESEARCH EDUCATION ACTION PROJECT

The following is an excerpt from Instead of Prisons: A Handbook for Abolitionists published in 1976 by the Prison Research Education Action Project (PREAP) and reprinted in 2005 by Critical Resistance. When thinking of a world without imprisonment, policing, and surveillance, it is important to think creatively about what tools we would use instead of incarceration, not only in non-violent crimes but also in violent crimes today and in the future. Some terms used in this piece, such as “lawbreaker” and “wrongdoer,” are not terms that CR uses because they criminalize and label people based on an action. Reading this piece gives us an opportunity to see how language has changed since 1976 and to imagine the possibilities for new terms and meanings in a world without the PIC. The potential for broad, creative use of restitution as a reconciliatory process.

Restitution to victims is a promising concept, but the prison setting hampers its most compelling aspects. For restitution to be creative and reconciliatory, the following conditions are important:

- Restitution should be truly voluntary.
- Restitution should occur in the community to bring the wronged and the wrongdoer together.
- Restitution should lessen the desire for vengeance and encourage reconciliation.

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Alternatives, Continued

Instead of Prisons: Restitution

BY THE PRISON RESEARCH EDUCATION ACTION PROJECT
Can you tell me about your background, and how you got into socially responsible architecture?

I started out being interested in environmental issues, which is now one of the big focuses of the profession—sustainable design, green building. In 2003 I did a lot of anti-war demonstration around the Iraq War and got to know people there who were also dealing with prison issues, which I really didn’t know much about. The anti-war movement did bring people together, at least in my case. At the same time, there was an organization out there doing green building stuff, called Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR). They asked me to be on their board.

I wanted to find a way to make social responsibility relevant to architects. I wanted to find an issue that had to do with building. It occurred to me when I learned about prisons that, in a really intense way, the relationship between the physical facility and the social institution of prison is really tight.

So I started to do my own research about mass incarceration, and I read stuff from Critically Resistant, Justice Policy Institute, and Prison Activist Resource Center. I was struck by how bad things are and how invisible it is.

In California the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) likes to stress the idea of wanting to rehabilitate people in some way. You talk about the relationship between the physical facility and the social institution of prison—how does this relate to the “rehabilitation” of prisoners?

I set myself apart from a lot of architects in this. I actually think that the way that buildings are operated is often more important than how they’re designed. Architects don’t like to believe that, of course. We’d like to think that what we do—the design—is more important, but every prison that’s opened in California in the last 10 or 20 years, the day that they open, the cells are supposed to be used as dormitories. In that sense, even though as a designer you intended it to have opportunities for rehabilitation, the way the prisoner is isolated takes from that goal and defeats your design intent.

The designers who I’ve talked to that create prisons view their task as trying to provide environments that are safe and have low-stress. I think at some level they can succeed, but you won’t get good prison management that is trying to achieve that. And you don’t get that in a lot of places.

A really tragic example is that in some juvenile facilities where kids have to be given six hours of education a day according to California code, they’ll have six individual cells next to each other, in a crescent shape, all looking at the same teacher. Each kid is behind a barred window, and they have a little slot where they can stick their notebooks through so the teacher can look at their exercises. Each student is isolated, totally restrained by the building. That is not a way to give somebody education. And people designed the building to work like that.

Once you decide you’re going to do this to people, it doesn’t matter how you design it: it’s a torture chamber. Architects are almost beside the point.

In a Socio Design Foundation interview from 2009, you mentioned ADPSR’s prison boycott and a case where a man actually quit his job to avoid being involved in all of the prisons his firm had been designing. Can you talk more about that campaign?

There’s been a lot of positive response. There was certainly some negative pushback from people who were building prisons. There was a firm out of Chicago that had hate mail because they felt like we were trying to destroy their business. Architects really understood the issue, but they also said, “We didn’t get into architecture to tell people what not to do. We’re here to make buildings.”

We need to step up and add “Alternatives to Incarceration” to the prison design boycott. This would be focused on alternatives, like community service or restorative justice, and on a bigger level, on providing things that people don’t have, things that the lack of which make “crime” a “good choice” for some people: better housing, more educational opportunities.

In that same interview, you talked about a town in Oregon that gave up all of its future water rights to a prison construction project in order to make the company building the prison more attractive to the community in which they’re constructed.

Prisons that got makeovers
Malmaison Hotel (Oxford, England—at right) and Galerias Pacifico Mall (Buenos Aires, Argentina—above). According to Sperry, these refurbishments “tend to trade on the morbid fascination that people have with prisons.” This capitalistic exploitation is yet another expression of the PIC’s pervasive oppression.

Sure. On the water rights issue, there’s basically no development without water. In Oregon developers came to the town, and they thought, “Perfect, we’ll build tract houses for the new people who come to town,” which would mean economic development. But you can’t build tract houses if there’s no water—you can’t get a permit from the water utility. You can’t open a factory there; there’s virtually no industrial process that doesn’t use water.

In terms of other issues, one of the assumptions people make is that with a new prison there will be more people working in the town. But I’ve been told that the California Correctional Peace Officers Association contracts allow prison guards to live at least 20 miles away from where they work. Guards don’t want to live in the town where they work. Prisoners pay much less in taxes, and then there’s not much of a tax base from new residents because the buildings often don’t pay much property tax.

In another expression of the PIC’s pervasive oppression, the building of prisons affects the community service or restorative justice, and on a bigger level, on providing things that people don’t have, things that the lack of which make “crime” a “good choice” for some people: better housing, more educational opportunities.

In towns that are trying to build jails, you don’t hear from architects. The only architects who show up are trying to get the contracts to build those jails. They need to hear from other architects who say, “Actually, this is a bad idea. If you’re going to pass bonds, put up a new school.” And partnering with community groups organizing around these issues—we have something to teach. For example, “Here’s how your county’s building petition process works. Here’s how long it’ll take to get something up with a plan, and, when they do, we can help you read it.”

I’m sure that would’ve been hugely helpful in the case of the town in Oregon.

Right. Someone might’ve woken up and smelled the coffee if this stuff had been explained to them.

The government of California is building tens of new courthouses. Goldman Sachs built itself a couple million feet of space in New York post-9/11. But the things that communities actually need are not on the board, because the financial incentives are all wrong in this country. Architects have a role in advocating for a system that builds the stuff that people need, first. I think we’d be happier as a group building more schools and better housing instead of corporate office towers. It’s difficult because, to support ourselves, we often have to work for rich people. They’re the only ones who have the money to build anything. It’s hard to fight the guys you’ve got to work for.

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Raphael Sperry is past president of Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR), where he conceived of and directs the Prison Design Boycott initiative. He has presented the campaign at design conferences in the US and other venues around the country. He works as a green building consultant and is a licensed architect in California, he also teaches classes on green architecture at Stanford University. Write to him at prisons@adpsr.org.
Youth Speaking Out for Youth

By Project WHAT!, Members, with Andrea Salinas

I am thinking about a future without prisons, a world where children are not separated from their parents due to the prison industrial complex (PIC), and a future where parents have the freedom to choose what is best for their children. This issue is not just about individual rights, but about how the PIC impacts everyone in society. The PIC is a system that not only imprisons individuals, but also destroys communities, and devastates families.

We want to highlight the perspectives and experiences of youth with imprisoned or formerly imprisoned parents. The latest Bureau of Justice statistics report entitled "Parents in Prison: A Statistical Profile" stated that a third of prisoners in state and federal prisons had children, a number which increased from 1997 to 2007. This number does not include children whose parents are in the nation's immigration detention centers. According to Project WHAT!, a group that works to "raise awareness about the effects of parental incarceration on children, with the long-term goal of improving services and policies that affect these children," there are approximately 7 million children in the U.S. with parents under some form of supervision, be it imprisonment, parole, or probation. WHAT stands for We're Here And Talking. The project employs youth who have experienced parental imprisonment to develop curriculum and facilitate trainings given to service providers on how to improve service delivery to this population. Given that the needs of these children are essential to rebuilding and building in a world without prisons, The Abolitionist asked youth from Project WHAT! about their needs from parents and their community. We pose three questions to them, here are some of their answers.

**What were your needs and expectations when your parent was released from prison?**

- To have a loving parent who understood me.
- I needed attention from my parent, love, quality time. I needed answers to the questions only my incarcerated parent could answer, but coming out of jail neither of my parents knew how to restore our bond.
- To hang out and have some sort of bond, to just be a dad and teach his son how to be a man. My needs when my parents were released from prison were love and stability. I also wanted my father to save me from hard time.
- I needed clothes and shoes. I also needed someone to understand me even though I have a hard time understanding myself.
- My needs and expectations were that I'd be able to meet them fairly. My needs were unconditional love. I needed to know everything and anything about these parents of mine.

**What support did your family need to satisfy your needs and expectations?**

- We could have benefited from a class of some kind to help my parents know how to come back into my life. We needed the support of employers to not discriminate against my parents' background when going through the hiring process. We needed my family to accept my parents and help them get back on their feet.
- The holidays were very hard on us. We could have used the support of an organization that talks to your parent and helps them make a list of presents they want to get you, and then gets them for you.
- My father needed a roof over his head, financial support, and food in his stomach.
- My family needs to show that despite the decisions my mom has made they still love her. They need to show they are there for her.
- They need a house so that I can live with them. My parent needs help to find a job, a little money, food, and clothes.
- We needed a reunification process to prepare us before they came home. Parents need to be able to make phone calls to their children, to keep in close contact with them. Parents need our forgiveness.

**What do youth need to heal from the experience of their parent being taken from them?**

- We need to heal our trust issues and learn how to deal with situations.
- They need to come to acceptance for their parents’ mistakes and forgive them. Also being educated helps the youth learn how to handle the situation mentally. Youth need someone to listen and lots of love. We also need outlets like art, sports, and programs like Project WHAT!
- We need more programs to help you do better at school and in life.
- I’m still looking for something to heal me, but we need counselors, mentors, and uncles, things like that.
- Parenting classes. Youth need to be able to talk to their parent about the situation.
- Youth need someone, whether that be friends or a close relative or a work group that understands their experience and understands

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A s individuals who have been psychiatrically labeled and imprisoned, members of Rights for Imprisoned People with Psychiatric Disabilities (RIPPD) know firsthand the horrors that exist behind prison walls. As a child, Miguel had difficulty in school and was sent to special education class. In junior high he heard voices in his head that told him that everyone was laughing at him. He began using drugs to escape the feeling of being different and then selling drugs to support his habit. He was caught, convicted of selling drugs, and sentenced to seven years. In prison he was diagnosed as schizophrenic with psychotic features, but instead of receiving treatment he was locked in solitary confinement. He spent seven years in and out of solitary with little to no medication. He didn’t make it in the New York State correctional system. For similar drug charges, spending a total of 10 years behind bars, Miguel now lives in New York City but notes that he has “never been the same.” Nothing can undo the torture he endured in prison. He has a lack of trust in people, even his closest friends and family. Miguel says that had he been offered “proper care in his youth” he “might have avoided the prison system altogether.”

Paul was diagnosed with bipolar illness in 1991. In 1996 he was arrested for two “D crimes” (the lowest category of felony) as a result of a manic episode. Instead of taking Paul’s bipolar diagnosis into account (often “D crimes” can be reduced to misdemeanors), the judge sentenced him to 4 to 20 years, a term usually reserved for someone who has committed a severe offense. He is now serving his 12th year in the New York State correctional system. All patients are labeled and treated the same, whether they are available, prison is the worst place to put a person with a bipolar condition. Guards assigned to units dealing with people with psychiatric illness are not trained to deal with the mentally ill or to recognize the symptoms of a psychiatric condition, so they inflict harsh punishment either through physical violence or Tier III tickets, which result in long terms of solitary confinement. Paul continues to suffer enormously in prison.

It’s no surprise that the destruction from the prison industrial complex (PIC) extends beyond the prison gates. On the outside we face tattered connections to family, friends, and society in general. Involvement in grassroots and community-based organizations working towards real alternatives to the Prison Industrial Complex can be essential to transition out of the PIC.

Since its inception in 2003, RIPPD’s mission has been to end the criminalization of mental illness through an abolitionist framework. Our push to abolish prisons is informed by our own experiences of inequality, oppression, and violence within the prison and mental health industrial complexes. We need to focus on real alternatives that disregard the prison industrial complex and other systems that are modeled after it (i.e. psychiatric hospitals) and develop true community-based solutions. In the case of individuals who are psychiatrically labeled, these alternatives mean access to holistic health and mental health care in a safe and inviting environment. Not a scene from One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, but places of recovery where people are self-determined to seek meaningful care.

While the concept of these alternatives is still in infant stages, there are several Hospital Diversion models throughout the country that serve as respite houses for people in crisis. Experience shows that these programs reduce stigma, increase community integration, and decrease hospitalizations/arrests. Beyond that, Hospital Diversion programs such as Rose House in Orange County, New York result in a significant cost saving upwards of $700,000 a year versus traditional hospitals or prison stays to treat the 250 persons served who might otherwise fall into institutionalization (People, Inc., 2010).

Hospital Diversion programs require three vital components to be successful.

First, they must adopt a philosophy that affords transparency and mutual respect. Second, they must create an environment that is safe and inviting. Third, they must engage participatory punishment, and seek to destroy the natural sense to be free, fully express potential, and contribute to a more sustaining community do not work.

It has become all too clear that life without prisons can be achieved. Together through consensus our communities can shatter the criminalization of whole communities. Punishment with underlying interests of privatized corporations or the state is ineffective. No one is freely contributing to society by being forced to make license plates or office materials for 10 cents a day, especially in such abusive conditions. Our own communities must create room in our society for life after prison.

What purpose does the prison industrial complex truly serve in our communities but to intimidate into submission, isolate, and attempt to destroy individuals and whole communities?

What reaction is expected from such continuous actions?

When I give to the activist community, I receive a sense of self-healing. Together we gain a clearer understanding that systems that intimidate, isolate, and punish, and seek to destroy the natural sense to be free, fully express potential, and contribute to a more sustaining community do not work.

Carlos’s Story

A s scary as it may sound to most non-abolitionists and prison profitiers, life after prison is a reality that many have had experience. It’s a journey taken by so many, those who acknowledge life after prison as a war waged against them.

Understanding the similarities of our own histories, one can’t avoid the identical visual images from historic slavery with today’s more modernized slavery in the prison industrial complex (PIC). Just peel the wall from any prison and compare that with the visuals of slaves on ships piled tier upon tiers, chained and tortured.

Nowadays, with so many private prisons being constructed and so many interstate transfers of contracted prisoners taking place, clearly the PIC’s mask is being revealed.

Like so many, I’ve been a victim of circumstances created within our society, and as a result was subject to being imprisoned and scarred for life, believing there will be no end to the cycles continuing due to circumstances within my community.

I was released from prison mentally scarred with what appeared to be nothing, and left in the middle of a multi-directional highway with vehicles speeding in all directions, totally scared and nervous, knowing that a wrong step would be the end of me.

I was embraced by communities who were actively engaging society to understand the consequences of such traumatic experiences. They provided a platform to build from and break the cycle perpetrated by circumstances within many communities. I knew the journey wouldn’t be easy, and that the chains are always there, lying on the ground to clasp upon a person as a misstep. In these surroundings I submitted to change even with the odds against me.

It’s been six years since my last imprisonment, which is mainly due to being active within a broader community/family seeking to break the chains and create a better world. Many people I don’t even know but clearly understand are in struggle against the same odds.

Carlos Sabater
Member, RIPPD

Continued on the next page

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Prisons are shocking to the consciousness—they are repressive, suffocating to the soul of humankind. They create unhealthy distortions within the train of thought of many humans.

For a society to prosper, when an individual goes against democratic consensus of the agreed upon considerations to other persons, properties and space then a response can be issued that will be beneficial for that person’s growth and society as a whole, not one that individuals will resent and plant the seed of hate.

Clear acceptance of differences, community, and the willingness of the community to embrace one another are healing processes. I’ve been fortunate to come into contact with such community since being released.

Imagine that on a larger scale...
The future holds a lot of hope!

Rights for Imprisoned People with Psychiatric Disabilities (RIPPPD) is a grassroots, direct action organization united to demand justice and social change for imprisoned people with psychiatric disabilities. We hold monthly meetings on the first Tuesday of every month at 1:30 PM at 123 William Street, 6th Floor, Manhattan, NY. Visit www.ripppd.org for more information.

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The invention of prisons and psychiatric hospitals as institutions of punishment has made it hard to imagine other ways to solve problems without incarcerating people who are in a mental health crisis. While CGITs and Hospital Diversion programs are not a cure-all for the dilemmas faced by people with psychiatric disabilities, these alternatives are a significant advance in the treatment of such persons and represent a positive hope for the future. That is why, as a community of activists and people directly affected, we urgently need to invest in these and other real alternatives to benefit society as a whole.

For society to thrive in a world without the PIC, there must be more transparency and community-based decision-making when it comes to efforts that impact our environment. Many of the reforms related to both the environment and the PIC don’t address the root causes of the problems. So instead of taking people out of cages and strapping ankle bracelets on them, or switching from oil to “clean coal”, environmental impact reports would be required for every project—no exceptions—and results would be distributed widely. Land currently taken up by the PIC (over 20,000 acres in California alone) could be transformed based on the needs of surrounding communities into wildlife habitats, farm land, recycling centers, fields where renewable energy such as solar and wind power are collected, or a great number of other possibilities. This could completely change the landscape of California’s Central Valley, often referred to as “prison alley” due to the ever expanding number of prisons, jails, and immigrant detention prisons that line the main thoroughfare through the valley, Highway 5.

There are clear and immediate environmental benefits to getting rid of prisons and the prison industrial complex. The burdens that prisons currently place on our land, air, water, and communities, burdens that have been explored and articulated in this article, will be alleviated. The key benefit, however, will come from the fundamental shift in our society that must occur to both abolish the prison industrial complex and reverse course away from environmental catastrophe. This shift will enable us to live in a world lush in diversity of species, where we have clean air to breathe and water to drink. A world where people have a say in what is built in their communities, and for what purpose, and where those industries provide real jobs or meet real economic needs of the people who actually live there.

So, even if you’ve never thought much—or at all—about the deep connections between abolition of the prison industrial complex and clean air, water, employment and housing, rather than locking people in cages.

To contact Project WHAT!, write to 1649 San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94702, or visit http://www.communityworkswest.org.
Labor After the PIC
BY ZACHARY ONTIVEROS

A ny speculative vision of a society in which imprisonment, policing, and surveillance are not relied upon as solutions to social problems must, inevitably, address the issues of labor and capitalism. The abolition of the prison industrial complex within the United States alone means that more than 2 million people will need to be retrained to provide the jobs, skills and resources and space to pursue meaningful work. Additionally, there are currently millions of people employed in some capacity within the PIC: police, prison guards, social workers, etc. If we are to build a society without prisons or police, then these people will also presumably need to labor in new areas that differ greatly from their current work. The challenge then becomes how we can build a society that provides the space and resources for people to work to maintain a functioning and more free world.

The development of the prison industrial complex (PIC) is intimately related to the history of labor in the United States. With the abolition of slavery, and, by extension, the pool of free labor it offered capitalism, new systems were introduced that ensured a captive labor force. These included sharecropping and the convict lease systems, which forced people convicted of a crime to labor in various agricultural and industrial capacities. The convict leasing system, along with sharecropping, established ways in which free labor was made readily available. By imprisoning certain sectors of the population en masse, captive populations were to provide the cheap and/or free labor that is essential to the functioning of capitalism. Added to these systems was the process of imprisoning people en masse as a way to warehouse a surplus labor force; a surplus made by the ways in which capitalism demands a certain level of unemployment while simultaneously trying to avoid stagnation. Additionally, in an attempt to make money in order to survive within a capitalist economy, many people may be forced into labor, such as sex work or illegal drug markets, that has been deemed punishable by imprisonment.

We must take into consideration the detrimental effects that imprisonment is currently having on unemployment in the U.S. In a 2002 study, John Sutton, a professor at the University of California Santa Barbara, argued that, “…the impression that incarceration was found to have reduced chances for participation in the labor market for the rest of their lives. Family stability and educational attainment were also negatively affected. Groups most affected in each case were racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants.” 1 If more and more people are being locked in cages, then more and more people will continue to struggle to find employment and contribute their labor in their communities.

The vast increase in resources afforded to the PIC has come at a great expense to social services. While more and more capital and labor are devoted to the expansion of imprisonment, education, healthcare, and infrastructure budgets continue to be slashed at alarming rates. However, the dismantling of the PIC could result in a renewed concentration on services that could lead to a more participatory economy.

For example, one major area that could expand is education. With more access to liberatory education people could pursue education that in turn could expand skill sets that were unavailable under the PIC. Additionally, former prisoners could apply their skill sets in ways that the prison industrial complex makes impossible.

With more time and resources devoted to educational opportuni ties we could potentially transform educational systems to better serve the needs and interest of people. Our educational systems could take on number of forms to better equip former prisoners with skills needed to contribute to the functioning and survival of their communi ties as well as allow more space to hone skills that were not available beforehand. 2 Educational opportunities should be expanded beyond the traditional forms of “manual labor” offered today, such as custodial, domestic, or industrial labor, to include forms of knowledge that are currently confined behind the walls of academia and that are not readily available to certain sectors of the population. To these areas, former prisoners, and, indeed, those employed by the PIC, could not only expand personal knowledge, but also bring to various areas of work a wealth of knowledge that could not be expressed while confined within prisons. However, it is our responsibility to ensure that former prisoners, po

WE WILL NEED TO CREATE ECONOMIC SYSTEMS THAT DO NOT VIEW NOR TREAT ANY LABOR AS SURPLUS, BUT RATHER AS ESSENTIAL TO A FUNCTIONING SOCIETY.

Zachary Ontiveros is a member of Critical Resistance, Oakland.

SEND US YOUR WRITING & ARTWORK! We accept articles, letters, creative writing, poetry, interviews, and art.

The theme for the next issue (#17) of The Abolitionist will be prisoner organizing. If you want to submit a piece on that theme, the deadline is February 24. Unfortunately we cannot accept all of the pieces we receive. Any pieces we consider for publication will go through an editing process for both content and grammar. Please note: we do not accept individual appeals for money, legal support, or publicity.

Ideas for Articles and Artwork
• Examples of current prisoner organizing
• Practical steps toward prison industrial complex abolition
• Ways to help keep yourself and others physically and mentally healthy while imprisoned
• Updates on what’s happening at the prison you’re in (for example: working conditions, health concerns, lockdowns)
• Legal strategies and important cases that impact prisoners
• Alternatives to policing, punishment, and prison
• Experiences of life after imprisonment
• Your opinion about a piece published in a recent issue

What to Submit
• Articles should not be more than 1500 words (about 5 handwritten pages)
• Letters should not be more than 250 words
• Empowering artwork that will print well

How to Submit
• If you want your name and address printed with your article, please include it as you would like it printed. If you do not wish to have your name or address included, please let us know that when you submit your piece
• If possible, send a copy of your submission, not the original

Writing Suggestions
• Try to write an outline before you write the piece. Ask yourself: does the first paragraph tell the reader what the article is about? Do the middle paragraphs support and strengthen the main argument. Does the last paragraph have a conclusion and some suggestions for action? • Even if writing is difficult for you, your ideas are worth the struggle. Try reading your piece out loud to yourself or sharing it with someone else. Doing this might help you clarify the ideas in your submission.

Send your submission to:
The Abolitionist c/o Critical Resistance 1904 Franklin St., Suite 504 Oakland, CA 94607

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CALIFORNIA ALONE SPENDS $1,038,813 PER HOUR ON PRISONS
WHAT ELSE COULD THAT MONEY BUY?

- Self-cleaning public bathrooms: 26
- Wheelchair-accessible taxi cabs: 35
- Community fitness centers’ worth of gym equipment: 32
- Community mental health counselors’ salaries for a year: 29
- Four-year university tuitions: 32
- Rent for a 1-bedroom apartment (in Oakland): 48
- Copies of the abolitionist (printing + mailing): 1,329,000
- Years worth of hormone treatments for a trans person: 432
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- 48 years worth of rent for a 1-bedroom apartment (in Oakland)
- 1,329,000 copies of the abolitionist (printing + mailing)
- 432 years worth of hormone treatments for a trans person
- 207,763 burritos (or other meals)
- 20,776 HIV tests
- 2011-2012 California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation budget.

*Per the 2011-2012 California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation budget.