

# THE ABOLITIONIST

FALL 2022

FREE TO PEOPLE IN PRISONS, JAILS, AND DETENTION CENTERS • ESPAÑOL AL DORSO

ISSUE 38: Labor Struggles & Abolition

FEATURES ANALYSIS

## From the Margins, Building Power: Labor, Struggle, and Prison Industrial Complex Abolition

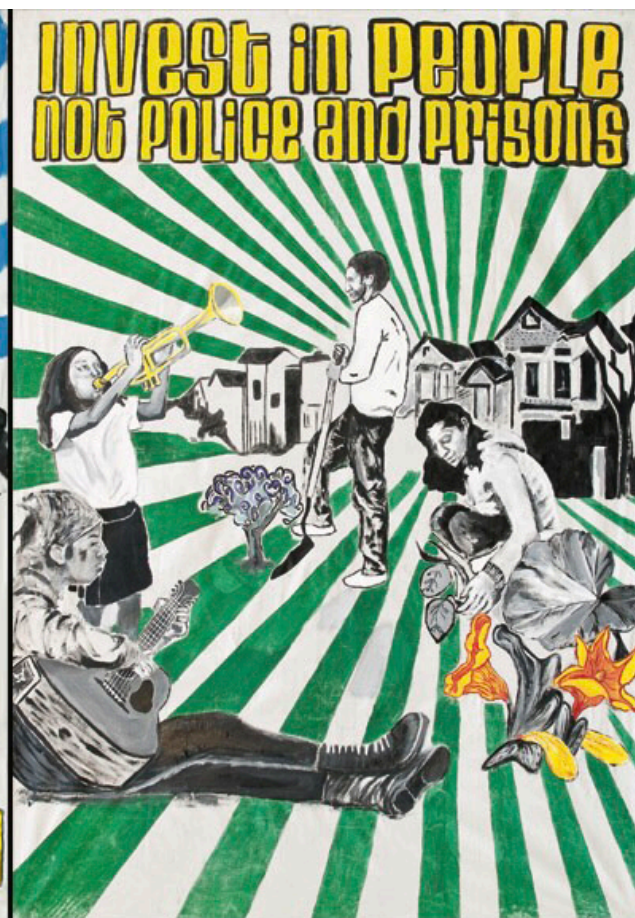
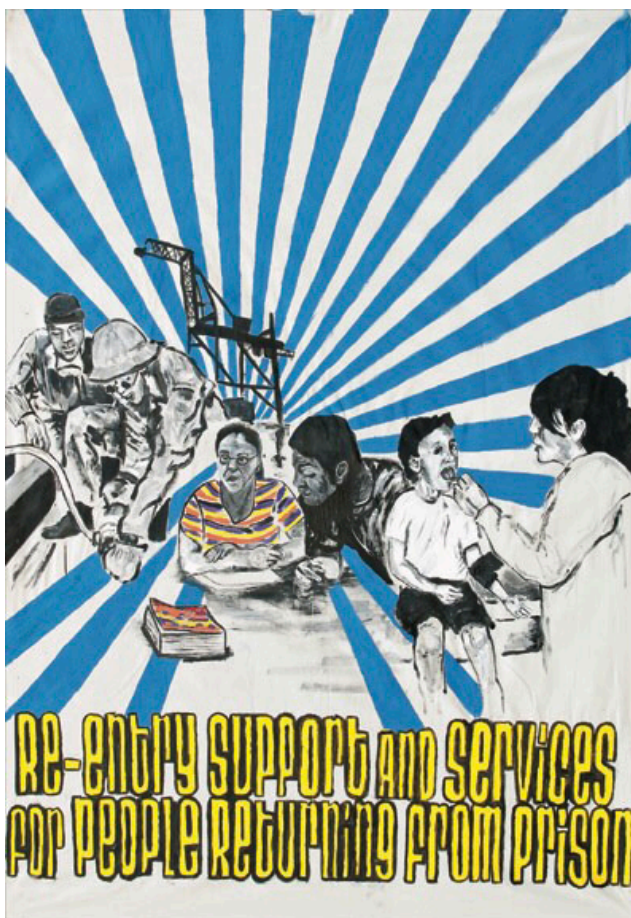
Interview with Isaac Ontiveros by Molly Porzig

**Why is a strong labor analysis necessary for CR's mission to build an international movement to abolish the prison industrial complex (PIC)?**

An analysis of labor—the relationship between workers and the work they do, and the relationship between workers and the capitalist system—helps us understand the contours of what we call the prison industrial complex (PIC), and hopefully helps us build strategies, struggle, organization, and movement to overcome it.

If we understand the PIC as a dynamic where state violence is advanced and accelerated in the absence of the state prioritizing equitable access to things like housing, healthcare, employment, political representation—and where instead the necessities of racial capitalism, imperialism, militarism are prioritized—then we understand how deadly racial, gender, and economic inequalities hit hardest against working class people, especially working-class communities of color. If we imagine a line graph for the past 50 years or so, we'd see lines going steadily upward representing an explosion in rates of imprisonment, alongside a rise in prison spending, in police budgets, police militarization, military spending; we'd see a line headed steadily downward for the number of workers who are in unions, opposite a rise in legislation and changes to laws that make it harder for workers to form unions and for those unions to represent working people; we'd see a fall in spending on social services; and we'd see a rise in people semi- or permanently excluded from the workforce based on their conviction records. At the beginning of the 1970s, around 30% of workers in the private sector were members of a union; now it's less than 10%. At the beginning of the 1970s there were around 200,000 people locked up in state and federal prisons; today there are around 2 million—not including around 550,000 more locked in jails.

If we understand the emergence of the PIC to be a part of the violent counter-revolution against civil rights, Black and Brown power, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, democratic, and militant labor movements—movements having everything to do with creating a world that reflects the interests of working people; if we understand the PIC emerging amid the rise of the neoliberal period of capitalism that ushered in the destruction



Banners made by Critical Resistance members (including Isaac Ontiveros and Molly Porzig) for Plan for a Safer Oakland in 2008.

of all things public, disempowering unions on a structural level and global scale; if we look at what communities are most impacted by policing, imprisonment, unemployment, and political disenfranchisement, then we should have a pretty solid analytical basis for understanding the structural racial, gender, and class violence that swirl around and through the PIC. If we think about the crises and inequalities that the PIC emerged from and serve to manage today, then we can imagine how anti-racist, gender-liberationist, democratic, internationalist working-class struggles are critical to abolishing it.

**What would you say the state of the labor movement is currently? What does this mean for PIC abolition?**

From my perspective, the labor movement in the US, like most progressive movements, is beleaguered. Less than 10% of workers in the US are members of a union. A majority of US states are anti-union, so-called "right to work" states, making it very difficult for people who live and work

in these states to form or join a union. For those that are able to join a union, they find it very difficult to exert their power collectively in the workplace or via local, state, or national politics.

**"If we think about the crises and inequalities that the PIC emerged from and serve to manage today, then we can imagine how anti-racist, gender-liberationist, democratic, internationalist working-class struggles are critical to abolishing it."**

The authoritarian right, advancing at tremendous strength across the country (and the world) is seeking to use state legislatures, the congress, and the supreme court to further disempower the rights of workers to form unions and build power. At the same time capital finds these advantageous grounds for rolling back rights for workers who aren't in unions, and to decimate

*Continue on page 3*

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# Letter from the Editors

Beloved Readers,

Greetings in struggle. We warmly welcome you to 2022's second and final issue of *The Abolitionist*: **Issue 38**, exploring the *intersections and possibilities of labor struggles and prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition*. As we put this issue together, worker struggles grow mightier, as austerity and repression intensify towards exploited workers advocating for their rights and liberation. Inflation rises, the pandemic continues with zero protections for sick workers, and money continues to flow into imprisonment, surveillance, and policing instead of to the life-affirming and dire infrastructure our communities need. And yet, we know resilience and resistance are strong; there is so much to learn from the past and the present to shape the future.

This issue's feature section includes a robust set of **interviews** with different organizers sharing analysis, reflections, resources and grassroots examples of labor struggles intersecting with PIC abolition. **38's feature analysis** is an **interview** with former Critical Resistance (CR) member **Isaac Ontiveros** assessing our economic and political landscape in the US and uplifting past and present organizing lessons to propel abolitionist strategy forward in 2022 and beyond.

This is followed by two reflective articles: one by currently imprisoned and returning author of *The Abolitionist* "Deep in the Heart of Texas," **Ricardo Vela, Jr** and another by **Mujeres de Frente** on "feminist unionism" and the **June 2022 Indigenous-led national strike in Ecuador**. These pieces are accompanied by a **round table discussion on union organizing**, an overview and communique on **Colombia's 2021 general strike**, a call to **decriminalize sex work** by **Chanelle Gallant**, and a look into **Melissa Burch's** work with the **Afterlives of Conviction Project** challenging the rise of background checks for formerly imprisoned people.

To wrap up the feature section, we offer **two resources**. The first is a new **guide by CR for imprisoned people to prepare for the job market upon release**. The other is **CR's organizational analysis - or political line - concerning the 13th amendment** and "**prison is new slavery**" argument, which we offer in this issue as an organizing resource to build more political unity across walls and cages for PIC abolition.

Three of our columns also speak to this issue's focus on labor struggles. Stephen Wilson discusses CR's political line of the 13th Amend-



**MY HEART OVERFLOWS WITH GRATITUDE FOR THE WORKERS GIVING US LIFE**

"Solidarity with Essential Workers" by Melanie Cervantes, Dignidad Rebelde (March 2020)

ment and prison labor for his column **9971** and includes a survey on work and prison he hopes all imprisoned readers of *The Abolitionist* will complete and send back to the editorial collective. Additionally, this issue's **Movement Highlights** underscore a potential resurgence in the labor movement, both in the US and internationally.

In this issue we also grieve recent losses of some influential liberation fighters: we pay tribute to **Mike Davis** in **CR Updates**, and we honor Angola 3 political prisoner **Albert Woodfox** and dedicated independista **Francisco "Franky" Velgara Valentín** in our **Until All Are Free** column. Please note, we cut the Abby Throwback reprint of this issue due to page limitations with our printing press.

Our first issue of 2023, **Issue 39**, will be printed in June and take a close look at a rising **movement for reproductive justice**. As ever, we invite all our readers to help shape the content of our newspaper by reviewing our submissions guidelines in our **Call for Content on page 24** and submitting pieces for this issue or future issues.

As always, we hope Issue 38 fuels your spirit and your tools for resistance, collective liberation and self-determination.

Onward,

Critical Resistance & *The Abolitionist* Editorial Collective



"The World Can't Wait" by Roger Peet, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

## THE ABOLITIONIST

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Critical Resistance (CR) seeks to build an international movement to end the prison industrial complex (PIC) 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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what little health, safety, environmental, and political regulations still exist as whatever weak barriers to ever-increasing profits. Anti-worker politics and policies are always going to impact the health and wellbeing of workers of color, women workers, and gender nonconforming workers most negatively. This includes vulnerability to structural violence, like policing and imprisonment.

That said, there has been an increase in workers fighting to form unions. The majority of people in this country have positive feelings about unions. Last year the number of workers who went on strike tripled from the previous year. Even though the number of workers in unions is incredibly low, unions still represent millions of workers in the US, and unions are still a powerful vehicle for people on and off the job. We also see how some of the most effective and winning union fights are being led by women of color. This relates to some advances in thinking among some unions about who should be in the lead of workplace struggle and the movement overall. In turn, we've seen a lot of unions and union members involved themselves in the George Floyd uprising and take up stronger racial justice resolutions and education, including around policing and imprisonment. Obviously, there is much more to be done.

For PIC abolitionists, this means there is a fair amount of labor struggle in communities impacted by the PIC, that there is eagerness among union members to think about how the PIC is impacting working people, as they are also thinking more about related social justice issues. Again, in the past couple years there have been absolutely massive uprisings centering around racist police violence—something abolitionists have been talking about for decades. These uprisings have been led and peopled by millions of young working-class people of color who face police violence along with the violence of precarious employment, lack of healthcare, unstable housing, and political disenfranchisement. In turn we see imprisoned people organizing around their working, living, and health conditions (especially during the pandemic). All of these are meaningful working-class and labor issues, and these are also meaningful abolitionists issues.

**During the George Floyd uprisings, slogans and demands to remove cops from different formations, including unions, emerged. What are your thoughts on this?**

Police unions and associations have an incredible amount of political power. The same goes for prison guard unions. I think it helps to think about their power in relationship with the social and economic priorities in this country. They have been able to flourish—their workplace and political organizations have been able to seize the time—because the social, economic, and political system we live in has a robust need for state violence to aggressively manage profound social, racial, and gender inequality.

I think working people, trade unionists, and social movements benefit from understanding the role of cops in a society based on racialized and gendered exploitation. This includes the political role police exert collectively. The readers of this publication know better than anyone that for the most part cops and prison guards work to preserve a pretty terrible status quo. That's their job, and like any worker, manager, boss, or CEO—they are interested in keeping their job and getting the most compensation, benefit, and security possible from it. Now as far as “kicking cops out of the labor movement”, I'm interested in being educated a little bit more on what folks are hoping this demand would achieve. If this is about getting big unions to embrace and advance racial and social justice in a bigger, better, and more systemic and militant way, that's a solid priority. We all need to be doing that. That said, I'm curious about our strategic and tactical priorities.

As opposed to most workers in the US, most police are part of some type of union or association. It strikes me that “association” is a more accurate word than “union” to describe many

of these organizations, given how police department management operates within them. The vast majority of these police organizations are independent and not part of any federation of trade unions. For example, the main policing association (the Fraternal Order of Police) isn't part of the largest alliance of trade unions (the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, the AFL-CIO). Of the around 800-900,000 law enforcement officers in the US, I think less than 50,000 are part of a broader trade union or trade union federation.

If there was a 100% unified labor movement (which there's not) that collectively refused to recognize police and guards as union siblings, as “fellow workers”, this would probably have a strong impact on the consciousness of working people and their communities, and maybe some politicians who approve police budgets. However, I'm skeptical about what sort of impact this declaration on its own would have on the ability of police unions to collectively bargain with their employers (local municipalities) or to exert political influence over state and municipal budgets, over law-and-order politics if the basic social structures we talked about earlier remain in place. But, if political and economic priorities were transformed, through mass struggle of working people, their communities, their organizations, and their movements, and bent toward an equitable distribution of social power for all peoples, toward more economic and political democracy, we might find police less powerful in their ability to assert their interests where they work and vis-a-vis state priorities.

**“If this is about getting big unions to embrace and advance racial and social justice in a bigger, better, and more systemic and militant way, that's a solid priority. We all need to be doing that.”**

All's to say, I wonder if the fight for the redistribution of resources, politics, and power is more transformative, and more broad-based, than a mostly-symbolic fight to somehow “remove” police unions from the labor movement. This could include strengthening fights against prison spending and police budgets; fighting for a redistribution of these budgets to areas where they could be defended by the people against capture from police department, sheriffs, and prison regimes; fighting for decarceration, and fighting to elect politicians who refuse to concede to the demands of police and guard associations, or at least who are moveable in this regard—these are all fights that could involve broad coalitions of organization and community—including abolitionists and trade-unionists.

**What are some effective strategies and tactics from the labor movement that imprisoned people and abolitionist organizers inside and outside of cages could use and learn from in resisting and dismantling the PIC?**

I think when unions are at their strongest they are able to use very disciplined methods of organizing that: clearly map the conditions they are trying to change; clearly map the strengths and capacities of their adversaries as well as their own base; develop a clear plan to win that unites their base; elevates their leadership; advances toward clear victories that tangibly change conditions and the balance of power; and consider very seriously how power is built, fought for, and wielded on local, regional, national, and international scales. Of course, when abolitionist organizations are at their strongest, they do the same thing. Something I've been privileged to learn from people organizing on the inside is how leaders in those struggles ask the key questions: *How do we build and maintain unity across differences? Across different social and political attitudes—especially when we don't necessarily like each other, or didn't chose to be in this situation?* There's a lot at stake, a lot of danger, for people organizing in their workplaces and for people organizing inside prisons. It's not the same, but I think about it—especially this hard and thankless work of building unity and soli-



“When We Fight” by Nicolas Lampert, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

arity, and the very inspiring ways leadership is developed out of these struggles.

Of course, building organization, movement, and power doesn't always work. As readers of *The Abolitionist* know, there's a lot of division in the workplace and for people on the inside. But, again, it's something I've been privileged to experience: *How workers and imprisoned people navigate difference creatively, using sharp skills to unite people in living or working in conditions that suppress unity.* I think abolitionist and other social movement organization benefit when they exercise the muscle of navigating difference and forging unity through struggle. I also think they benefit from considering very seriously what it means to build power and to use it.

**What are some organizing victories or even losses that we should examine now in our current moment in order to strengthen the fight against the PIC?**

When we examine gains and setbacks for labor or for abolitionist organizations or any other movement, I think it's important to also examine our overall economic, social, and political terrain. As far as labor goes, I think we can be heartened by the new organizing energy we see among workers at places like Amazon and Starbucks. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic really brought forward into our consciousness the struggles of frontline workers, most notably nurses and other healthcare workers, who not only kept our communities as healthy as possible when capital and the Trump regime wouldn't, but who also organized unions, won strong contracts, and advanced pro-worker health and safety legislation at the height of the pandemic.

If the purpose of this conversation is to think about the intersection of labor and the struggle to abolish the PIC, then I also think we should think about the George Floyd uprisings as a real advance. There we experienced uprisings across the country—and globally—involving tens of millions of people that brought key questions about policing, racism, capitalism, public health and social justice squarely into the mainstream. It invited us (and still invites us) to think about the distribution of political, economic, social, and cultural power in society at large. It invited us to rethink our organizational priorities. This energy was probably also decisive in the electoral defeat of the Trump regime.

Now, that's the rosier side of the story. Our movements are still beleaguered, we are often working at cross purposes and attacking ourselves; we still lack the unity that our enemies have. Fascism is still on the advance, and able to win big even without Trump. As far as the PIC goes, we probably missed the moment to get more people out of prison during the pandemic and the movement to defund and reinvest has taken some setbacks (But I'd leave it for your readers and people more involved in anti-PIC struggles right now to make a stronger assessment there).

*Continued on next page*



For workers and for unions, even as they have some stronger allies in government than they've had in a long time, capital still runs rampant, still able to exert extreme influence over state priorities in this country. This raging contradiction between the interests of working people and the relative failure of those interests to be reflected socially and politically leaves us confronting extreme social instability—whether that's deep racial and gender inequality, environmental crisis, housing crisis, health crisis, a lack of democracy, fascism, and of course as it relates to the violence of policing and imprisonment (To overstate the obvious, in the US, working people still have more than two million of their sisters, and brothers, and siblings locked in cages).

People locked in women's prisons who've been fighting pitched battles over their reproductive and health rights for decades watch as women and other child-bearing people on the outside are having their reproductive and human rights stripped from them by the Supreme Court and vicious state legislators. Again, this violence, along with attacks on the human rights of trans people, is going to impact working people most intensely—especially working people of color, especially working people of color who live in states that are also seeing their workers' rights and political rights stripped from them. Again, these are conditions that the majority of your readers are already living and struggling against.

I can't help thinking about that quote by GL\* Jackson: "Settle your quarrels, come together, understand the reality of our situation, understand that fascism is already here, that people are dying who could be saved, that generations more will die or live poor butchered half-lives if you fail to act. Do what must be done, discover your humanity and your love in revolution." Now, Jackson said this right when the crises that led to

the emergence of the PIC, the decimation of the labor movement, and the rise of neoliberalism were just getting started. Here we are fifty-plus years later living in a world born of that crisis—but also born of a whole lot of peoples' struggles as well.

**"Settle your quarrels, come together, understand the reality of our situation, understand that fascism is already here, that people are dying who could be saved, that generations more will die or live poor butchered half-lives if you fail to act. Do what must be done, discover your humanity and your love in revolution."**

The authoritarian right's program hinges on incredible violence targeting working class people—we see its rabid, overtly racist law-and-order politics; its drive for militarized border politics; its attacks on reproductive or gender rights and its criminalization of healthcare workers, childcare providers, or teachers who would defend those rights; and its support for vigilante violence against political opponents of all types. Again, these are workers' issues, they are prisoners' issues, and they are abolitionists' issues. I think it should be a top priority to defeat this threat at the ballot box where possible, and to also wage other struggles to defend against and beat back fascism.

At the same time, it would be great for unions, abolitionists, and others interested in struggling against the PIC to educate and mobilize one another at the intersection of their movements. Continuing to dig into how "defunding" or "divestment/reinvestment" could work for

working people, especially working people of color. Supporting strikes, organizing, and legislative battles led by trade-unionists, while at the same time supporting strikes, organizing, and legal battles led by imprisoned people—and understanding both as working-class struggles. Continuing the powerful ecological defense work among anti-prison activists, workers, and environmentalists. Defending migrant workers and peoples against state and vigilante violence. Building a movement against war, militarism, and colonialism. Forging ties with labor and social movements globally to both defend against repression of those movements, along with uplifting advances in places like Brazil where more pro-worker, pro-people, pro-environment, pro-democracy movements are taking power.

The "reality of our situation", as Jackson put it, is grim, yet it does create some very ripe ground for struggle across our movements. I do believe that through those struggles—wrought with contradictions and uncomfortable choices—abolitionists, trade unionists, and everyone else have a lot to discover and gain. ♦

**\*Editors' Note:** The author mentions a revolutionary leader and imprisoned intellectual of the radical prisoner movement in the 1960s-1970s. Since some facilities use this figure to justify gang validation and other tactics of repression, the editorial collective omitted this person's full name and replaced it with his first and middle initials GL. Long live GL Jackson!

**About the Author:** Isaac Ontiveros is a former member and former National Communications Director of Critical Resistance. He now organizes and works as a political educator in the labor movement.

FEATURES REFLECTION

## Deep in the Heart of Texas: Abolition is a labor of love

By Ricardo Vela, Jr.

Drawing a straight line between the Ford Model T and a shiny new modern Bronco is easy to recognize and accept: Both have four wheels that propel it down the road and both share an iconic blue oval logo. It's an easy connection to make. The vehicles may be radically different in many ways, but they are essentially the same.

Unfortunately, in the minds of most people, drawing a straight line between modern policing, surveillance, and the caging of humans—the prison industrial complex (PIC) as a whole—and the slave patrols of the antebellum South is a much more difficult task. Getting people to recognize and understand the connections requires considerably more effort. As Professor Angela Y. Davis encourages us, "We must learn to think, act, and struggle against that which is constituted ideologically 'normal.' It takes a lot of work to persuade people to think beyond the bars, and to be able to imagine a world without prisons, to struggle for the abolishment of imprisonment as the dominant mode of punishment." It is the work of abolitionist. It is a labor of love.

Here in Texas, before they cage our bodies, much deliberate effort is put into caging our minds. This mind-control operation starts out very early in childhood, but the contours and parameters—the "hard line", so to speak—begins to take definitive shape during the state-mandated "Texas History" class required of all 7<sup>th</sup> grade Texas students. Despite the mythical, fairy tale-like accounts of the Battle of the Alamo, which portray the so-called Defenders of the Alamo as virtuous freedom fighters, and despite the more recent Project 1836 being promoted by Governor Abbott's neo-fascist regime that seeks to push an almost utopian vision of the Republic of Texas (1836 – 1846), along with a twisted set of "Texas values" (basically red meat for the rabid far-right political base), the historical facts are much more interesting and useful to those of



"Corrido" By Zeke Peña.

us who value truth and who seek to *dismantle, change, and build* for a world without cages.

An honest analysis shows the Mexican Constitution of the early 1820s was abolitionist. While far from a perfect document, it outlawed the owning and keeping of humans as slaves, and when news of the document began to spread among the slave owning white settler class in Coahuila y Tejas (the Mexican province which includes the US state of Texas now), the writing was on the wall: The illicit fortunes amassed by exploiting the forced unpaid labor of enslaved Africans in the East Texas cotton fields were threatened. Something had to be done to protect white su-

premac, Texas's slave economy, and the vast fortunes and privileges that accompanies the hoarding of wealth and power.

What resulted was the so-called "Texas Revolution"—more accurately a siege by white colonists whose greatest fear was not "Mexican tyranny", as state propagandists would have us believe, but losing their slaves. Most of these mythical accounts are unquestioned historical facts in the minds of most Texans, which demonstrates not only how effective the state propaganda machine is, but also confirms the words of Steve Biko, South African anti-apartheid activist and Black liberationist, who wrote: "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed."

As if this were not horrific enough, a deeper examination of Texas history reveals the following: The wholesale slaughter of entire nations of Indigenous people, savagely murdered in genocidal police-state actions conducted by mounted paramilitary death squads commonly referred to as Texas Rangers—who by the way, still exist today in a more sanitized but no less dangerous form; the systematic terrorizing and murder of the "Tex-Mex" or "Tejano" people of mestizo ancestry, the worst of this white supremacist violence occurring along the Rio Grande and in many of the South Texas Borderland ranching communities of my youth, where as a child I was schooled in the oral tradition with tales and "corridos" about those who raised their voice or actually organized against this vile racist terror and were labeled "bandits" and "bootleggers". It's instructive to remember that Texas is the state where chattel slavery continued for approximately two years after the last Civil War cannons went cold and silent, where it took the arrival of Union troops to announce the Emancipation Proclamation had been signed by Abraham Lincoln in 1865.

The is Texas history—a very brief, cursory account, but enough to sketch the outlines for the modern fascist police state organized and run out of the Governor's mansion in Austin, and to excavate the foundations of the modern-day plantations organized and run out of the Texas

*Continued on next page*



Department of Criminal Justice's offices in Huntsville, TX, a sprawling penal colony built up and maintained by the state power structure who found themselves scrambling for labor to exploit after the Civil War and who used the Black Codes as legal cover to targeting newly enfranchised Black citizens, arresting them and criminalizing them for minor "offenses". As Keenaga-Yamahatta Taylor writes, in the South "...policing was more than simply racist: The police worked with those in power to provide a regular labor force to replace the labor that had been disrupted by slavery's end."

These nefarious arrangements between racial capitalism and state terror are still enshrined and honored in the names of many prisons in Texas. For example, the WF Ramsey Unit in Rosharon, TX, "honors" the owner of the plantation on which the Ramsey Prison labor camp was first located. Although a few prisons have been renamed in recent years, the change is mere cosmetic as long as forced prisoner labor still exists in Texas—actually, as long as caged humans are kept in Texas! Real change is possible only by smashing the cages and liberating all of us.

This new paradigm worked splendidly well for the racist capitalists and the state; not very well for caged and shackled, many of whom, after being kidnapped from their communities, died humiliating and anonymous deaths, succumbing in their cells from overwork and abuse and malnutrition—some dropping dead in the fields and buried on the spot in unmarked graves. (The recently unearthed unmarked mass graves around the now-closed Central Unit in Sugarland is one infamous example. How many more remain undiscovered?) With the benefit of over 150 years of hindsight, we can see how the convict leasing labor system worked beyond their wildest dreams, laying the groundwork for the \$80 billion PIC, the insatiable beast that devours generations of Black, Brown, and poor white men, women, gender-non-forming people, and children.

Although there really is no such thing as a humane prison system, the state of Texas assumes a well-earned position of prominence in the "PIC Hall of Shame": Not only did it pioneer much of the policing, surveillance and caging that mark the PIC generally, but Texas is also one of the only a handful of police states that refuses to pay prisoners a penny for their labor. While many Americans may experience wage slavery, it's especially demeaning and an assault on our humanity to be forced to work for nothing at all—even worse, to be forced to mop and sweep, paint, maintain plumbing and electrical systems in order to maintain the cages in which we are kept...for nothing but our own captivity.

Although recent reform efforts such as the so-called "Abolition Amendment" filed December 2, 2020, in the US House of Representatives, which would abolish the "punishment clause" from the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, are well-meaning and appreciated, as abolitionists focused on and committed to dismantling the PIC as a whole, we must carefully analyze and interrogate "reforms" that can easily be turned against us by appearing to sanitize the vile practice of caging humans. Some might say, "It can't be that bad, at

least they're getting paid." Ultimately, as stated on page two of each issue of *The Abolitionist*, Critical Resistance's mission includes, "because we seek to abolish the PIC, we cannot support any work that extends its life or scope." Though I keep an open mind to what's practical in the "real world", I believe we must stay focused and not lose sight of the goal: Breaking the chains and smashing the cages!



"Rooted in History" by Zeke Peña.

As I write these words in the aftermath of the Uvalde school shooting at Robb Elementary and the "botched" law enforcement response, I think a few comments are appropriate. Against the backdrop of so much pain, horror, heartbreak, recriminations, and loud shouts of "system failure", you can imagine how difficult it is when I attempt to communicate my point of view. This was not a system failure at all, but the inevitable consequence of a fanatical gun culture in a state that built up and maintains a massive carceral system—one of the largest prison systems in the world, actually—yet has consistently failed to allocate resources that would truly make communities safer: Education, housing, food, and health care including mental health care. When you begin to analyze the "systems" that were designed by capitalism, it's increasingly difficult to accept the official line of "system failure."

The more you learn, the clearer it becomes: The system is not "broken" nor has it failed; in fact, it works very well for those who designed it. And I think it's important to reaffirm a core abolitionist principle: We cannot sit around and wait for the system to "work" or for it to be "reformed." No, we must instead keep ourselves busy in the steady work of dismantling systems of oppression, by changing how we think and act, as well as how we work together to change our conditions, so that we can build the new world in which our communities can grow in health and freedom.

Without this important work, we will continue to hand over our power at each new crisis, and history will keep repeating itself in a never-ending cycle of tragedy and farce, as seen at the press conference in Uvalde in the hours after the shooting, when a well-known politician whom many consider to be "the voice of the left" in Texas confronted the governor and his minions, saying this massacre was a direct

result of the governor's policies. At that, the right-wing neo-fascists went on stage, led by the clownish Ted Cruz, and all began to shriek and howl on the one hand, while calling for decorum on the other hand. They all deliberately and systematically work against the common good. As a man whose roots run several generations deep in the red sands of South Texas and who feels a close kinship with the people of Uvalde, I say the time for decorum is over. We do well to remember the words of Lawrence Jenkins in the latest *Abolitionist* Issue #37—"It's a war."

**"We must instead keep ourselves busy in the steady work of dismantling systems of oppression, by changing how we think and act, as well as how we work together to change our conditions, so that we can build the new world in which our communities can grow in health and freedom."**

Despite all the weapons aimed at us now, despite the savagery and butchery and genocidal actions taken to conquer us and destroy our will and clear us off the land, in spite of centuries of colonialism and white supremacist violence, along with more recent strategies and tactics straight out of the fascist playbook—i.e., destroy truth; sow seeds of mistrust and confusion; establish an "us vs. them" dichotomy by demonizing and dehumanizing "outsiders" and "foreigners" as "invaders", etc.; raise up charismatic capitalist political leaders who claim to look out for the interests of the working-class but in fact promote policies that continue to concentrate wealth and power and strengthen the capitalist state—and despite the global neo-liberal economic assault on freedom and democracy, despite all the storm clouds gathering on the horizon, one simple truth keeps shining its light and giving us hope: *The love of power will never conquer the power of love.*

True love sparkles and illuminates even the darkest of places, even inside this cage. True love is not the diamond but the light that passes through the diamond—*We are the diamonds!* We channel, direct, and reflect the light. **Like diamonds emerging from great heat and pressure, strong and beautiful, we need to be multi-faceted, multi-purposeful, both a tool and a treasure, drilling into the hardest of rock and hardest of hearts.** As we move forward in "clarity and power", when we *dismantle, change, and build*, we do so in the firm belief that love is the most powerful force in the universe and an essential component of our vision for a world without prisons. ♦

**About the Author:** *Ricardo Vela, Jr.* is a budding abolitionist behind the walls in Texas. He looks forward to hearing from readers and encourages feedback, criticism, ideas, and working. Write to him at:

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FEATURES REFLECTION

## Making A Living: Building New Worlds Against Punitivism & the State

By Mujeres de Frente of Ecuador

In this piece, Mujeres de Frente (Women Up Front) from Quito, Ecuador talk about their vision of abolition as an anti-punitive feminism focused primarily on the labor of "social reproduction." The term "social reproduction" is used to describe work that is required to sustain life and has been systemically invisibilized, feminized, racialized, and, as explained in more in detail in the piece, hyper-criminalized. Mujeres de Frente organizers discuss the broader labor movement in relation to precarious femi-

nized labor, the building of new social relations outside of capitalism, and reflections on their participation in the massive and successful National Strikes of 2022. We hope readers engage and struggle with the thoughts and examples of these visionary comrades.

### POPULAR AND COMMUNITY FEMINISM: AGAINST STATE AND PRISON PUNITIVISM

Mujeres de Frente (Women Up Front) was born in 2004 inside the women's prison in Quito,



Photo of Mujeres de Frente members protesting.

Ecuador as a collective of imprisoned and non-imprisoned women engaged in a process of feminist research and action against the prison industrial complex (PIC). Today, we are a community of cooperation and care involving autonomous street sellers, recyclers, domestic workers, university students, professors, artists,

Continued on next page



formerly convicted women, family members of imprisoned people, boys, girls, and teenagers. We are indigenous, Afro-descendants, mestizas, whitened cholos, and sexually diverse people. Ours is a feminist organization against punishment. We build community based on reflection, production, and care anywhere that the social fabric is being continuously torn apart by the dynamics of capital accumulation and the prison state.

In the historic center of the city, we support **La Casa de las Mujeres**, a counter-cultural center open to various organizations and groups in the city. The meeting place for the School of Feminist and Popular Political Formation, the Wawas (Children) Space, the shared kitchen and dining rooms, a space for workshops and meetings, our Sewing Workshop, and the food basket and Catering of Mujeres de Frente, it is our space of transit, encounter and reunion, where processes of circulation of knowledge, legal support, co-investigation and daily accompaniment take place in every day. In the women's section of the prison in the central-northern highlands region of the country, we also have our School of Feminist and Popular Political Formation and a space for the relatives of people imprisoned there.

Our collective work has allowed us to understand that labor struggles are not restricted to mere job-seeking. We who have been expelled from the formal economy and wage-labor relations stand as part of the (wrongly-defined) "informal" proletariat, whose presence is commonplace in the region. From there, we may say that our struggle is about seeking a dignified life among the interstices of the cities, jumping from legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate economies.

Therefore, our struggle is against the state, a state that impoverishes and criminalizes us and takes away our opportunities because of our class, race, and gender. The very state that prevents us from accessing dignified jobs and dignified lives is also the state that pushes us in one way or another to resort to subsistence economies through autonomous work, which is often not enough to provide for our families. It is the kind of work that is always being targeted and criminalized and also leads to job insecurity, preventing us from reproducing life with dignity and pushing us to the limits between what is legal and illegal. It is precisely the state that, through its bodies of control and repression like policing and other state actions, targets and prevents autonomous vendors from working. This system is not designed for us, and it turns all of our efforts to keep our jobs into a tedious and bureaucratic process, making it difficult for people who work in the informal economy to gain access to regularization or legalization of their situation.

## ORGANIZING DURING THE NATIONAL STRIKE OF JUNE 2022

The National Strike of June 2022 was called by the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE—Indigenous Nationalities Confederation of Ecuador) and several Indigenous and social organizations against the government's neoliberal policies, posing 10 concrete demands. For us, as an organization focused on the reconstruction of the community, it is important to recognize what it means to speak from the urban space, where the ties to community are constantly torn apart by the dynamics of corporate capitalism and the punitive state. At the same time, it is necessary to establish close bonds with the Indigenous-led organizations and communities that called for the National Strike. As daughters of the peoples displaced in the urban cities, *our memory made us participate in the strike and recognize ourselves in a plural struggle*. We believe that it is not necessary to be out in the country to see the needs we have every day—the hike in prices, the impossibility to access a home, the lack of food. This reality has pushed us to understand that this is not only the struggle of the Indigenous out there in the country but also the struggle of those who inhabit the city.



Photo of Mujeres de Frente organizers.

To us, it is essential to note that during our participation in the strike, we assumed the maintenance of the collection center, which allowed for the sustenance of the communities that spent the night in the university facility during the striking days. This work was required to sustain the material conditions of reproduction of the struggle. We stood as an assembly in the collection and distribution spaces to receive and distribute donations, with the aim of guaranteeing care during times of struggle. At the same time, we occupied positions as spokespersons, and several of our comrades took to the front lines so that we were not only at the rearguard of the strike, preoccupied with sustenance and care, but also at the forefront, exercising our political participation in the streets and other spaces.

**It is worth noting that the strike also served to nurture alliances; the collection center was run through a collaborative effort between students and social movement activists, in particular with the participation of the transfeminist assembly.** Sharing this experience allows us to recognize ourselves in diversity even more and overcome our own prejudices. These are individuals who have lent a helping hand and taught us a lot; we are all people, and we should all raise our voices in this shared struggle, one that seeks the need to strengthen and acknowledge our demands and open the way to the varied struggles of different organizations. The capitalist, racist, and patriarchal state affects us all.

## ADDRESSING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LABOR, POLICING, IMPRISONMENT AND STATE VIOLENCE IN ECUADOR

To us, labor struggles are not only related to seeking formal jobs. Even though that is what classist sectors may say, and the left may keep as its hegemonic discourse, our struggle transcends toward "making a living" in contexts of dispossession and punishment. We believe that it is no coincidence that it is precisely us, who work in the streets, who suffer persecution, criminalization, and impoverishment on the part of the state. The informal proletariat has always had to adjust to the labor market's aggressive dynamics, which are only considered for wealthier classes and social strata, and this prevents us from growing and sustaining just spaces of labor. Thus, through our understanding of the labor struggle as the comprehensive effort to realize social reproduction, we give meaning to an immediate relation in terms of struggle against punitivism. If most of the trades we engage in involve imprisonment, persecution, and criminalization—such as, for instance, the metropolitan police persecution of fellow female comrades working as autonomous vendors, so that, according to authorities, they are to a greater or lesser extent always violating the law—we may understand that there is a relation between the struggle for social reproduction and the struggle against punitivism, which is likewise a struggle against the state that punishes these forms of making a living.

This makes Mujeres de Frente an organization against jails, prisons, penal punishment, and, more generally, against the prison industrial complex. Through policing, penitentiary, and judicial officials, the system criminalizes the daily lives of women who seek social reproduction in the streets (between the legal and the illegal, the legitimate and illegitimate). For these reasons, our reading of labor struggle goes beyond seeking a job; rather, it relates to seeking life in adverse conditions.

The focus of the capitalist system is capital accumulation, and the labor movement seeks to maintain this monetary relation. We are interested in going beyond money. We are interested in being physically and emotionally well. We are interested in building relationships based on respect. We are not interested in working just because but rather realizing for ourselves the conditions of our existence: Who are we? Where do we come from? What is our history, our background?

To us, the aim of the struggle is not just to be able to work in order to be exploited but to build a new model beyond money, through which our labor and effort would center on all that is necessary to sustain life within our families and our communities. The idea is to do our work happily, because work would become an act of care and companionship, a collective endeavor, capable of building liberatory relationships and new possibilities. To us, fighting for work means respecting our value before the state, building communities that resist racism, criminalization, and poverty, creating tools that allow us to have our own voice and live in dignity, all led and by those who suffer day in and day out.

**“To us, the aim of the struggle is not just to be able to work in order to be exploited but to build a new model beyond money, through which our labor and effort would center on all that is necessary to sustain life within our families and our communities.”**

Our struggle is comprehensive and represents an attempt to stand out as a collective and sustain ourselves and each other so that, despite seeking a salary or a job, we are likewise reflecting upon the logics we want to leave behind. This means considering the needs of our fellow female comrades, organizing in assemblies and by consensus, and working together as we sustain each other and the care of our space, which every day we are building with mutual aid. ♦

**About the Authors:** *Mujeres de Frente* is a feminist and abolitionist organization from Quito, Ecuador that works inside and outside women's jails and struggles to build a community of reflection and care.



# The Rise of “Criminal” Background Screening, Employment, and Impacts on People Looking for Work: An interview with Melissa Burch by Rehana Lerandean

**Editors’ Note:** “Criminal records” is a general term describing the lists of arrests, prosecutions, and charges pending that would likely show up on various background checks. We use the term in this piece as it is used in employment contexts, and, as abolitionists, want to encourage rejecting language that criminalizes people and acts of survival, language that defines people by harm they may have committed in the past, or any language that categorizes groupings of people as deserving of punishment, imprisonment, and surveillance.

## How did you develop an interest in criminal records and background checks?

When I lived in Los Angeles, I organized with CR against jail construction in the No New Jails Coalition, where I met Susan Burton, who founded a reentry program for women coming out of prison, called A New Way of Life Reentry Project. I began doing political education with the women at A New Way of Life and eventually joined the staff.

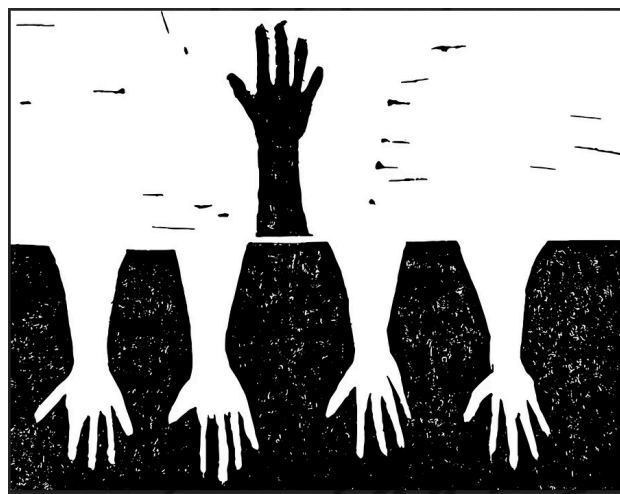
At A New Way of Life, I helped to establish a legal clinic in collaboration with UCLA Law School and its students to help people expunge their records. Many people weren’t eligible for expungement and started coming to us with general issues of employment discrimination—being unfairly and illegally denied jobs or promotion based on their convictions. That’s where, working alongside the law students and hearing the challenges people were having finding and retaining work based on their criminal records, I first developed an understanding of the nexus of employment and criminal records and the significance of employment for people coming home.

At A New Way of Life, we were also the hosts for a local chapter of All of Us or None (AOUON), the former-prisoner-led group that was founded in 2004 in Oakland, California, that established the Ban the Box campaign around the country to remove questions about records on job applications and other discriminatory practices against people with records. We were specifically trying to get the city and county of Los Angeles to pass Ban the Box laws, while CR’s Oakland chapter worked to “ban the box” by partnering with AOUON in the Bay Area to create the coalition Plan for a Safer Oakland. This was an incredibly informative and frustrating experience.

Now in 2022, Ban the Box policies have been adopted in hundreds of cities and counties all over the US—we no longer think of it as a big deal, but this was back in 2004 - 2005. While working to first implement it, there was great resistance to the idea that we not ask about past convictions on job applications. From our perspective, this was a modest reform, but somehow it seemed unprecedented to folks. That’s where my intellectual curiosity kicked in. Furthermore, the reasons provided by the County Board of Supervisors for not adopting change were very unconvincing—they didn’t want to give people “false hope” by allowing them to get a foot in the door when they might later be denied. The board also concluded, through a study of their own practices, that they weren’t discriminating! *Why such huge resistance to such a moderate and symbolic reform?* My research attempted to get to the bottom of this: *Why are so many employers unwilling to hire people with records? Why are some willing? What drives decisions to include or exclude?*

## What are the consequences for folks that are living with criminal records after a period of imprisonment?

Unfortunately, evidence shows that having a record generally, and especially after imprisonment, negatively affects both immediate wages and long-term earnings. Many people with felony convictions get hired into the lowest tier of the labor market—jobs paying the lowest wages, with few if any benefits and little job security. A record can also affect a person’s ability to move up—for example, sometimes people successfully get hired but have trouble advancing into higher-level positions.



Art for Afterlives of Conviction Project by Ana Holschuh

There is also a huge range of people who are convicted and who go to prison, and differently situated people are impacted differently—these variations in experience are very important. For instance, some people had careers before being sent to prison, while others may have never had a job or have very little or spotty work experience. Some had careers that they can’t go back to due to occupational licensing statutes that prohibit people with felonies or specific convictions in certain professions. Some people are past middle age when they come out of prison, and their record may not even be the biggest barrier; it might be age discrimination, or the combination of the record plus being older. There’s plenty of evidence that suggests that Black people, especially women, with records, have a harder time finding work because of the double discrimination based on race and a record. People with sex-related convictions by far face the most difficult time of all.

Even with many different experiences of job seeking with records, there are commonalities. In our organizing and advocacy, we need to not flatten those differences or pretend they don’t exist.

## How did “criminal” background checks become common in employment contexts?

The rise of record screening in employment is a deeply fascinating and complex story. Prior to the 1970s, a prospective employer would not likely have known about a past conviction. Only 50 years ago, record screening was rare in employment contexts and mostly used when applying to be a judge, cop, or some high-level position of public trust. That’s what a background check was for—not for every single job as is almost the case now. It’s important to remember that criminal records were first and foremost a tool of policing. Records of arrest and prosecution were collected and primarily used by police for the purposes of policing and “criminal justice”. **By 2005 or so, nearly half of all background checks were conducted for a purpose**

**other than “criminal justice”. In the next 10 years, the number of these checks increased by another 55 percent.** It’s hard to estimate exactly how many employers conduct background checks today. The point is many more private employers now conduct background checks as a matter of routine than a few decades ago.

**“Prior to the 1970s, a prospective employer would not likely have known about a past conviction. Only 50 years ago, record screening was rare in employment contexts and mostly used when applying to be a judge, cop, or some high-level position of public trust. That’s what a background check was for—not for every single job as is almost the case now. It’s important to remember that criminal records were first and foremost a tool of policing.”**

It’s important to unpack why and how we came to be in a situation where most employers conduct routine background checks. My goal is not only to build a chronology of who did what, when, but also how things have worked together, and to what effect. **In order for records to be used effectively as discriminatory information, and for an employer to have that information in their hands to use in hiring decisions, 1) the data has to exist 2) it has to be available and widely shared, and 3) people have to be convinced of its value.** The rise of background screening is a story of availability, capacity, and motivation. To think about these three factors through time we must consider three key trends that developed simultaneously in the late 1960s and continued into the 1990s that set the stage for widespread background screening.

In the late 1960s, police were expanding the scope and volume of the data they were collecting and using new technology to digitally integrate and automate their new databases. This investment in databases was linked to investment in other tools of policing in the late 1960s and early 1970s following urban uprisings across the US. Computers, electronic maps, databases, etc., were all tools meant to improve policing infrastructure and performance. Simultaneously, there was also a lot of buzz about police modernization and professionalization: That was the origin of this major push to integrate the records of prosecution, court records, correction records, arrest records into a nationally accessible database. Suddenly, a cop could stop someone in any given place and quickly be able to see anything going on with that person in the past, anywhere in the country.

A commission under President Johnson called for this integrated national information system to serve all the needs of police, courts, and cor-

*Continued on next page*





Art for Afterlives of Conviction Project by Ana Holschuh

rections at local and regional levels. This established the National Crime Information Center in 1967, allowing people within these systems to effectively share information quickly with one another. However, in accounts of the rise of background screening, there is an overemphasis on the idea that technology caused this integration, whereas it's important to focus on the ways that people made more deliberate decisions to pursue these kinds of systems.

The second factor was governments developing new systems to share the data. Major national organizations undertook efforts to integrate, collect, and modernize systems of record keeping. This took years to make possible—moving from paper and local records to sweeping integrated systems, where federal, state, and municipal records are all available, with an ongoing effort to make that integration ever more seamless. They were also exploring how to share this data with the public, deliberately granting access to users outside of the criminal legal system.

Court records have technically always been available to the public, but prior to the internet were basically unavailable since obtaining them required going to a courthouse and requesting information for a particular person. They were also limited by locality to records in your city or county—you couldn't get records outside those locations. FBI records, in contrast, were not shared with agencies outside of law enforcement. In the 1970s, Congress began to chip away at keeping FBI records secret, and throughout the 1970s and 1980s there was a constant privacy debate around the kind of access a person or agency should have to a person's record. By 1976, the Supreme Court set aside concerns about privacy and started marching steadily toward increasing access to users in the public. This eventually included selling court data in bulk to providers of background checks and establishing databases and infrastructure.

The third key trend during the 1970s into the 1990s was state and local government agencies enacting legal restrictions and exclusions that prohibited people with records from working in particular industries or professions through two approaches. The first included state or federal laws directly barring people with records from performing particular occupations. For instance, California automatically denies eligibility to people with any felony to be employed in positions dealing with electronic records or to own or manage a smog-check station. The second are thousands more barriers enacted by occupational licensing agencies that regulate a particular profession—for example, the Emergency Medical Services Board or the Department of Real Estate. All forms of government-generated barriers have increased exponentially since the 1970s. **In fact, in 2014 the American Bar Association identified 28,000 legal restrictions related to employment for people with arrest or conviction records—an enormous jump from the 2,000 restrictions identified in 1970.**

Additionally, in the 1990s, courts began to expand employers' responsibility for the behav-

ior of employees. A series of court decisions reasoned that employers are legally responsible for employees' actions on the job. There were a couple of very sensational cases in which someone who had a record did something harmful while at work and companies got sued for millions of dollars. Those cases created a precedent to not hire people with records, broadly called "negligent hiring". The doctrine of negligent hiring, however, is not as broad as it is touted to be.

For a negligent-hiring case to be successful, the case has to be made that an employer reasonably could have foreseen the harmful behavior and that the behavior was related to the person's specific "criminal" record. Furthermore, the law does not say an employer has to do a background check, only that they have to somehow vet the people they hire. **The perception of employer liability took off at a rate that's higher than its actual legal fact. In other words, even if it's not really true that employers will be held legally responsible, the feeling that it's true may matter more than the empirical fact.**

The events of September 11, 2001, dramatically accelerated and amplified the growing consensus that background checks were a smart idea. These events prompted the single biggest surge in state-mandated background checks to date, bringing the fields of employment law, human resources (HR), and the background-screening industry into play. New congressional mandates for airport workers, airline personnel, port workers, and truck drivers resulted in millions of new background checks and restrictions, and strengthened the idea that there were clearly identifiable "bad guys" who could be kept out of one's organization by doing a background check. Professional HR organizations began to promote background screening as a best practice. Attorneys partnered with screening companies to encourage background checks to avoid negligent-hiring litigation. Together these entities generated the necessary information and know-how to take background screening to scale. As more vendors entered the market, screening also became more affordable—making it possible for more employers to incorporate background screening as a routine part of the hiring process.

#### **What should organizers be working toward to address this issue?**

There's a lot of really important work to challenge these more fundamental structures. There are people actively working to oppose occupational licensing restrictions and to repeal exclusionary legal statutes. There are also people and organizations working to go back to some version of privacy, to reconsider how easy it is to access all of this information. Beyond Ban the Box, there is lots of organizing toward more comprehensive fair employment standards that may not eliminate background checks but would make it more difficult for employers to use them to discriminate.

We need more synergy between people and organizations working to end the reliance on policing and punishment generally, to take action to improve the conditions of people coming home and reduce post-release surveillance and criminalization. There must be more discussion and understanding of the use of records as one of the many ways that our society relies on punitive strategies and records as the key mechanism through which the prison industrial complex (PIC) continues to operate in people's lives long after arrest, conviction, sentencing, and release. Records and monitoring are key mechanisms of ongoing criminalization that essentially never go away. I'm trying to foster more of an

analysis of records not just as a reentry issue but as integral to the PIC.

**“There must be more discussion and understanding of the use of records as one of the many ways that our society relies on punitive strategies and records as the key mechanism through which the prison industrial complex (PIC) continues to operate in people's lives long after arrest, conviction, sentencing, and release.”**

#### **If there was like one wrench you could put in the cogs of “criminal” record screening practices where would it go?**

My wrench is an ideological one. The whole basis for the “criminal” background screening system relies on the notion that records reliably sort the world into the people who have done “bad things” and the people who haven't. We know this isn't the case, that instead records reliably tell us whose actions have been criminalized. By reframing what records are and questioning what they're supported to do, we could begin to undo fundamental ideas about who is “risky” vs “at risk”, “dangerous” vs “safe”, as well as what safety is and how we build it; what danger is, and how we detect it. These questions are fundamental not only to the background-screening system, but to the entire PIC. We could fix a lot more than records discrimination if we did away with the basic myths that underlie their use.

#### **For folks who are currently locked up in jails and prisons and detention centers, what could help them prepare for release to secure employment?**

Despite all the barriers, it's important to know that many of the people released from prison, including those who have been in prison for a long time, do really well in the job market. There is an unfair expectation that people with records should be willing to go to great lengths to get any job even if it's a terrible job. We must challenge this idea. It is also true that people who go the extra mile to get or keep a job often succeed, including moving up into positions that are better paid and more interesting.

Throughout my research, I encountered many business owners, especially small and midsized, who were quite open to hiring people with records, and not only into the lowest-level jobs. It's a big world, and there are many employers who have found that having a record or not has very little correlation with job performance. Businesspeople are business minded, and they actually just want to know who will show up for work, work hard, stay until the job's done, and do it well. That is the basis on which they're hiring—mostly they're not trying to morally evaluate or decide whether they agree or disagree with the behavior someone was convicted for. They're more invested in good employees. Those employers are out there. The key is to find them and not get discouraged in the process.♦

**About the Author:** *Melissa Burch is an anthropologist whose research and community work focuses on the experiences of people with criminal convictions in the United States, with an emphasis on how social hierarchies and inequalities are maintained and reproduced through processes of criminalization and punishment. Her forthcoming book explores the discriminatory use of criminal records in the southern California job market. She is the director of the Afterlives of Conviction Project, which aims to deepen understanding of the lived experience of criminalization and make scholarly data and concepts available to organizers, educators, and policymakers in engaging and useful ways.*



# Seeking Employment When Formerly Imprisoned: Myth Busting & Tips for the Job Hunt

By Rehana Lerandeanu

One of the key indicators of getting out and staying out is a person's ability to secure employment upon release. This tool is designed to support people awaiting parole to prepare for the job market once released. We debunk a few common myths about employment for formerly imprisoned people while providing helpful job seeking tips.

The data and recommendations in this resource are compiled from sources such as the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, All of Us or None, the National Employment Law Project, the Society for Human Resource Management, and various industry experts who supported the creation of this resource. If you have further questions about anything in this resource, you can reach out to rehana@criticalresistance.org, or write to her at CR's national office.

## MYTH: EMPLOYERS CAN ALWAYS DENY MY APPLICATION BASED ON A RECORD.

**FACT** While barriers to employment do exist for certain occupations and within certain industries, blanket bans on hiring workers with records are not recommended by the Equal Employment Opportunity Committee (EEOC). The EEOC recommends that employers conduct something called a "nature-time-nature" test when assessing a job candidate's record. This asks employers to assess the nature of the conviction, the time that has passed, and the nature of the job role; if together they do not pose a "legitimate risk" the record should not be means for denying employment. For example, a Driving Under the Influence (DUI) 10 years ago would not pose a "risk" to a candidate being interviewed for a customer service role today.

**Job-Seeking Tip:** In order to give yourself the best possible chance at securing employment, research the requirements for the industries in which you're interested and don't go after jobs that have a primary function that is very related to your charges. For example, if you were convicted for data theft, don't apply for a data-analyst role, instead apply for a customer service role. Or if you were convicted for theft, don't apply to work the floor in a retail space, instead apply for a role in logistics.

## MYTH: MOST LIVING-WAGE JOBS HAVE A BAN ON FELONY CONVICTIONS.

**FACT** While there is no national ban on employing workers with criminal records, many jobs that require an occupational license (i.e., barbers, dental hygienists, some teaching roles, etc.) do have bans on felony convictions, which can be determined at the local, state, and federal levels depending on your location. However, that doesn't mean that it will be impossible for workers with felony records, or convictions of any kind, to find meaningful, living-wage work. Many open roles for which workers are qualified will not require an occupational license.

**Job-Seeking Tip:** You can check resources like the National Occupational Licensing Database to see what roles may be harder to secure with a reportable conviction. You can also use fair chance friendly job search engines like 70million Jobs, Honest Jobs, and LinkedIn's "Fair Chance Filter" to find employers who are prepared to hire workers with records.

## MYTH: AS A WORKER WITH A RECORD, I HAVE NO RIGHTS IN THE EMPLOYMENT PROCESS.

**FACT** Formerly incarcerated people and their loved ones from the grassroots organization All of Us or None (AOUON) have success-



By Roger Peet, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

fully won campaigns to "Ban-the-Box" in 37 states and 150 cities, which delays asking about a conviction history until later in the hiring process. This means that in these regions employers may not ask about your conviction history until your skills have been fairly assessed and a conditional offer of employment has been made. Progress has also been made on the federal level like the passing of the Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs Act of 2019 which went into effect in 2021. The law prohibits most federal agencies and contractors from requesting information on a job applicant's arrest and conviction records until after conditionally offering the job to the applicant. Additionally, even after a job offer has been made, an employer must give written notice and receive permission from the candidate to run a background check, and the employer is bound to Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) laws that protect the candidate from privacy violations and discrimination.

**Job-Seeking Tip:** With policies like "Ban-the-Box" and the FCRA, if an employer asks you about your record prior to a conditional offer or runs a background check without written consent, you may have grounds for filing a discrimination suit. For example, one worker in the San Francisco Bay Area successfully filed a discrimination suit against a large and well-known tech company and won in large thanks to the city's recently passed Fair Chance Ordinance. She was able to reclaim her position, which had been denied based on her record, and has since maintained her employment and been promoted several times.

## MYTH: ONCE I LAND THE JOB, I HAVE TO DISCLOSE MY RECORD TO MANAGEMENT AND MY PEERS.

**FACT** When you do make it through the interview process, and are hired and on-boarded as an employee, the Human Resources (HR) team that ran your background check may keep your results for between 1-5 years depending on their policies. However, those results must be kept in a locked compartment, must be kept confidential, and must be completely destroyed after the waiting period is over. Outside of the initial background screening process (if they have one) it is your decision to disclose your conviction or not.

**Job-Seeking Tip:** You may want to share with your manager so that they can support any conditions of parole/probation that could affect your work or share your history with a trusted peer who is helping you get acclimated. The important thing to remember is that your history is yours to share (or not) and should not be discussed without your consent, and sharing should not lead to additional monitoring in the workplace.

## MYTH: BECAUSE I HAVE A REPORTABLE CONVICTION, NO ONE IS GOING TO WANT TO HIRE ME OR BELIEVE I'LL DO WELL ON THE JOB.

**FACT** We are still in the fight to dismantle the stigma, stereotyping, and discrimination seen in employment for workers with records, but we are also in an exciting moment in our organizing for full rights and access to work for workers with records. In addition to an overall ideology shift happening, more and more employers are taking up banners of "fair chance hiring", and we have achieved important policy wins. The Society for Human Resource Management has shared that "82% of managers and 67% of HR professionals think that the value new employees with records bring to the organization is as high as or higher than that of workers without records." All things considered, now is a better time to be a job seeker with a record and many efforts are out there to create ease in the process.

**Job-Seeking Tip:** Remember, good employers for formerly imprisoned people and people with records do exist. Don't get discouraged! Despite your record, you have so many skills and strengths that would make you a great employee. Demonstrate your self-awareness, eagerness to learn and grow, and ability to follow through and be accountable for any job you apply for.

## MORE TIPS & STEPS TO PREPARE FOR JOB SEEKING.

1. **When you're preparing for job interviews, find out the employer's practices around considering conviction histories, and know what would come up on your record if they do run a background check.** Most employers fall somewhere on a spectrum between "open hiring" and "highly regulated" screening processes. "Open hiring" is a process, used by employers like Greystone Bakery, that doesn't require candidates to interview or consent to a background check. Instead, there is an open pool of roles and candidates and it's a first come, first employed process. A more highly regulated industry, like working in an elementary school, might have strict requirements in both skill set and conviction history. But most employers will fall somewhere in the middle, and it will be helpful to know the nature of their business and if your reportable convictions pose a risk.

**What to do:** To prepare, consider using www.betterfuture.com to run a free basic background check on yourself and see what convictions still come up before the interview process. *This basic check may not pick up all possible reportable convictions.*

2. **Identify your strengths and skills.** One of the biggest perceived barriers for folks looking for work after a long stint inside is a "gap in the resume". However, you can consider sharing all the things you've been doing during your period of imprisonment as transferable skills. Whether you have held jobs while imprisoned, or have been working on your education, or counseling peers, what you've been doing has provided you with valuable skill sets for the workforce.

**What to do:** You can choose to be fully transparent in the interview process, or list those skill-sets as being employed by "The State of [wherever you spent time inside]".

3. **As you're searching for work, consider breaking up your goals into short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals.** Right when you get out, you might need to get easily accessible work quickly to start generating income and meet potential conditions of parole. Once

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you have that, you can spend a certain portion of every week job searching for something more attuned to what you'd like to be doing in the medium term if you're not already on that career path. Once you have a sustainable living wage job in the medium term, you can really set your sights on the career you'd like to develop long term. Don't be discouraged if it takes you a few years to get to where you'd like to be ultimately -- everyone, formerly incarcerated or not, is on an employment path that doesn't lead straight to where they want to be right away without a journey. Have patience with yourself and think strategically about how to sustainably meet your goals over time.

**4. Look for jobs across industries and sectors, in addition to your interests.** As you prepare to parole, you may be feeling stumped about what jobs to look for in the first place. Of course, your interests and skill sets play a major role in what work you look for once you're out, but it may also be worthwhile to think about what industries are accessible and growing in their labor force.

Potential industries to search for work in:

**Healthcare** - Healthcare support occupations are projected to grow the fastest of all occupational groups. Projected fast-growing occupations in this group include physical therapy assistants, home health and personal care aides, and occupational therapy assistants. This sector is projected to gain approximately 924,000 jobs, reaching an employment level of 4.6 million in 2031, which would make it the largest occupational group in the economy. Demand for caregiving services and therapy services is expected to rise rapidly in response to the growing elderly population, which typically has elevated healthcare needs compared to younger groups.

Projected # of jobs (2021-2031): 924,000.  
Salary range: \$48k-\$160k.

**Computer & Mathematical** - The computer and mathematical occupational group is projected to experience much faster than average employment growth of 15.4% through 2031. Expected strong demand for IT services, including cybersecurity services and cloud computing, will fuel demand for computer occupations. For mathematical occupations, expected robust growth in data and demand for data to be collected and analyzed are main factors behind strong projected employment growth. Three computer and mathematical occupations are featured among the ten fastest growing occupations: data scientists, information security analysts, and statisticians. In addition, software developers are expected to see the third-largest increase in jobs of any occupation over the 2021-31 decade.

Salary range: \$50k-\$220k.

**Green Jobs** - Green jobs, or occupations with a focus on the environment, are projected to rapidly expand over the next decade with an above average growth rate of up to 50% for certain roles. These roles include environmental specialists, environmental protection technicians, environmental engineers, solar installers, and more.

Projected # of jobs (2019-2029): 405,500.  
Salary range: \$45k-\$96k.

**Manufacturing** - These jobs typically require some level of technical training or applied skills. Examples include computer numerical control (CNC) machinists, welders, and maintenance technicians. At the higher end of experience, some of these jobs require more specialized skills. Unlike the first category, these jobs cannot typically be filled immediately with someone

from another industry or recently graduated from high school. Rather, they often require a hands-on, applied training program that can take between several months to more than a year. Some also require licensing and certification.

Projected # of jobs (2020-2030): 4 million.  
Salary range: \$28k-\$120k.

**Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics** - The Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics cluster is all about moving people and things from one location to another quickly, safely, and at a low cost. Workers in this industry design transportation systems, operate or repair equipment, plan how to move materials, and take care of storing products. Transportation systems included in this cluster include aircraft, railroad, waterways, over the road, and pipelines. Careers in this cluster include the following: Aircraft cargo handling supervisors, ambulance drivers, bus drivers, freight forwarders, mechanics, truck drivers, and many others. Careers that involve more advanced training include logistics analysts and supply chain managers.

Projected # of jobs (2020-2030): 4 million.  
Salary range: \$28k-\$162k.

Most importantly, take time to reflect on yourself, all that you've already accomplished, and your right to living-wage employment and everything that comes with it. Go with confidence into the crucial process of securing meaningful work, and remember that you have rights along the way!♦

**About the Author:** A former CR Oakland member and now CR's National Membership Coordinator, **Rehana Lerandean** is a member of The Abolitionist Editorial Collective based out of Atlanta, GA. Before working with CR, Rehana worked with several non-profits supporting formerly imprisoned people with employment

FEATURES ACTION

## Terrains of Labor Struggle: A Roundtable on Union Organizing

With Jessica Suarez Nieto, Clarence Thomas, and Ana Laura Camarda

by Dylan Brown and Mark Golub

**Editor's Note:** For this issue, editors from **The Abolitionist Editorial Collective** interviewed three union organizers from distinct labor fronts and geographical contexts to discuss union-organizing strategies, tactics, and points of intersection between labor struggles and the fight to abolish the prison industrial complex (PIC). **Jessica Suarez Nieto**, a K-12 educator and member of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), told us about union organizing in the Midwest. **Clarence Thomas**, a retired member of Local 10 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) based in the San Francisco Bay Area, shared the ILWU's long-standing tradition of organizing in the name of anti-racism and class struggle. Finally, **Ana Laura Camarda**, an organizer with the Argentinian prisoners' union, *Sindicato Unido de Trabajadorxs Privadxs de la Libertad Ambulatoria (SUTPLA)*, provided an internationalist example of how union organizing might connect to prisoner resistance. We have brought their responses together in conversation.

A special thanks to our translator, **Luigi Celentano**, for his support coordinating and editing this piece.

### Can you share how you came into this work and about the origins of your organization?

**Jessica, Chicago:** My work stemmed from a coalition that included the teachers' union, community groups, and Teachers for Social Justice. Eventually, when I joined CTU, we were thinking about how to change our social conditions and how the city was pushing out Black teachers—who I believe were a militant sector of our union

members. We started looking at the implications of Renaissance 2010, school closures, and charter expansion in Chicago. All of those had serious consequences within our communities but also provided an opportunity to organize and mobilize against them.

We think about the connection with other struggles in the city as linked to the stuff that we teachers are trying to fight for, like affordable housing, the role of bilingual education, making sure our students in temporary living conditions have resources, and looking at how these issues intersect. Now, we have a moratorium on charter expansion in our union contract. Understanding how our fight goes beyond the four walls of our classroom is key when it comes to labor.

**Clarence, San Francisco:** I'm a third-generation longshore worker and come from a family of activists. My parents were very involved in supporting the civil rights movement, and during the early years of the Black Panther Party, allowed community meetings to be held in their home. I attended San Francisco State College, now San Francisco State University, starting in 1967, and was a member of the Black Student Union and part of the leadership of the longest student strike in US history, which resulted in the establishment of the first Black Studies Department and School of Ethnic Studies, which still exist. The idea was to make the state colleges accessible to working-class people in California because at that time they were not for people of color. This is how my activism really took shape.

The ILWU Local 10 has no doubt been one of the most radical unions in the US, partially due to the 1934 Maritime Strike. All the waterfront workers from Bellingham, Washington, all the way down to San Diego, California, were demanding a coast-wide contract agreement to have union representation. The strike started in May of 1934, and it went on through July. San



Photo taken in 2016 in Argentina during mobilizations against the changes to Law 24,660 (image provided by Ana Laura Camarda).

Francisco was the number one port city in the world at that time, and back then, the Embarcadero was teeming with piers where longshore workers were. During the strike, all of those piers were shut down, and the police, National Guard, Pinkertons, and vigilante groups were all trying to keep the ports open. On July 5, 1934, "Bloody Thursday," the police shot two people, which prompted a major outpouring of public support for the longshore workers. I think that our members have a clearer understanding about the relationship between policing and the working class, because for 24 hours every July 5, on Bloody Thursday, all ports on the West Coast shut down to commemorate their deaths.

**Ana, Argentina:** There are three important factors that allowed SUTPLA to get started. First, in December 2001, we had a major economic and political crisis in Argentina: We had transition governments and ultimately Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner started their governments. People started organizing more—especially in neighborhood-based schools—and started believing again in politics as a way to transform society. Second, a lot of organizing had already taken place at the University Center located in the federal prison in Buenos Aires, where prisoners fought to have the university offer classes there—which is how that program started in 1985. Since then, prisoners have engaged in various organizing projects, one of which was to form a union because there were a lot of imprisoned people working in jail

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and they wanted to organize and fight for their labor rights. The third reason was that the director of the National Penitentiary Service allowed certain programs to take form. I wouldn't say that thanks to him SUTPLA happened, but at the same time he didn't actively try to stop it.

In 2018, 1,400 out of 1,700 prisoners were SUTPLA members. The situation is not as good as it was back then, though. Victories are never definitive in prison: You gain something, but then you always have to keep fighting to keep it—and then sometimes they still take it back. But the union is still working and fighting. This is possible because they were organized; they shared membership forms so that people could become part of the union and specified that people did not have to pay dues, which made people more willing to sign up. There were two very important things about how this union worked: (1) They had representatives from each housing unit, and (2) they had walk-throughs, where a group of members would go to every unit and place of work and talk to everyone to let them know about the union. Back then there was the Argentine Workers' Central Union (CTA), which gathered all the workers' unions in one place. CTA had our back. Repression from guards still existed but one phone call from CTA would make them take a step back. Guards would spread rumors about the union so that people would be mistrusting, but there wasn't much that they could really do to prevent the union from moving forward when it was first founded in 2012.

Finally, there's a lot of prejudice in the labor movement against people who are imprisoned. Many activists in Argentina don't seem to understand how prison works, really, and labor organizations are sometimes not inclined to work with SUTPLA because they think "the person who robs doesn't want to work." But there was one instance in 2015 when the Labor Ministry got a team of people (including myself) from different unions to do an assessment of the labor situation inside of prisons. After our report a lot of people from different unions were eager to work with SUTPLA. But then the prison system made this work so difficult with too much paperwork that people got discouraged right away.

**What do you see as the role of labor unions in the struggle against policing, imprisonment, and surveillance?**

**Jessica, Chicago:** The militarization of schools is strongly linked with a perceived need for policing. Given that, what does the labor movement have to do? We need to look at how much districts across the country spend on policing, and we see that we spend so much and don't get the outcomes we're saying we want. We could look at Chicago, where every year people are saying, "It's so dangerous, people are constantly getting killed." But we have a huge amount of money being invested in constantly increasing policing and violence has not really decreased. From that we know that policing doesn't work. We know that former Mayor Rahm Emanuel closed so many mental health clinics; there is a direct connection between removing those wellness support systems and an increase or continuance of violence within the community. The labor movement needs to be working more closely with all these different struggles. It has to be much broader.

**Clarence, San Francisco:** If we go back to 1886, with the first May Day and the Haymarket massacre, we understand the role of the police: They represent the state. They are the "goon squad" of the ruling class. Whenever there is a labor dispute, the police come out not to support the workers but in support of the bosses. People need to be very clear that the police are not a part of the working class. They may be working-class people in the police department, but when it comes to labor, police represent power and privilege—the bosses—and they are our class enemies. When we talk about labor and why we should be opposing these police killings (which in many instances involve working-class Black people), people need to understand that the role of the police in

the Black community is one of surveillance and containment. They're not there to protect and serve. Not us. That's why we shut down the ports to commemorate George Floyd's death.

**"People need to be very clear that the police are not a part of the working class. They may be working-class people in the police department, but when it comes to labor, police represent power and privilege—the bosses—and they are our class enemies."**

On the day of George Floyd's funeral, all longshore workers laid down their tools for 8 minutes and 46 seconds—the same amount of time that he was being murdered in front of witnesses. On June 10, 2020, the ILWU shut down all 29 ports on the West Coast to commemorate June-teenth and demand an end to systemic racism, white supremacy, and the privatization of the Port of Oakland. For eight hours, there was no maritime cargo moved from Vancouver, Washington, to San Diego, California.

Longshore workers are responsible for the loading and unloading of maritime cargo: The cars people drive, shoes people wear, food, phones, computers, and more. We're the ones that make that merchandise available to you. Our labor is critical to the global economy, and when there's a disruption like that, it is felt worldwide. Those are important lessons in terms of working with various organizations—we need more people to understand intersectionality. Across our struggles, whether they are about climate, women's rights, or PIC abolition—labor cannot be a special interest group. The union is supposed to speak for the entire working class. Killing Black people, killing Latino people, killing working-class people, killing disabled people: It's a working-class issue, and they're not killing the ruling class.

**Ana, Argentina:** In the 1990s, Argentina was experiencing an economic crisis and the unemployment rate was increasing dramatically. Workers did not have unions at the time, since unions were traditionally associated with only certain types of jobs, but this was the beginning of a new workers' movement in Argentina, and it grew because working conditions were becoming more precarious every year. Now, in Argentina, sex workers have a union, unemployed people have a union, imprisoned people have a union, and most recently, the Union of the Workers of the Popular Economy was created. There is now a lot more solidarity. Unsurprisingly, however, these workers and unions are surveilled and targeted by policing. As the welfare state in Argentina—like places all around the world—shrinks, people become more afraid and mistrusting, resulting in greater support for surveillance and policing because of the false belief that it will make people safe.

**The majority of The Abolitionist newspaper's imprisoned readership is located within the US. What lessons can US-based prisoners learn from prisoner-union-organizing work in Argentina?**

**Ana, Argentina:** It's important to understand that Argentinian laws related to imprisonment and the prison system are different from the US. In Argentina, we don't have to fight the same legal fights, but, in some cases, we have to ensure certain laws are enacted in order to organize effectively for people's rights. For example, Law 24,660 dictates various aspects of life in prison: What a prisoner has to do, like go to school or have a job, whether they are allowed contact with their families, etc. Unlike in the US, it's in alignment with international human rights, and as a result, requires prisoners have access to the opportunities and resources every human needs. Since prisoners must live, work, and study all in the same place, the union has been able to intervene in more than just labor rights. For example, if a guard makes you wait for two

hours in the cold to go to the workshop from your housing unit, the union has the right and power to do something on your behalf because your labor rights are being violated.

When SUTPLA wants to protest something, they have a couple kinds of actions at their disposal: One is to make noise against the cell bars, and another is to return or refuse food. The guards are responsible for prisoners eating, so by refusing food, prisoners ensure guards do not fulfill their duties. The next level of action is a sit-down strike where prisoners go to their work assignments but do not work. The last level of action is a hunger strike.

In 2016, we had a huge setback. Law 24,660 was modified, and some rights that were initially given to prisoners were taken back. Specifically, parole eligibility guidelines became stricter, and we had a huge fight to try to prevent this, culminating in hunger strikes. But, as you see, the fact that they live and work in the same place not only means that they can fight for different rights, but it also means that the kinds of actions that SUTPLA members take do not only have to do with work.



Summer 2019 image of Chicago Teachers Union organizing around member concerns in their upcoming contract negotiations (Image provided by Jessica Suarez Nieto).

**What advice do you have for organizers looking to engage labor unions in their fight against the PIC?**

**Jessica, Chicago:** Before I go into advising people, I think what helps more is taking their social conditions and using them as a concrete example. During the Fight for 15 in Chicago, trying to get McDonald's workers a livable wage—though I would argue 15 dollars is still not enough—I would work to get organizers to understand how much of our labor is treated as a commodity, and the amount of profit that corporations like McDonald's or Amazon make off exploited labor. If people are still living paycheck to paycheck, not receiving health benefits, and are having to sacrifice family time or other extracurricular things, what can unions do to shift conditions? I think one of the arguments against joining unions generally is, "Well, why do we need to be paying dues; what's the point when I need that money?" And although that is true, I think the question should be: How do we build power? We need to invest that money in dues to ensure we get livable wages, health benefits, and all these different resources needed for survival. It requires getting people to analyze how things are so they can see why being in a union is so important.

**What is the role of PIC abolitionist organizing in relation to labor formations? How might abolitionist organizers better engage with the labor movement and unions?**

**Clarence, San Francisco:** I would say, first and foremost, solidarity—international solidarity. There was a time in this country when organized labor spoke for the entire working class. The ILWU has a long history of that going back to the 1930s. When we started dealing with the issue of #BlocktheBoat with the Palestinian struggle, we had to explain to our younger members about the anti-apartheid school and how that unfolded. Workers had read about it, but now they had to really internalize what that meant in terms of people coming out and putting up a picket line. We don't cross picket lines. The next question people have is, well, if the picket line is going to be here in Oakland, is there going to be a picket

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line in Los Angeles when that ship goes to LA? Is there going to be a picket line in Seattle?

Furthermore, the labor movement is so wedded, unfortunately, to the Democratic Party. But because of that, they gotta pay attention to what we say. When you have somebody like Sara Nelson who's talking about this issue—she's the head of the flight attendants' union—or somebody like Willie Adams who's the president of the ILWU, and he's talking about it, that means a lot. Willie Adams wrote a letter to the governor after George Floyd went down. It started with a simple letter, and he didn't know that we were going to end up shutting down all 29 ports. That came

from the rank and file, and the rank and file is where it has to start. As abolitionists engage in legislative work and are dealing with the likes of governors and state legislators, it would be very helpful to have unions on your side, saying that we stand with Critical Resistance on this. ♦

**About the Authors:** *Jessica Suarez Nieto is a teacher, mother, organizer, and community member committed to the revolutionary transformation of society, world, and planet.*

*Clarence Thomas is a third-generation retired member of ILWU Local 10 in San Francisco and a leading radical African American trade unionist.*

*As past secretary-treasurer and executive board member of his local, he has led or been a part of many historical rank-and-file struggles and solidarity actions at the point of production. A labor and community activist, Thomas has championed the struggles of African Americans, the oppressed, and the working class at home and abroad.*

*Ana Laura Camarda has a BA in literature from the Universidad de Buenos Aires (University of Buenos Aires). Since 2013, she's been teaching a class on union and labor rights at the Federal Prison Complex in the City of Buenos Aires as part of the Programa de Extensión en Cárceles (Prison Outreach Program) of the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (Faculty of Philosophy and Letters) at the University of Buenos Aires, a program she helps coordinate.*

FEATURES ACTION

## Beyond "Sex Work is Work": An interview with Chanelle Gallant by Billy Ray Boyer

*Please start by telling us who you are and how you find yourself in the landscape of abolitionist work and sex worker organizing.*

I have been involved in the movement since 2000, and originally, I joined because I was a queer sex party organizer. The first party I organized was raided by the Toronto police, and then I was immediately an anti-police organizer! The day after the police raid, we started to organize. We launched a human rights complaint against the cops and won one of the largest financial settlements against the police in Canadian history, leading to the first policy regarding searches of trans people by cops. At the time, we fought for really liberal reforms, like hiring more "gay cops" and introducing the first "sensitivity training" to a policing force. So I began in anti-police organizing that was focused on reformist goals.

A couple of years later, I started organizing with sex workers as a response to an ongoing massacre in Vancouver. I believe around 65 sex workers were killed over the course of a couple of decades. Dozens of the killings were attributed to one serial killer who was known to have friendly relationships with the local cops. I started organizing with sex workers out of sheer self-defense, as I saw that the fight for decriminalization was a matter of life and death. My family included sex workers, and I felt terrified that if sex workers couldn't win decriminalization, it made them targets to be preyed upon in a variety of ways. My sister was dancing at a strip club in the same neighborhood where all of those women had gone missing, and I was horrified that there was no safety net for poor women. Organizing with sex workers, I noticed the radical difference in how criminalization was enforced and how much more it targeted Black, Indigenous, and other women of color in the sex industry, as well as trans women, poor women, and drug-using women.

Later, I did the Anne Braden Anti-Racist Organizer Training Program through the Catalyst Project, who placed me with Critical Resistance (CR) as a volunteer. That was a transformative experience—I came in with an anti-police and anti-criminalization stance but, through my volunteer experience and the political education I got through CR and the Catalyst Project, I became an abolitionist. I started to see how criminalization and cops were part of much bigger systems of racial and economic control and exploitation. That really changed my life and redirected my focus toward abolitionist work that is about shrinking and eliminating policing and imprisonment.

**Why has the phrase "sex work is work" become so popular as a rallying cry for people who want to show solidarity with sex workers and for sex workers themselves? And what are the possibilities and limitations of this way of talking about sex work?**

The phrase "sex work is work" implies a political analysis calling for labor recognition and

rights for sex workers. The phrase names a fact, which is just that sex work is a type of labor—a service for a wage.

The reason it has become a necessary rallying cry, rather than a simple statement of fact, is because varied interests promote beliefs that sex work is "a sin", "a crime", or a form of violence against women. These ideas only further criminalization, stigmatization, and violence against sex workers. It has become necessary for sex workers' rights efforts to rally behind an incredibly basic statement: that they do a job.

The term itself was coined in 1979 by one of the Mothers of the sex workers rights movement—Carol Leigh, to confer dignity to those in the sex industry. Carol recently passed and I want to honor her transformative intervention. Today, the global sex workers rights movement rallies behind the phrase "sex work is work".

There are limits to this analysis though. Carol was the first to acknowledge that too—she was gracious about her contributions. Capitalism is so exploitative and coercive that being recognized as a "real worker" doesn't necessarily get you much. The majority of the world's workers have no guarantee of decent conditions, labor protections, fair wages, or even consent to work. Beyond that, a lot of people can't work or can't work much, and most of the world's work isn't even paid—like "reproductive labor" or "care work", such as raising children or taking care of elders. So, while sex work is work and should be recognized as such, we also need a fair and just society that provides safety and resources to all, rather than just to those who are recognized as paid workers under capitalism.

**What are the limitations of wanting to be recognized as a worker under capitalism? What do you give up in the process of wanting the status quo definition of a worker to be applied to you?**

It's really a strategy question. Recognizing sex workers as workers can provide more power to both the sex workers' rights movement and the labor movement. In New Zealand, sex work is recognized as labor with a range of labor protections, including policies regarding wage theft and sexual harassment at work. Defining sex workers as workers also reveals problems and gaps in the labor movement. I think the labor movement doesn't recognize that what sex workers often need is similar to what other marginalized and criminalized communities need.

An example is sex workers who fight for recognition as employees, which is currently happening in California. On one hand, you have workers saying, "We literally are staff! We have to follow all the same workplace rules as other staff members." However, winning status as employees leaves behind those who work informally and can't qualify as employees, such as undocumented people forced to work without that recognition. Some workers achieve better conditions but, for others, things can actually get much worse. Any movement that is fighting



Chanelle Gallant organizing against borders and to decriminalize sex work.

for recognition within the system has to address the dangers faced by the people that the system will invariably leave out.

People need to be able to sell sex safely in any context for any reason. This is similar to abortion or drug use. If you put *any* barriers in place, you'll kill people. People are going to sell sex, and they're especially going to sell sex under the most difficult, dangerous circumstances. They'll sell sex in refugee camps, in prison, on the street, in disaster zones, and in conflict zones. Sex work policy needs to reflect that. All of those environments must be made safe for sex workers, and that's actually where our advocacy needs to start.

**"People are going to sell sex, and they're especially going to sell sex under the most difficult, dangerous circumstances. They'll sell sex in refugee camps, in prison, on the street, in disaster zones, and in conflict zones."**

The best sex work policy does not center formal labor recognition by the state. No policy around sex work should force people to interact with the state. Abolitionists can both recognize that sex work is work and not want it to be controlled by the state.

To complicate this question of "labor" even more, capitalism and jobs suck. A lot of what people like about sex work are the ways that it's *not* like other jobs, because it's part of the informal economy and unregulated. Especially for people who can't, or don't want to, meet the demands of a more socially accepted job. A lot of sex workers are sick, neurodivergent, or they are disabled through things like chronic pain and mental health issues. There are a million ways that people's bodies and minds don't fit into capitalism. While sex work is a service for money, for some, sex work is more of a hustle or a way to survive than a regular job. And that's exactly what they like about it! In places like New Zealand, the government recognizes sex workers as workers, without forcing them all into employment regulatory systems. Some people need to just be allowed to work under the radar.

**Can you give a brief explanation of the difference between decriminalization and legalization?**

There's a really important difference between decriminalization and legalization, and I think it's incredibly important for abolitionists to know at least this: Decriminalization, not legalization, is what sex workers want. Sex workers

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around the world demand decriminalization because it removes sex work from criminal codes or laws. Legalization, on the other hand, provides a narrow range where some sex workers are permitted to work under strict state and employer control, creating a typically larger category of “illegal sex workers”. To have a legal sex worker, you must have an illegal worker.

Decriminalization removes legal penalties against sex workers. But legalization makes the state the boss. For instance, being queer in the US has been regulated by law for centuries, because it has been seen as a sin and “violence” against the Christian family. Now imagine if a person had to obtain a license to engage in queer sex. That’s ridiculous and invasive right? But that’s legalization: people have to give up a lot of control over their sexuality to the state. Legalization would’ve meant those laws stayed on the books and queer sex was only permitted by state approval.

Autonomy is essential to sex work. That’s why we want to decriminalize sex work. We ought to be able to make those decisions ourselves and it’s extremely dangerous when people can’t. Legalization spurs state-sanctioned violence against sex workers since some will have to work in some horrendous conditions in order to remain hidden or survive under the state’s radar. They are then made even more vulnerable to exploitation, because it’s in these conditions that people prey specifically on sex workers.

Legalization actually creates criminalization. People often forget that in the US, the state of Nevada has legalized sex work in some of its smaller counties. Which sounds great on paper. People think this means that the police will leave sex workers alone. But the result is that policing is even worse in the neighboring counties where it’s *not* legalized, like in Las Vegas, which has some of the highest prostitution arrest rates in the country. It’s not like legalization is a partial measure toward decriminalization. It can actually make things worse for sex workers.

#### **How do human trafficking laws get conflated with protection and advocacy for sex workers?**

Sex work often gets conflated with human trafficking or compared to slavery. Essentially, what most people don’t know is that all human trafficking laws are written and designed to criminalize sex work. They’re not designed to stop human trafficking or to protect workers in any other industry. They *create* human trafficking. The anti-trafficking sector masquerades

as part of social services but, in reality, it exists to conduct surveillance on marginalized communities selling sex, share information with the police to advocate for further criminalization of sex workers and border restrictions against migrants, and increase police presence in working class communities of color.

Our society conflates sex work and human trafficking because the ruling class narrative envisions labor exploitation, coercion, involuntary migration, and slavery as fundamental problems in the sex industry, when these are products of racial capitalism, white supremacy, and border imperialism. The panic and myths around human trafficking distract us from the true problem and instead blame sex workers, in particular migrant and racialized sex workers. It’s actually a really slick move to say that slavery is over yet, when it happens, it’s these bad working-class people of color in the sex industry who are enslaving people.

The real problem of human trafficking is the forced displacement of tens of millions of people every year who must leave because their homes have become un-inhabitable due to corporate, economic and environmental policies. Once displaced, they are forced to take abusive, dangerous jobs where they have no access to safety, protection, or freedom—essentially in indentured labor.

There’s also a lot of overlap because all migrant sex workers are in violation of their immigration status—not necessarily because they don’t have the immigration status to be in the US or in Canada, but because they are engaging in sex work. Migrant sex work is illegal in every country on earth, and a high proportion of the world’s sex workers are migrants. Providing for the needs of undocumented migrant workers would go a really long way toward benefiting all sex workers, but it can’t depend on legal recognition by the state.

The Frederick Douglass Trafficking Prevention Act in the US, named after slavery abolitionist Frederick Douglass, defines sex trafficking as “a commercial sex act”, which presupposes so many things. It defines consensual sex, with no force or violence present, as slavery. It defines waged sexual labor as slavery. There’s a deep anti-Black sentiment in the idea that sex work is slavery and that criminalizing it is “abolition,” because those who will be the most criminalized by this law are Black and other racialized people.

It’s important to clarify that sex work is not sex trafficking. Yet, under current US law, they are considered the same, and the legal conflation of the two produces sex trafficking and violence. That’s how people end up being trafficked into the sex industry; they’re made “illegal”, cornered, and criminalized. They then can’t protect themselves—certainly not through police, but also because they are unable to work with each other. Very basic self-protection strategies are illegal for sex workers.

Many abolitionists don’t realize that when supporting anti-trafficking rhetoric and laws, they’re supporting these extremely pro-cop strategies. The language used is often camouflaged as being for women’s safety and the social good. Trafficking is the “Trojan horse” for a lot of expanded policing power and budgets. An example is a new law in my Canadian province that provided \$300 million to police and gave them the power to conduct warrantless searches. Until a sex work organization raised the alarm, not one leftist organization was going to oppose it. Why? Because it was an anti-human trafficking law. Everyone thinks there’s this boogeyman called “the human trafficker”, not realizing the state is the human trafficker.

When people say “Okay, but what about the real human trafficking victims,” this is the same question that abolitionists are asked all the time about “the murderers and rapists”. We already know that prisons and police don’t prevent violence, they create violence. It’s the same with human trafficking, but some people believe that people in the sex industry need rescue, supervision, and control. No, they do not. We all deserve more power, rights, and resources.

Sex workers need abolitionist support and don’t get it enough, unfortunately. This is very dangerous, because it’s another way that sex workers and sex work activists are isolated from broader movement strategies and advances. That’s the rallying cry that we need, in my opinion. Sex workers need to be a full part of our work toward abolishing the prison industrial complex. ♦

**About the Author:** *Chanelle Gallant* has over 20 years of experience in movements for sex workers’ rights and racial justice. She is an activist, strategist, trainer, and reluctant writer. Her work has appeared most recently in *Disarm, Defund, Dismantle: Police Abolition in Canada, Pleasure Activism, and Beyond Survival: Stories and Strategies from the Transformative Justice Movement*. She is also a board member of *Showing Up for Racial Justice*.

## FEATURES ACTION

# Repression & Resistance: People’s National Strike in Colombia, 2021

By The Abolitionist Editorial Collective

On April 28, 2021, tens of thousands of primarily youth defiantly took to the streets of Colombia, in the middle of a pandemic, to voice their opposition to a tax reform put forth by then President Iván Duque. The country — with the fourth largest economy in Latin America — had been submerged in social unrest, high levels of inequality, and a rising unemployment rate (16%). The proposed reform — a clear product of decades of austerity measures, neoliberalism, and US imperialism — involved subjecting the working class to an income tax, transferring responsibility over empty state coffers to the middle class. For three months, the largest uprising in Colombian history spread to over 800 municipalities throughout the country.

During the strike, police violence was rampant. With over \$11 billion in military assistance from the US over the past 25 years, the Colombian government has killed, massacred, maimed, beaten, and injured protestors for decades. Since the uprising, 300 remain imprisoned as political prisoners of the strike. US-based anti-prison groups including Black Alliance for Peace, National Lawyers’ Guild – San Francisco Bay Area Chapter, and Woodbine, joined forces with organizing collectives in Colombia, particularly



By Roger Peet, Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative.

Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz, Punto de Resistencia del Paso del Aguante, Trabajo y Justicia – Grupo Jurídico, Cali Colombia, to form an international collaboration called **The Free-**

**dom for Political Prisoners of the Uprising in Colombia Collective.** Struggling for the freedom of all political prisoners from the uprising, the collective works directly with pro bono lawyers, resistance points, and local organizations. Currently the collective is raising funds for legal fees, humanitarian support and commissary to support political prisoners from the Resistance Points in Cali – the epicenter of the uprising.

The underlying political and economic causes of the People’s National Strike continue to stir across the country. The region of **Cauca, Colombia**—the southwestern part of the country is home to the majority of Colombia’s Indigenous and Black people and it is a place where communities experience the most militarized violence from police and other forces. Rich in its biodiversity, the region has been the target of different international corporate investments related to extraction and agribusiness, resulting on an intensification of land expropriation, ecological devastation, and labor precarity.

In terms of labor struggles, as the land of Cauca has been packed with sugarcane plantations for generations, tensions between sugarcane workers and Indigenous groups have risen throughout the years. Fearing even lower wages, formal unions have unfortunately often backed the plantation owners rather than Indigenous peoples when Indigenous communities have contested for their lands and challenged the mono-crop destruction caused by sugar plantations. These

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tensions have often been used to legitimize militarized police presence and violence against both Black and Indigenous communities.

The *Abolitionist* Editorial Collective connected with two members of **Pueblos en Camino** to share a bit of their perspectives when understanding current struggles within a long-term and structural history of violence, as well as the resistance of Black / Afro-Latinx and Indigenous peoples against policing and colonial occupation.

## Dispatches from the *Kauka*: Pueblos en Camino

By Vilma Rocío Almendra Quiguanás and Emmanuel Eduardo Rozental Klinger

Colombia is a “genocidal democracy,” and its state model is based on violence against the people, so that power remains in the hands of elites in conjunction with transnational capitalist interests. Capital accumulation and value transfer to the (global) North lies at the expense and exploitation of Colombia’s impoverished people and nature. What’s more, the Colombian state is designed as a police state, whose formal democracy—with electoral processes held at regular intervals almost uninterrupted—is visibly supported by the legal and illegal terror against the earth and its peoples. All states play the same violent role of dispossession and accumulation, and the Colombian state, like them all, does so in a bloody manner.

The police exist to enforce the laws of “exploitation, exploitation, exclusion, and extermination,” thus guaranteeing profit to the powerful. In 1987, National Police of Colombia committed the “Portachuelo Massacre” at the town of Totoroó, at the Cauca Department. (*Kauka*, in Namuy Wam, the language of my people, the Misak, means “madre de los bosques,” or “mother of the woods.”) There they murdered Reynel Rojas Mazabuel, Hugo Sánchez Mazabuel, my father Juan Isidro Almendra Velasco, and my uncle José Tomás Almendra—the latter two were supporting the land demands from the Misak people. Crimes such as these have been committed for centuries. In the cities, they usually kill poor youth and mostly Black people, because the police structure is also racist.

We, the vulnerable, have suffered state violence for centuries at the hands of the police. Currently, they are at the service of transnational corporations. When transnational interests are jeopardized, the government does the dirty work needed through public force. It is not surprising, then, that we face police violence, both in the streets, when people try to make ends meet or stand up for their rights, and in the countryside, when people oppose the privatization and destruction of Mother Earth.

### THE PEOPLE’S NATIONAL STRIKE

In April 2021, the last straw in this territory called Colombia was the fiscal reform that levied taxes even on the most basic items of the family shopping basket. Inflation was at the doorstep, and poverty levels worsened dramatically and intentionally during the pandemic. We, the people, took to the streets en masse: There were 300 protest actions on average every day. Demonstrations in more than 800 municipalities, out of the 1,122 in Colombia; protests from home with pots, in the same lines as the ones famously held against Pinochet in Chile; roadblocks by teamsters; as well as rallies by indigenous, farmers, and Afro-Colombian community groups. It is estimated that more than 15 million people took part in these urban-rural protests (according to *Indepaz*, an NGO engaged in advancing spaces for dialogue around development and peace).

Sustained actions based on self-organization, self-care, and self-management in all realms took place: frontlines of youth guarding demonstrators at the barricades; frontlines of mothers protecting their children at rallies; frontlines

of lawyers defending detainees; frontlines of communicators denouncing the horror; frontlines of health care workers looking after the injured; frontlines of art workers pouring joy into the mobilizations; frontlines of comrades cooking for the resistance... Indigenous people also stood out: the Misak people brought down the statues of two genocidal, racist, criminal looters and colonizers—Sebastián de Belalcázar fell on April 28 in Cali and Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada fell on May 7 in Bogotá. The Nasa, Kokonuko, and Totoró peoples came out from the countryside with food for the pots in the city to feed the protesters; the Indigenous, farmer, and Maroon guards came to look after the peoples. The government’s response was to impose order, normalcy, and obedience to state authority, deploying all police and military forces against the communal masses.

The joy of gathering, singing, and marching together during the day would turn pale at night with sadness at the hands of the police: evictions, disappearances, sexual assault, torture, murder, massacre, judicialization, stigmatization, targeting, imprisonment... That’s their recipe for breaking up demonstrations, halting marches, delegitimizing demands, and looking after national and transnational elites. **Temblores** (Tremors), a human rights NGO, registered “a total of 5,808 cases of police violence during 2021, out of which 5,048 took place during the National Strike. Eighty cases correspond to homicidal violence, 47 to sexual violence, and 1,991 to physical violence. This overall figure also includes other types of violence, such as gender-based violence, harassment, arbitrary detentions, threats, verbal violence, economic violence, and violent interventions.”

The Colombian National Police are one of the militarized arms the state has at its disposal, who step into action with schemes to murder the people, wash their hands, and guarantee impunity for themselves. We have been living through this for centuries, but, during the National Strike, these repressive actions became more blatant and executed against a people who had risen up in dignity. Systematic denunciations with live video feeds gave them no respite. During one of those days, armed men shot against the youth from a truck, and the Indigenous Guard gave chase and managed to capture one of them. He was then taken to the Universidad del Valle, where the population had gathered, and where it was publicly confirmed that he was a plainclothes cop. The agent was handed to human rights bodies. This action once

more demonstrated the institutional vandalism that agents enforce and the dignified action of the organized people. Unfortunately, days later, when another delegation of the *Kauka* attempted to enter Cali, the racist elites’ revenge, in conjunction with the National Police, promptly arrived. They were greeted with gunfire, leaving ten injured. Currently, all forms of surveillance, persecution, and imprisonment remain latent against social leadership, which hit a milestone during the National Strike.

Regrettably, leaving all banners, dreams, and dead at the hands of the state has fractured social organization, because the ultimate achievement that came out of the strike was focused on getting a presidential election and obtaining government positions. Social struggles were bent on seeking votes, appointing leaders, creating projects, competing for breadcrumbs while terror and war never abated. It is precisely because of this that we share the pain and the calling made from *Temblores*: “We are concerned for the judicial schemes that we have registered, especially after the National Strike... We have recorded another 203 cases of police violence... We need to urgently engage in a structural transformation that also attends to the needs of those who are most vulnerable.”

We speak from the place they call Colombia, and we assert that there is no room for life under any state, that every state is a police state, and that all police enslave. We cannot abolish the police and maintain the state, because they need and serve each other. Neither colonization, violent-racist-patriarchal conquest, nor the costume of a civilization has ceased. Reforming the police and the repressive armies is to keep on believing that the enslaver, when it shifts its appearance, ceases to be. ♦

**About the Authors:** *Vilma Rocío Almendra Quiguanás* is daughter of the Nasa and Misak peoples of the *Kauka*—*Mother of the Woods*. She has worked in the promotion and defense of the right to Indigenous communication and to the popular and alternative media. She accompanies strategies and gathering spaces for women, communicators, and children.

**Manuel Rozental Klinger** is Colombian. Physician, communicator, pedagogist, analyst, and political and popular activist. He articulates and weaves indigenous and popular struggles in different territories and villages of *Abya Yala* and beyond.

**Pueblos en Camino** is neither an organization nor a foundation nor an NGO. It is a self-managed effort committed to weaving resistances and autonomies.

#### FEATURES ACTION

### Critical Resistance’s Analysis of “New Slavery,” 13th Amendment, Private Prisons

**Editors’ Note:** The following is taken from a document *Critical Resistance (CR)* created over the years to be used internally to the organization. CR members refer to the entire document as *CR’s Political Lines*. It explains who CR is an organization, what the organization believes in, and what the organization’s analysis of certain points of contention regarding the prison industrial complex (PIC) and abolition. CR members created this document to help orient new members and staff to the organization and build political unity and shared understanding across our membership of what our politics are as a PIC abolitionist organization, in hopes of supporting all of members to engage in principled struggle and rigorous anti-capitalist analysis of the PIC.

For this issue of *The Abolitionist* covering labor struggles, we offer CR’s political line analyzing debates of “new slavery,” the 13th Amendment and private prisons as a feature organizing resource in hopes of building more political unity among readership of our newspaper around these topics. In the columns section of this issue, *Imprisoned* columnist Stephen Wilson shares his thoughts on CR’s *Political Line* for this issue’s 9971 column, as well.

CR understands the PIC as a complex set of overlapping interests, institutions, social relations, and political forces that rely on the systems of imprisonment, policing, and surveillance to solve political, economic, and social crises and problems. This set of overlapping interests exists in order to protect and maintain the system of racial capitalism along with those that benefit as the status quo. While the purpose of the PIC is clear and consistent, CR does not understand the PIC as reducible to any one institution or type of policy/legislation.

A popular emerging understanding of the PIC is that it exists to function as the “new slavery.” Proponents of this un-

derstanding often point to the loophole in the 13th Amendment (that slavery was abolished “except as a punishment for crime”) as the reason that the US is able to lock up so many people. Further, proponents also point to the parallels between slavery and the PIC as racialized systems of control, and draw a historical lineage between the two, specifically centralizing their oppression of Black people, in doing so. It is important for abolitionists to understand, however, that following emancipation from slavery, Black people continued to be controlled, surveilled, imprisoned and forced to work through the passage of the overtly racist Black Codes, rather than slippery language in the 13th Amendment.

While the PIC, like slavery, is a racialized system of control, arguments that claim that the PIC is an outgrowth of slavery miss key analyses about its form, function, and roots in racial capitalism. Imprisoned people overwhelmingly are locked up to be separated from their communities, warehoused, and *made idle* – not exploited and made to work for profit. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore writes, “*The problem with the ‘new slavery’ argument is that very few prisoners work for anybody while they’re locked up. Recall, the generally accepted goal for prisons has been incapacitation: a do-nothing theory if ever there was one.*” Imprisonment’s primary function is disempowerment: to incapacitate people and keep them idle stems from racial capitalism’s need to control “surplus populations,” or populations that have been expelled from capitalism’s workforce because of crisis.

Further, there has virtually been no case where the 13th amendment has been invoked to justify someone’s imprisonment. Relatedly, a miniscule fraction of the imprisoned population are allowed to work for entities to profit from their labor (private and public), and privately run facilities make up only around 8% of the entire US imprisoned population. Put simply, the US is not locking people up to profit off their labor; and private prison companies are not the primary drivers of imprisonment rates, but are simply leeching off of them.



9971:

## The 13th Amendment, “New Slavery,” Political Unity, and Abolition: A conversation between Stephen Wilson and Molly Porzig

**Molly:** There’s been a rub in leftist and anti-prison movement building circles lately around the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, and equating prison with the “new slavery.” Critical Resistance (CR) as a political organization has a particular analysis of these critiques, and sometimes there’s some tension internally and externally around it, leading to debates with new members, or imprisoned people we correspond with, and also partner organizations.

I’m wondering what you think about CR’s political line on the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment and the claim that “prison is the new slavery” (printed on p. 14 of this issue of *The Abolitionist*)?

**Stevie:** I agree with CR’s analysis and have shared it for a long time. The biggest problem I see with the “new slavery” analogy and the call around the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment is that neither gets us closer to freedom. When we talk about the material effect they have on imprisoned people, they don’t get anyone free. When I ask people who offer that analysis, *what do you really want?*, sometimes people say minimum wage or more resources for the PIC; instead of starving it, they’re trying to feed it. If imprisoned people were able to win minimum wage, the prison system would find a way to take it from you, whether through prisoners having to pay room and board or fines for court or legal calls. What we need to do is starve the PIC, not give it more resources.

**Molly:** That strategy for abolition is something CR has been working to cultivate for two decades now. In CR, we call it our “shrink and starve” strategy, in which we work to develop campaigns and projects that chip away at the life, scope, power, and legitimacy of the PIC, from reducing the funding of policing, imprisonment, and surveillance to challenging the idea that the PIC makes us safe to reducing the tools, tactics, and technology the PIC can use to oppress our communities and reducing the scale of policing, surveillance, and imprisonment.

**Stevie:** Exactly. As abolitionists, overall, we need to find ways to get more people out of prison and open up paths toward freedom. I don’t believe a movement that tries to change the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment will change the material conditions for people inside prisons. This is something we should have learned a long time ago.

**Molly:** This makes me think about conversations I’ve had over the years with one of my elders and a cofounder of CR, Masai Ehehosi, a former political prisoner, citizen of the Republic of New Afrika, a former Vietnam veteran, and a former member of the Black Liberation Army. Masai taught me when we were talking about these political tensions that the Republic of New Afrika – which seeks a sovereign Black nation – doesn’t attribute the capture of Black folks to the ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, but rather to the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, another Reconstruction-era law that granted citizenship and “equal protection under the law” to anyone born in the US or who became a US citizen. This included African Americans and former enslaved people who had been freed after the Civil War, and it impeded Black nationalists’ ability to form their own nation. Native people fighting for Indigenous sovereignty experience parallels.

**Stevie:** Right, there’s obviously a long history of Black and Indigenous communities not being considered US citizens. Black folks are not only not considered full citizens in the US; they are also subjected to certain laws and procedures that other people who are considered full humans never get subjected to. We see this every day in how police gun down Black and Brown people. There are certain laws that are created

that seem “race-neutral,” but they’re designed to capture Black and Brown people, particularly poor Black and Brown people. Minimum mandatory sentences, for example, target Black populations. Same with policing practices like “Stop & Frisk,” targeting Black and Brown people and youth of color. Equal protection under US law has never been real for Black people.

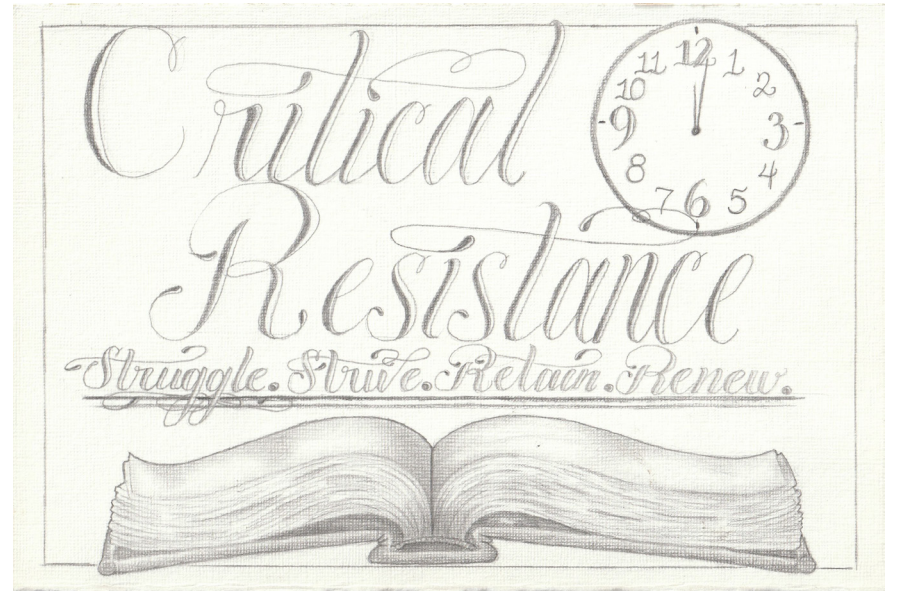
Throughout US history, whether during the civil right movement or what’s happened to other marginalized groups, there’s been a struggle to get recognized by the law or to get something changed in the law. But how much does that affect us on the ground materially? I don’t believe what the law says actually impacts people’s material conditions, at least not in the way one might imagine. I’m thinking of Dean Spade’s work on “law’s as tactic” and solitary confinement in Pennsylvania, where I’m at. Today there are more people in solitary confinement than ten years ago when the law changed. The state and the Department of Corrections (DOC) tend to absorb our demands and create something even worse. When you talk to people imprisoned in states like Utah and Nebraska, states that have removed that language from their constitutions, imprisoned people in those states will tell you nothing has changed for them.

The biggest concern I have is that this perspective on imprisonment as the new slavery and the movement around the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment don’t prioritize the real concern of imprisoned folks: creating pathways toward freedom and enacting decarceration. Repealing the 13<sup>th</sup> doesn’t decarcerate anybody.

**“The biggest concern I have is that this perspective on imprisonment as the new slavery and the movement around the 13th Amendment don’t prioritize the real concern of imprisoned folks: creating pathways toward freedom and enacting decarceration. Repealing the 13th doesn’t decarcerate anybody.”**

**Molly:** It goes back to your original point about how our purpose – as abolitionists – is to obtain freedom. Is our fight about inclusion within an oppressive political and economic system or is it about liberation and creating a new way of life for society? We need to keep our sights on the ultimate goal we have as abolitionists.

**Stevie:** Absolutely. Sometimes we forget the ultimate goal. This is why I make a distinction between emancipation and freedom. People here tend to think it’s about emancipation, in this case getting out of prison. But that’s not freedom; look at what you’re going back to: the same situation or the same conditions, or in some cases worse conditions, which either way lead you back to the same place. Our struggle is about creating freedom, which requires building the institutions and relationships needed so people can live and thrive. If we keep freedom, not emancipation, at the forefront, then the political unity that we need to create in order to get there is clearer.



Art by Marcel Buggs, imprisoned in California.

Being an abolitionist means bringing as many people as possible along and not leaving anyone behind. Those left behind become marginalized communities. As a matter of fact, let’s place the freedom of historically marginalized communities front and center. Because if they get free, we all get free. I love the point you make about inclusion, because so often we find people misunderstanding freedom as inclusion in an oppressive system. This goes back to “law’s tactics”; somehow you think if you’re recognized by the law, you made it, you’re a full citizen. That’s not how it goes at all.

**Molly:** And while we could “agree to disagree” about the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment offering some sort of loophole, or about imprisonment being the “new slavery,” what gets lost in that liberal tendency to not struggle with one another is the fact that collective liberation can only be won once we abolish the whole PIC, not only prisons, and that, as an organizing strategy, must be achieved through principled struggle toward unity.

When I’ve talked with comrades inside and outside of prison about this, one of the debates we get into is around Ruthie Gilmore’s analysis, which CR as an organization also shares, that **the goal of imprisonment is to incapacitate people**, especially poor people or the working-class and communities of color. Ruthie calls it in her book *Golden Gulag* the “do-nothing theory.” How do you understand “incapacitation”?

**Stevie:** First of all, Ruthie’s observation is correct, and it counters the now-mainstream narrative that says imprisoned people are forced to work behind walls for private companies or whatever. Actually, most of us don’t work. Most people locked up do not have a job. If you go to any prison anywhere, and you find that one third of the people there work, that would be a lot. That’s the max. Prisoners who work do the reproductive labor of the prison itself. That’s the first myth I break down.

Secondly, there used to be a time—I think up until the 1970s—when the prison system was experimenting with rehabilitation. Some prisoners would get access to certain skills so that when they got back out into the world they would be “better,” more “law-abiding and productive citizens.” Today, you’re brought into prison, and you are sat down. They have people sitting in cells for 20 hours per day.

There was a recent ACLU report that said there are 40,000 people in Pennsylvania’s state prisons. They said that 33,000 people in Pennsylvania work. I found out the DOC gave them that number, and it referred to people who were “work eligible.” In fact, Pennsylvania doesn’t have 6,000 people working inside prisons. They

*Continued on next page*





Art submission by the Amor y Resistencia Collective to Justseeds' Voices from Outside: Artists Against the Prison Industrial Complex Portfolio for CR's 10th Anniversary Conference, 2008.

conflated work-eligible, meaning those who could get a job, with people actually working. The DOC has a vested interest in making the public believe that we're in here doing something productive, or that we're getting skills or are of some use to capitalism while here, when most people are sitting in prison doing nothing. Therapeutic, educational, and vocational programs have all been gutted, so most people are just sitting here, waiting for a date to go home. That's what incapacitation is.

One thing Ruthie talks about that I think is really important is around the theory and practice of "extraction." *What are they actually taking from us?* They're taking time. Ruthie says it's like we're in a time-hole. Being in prison creates a hole that money funnels through. Some people make a lot of money—a lot of companies and corporations, a lot of wealthy people, and politicians and government officials who have jobs because of the PIC. Money is coming through this hole made by capturing us and extracting our time. Incapacitation is about taking time out of your life, large chunks – years, decades – when you are just being sat down. These create pathways to release money through your capture. The prison system is able to create jobs that maintain your captivity.

**“Money is coming through this hole made by capturing us and extracting our time. Incapacitation is about taking time out of your life, large chunks – years, decades – when you are just being sat down. These create pathways to release money through your capture. The prison system is able to create jobs that maintain your captivity.”**

**Molly:** I think another important aspect of the PIC that gets left out of this conversation is the function of control units, and why the PIC has engineered control units as a strategy for incapacitation and political repression. Sensory deprivation is used in particular, and extreme isolation, as forms of torture, to break people's will to live or fight for freedom, but also to connect with other people as human beings. Control Units and sensory deprivation harm not only prisoners, but also their families, breaking so many connections; the psychological impacts are devastating and severe. The purpose, again, is to repress organizing inside, collaboration and collectivity. Through control units—as they're used in maximum security facilities or when they're used as threats in lower-level facilities or to loom over and coerce prisoners in the general population—the PIC has been able to neutralize the radical impulses of imprisoned people.

**Stevie:** Definitely. Control units were created for that very purpose to stop organizing inside, to stop study groups inside. Study groups were how prisoners were getting politicized, and the first prisoners in control units were politicized prisoners, people who were political prisoners

to begin with, but also people becoming leaders and organizers while inside because of what they were learning in study groups. When you're in isolation or a control unit, it does something to you psychologically, especially in terms of your being able to connect with people afterwards, being able to build with people. Solitary deskills you. There doesn't have to be someone who comes and beats you up every day necessarily for this to be torture; it's about what's happening to you psychologically every single day. The purpose, again, was to get organizers out of the general population, to make sure they couldn't do this type of work anymore, and it remains a threat for the general population, that they can just put you in the hole for any amount of time.

**“When you're in isolation or a control unit, it does something to you psychologically, especially in terms of your being able to connect with people afterwards, being able to build with people. Solitary deskills you.”**

I've experienced this myself. I was transferred from prison to prison, and each transfer meant they seized my books or blocked my work. Each time I was transferred, it was because of my work, and each time I went through the hole. When we think about the history of solitary confinement, how control units started and when they started, we see it was a reaction to the advances of the 1960s and 1970s.

**Molly:** Right, because while prisons have existed for longer, the PIC as we know it really emerged in the 1970s to repress revolutionary change and movements. That incapacitation is multi-purpose: it's about capturing labor potential as a way to manage surplus labor from surplus populations; extracting time from people locked up; and snuffing out revolutionary potential or the will to struggle toward unity and freedom. These goals are achieved through isolation, sensory deprivation, and deskilling.

**Stevie:** They deskill you so you can't work to fight together! If you knew how to do this beforehand, you won't when you get out of the hole. After three years in the hole, you're gonna be messed up. You can't do that work anymore, can't connect with people and organize. Even if you're not in the hole, after you do 20 years in prison and you come home, you've been deskilled. Your ability to go home and to function – it takes a while to get that back. Some people never get it back.

It's difficult to organize people coming home from prison in labor unions. That's because in prison everything that's done collectively is punished. The collective nature of union work becomes foreign and even scary to folks who have been inside. If you get out and you get a low-wage job and you and your coworkers start talking about how if you unionize, you could uplift everybody. But in prison you've been conditioned not to think that way. Psychologically, you're unable to think about or do what you used to be able to do because of the time that's been taken from you.

When the mainstream narrative highlights a certain cause, and we're denied access to radical research, books, and history, when we then try to articulate what we're experiencing, we sometimes do it in a way that doesn't identify the connections or point to the causes precisely. Also when we're living in conditions of imprisonment, we're trying to survive all the time; it's hard to think critically about it and do the work of this analysis.

**Molly:** That's one of the reasons why I think what's going on in Alabama is so historic and radical—how folks inside in Alabama, whether they do work or not, are using withholding labor or time as an organizing strategy rather than seeking to be more included within capitalism by fighting for wages or equal treatment. Their demands are about getting out, not about getting paid better.

**Stevie:** That's what's so bothersome about the mainstream media coverage of what's going on in Alabama. The demands are explicit. They're not asking for minimum wage, or better jobs; they're asking for real hope and pathways toward freedom. That's what they're asking for: Repeal this habitual offender law; change the parole board; give us mandatory criteria for parole so we can get out of here. Their strategy is about withholding labor to disrupt the operations of the prison and then negotiate. The mainstream media is focusing on the conditions of the prison, but we know that they're bad already. That's why we're trying to get out. We're not trying to make prisons beautiful or humane. Get us out of prison. It's important for us to highlight what they're really asking for. The mainstream media is not spreading a narrative that is going to get people out.

**Molly:** What do you think is at stake if we stay misaligned around the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment and “new slavery”?

**Stevie:** I think we need to make a distinction. Five states do not pay imprisoned people for work. That's an anomaly in the US prison system. Again, most states again don't use prisoner labor, and, if they do, prisoners get paid. States that don't pay prisoners give “good time earned time.” Texas, Florida, and Alabama are not typical. This goes back to what we were saying about our organizing – that it has to be hyper-local. What's happening in Florida is not what's happening in Pennsylvania; what's happening in Texas is not what's happening in Michigan. When the media uses what's happening in Texas, Florida, and Alabama to cover an entire movement or country, that's not really what's going on. We need to say, this is what's happening there in particular. Otherwise, people jump to conclusions and say, “Well, because slavery.” But that's not what's happening in Kentucky, or in most of the country. There's what's happening overall and then what's happening in particular in these states. We may need to organize in a different way there.

**Molly:** Right, but I think part of what we have to remember is that the PIC is so intentional and strategic; it's not a monolith. Not every institution that uses imprisonment is the same, yet every tentacle of the PIC is precise in what it's trying to do, how, and why. We can say one state's prison system may be an anomaly because it doesn't quite fit into the pattern elsewhere, but it's still not an exception in that even there the PIC functions in the way it's designed to. There's a reason those states use these particular strategies to defend and maintain racial capitalism. The goal of the prison system under capitalism is to manage surplus: surplus land in some cases of community service, and surplus labor in terms of forcing people under court supervision to conduct that labor. “Good time” programs in Texas are about the extraction of time. These are all disciplining strategies within systems of punishment: “Be a good worker, and we'll shave off your time. Be a bad worker, unruly and disobedient, and we'll extract more time.”

**Stevie:** Yeah, it's still incapacitation, but it manifests differently in different places. I recommend that folks inside and outside who want to continue thinking about these topics read work by Ruthie Gilmore, but also James Kilgore, who does a lot of research and is also a former prisoner.

**Molly:** Yeah, there's that great conversation between both Ruthie and James on this topic, “Some Reflections on Prison Labor,” that was published online a few years ago. Clearly a lot of CR's analysis as an organization is inspired by Ruthie's work.

When I come across a challenging issue in my organizing that I need to study more, I turn to my organization and lean into struggle with other members to hash out my analysis. What does CR as an organization say or think about this? Where do our organization's political lineages point us? And, luckily because CR is a multi-racial, multi-generational, multi-geographic organization, for me that has meant I have had the honor and the privilege over the years to politic



with movement elders, including longtime abolitionists like Masai, Ruthie and Craig Gilmore, but also with Rachel Herzing, Kai Lumumba Barrow, Claude Marks, and the late Elder Ronald Freeman, Rose Braz, and Linda Thurston. Reading together has been essential to my political education and organizing praxis, but it has also meant getting my hands dirty and organizing with folks and figuring things out along the way, and struggling with folks currently inside. Talking to and working with you, Stevie!

**Stevie:** Yes, I'm so grateful for CR and to work on *The Abolitionist*. In my work and study, I also often use surveys. Right now, I'm trying to find out from more people behind bars in other states what they think about work, and the type of work that they're doing inside prisons. We're

also doing political education as we're completing and assessing the survey. We're doing a mailer soon, uplifting the demands in Alabama and doing some political education on labor inside. It's an ongoing project. For more information, visit [theworkandus.wordpress.com](http://theworkandus.wordpress.com). ♦

**About the Authors:** **Stephen Wilson** is a Black, queer abolitionist writing, (dis)organizing, and building study groups and community behind the wall in Pennsylvania. A subscriber of *The Abolitionist* for a few years now, Stevie became a columnist of our newspaper in 2020. "9971" is his column focused on radical study for abolition, and also refers to an inside study group.

As CR's Media & Communications Coordinator, **Molly Porzig** is the project coordinator of *The Abolitionist*. Molly first became a member of CR in 2006

as a transitional-aged youth with experience in the juvenile system and systems-impacted youth-based and women-led anti-violence organizations. On behalf of CR, Molly has organized in *Stop the Injunctions Coalition* against the use of gang injunctions, *Prisoner Hunger Strike Solidarity coalition* against solitary confinement, *No New SF Jail coalition* to close a county jail in downtown San Francisco, *Plan for a Safer Oakland* in partnership with *All of Us or None*, the *CR 10 Anniversary Conference* organizing committee, the *Story Telling and Organizing Project*, and more. **Write to her at CR's National Office** (You can also send her letters for Stevie and she'll pass them along):

Critical Resistance  
Attn: Molly Porzig  
PO Box 22780  
Oakland, CA 94609

## THE WORK & US SURVEY

Share your responses to The Work and Us survey, mail them back to CR at our national office and we'll get them over to Stevie.

### SURVEY QUESTIONS:

**1. Do you have a job?**

a. Yes. If yes, what is your job title?  
\_\_\_\_\_

b. No

**2. If you have a job, how many jobs do you have?**

a. \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Are you required to work?**

a. Yes

b. No

**4. Do you want a job?**

a. Yes

b. No

**5. Why do you work? Check all that apply. If you don't work, why would you work?**

a. Boredom

b. Forced

c. Money

d. Skills

e. Good time

f. Access / Legs / Movement

g. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**6. What are the negative consequences of not working? Check all that apply.**

a. Loss of recreation time / access to day room or yard time

b. Restricted access to commissary

c. Worse housing units

d. Solitary confinement

e. No income

f. No skills development

g. Doesn't look good for parole

h. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Does your job keep the prison running?**

a. Yes

b. No

**8. Do you have a correctional industries job?**

a. Yes

b. No

c. If yes, is it a private industry or prison industry job? \_\_\_\_\_

**9. What type of job do you have? Check all that apply:**

a. Food service / kitchen

b. Laundry

c. Maintenance

d. Electrician

e. HVAC

f. Welding / Carpentry

g. Painting

h. Door crew

i. Janitorial / Custodial

j. Yard

k. Clerk

l. Library

m. Manufacturing / Correctional Industries

n. Block / tier work

o. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. What are the primary ways someone gets a job? Check all that apply:**

a. Apply

b. Assigned without application process

c. Based on who you know / relationship with guards

d. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**11. On a scale of 1-5, how much do the following factors affect your ability to get a job (if you want one)? Mark 0 if not at all.**

a. Age \_\_\_\_\_

b. Race \_\_\_\_\_

c. Gender Identity \_\_\_\_\_

d. Sexual Orientation \_\_\_\_\_

e. Relationship with guards \_\_\_\_\_

f. Relationships with other imprisoned people \_\_\_\_\_

g. Disability status \_\_\_\_\_

h. Skill \_\_\_\_\_

i. Time left in sentence \_\_\_\_\_

j. Conviction \_\_\_\_\_

k. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. How long did it take you to get a job? Fill in numerical answer for one line.**

a. \_\_\_\_\_ days

b. \_\_\_\_\_ weeks

c. \_\_\_\_\_ months

d. \_\_\_\_\_ years

e. Depends on the job

**13. What are common reasons someone is fired from a job assignment? Check all that apply:**

a. Stealing

b. Breaking the rules

c. Problems with other prisoners

d. Problems with staff

e. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**14. What are the day-to-day difficulties of your job? Please describe:**

**15. How are workers compensated in your facility? Check all that apply:**

a. Wages

b. Good time / earn time

c. No compensation

d. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**16. If workers are compensated with wages, what's the pay scale?**

**17. If workers are compensated with good time / earn time, how much time do you get off your sentence per hours worked?**

**18. Are you being paid for all the hours you work?**

a. Yes

b. No

**19. Do you receive overtime pay?**

a. Yes

b. No

**20. Do you receive idle pay if you are not working?**

a. Yes

b. No

**21. Do you pay for copays for medical services?**

a. Yes

b. No

c. If yes, how much does a medical visit cost in your facility? \_\_\_\_\_

22. Is there a hierarchy of jobs (i.e., are some jobs considered better in the eyes of prisoners)?

23. How do you feel about jobs that keep the prison running (i.e., non-industry jobs like doors and locks, kitchen, groundskeeping, etc.)?

24. Do you talk about your wages and work with other imprisoned people?

25. Are there any efforts to organize among imprisoned people about labor issues in your facility?

26. Do you see yourself as part of a larger labor movement?

27. What would you ask outside allies to fight for when it comes to prison labor?

28. Is there anything else you would like to share about jobs or working in prison?

**29. Background information (All Optional!)**

a. Name (Feel free to use your first name only, pseudonym, or remain anonymous)  
\_\_\_\_\_

b. Age:

c. Gender:

d. Sexual orientation:

e. Disability status:

f. Race:

g. Length of current sentence:

h. Time served on current sentence:



# INSIDE-OUTSIDE FISHING LINE: Defending the Earth and Defeating the Prison Industrial Complex

By Bryant Arroyo and Richard Thomas,  
Fight Toxic Prisons

For issue 38 of The Abolitionist Newspaper, Richard Thomas of **Fight Toxic Prisons** and Bryant Arroyo, **noted imprisoned environmental activist**, sat down for a visit to discuss the intersections between climate catastrophe, the prison industrial complex (PIC), inside outside solidarity, and major victories for environmental justice waged from behind the walls. We hope our readership enjoys this powerful discussion!

**Richard Thomas:** To start this conversation off, could you please say a little about yourself. Who are you and how did you get into prison abolition organizing?

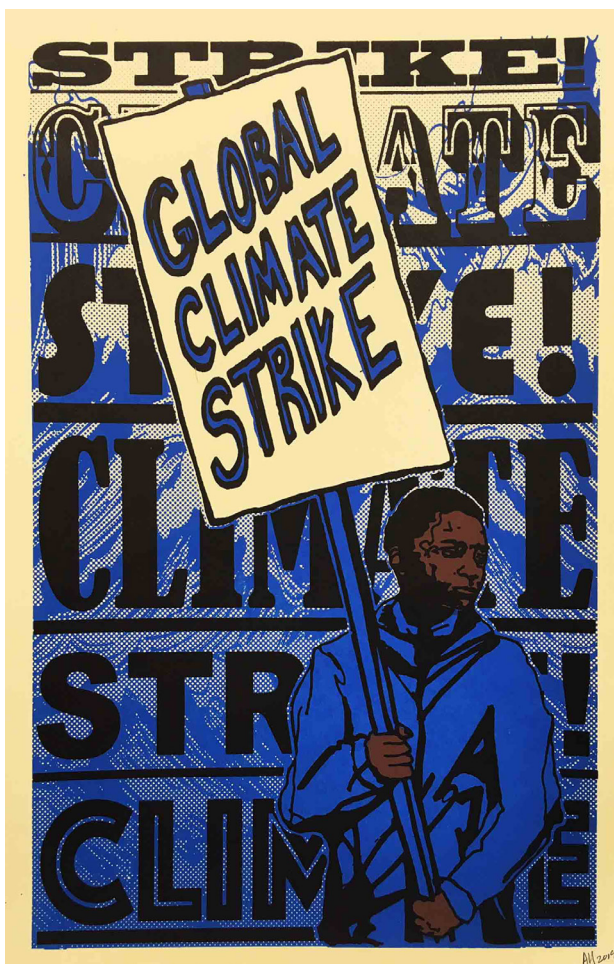
**Bryant Arroyo:** My name is Bryant Arroyo, I'm Hispanic/Latino, 51 years of age and dubbed the first jailhouse environmental lawyer by Mumia Abu Jamal. When I first fell, I did a good majority of my time in SCI Mahanoy in Pennsylvania. This was the first time that I encountered an environmental issue of a magnitude that was just totally unprecedented and I was not ready for. I encountered an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that was available at the Law Library and it read like an apocalyptic nightmare. I learned that a coal gasification plant was planned to be built only 300 feet from the center point of SCI Mahanoy's yard. The project was backed by Pennsylvania anthracite baron John W. Rich, Jr.

The coal gasification plant was estimated to cost \$860 million. \$100 million was going to be paid for in tax subsidies approved by former President Bush, Jr. I formulated an objection letter in protest of the coal gasification plant being built and mobilized, organizing over 902 prisoners on an individual and collective basis. Any time objections were to be made, they had to be individualized and had to be singular. If there were two or more signatures it would be construed as a petition. So, we circumvented their policy by individually and collectively making objections. It mounted a successful debacle against the coal gasification plant.

Through our actions, plans came to a total standstill and the plant cannot and won't be built. That was my first encounter in the environmental role as an activist and prison abolitionist. This was in Schuylkill County, a rural area of Pennsylvania which holds three state prison facilities in the community: SCI Mahanoy, SCI Frackville, and SCI Coal Township.

**Richard:** Thank you for that introduction, Bryant. My name is Richard Thomas and I have been an organizer with the Campaign to Fight Toxic Prisons (FTP) since 2018. FTP is a collective of anarchist grassroots abolitionist organizers primarily in the South. We work at the intersection of earth liberation, prison abolition, queer/trans liberation, Black/Brown/Indigenous liberation, and public health issues. We work directly with currently and formerly imprisoned folks to draw attention to both environmental hazards in various carceral facilities and the impact of the carceral state on the environment. We specifically push for abolitionist and decolonial-centered approaches alongside strategies to provide material support for communities most deeply impacted by the carceral state.

I got into abolitionist organizing after helping to put together the 2018 Fight Toxic Prisons National Convergence held in Pittsburgh. I worked closely with so many grassroots organizers, activists, and community members who all helped me to deepen my own analysis of the relationship between the prison industrial complex and the environment. That convergence helped lay



By Aaron Hughes, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

a framework for strategies and networks that I continue to build off of today.

Bryant, could describe in more detail the relationship between environmental conditions and prison conditions?

**Bryant:** In my research as a jailhouse environmentalist, I discovered that the majority of prisons, including federal prisons in PA, are built on what they call "mountains of anthracite" -- which is a kind of coal -- or on abandoned and toxic dumps or superfund sites. It is the design intent for those locations to build prisons instead of anything else. The government conspires so that these particular toxic areas will have some economic value for the rural hinterlands and their communities to not only profit from, but also utilize the prison system to exploit and also, I say, create a genocide within our culture.

This is an open secret between the government and corporate raiders to build these particular prisons. Statistically, a majority of individuals either die in prison of some form of cancer-related health issues, or when they're released, they're short-lived in their freedom as a result of spending years within these prisons that are built on toxic fund sites.

**Richard:** I think of prisons as a microcosm of the free world. All of the environmental hazards that we experience outside of the prison system are also experienced by those on the inside in a more acute way without any of the resources necessary to manage them. For example, massive overall temperature increase from global warming/climate change makes summer in a state like Texas (where I currently live) sometimes unbearable. However, I have resources like fans and air conditioning etc. to deal with the impact of veritable seasons. My comrades on the inside, especially in a state where over 70 percent of all facilities do not have access to air conditioning, feel much more of the brunt from environmental disasters and environmental harm.

The harm that our comrades on the inside feel is further enhanced by the inherent toxicity of the carceral state and all prison systems. Bryant has already highlighted that there are many prisons built on superfund sites, where military, biochemical, and nuclear weapons have been tested. Many facilities are built on cheaper land which increases the probability of soil

and water resources becoming contaminated. The economic interest of federal, state, and local facilities are frequently prioritized over the well-being of incarcerated folks, which further denies our comrades access to resources that could help or mitigate the impact of environmental harm and thus worsening prison conditions. There is much more that could be said here, but the key point to emphasize is how the environmental conditions on the outside are mirrored but also amplified on the inside because of very intentional factors.

What are some examples of issues that you have worked on at this intersection, Bryant?

**Bryant:** Around 2018, Panagioti Tsoklas from Fight Toxic Prisons reached out to me with an address in Washington, DC to write in protest of the proposed building of a Letcher County, Kentucky federal prison on a toxic mine site. It was on track to be the most expensive federal prison in the history of the US at \$510 million dollars. Since we were successful in our former victory against the coal gasification plant, I utilized the same blueprint while I was at SCI Frackville in Pennsylvania. So, I typed up a formal objection letter, mobilized with a few comrades and had those passed around to be signed. We ended up totaling around 200-300 formal objection letters in protest of the Letcher County federal prison. This was another historically unprecedented challenge, and also another victory. This also was the first time state prisoners from another state protested against a federal prison being built on a toxic mine site in another state.

**Richard:** I have worked on a myriad of issues centering environmental conditions and prison conditions. In Texas, a main issue has been better protection against deadly heat waves in the summertime. Over the last several years, Fight Toxic Prisons has worked with Texas Prisons Community Advocates and several other groups to push for decarceration and funding for air conditioning in every unit within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. We have also pushed for clean and safe drinking water and better water testing procedures to prevent breakouts of H-pylori and other deadly bacteria transmitted through water.

**“This also was the first time state prisoners from another state protested against a federal prison being built on a toxic mine site in another state.”**

We have dedicated many resources to developing a disaster response team, composed of abolitionist organizers from across the US who have expertise in areas such as weather tracking, mutual aid support, mapping, and rapid response organizing. So far, our team has focused on providing mutual aid, material support, and other resources for our incarcerated comrades during hurricanes. We have done phone zaps and direct actions engaging FEMA and pushed for more transparency and effective evacuation procedures during major storms, hurricanes and wildfires. We are in the process of developing more infrastructure to locate carceral facilities near hot spots and disaster zones for extreme weather conditions. Our aim with the disaster response team is to provide comprehensive support for our comrades on the inside and their communities before, during, and after an environmental disaster.

Can you talk about what has been the role of inside-outside solidarity in organizing at the intersection of climate justice and abolition, Bryant?

**Bryant:** For people on the inside -- like myself -- communication is the actual conduit to start getting organized, educated, and working at the intersection of climate justice and prison abolition. In order to fight back, you have to become educated by getting with individuals that are already in, taking your notes, engaging, and listening. And you need to ask questions! Every question is important to gain traction in your participation to become part of the mobilization and organizing in order to challenge the corpo-

*Continued on next page*



“For people on the inside – like myself – communication is the actual conduit to start getting organized, educated, and working at the intersection of climate justice and prison abolition. In order to fight back, you have to become educated by getting with individuals that are already in, taking your notes, engaging, and listening. And you need to ask questions!”

rate raiders destroying our planet. Fundamentally, the first step is for people to reach out to these particular organizations, like for example, FTP. When I did the protest and formal organization of the 902 petitions to stop the construction of the coal gasification plant, the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund reached out to me. I knew nothing about them, but the only reason that they reached out was because we had made the front page of the *Pottsville Republican* in 2006. We made waves, and that garnered the attention specifically from the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund. Then the lawyers wrote to me and said that they wanted to meet with me at the visiting room.



CR Oakland action in 2012 with Californians United for a Responsible Budget and All of Us or None in San Mateo, CA resisting jail construction on a toxic site

Although I wasn't organizing and mobilizing to attract the attention of such organizations, the protest was heard and it did not fall on deaf ears. That made a difference.

I think it's critical we have alternate media and alternate means of accessing information and news. You have *The Abolitionist*, *Workers World*, *The San Francisco Bay View*, *Prison Legal News*, *Fight Toxic Prisons*, etc. These organizations provide viable means of communication that are always putting information out within and outside of the US. Access to all of these vital newspapers, periodicals, and magazines helps

in mobilizing and organizing from within to get our voices heard. ♦

**Get in touch with Fight Toxic Prisons by writing them at:**

Fight Toxic Prisons  
P.O. Box 11532  
Fort Worth, TX 76110

**You can connect with Bryant by writing him at:**

Bryant Arroyo CU1126  
SCI Coal Township  
P.O. Box 33028  
St. Petersburg, FL 33733

## KITES TO THE EDITORS

### BUTTERFLY EFFECT

By Terrance Harris, Jr.

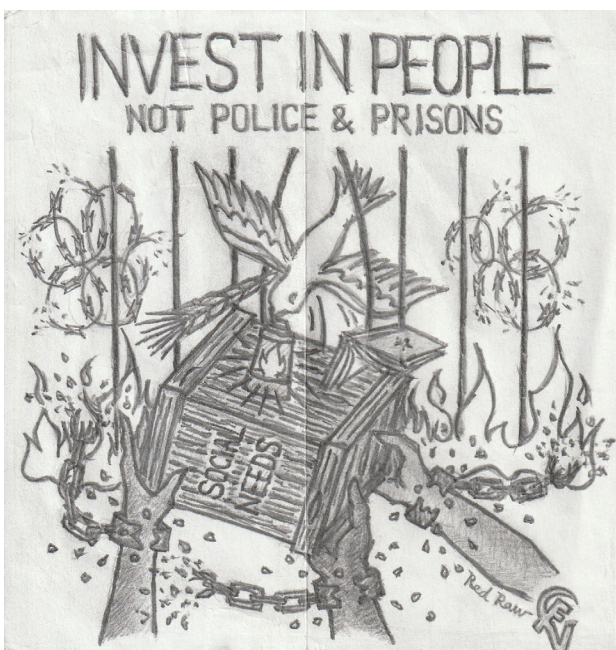
Swinging from a lemon tree  
Nose draining the life out me  
Stripped naked, shaking as I choke  
Sweat dripping, blacking out  
Then the rope breaks  
Seeing stars  
Searing pains  
Screams profane  
I won't answer  
Never again  
**That's not my name**  
Gotta run  
Get up, stand up  
Slip the handcuffs  
Fight for life  
Catch a fire  
Run like hell  
**I rebel**  
Freedom calls  
Escape the claws  
**Escape** the jaws  
Turn around  
Turn to salt

I was never a slave, Resisted being broken, So they tried to lynch me, Put the weight Of the state of California against me, **Life** sentence is a slow death, Mutilation, brainwashing, Soul stealing, soul searching, soul revealing, soul **healing**, grew strong, grew **wise**, learned to fight, learned to **see**, learned to plan out a strategy, strategize from A to Z, learned to read, learned to speak, learned to **pray**, learned to think, **revolution** is complete change, **evolution** can feel strange, priorities re-arranged, rebellion runs in my veins, shake the foundation of the plantation, **earth** quaking, tattoos hurt, pain worth taking, ain't **forever** long enough, **sunset**, **sunrise**, free spirit, new life, wake up and live, less take, more give, be peaceful, 4 give, apologies accepted, **human** flaws neglected, accept the **message**, accept the **blessing**, answer the question, **question** the answer, do your best, inspire **genius**, build a legacy, fly like Pegasus, **fly** like Icarus, butterfly effect, remain rebellious.

Liberation. ♦

### HELLO AWESOME FOLKS,

A special shoutout to Devin M. at Lawrenceville CC in Virginia. I'm writing from Pocahontas State CC in Virginia. I just finished my first



By "Red Raw," imprisoned artist.

read through the Summer 2022 issue of *The Abolitionist* and I was glad to see a fellow captive in the print from the same occupied area. Devin paints a, mostly clear, picture of this backwards state. There are a number of updates and changes that have made this place (Virginia) a far more dangerous place.

Glenn Youngkin—an open braggart for fascism—won the “election” and went straight to it. He eliminated the parole board and has twice now replaced it with police (“retired”) and other non-neutral persons. As Devin pointed out, there is no parole unless you were convicted as a juvenile, have geriatric options, or fall under the Fishback case. Not many meet these requirements, so very few are eligible. In the first quarter, 177 paroles were denied. That parole board was then sent packing by Democrats who refused to confirm them during hearings, so a new board was appointed, and it looks just like the last one... ugliness.

The Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) is now openly violating all mail standards, including legal mail, which is essentially being held hostage. David Robinson signed Chief of Operations memorandum #052-2022: either lie to the courts (provide a false address at State Farm, PA) or no more legal mail. This was the VADOC solution to its staff being outed as the major contraband suppliers in publications like the *Virginia Mercury* and *Prison Legal News*.

But it gets worse... A change in law, HB 5148 passed in 2020 and enacted, was set to provide a new Earned Good Credits system for some captives, basically all non-violent convictions. This would have brought Virginia, in part, in line with most other DOCs and the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP). The bill was flawed and discrimina-

tory, but it was a step forward. It brought hope, even as the new right-wing extremists that swept into power took every office but the senate and went all out to repeal every progress made.

June 17, 2022, in a backdoor move and after thousands of prisoners had already been told “you are going home,” an illegal (ex post facto) amendment was snuck into a budget bill—HB 30—immediately revoking that status from over 500 captives who had, along with their families, made plans. They were told on June 20, the day after Father's Day, and on the observed Juneteenth holiday. At PSCC, the Assistant and Warden came in on his day off just to tell those captives and gloat. Governor Youngkin also tried to make the first amendment and right to protest a felony... you heard that correctly. It failed, but only barely. A total of 8000 captives are affected by the ex-post-facto change. I'm 48; I've been an activist for 30 years. I was in Seattle in 1999 and involved with Occupy at Asheville, NC camp. Virginia needs a real activist presence, and we need it now, because right wing fanatics have all but taken over. ♦

**About the Author: David “DavsNotHere” Annarelli** is a father, musician, activist, political prisoner and contributing writer at the Prison Journalism Project ([PrisonJournalismProject.org/our-writers/](http://PrisonJournalismProject.org/our-writers/)). He was the victim of an unannounced and unidentified police attack in his own home in the dark of night, during a mental health crisis. Write to David here:

David J. Annarelli #1853637  
A 118 Pocahontas CC  
PO BOX 578  
Pocahontas, VA 24635.

### To Critical Resistance (CR),

I consider myself a hostage in the war on drugs. I'm serving ten years in Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) for prohibited possession of a gun. I would like to inform CR of the cruel and inhumane treatment that prisoners in ADC are subject to. Mainly medical and dental needs. Many people who have valid medical problems such as Hep. C or cancer are denied treatment. The dental procedure takes three months or more. ADC is being negligent to basic as well as serious medical needs. I just wanted to bring attention to this issue of prisoners being neglected regularly. In other news, I would like to thank everyone at CR and *The Abolitionist*, for the newspapers. It's comforting to know that I'm not the only one who realized that prisoners are a waste of taxpayer dollars and are doing more harm to society than good. I've enclosed a very short story. It doesn't have a political agenda, but it's something I wrote to entertain myself while passing time away in this horrible, lonely, and boring place. Perhaps you can print it in one

*Continued on next page*



of the issues of *The Abolitionist*. If anyone at all would like to correspond, I will be grateful. I can receive emails through the Securus website or through the mail. My address is as follows:

Cody Headrick ADC #312176  
Tucson Complex Santa Rita  
PO BOX 24401  
Tucson, Arizona 65734

## “JAIL BIRD,” A SHORT STORY BY CODY HEADRICK

They fed me peanut butter sandwiches every day. Such a cruel and depressing existence. Boring, repetitive, pointless. As time passed, I forgot more and more what freedom felt like. Imprisoned for a crime I didn't do. “I'm innocent,” I told the police, but my words were ignored.

Five years left on a ten-year sentence, I was still thinking about my girlfriend, Sandy, and my family. Suddenly a cardinal landed on the fence outside my window slit. I said out loud to the bird, “If I were you, I'd fly away my little friend.” He took my advice and fluttered off.

When I turned around, a bald, sun-cured old man with a long blonde beard sauntered into the tiny cell. His eyes were alert and crystal blue like an ocean somewhere in the Bahamas. His stare seemed omnipresent and a bit intimidating. He smelled of patchouli and fresh ganja. “I'm your new cellie.”

I asked, “What's your name, Bro?”

“I am God.”

“But you're wearing DOC clothes, you ain't God.”

“Question me not, child, I am God. What is the thing you want most in the world?”

“That's easy. I want to be free as a bird. I'd go home to see my girlfriend and family.”

“Fear not, your prayers will be answered, my son.”

“If you say so. Cool,” as I thought to myself, this fool had Rule 11 Crazy Court for sure. I went to sleep that night thinking nothing more of my new roommate, God, or whatever his real name was.

When I woke up the next morning, I looked in the mirror. My eyes were beady, the scar on the bridge of my nose had disappeared, my salt and pepper hair turned black and shiny like a crow.

I stayed in the cell all morning wondering if I'd finally gone birdshit crazy. Just after the 11:00 am formal count, I realized I was no longer a human. I had feathers and wings, and a beak. I was a bird. I could fly away, and I was gonna!

As soon as the guard buzzed open the doors to the cell block, I bolted out and flew like I'd never flown before. (Oh wait, I hadn't ever flown before.)

It was glorious to escape from that horrible, miserable, traumatic place. I headed straight to Sandy's house. I couldn't wait to talk to her. I got there and frantically pecked on the door. When she came outside, she glanced around. Her curly cappuccino hair sparkled in the sunlight. She looked amaz-

ing. Tight blue jeans, black tank top, five foot three of curves and booty and Oh My God.

“Hey it's me,” I said, but she didn't understand birdspeak. She grabbed a broom from the front porch and shooed me away.

“Fuck it!” I chirped, and took wing to my mama's house. When I got there, I could smell lasagna and garlic bread. It must be Sunday. I landed on the kitchen window sill. “Hey, Ma! Hey, Ma! Hey, Ma!” I called. But it came out as “Ca-caw, ca-caw, ca-caw.”

My mother looked out the spotless kitchen window at me and said, “Get out of here you crazy bird.”

That's when it occurred to me: God has a sick sense of humor.

But I wouldn't leave. I was determined to be with my family. I pecked on the windows and rang the doorbell with my beak. Nothing worked.

When my Pops came outside to get the newspaper the next morning, I attempted to hug him. (Well, at least as close to a hug as I could manage.) I tried to land on his shoulder but he smacked me mid-air, knocking me out. I woke up dizzy, with my son and nephew standing above me, poking me with sticks. Animal Control arrived to take me in, just before I was able to fly away. “I'm innocent,” I squawked. My calls were ignored. As it turns out, I am a rare and endangered species of rook. I'm locked in a zoo for the rest of my life. Every day, they feed me raw meat. ♦

## CRITICAL RESISTANCE (CR) UPDATES AND MOVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

### CRITICAL RESISTANCE (CR) UPDATES

**Shirley Leslie**, previously CR's Development Coordinator since 2019, was hired as CR's new Development Director. **Member Rehana Lemandeau** was also added as CR's new Membership Coordinator. **Anastasia Franco** was brought on as an intern to help expand the prisoner correspondence program.

#### CR NEW YORK CITY (CRNYC)

After focusing on rebuilding its organizing capacity, CRNYC held a relaunch event in October 2022. Over 50 people attended the event in Sheep Meadow in Central Park, and 36 signed up for CRNYC's volunteer listserv, along with several interested in joining monthly prisoner mail nights. We shared updates about our ongoing campaign work to pass **the Dignity Not Detention Act** in New York state and to **reject a proposal to convert the presently defunct Lincoln Correctional Facility into a jail** for women, gender non-conforming, and gender-expansive people. During the event, participants also made posters and banners for **CRNYC's Dignity Not Detention campaign** with **Abolish ICE NY NJ coalition**.

Attendees also heard from organizers with **Brooklyn Eviction Defense** on their group interview published in **Issue 37 of *The Abolitionist* on housing justice and PIC abolition**.

#### CR PORTLAND (CRPDX)

CR is part of the **Oregon Prisoner Coalition**, collaborating on a Know Your Rights tool for Oregon prisoners and a general resource hub for imprisoned people. Both tools will compile different accessible resources that exist in Oregon for imprisoned people, including materials on mental health resources and access, disability justice, resources for trans and gender non-conforming imprisoned people, and more! Stay tuned for these resources to drop.

#### CR OAKLAND (CROAK) & CR LOS ANGELES (CRLA)

CR's campaign with **Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB) to close 10 prisons**



Photo of CRNYC's Abby and Chapter (Re)Launch Event, October 2022 in Central Park, New York.

**by 2025** has made recent headway. In May 2022, we mobilized from across the state to Sacramento for Governor Newsom's May budget revision, demanding he name more prisons for closure and delivering a petition with thousands of signatures in support of **The People's Plan for Prison Closure**. Within hours of our mobilization, Newsom announced the possibility of more prisons to close in addition to **Duel Vocational Institute (DVI)** in Tracy, which was closed on September 30, 2021, and **CA Correctional Center (CCC)** in Susanville, a closure fight currently facing pushback in court. In July, we organized **over 100 Californians for Building Power Across The Walls To #CloseCAPrisons**, a statewide online information session for the campaign. We continue to build a two-tiered fight for prison closure: statewide effort to pressure the legislature in Sacramento to site more prisons for closure and local efforts to close specific prisons once closure is mentioned by the governor.

In September, we won an exciting **victory** in one of the local fight to close **CCC in Susanville** when a CA judge ruled that the state can move forward with closure. Since Newsom's original mandate in April 2021, Susanville residents pushed back through a lawsuit due to fear and panic of loss of jobs resulting from economic dependency on the prison. CR and CURB has been working to get the town of Susanville and the state of CA to see the harm CCC causes, especially as the Dixie Fire in 2021 threatened the lives of over 2,000 people imprisoned at CCC.

**The ruling would not have been possible without the steadfastness of people imprisoned in CCC.** The case dragged on for a year in an ardu-

ous process, and CCC prisoners filed an amicus brief in May 2022 to demand it be expedited. Imprisoned organizers continued to resist after that was rejected, issuing a public statement on August 23 calling for the court to “do the right thing” and shut the prison down. CCC is ordered to close by June 2023, and CR and CURB are now working to expedite the closure process.

### PRISONER CORRESPONDENCE: CR'S PRISONER MAIL PROGRAMS & PHONE LINES

CR continues to correspond with thousands of people inside through chapter mail programs and a national phone line. CR members have been working to reinvigorate this work through orientation workshops and political education for members and volunteers, focusing on our remotely-run phone lines this year. Having stronger mail programs and phone lines has positioned CR to more effectively build relationships and strategize with our comrades inside jails, prisons, and detention centers.

**Write to one of our chapters or give us a call at our national office:**

☎ **Phone: (510) 444-0484**

*Volunteers and members take shifts from 10am – 6pm PST Monday – Friday.*

✉ **CR Oakland?**  
**PO Box 22780**  
**Oakland, CA 94609**

*Responds to mail from prisoners across de US & internationally.*

✉ **CR New York City**  
**PO Box 3988**  
**NY, NY 10163**

*Responds to mail from prisoners across the East Coast & South.*

✉ **CR Portland**  
**PO Box 11055**  
**Portland, OR 97211**

*Responds to mail from prisoners in Washington & Oregon states.*



## MOVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

The following news covers movement struggles and advances from May to November 2022, based on reports from Democracy Now, Al Jazeera, and some of CR's movement partners.

### NATIONAL (US-BASED)

#### 50,000 Tortured in Solitary Confinement

A new report says that nearly 50,000 prisoners across the US are caged in prolonged solitary confinement — conditions the United Nations (UN) considers tantamount to torture. Researchers at Yale Law School found some 6,000 of the prisoners have been imprisoned in isolation for over a year. The UN special rapporteur on torture says such practices are prohibited under international law and can lead to severe and irreparable psychological and physical consequences.

#### November Mid-Term Election

Republican-led states are suppressing voting rights leading up to the November midterm elections. Black voters and Black-led organizations have hustled unprecedented voter turnout ahead of midterms. According to **Democracy Now**, LaTosha Brown of the **Black Voters Matter Fund** says: "We are literally fighting for democracy," elaborating that organizing voters is "the winning strategy" despite the resolve of the "consulting class" to invest funds primarily in TV ads. Brown continued, "We need to recognize that it is going to be community-led efforts, grassroots democracy groups that are literally our best defense on the frontlines from protecting us against fascism."

#### Criminalization of Abortions & Reproductive Justice

In June, the US Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, ending nearly 50 years of the constitutional right to abortion. Throughout July, thousands protested the decision. Abortion funds across the US have come under legal and extra-legal attacks; **The Texas Equal Access Fund** has been a particular target for criminalization as their work becomes more urgent in one of the most restrictive states for abortion.

Some of the state legislation that criminalizes abortion and other reproductive and gender-based health decisions also deputize civilians to enforce these laws and police fellow community members, widening the PIC's dragnet. Even menstrual-cycle and birth-control tracking digital applications can be used in court against people seeking abortions. As always, these restrictions disproportionately target Black, Indigenous, poor and low-income, migrant, disabled, queer, gender-non-conforming and transgender lives and bodies.

In anticipation of the decision, **Interrupting Criminalization** released a toolkit in May, "Abortion Decriminalization is Part of the Larger Struggle Against Policing & Criminalization: How Our Movements Can Organize in Solidarity with Each Other." The toolkit can be read and downloaded from CR's website: [criticalresistance.org/resources/abortion-decriminalization/](https://criticalresistance.org/resources/abortion-decriminalization/)

#### Railroad Workers United

In September, a massive railway strike was diverted after workers reached a tentative new union contract with rail companies secured by the Biden Administration. Tens of thousands of railroad workers were prepared to strike and agreed to hold off while votes were tallied for several weeks after tense negotiations. A strike would shut down most railway service in the US and comes after decades of growing resentment over deteriorating work conditions and removal of standard worker benefits. Ron Kaminkow, locomotive engineer and union organizer with **Railroad Workers United**, says the current railway crisis is the result of 30 years of eroding labor protections: "There is a lot of momentum on our side and there is a lot of deep anger and resentment. The labor movement is on the resurgence."

## EAST COAST

### Pennsylvania

#### Carl Kabat, Presente!

The longtime anti-nuclear activist and Catholic priest **Carl Kabat** died at the age of 88. In 1980, he took part in the first **Plowshares action** when activists broke into a General Electric missile plant in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. They damaged missile nose cones beyond repair and poured their blood on the damaged parts. Kabat spent over 17 years in prison for his anti-nuclear activism.

### New York

#### Chipotle Workers Win Millions

Chipotle has agreed to pay a potential \$20 million settlement over violations of worker protection laws. The fast-food chain was found in violation of scheduling and sick-leave laws for 13,000 employees over the course of four years. The settlement is a result of 160 Chipotle employees organizing and filing complaints to the city's Department of Consumer and Worker Protection. Chipotle will also pay a \$1 million civil fine to the city. This is the largest settlement of its kind in New York City history.

## WEST COAST

### California

#### Reducing Sentencing

In August, the California Supreme Court ruled on *People v. Strong*. Mr. Strong was sentenced to life without parole as an accomplice to felony murder. The Court ruled that a pre-2015 special circumstance finding does not automatically bar his opportunity to petition for resentencing relief with **California Senate Bill (SB) 1437** and allows many people convicted of felony murder to get a sentence reduction. **California Coalition for Women Prisoners (CCWP)**, **Ella Baker Center for Human Rights**, **Felony Murder Elimination Project**, and the **Office of the State Public Defender - Indigent Defense Improvement Division** held a public celebration and virtual community info session to help folks learn how to support loved ones in the legal process.

#### Legislative Advance for CA Unions

**The United Food Workers (UFW)** launched a 24-day, 335-mile March for the Governor's Signature to support **Assembly Bill (AB) 2183**. After weeks of pressure from the community, celebrities, President Biden, and negotiations with UFW and the California Labor Federation, Gov. Newsom finally signed the bill into law. AB 2183 creates new ways for farmworkers to vote in union elections, including options for mail-in ballots and authorization cards submitted to the California Agricultural Labor Relations Board, in addition to the existing in-person voting process.

#### No Tech for Apartheid: San Francisco Bay Area

An employee at Google says she was forced out of the company for speaking out against a secretive **project to provide artificial intelligence tools to the Israeli government and military**. In her resignation letter, Ariel Koren wrote: "Google systematically silences Palestinian, Jewish, Arab and Muslim voices concerned about Google's complicity in violations of Palestinian human rights — to the point of formally retaliating against workers and creating an environment of fear."

**No Tech for Apartheid** then raised a call to action: "We're heeding the call from over 1000 Google and Amazon workers to rise up against the contract, known as Project Nimbus. Technology should be used to bring people together, not enable apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and settler-colonialism. Following in the footsteps of those who fought to divest from apartheid South Africa and won, it's our responsibility to rise up in support of Palestinian freedom."

## REST IN POWER, MIKE DAVIS!

CR joins communities of resistance in mourning the loss of historian, geographer, abolitionist intellectual and organizer Mike Davis who passed away October 25 at 76 after a long battle with cancer.

CR is indebted to Mike Davis and his precise analysis, sharp historical materialism, and ability to inspire revolutionary hope amidst bleak conditions under racial capitalism. Among many of Mike Davis's contributions to anti-capitalist liberatory struggle, he provided clarity of purpose for abolitionists to be able to assess tumultuous political, economic, and social landscapes. The importance of his powerful writing, analysis, activism, and organizing that sharpened our fights against systems of oppression cannot be overstated. His legacy and the body of work he leaves behind will continue to bolster efforts for liberation for generations to come.

Mike's anti-capitalist analysis has been foundational to CR's mission, how we understand systems of state violence and control, and how we can organize against them. Indeed, it was Mike who gave us the term "prison industrial complex" (PIC) to identify the interconnecting interests and structures that use policing, imprisonment, and surveillance as a way to address our society's social, political, and economic problems. Speaking at our founding conference in 1998, he articulated the stakes of the rise of the PIC and the severe impacts on Black, Brown, and working-class communities:

"Each of those prisons is a school or a hospital that will never be built. This California gulag archipelago is more of a direct threat and immediate danger, more of a hazard to the health of the people of California, than the San Andreas Fault. No society since Nazi Germany has built so many prisons in such a short amount of time."

Mike ended his talk with a directive to us and the budding fight for PIC abolition: "What do you do when you have these gray concrete [prison] walls? How do you knock a concrete wall down? Well, the answer is, you need a hammer. And you're the hammer." We proudly carry forward as the hammer to shatter the PIC, and will continue to do so forever propelled by the legacy of Mike Davis. Craig Gilmore, Mike's close comrade and CR Community Advisor, said: "In addition to the work he's left us, he introduced thousands of people to each other, to new organizations, to new & old ideas. He connected us in ways none of us could have imagined...[Rest in power] to a remarkably generous man."

¡Mike Davis, presente!

## THE SOUTH

### West Virginia

#### No Sacrifice Zones Resists Pipeline

In September, climate activists from Alaska, Indigenous peoples, and Appalachians rallied in Washington, DC against the construction of the **Mountain Valley Pipeline**, a natural gas pipeline spanning approximately 303 miles from northwestern West Virginia to southern Virginia. The protest — **No Sacrifice Zones!** — resisted concessions to West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin and the Inflation Reduction Act that would expedite the pipeline. Senator Bernie Sanders gave an address on the Senate floor calling it a "disastrous side deal" that undermines climate activism.

### Georgia

#### ¡Charles Sherrod, Presente!

Civil rights activist and minister **Charles Melvin Sherrod** died in October at the age of 85 in Albany, Georgia. Sherrod joined the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee** as its first full-time field secretary in 1961 and was a key figure in **the Albany movement**, which galvanized Georgians in the fight against segregation.

*Continued on next page*





Photo by Brooke Anderson, "Movement Photographer." Taken at a Safety Net for All Coalition rally in Sacramento, CA in June where hundreds of workers delivered 25,000 signatures to the governor demanding unemployment benefits for excluded immigrant workers.

tion and for voting rights in the Jim Crow South. He later went on to serve as Albany City commissioner and teach at Albany State University. He founded the Black-owned farming collective and land trust **New Communities** along with his wife Shirley Sherrod and others.

### Ashley Diamond is Free!

Ashley Diamond was freed in early August. Diamond is a Black transgender woman who sued the Georgia Department of Correction (GDC) twice over their refusal to protect her from sexual assault or provide her with adequate medical care. Ashley said "Although I'm elated to be released, I'm still damaged by what happened to me in prison and I'm worried about the people I left behind." Ashley is still in need of support. To find more information, check out: [freeashleydiamond.com](http://freeashleydiamond.com) and [@freeashley\\_now](https://twitter.com/freeashley_now) on social media.

### Florida

#### Hurricane Ian

In September, Hurricane Ian, a Category 4 hurricane, was one of the deadliest to ever hit Florida. The storm swept across Florida and South Carolina and all the way to Cuba, killing more than 100 people in the US. Among the hardest-hit areas were low-income communities of color like Dunbar and Harlem Heights in Lee County where officials didn't issue evacuation orders until the day before landfall. Even though not everyone had the means or ability to evacuate, millions of Florida residents were ordered to leave. Advocates and organizations including the **Restorative Justice Coalition** and **Fight Toxic Prisons** demanded the roughly 176,000 people caged in prisons, jails and detention centers throughout the state be included in the evacuation plan. The Lee County Sheriff's Office refused to evacuate people from Fort Myers jail even though the jail is in a mandatory evacuation zone. Storms are expected to intensify as climate change warms global ocean temperatures and triggers sea level rise along the coast.

#### Voter Repression

Governor Ron Desantis' new **election police force** is arresting people for voting, including many who are formerly incarcerated. The "election crimes" police squad was announced last year to catch voters in the act of "voting fraud". In collaboration with local and state police, the newly formed Office of Election Crimes arrested 20 people in August for alleged illegal voting in the 2020 election. The 20 arrested, despite prior convictions, were able to register to vote, misleading them to believe they could cast ballots.

A remnant of Jim Crow, Florida's felony disenfranchisement system has barred generations from voting with felony convictions, but in 2018 nearly two-thirds of Florida voters approved a constitutional amendment restoring voting rights to people with felonies. However, due to murky exceptions to the amendment, countless formerly imprisoned Floridians have struggled to understand their own eligibility, fearing voting could send them back to prison.

The 20 arrested thus far each face at least one felony charge with a penalty of up to five years in prison and thousands in fines. **Florida Rights Restoration Coalition** is connecting those arrested to pro-bono legal defenses.

### Alabama

At the end of September, thousands of Alabama prisoners began refusing to leave their cells or

attend work. Alabama prisons are considered the deadliest in the US and the Alabama Department of Corrections (ADOC) has been under federal investigation since 2016. The state incarcerates at a higher rate than any other in the US (39% higher than the national rate), resulting in severe overcrowding and horrendous conditions. Only 648 people were granted parole across the state in 2021; the number of people granted parole in Alabama has fallen 83 percent since 2019. Alabama is one of seven US states where prisoners are not paid for forced labor. In its fifth week, the action paused to allow ADOC to consider their demands:

- Eliminate life-without-parole sentences.
- Repeal Alabama's Habitual Felony Offender Act, which mandates longer sentences for those with prior convictions.
- Establish parole criteria that mandate release if met.
- Reduce the 30-year minimum for juveniles to no more than 15 before parole eligibility.
- Create a review board overseeing the Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Paroles.

Alabama prisoners have remained strong in the face of intense repression, including cutting food rations to starve prisoners, threatening incarceration to prisoners who work outside, systematic beatings, and solitary confinement.

#### Miners' Strike

Coal miners in Alabama have been striking for almost a year and a half for better pay and basic benefits. The group is organized with the **United Mine Workers of America (UMWA)** against Warrior Met Coal. The strike began in April 2021 and includes more than 1,000 miners; the impasse over a tentative agreement has been contentious and violent. The strike is a result of pay cuts during an ownership turnover of mines in Brookwood, booming steel prices amidst tariffs on Chinese steel, and a global construction surge prompted by COVID-19 stimulus packages. UMWA is now fighting a \$13.3 million fine, in part for property damage during the strike.

## INTERNATIONAL

### SOUTH AFRICA

On August 24, the people of South Africa held a **National Shutdown in protest of neoliberal policies of austerity** that have ruined the economy. **The Assembly of the Unemployed** joined this effort which calls for a monthly Basic Income Grant for all unemployed and the precariously/informally employed between the ages of 18-59; for the government to work with communities to ensure access to land and food security; raising the monthly Child Support Grant; initiating a government Wealth Tax; and restricting profit shifting and wage evasion which cost the country billions.

### PALESTINE

#### Hunger Strike Ends

In the occupied West Bank, a 40-year-old Palestinian prisoner, Khalil Awawdeh, ended a hunger strike that saw him subsist on only water for over 170 days. Israeli officials agreed to release him in October. He has been held without charge by Israel under its so-called administrative detention program since late 2021. From a hospital bed **Awawdeh** proclaimed, "...This victory is a continuation of the victories that our Palestinian people have achieved."

#### West Bank

Israeli forces raided and closed the offices of seven Palestinian civil society rights groups in the occupied West Bank, six of which Israeli authorities designated as "terrorist groups" last year. The raid came as the UN condemned Israel for killing 19 Palestinian children in recent weeks and 100 days after Israeli forces shot and killed Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh while covering an Israeli military raid in the Jenin refugee camp. Defense for Children International Palestine is one of the organizations targeted as part of

a multi-year campaign to delegitimize through criminalization the work of dozens of service-provider, legal, humanitarian and political groups challenging Israeli occupation.

### IRAN

#### Gender Liberation

Women in Iran and around the world have been protesting the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, a Kurdish woman who died in police custody September 13 for allegedly breaking hijab laws. These protests have been part of the largest wave of resistance to sweep the country since 2019. One month later, the death of 16-year-old Nika Shakarami ignited more public rage. Shakarami's family says she disappeared after being chased by security forces for burning her headscarf during a protest and was found 10 days later at a mortuary.

Protests are spreading to more provinces in Iran despite the government's deadly crackdown. In Iran's Kurdistan province, one group says at least 32 people in the region have been killed, another 1,500 injured and thousands arrested. Human rights groups say at least 185 people in Iran have been killed so far in the protests. Workers at one of Iran's major oil refineries went on strike in solidarity with the protests.

### HAITI

#### Self-Determined Solutions

The US and Canada shipped military equipment to Haiti after the US-backed Prime Minister Ariel Henry called for international involvement to combat "gang" activity. Thousands of people since August have taken to the streets protesting foreign military aid and occupation and demanding Henry's resignation. Protesters are demanding a Haitian-led solution to the nation's current humanitarian crisis, not the armed foreign intervention proposed by countries like the US and international humanitarian organizations.

### BRAZIL

#### From President to Prisoner to President Again

Leftist presidential candidate Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has won Brazil's runoff election, ousting far-right fascist President Jair Bolsonaro after just one term. Though Lula won with 50.9% of the vote, Bolsonaro took two days to concede, raising fears that he and his allies will deny the election result.

Lula, a former metal worker, union leader, and two-term president who held office from 2003 through 2010, has run on a leftist platform to uplift Brazil's poor, preserve the Amazon rainforest, and protect Brazil's Indigenous communities. His campaign is backed by a grassroots alliance that first formed as a mutual aid network in response to the pandemic. Brazilian socialist organizer Sabrina Fernandes says Lula is trying to return "democratic normality" after four years of Bolsonaro's environmental destruction, COVID denial, and undermining of the country's institutions.

### ARGENTINA

#### Solidarity with the Mapuche People

As part of an ongoing attack on the **Mapuche** struggle to defend their territory, there was a police raid on October 7, 2022, in **Villa Mascardi (Río Negro, Argentina)**, with the arrest of seven women from the Lafken Winkul Mapu community. Four of them—the Machi (spiritual leader) Betiana Ayelén Colhuan, Martha Luciana Jaramillo, Romina Rosas and María Celeste Ardaiz Guenumil—remain imprisoned. We join the demand for their liberation and stand in solidarity with the call to an end to the harassment of their communities. ♦



# UNTIL ALL ARE FREE: POLITICAL PRISONER UPDATES

In this issue's political prisoner updates, we highlight news from late Spring through early Fall 2022 regarding a few political prisoner cases. This column is in no way a complete list of all political prisoner cases. As a prison industrial complex (PIC) abolitionist organization, Critical Resistance fights for the release and freedom of all imprisoned people, whether recognized as political prisoners or not. We resist the use of imprisonment as a tool for political repression and control across our communities. Free them all!

**Albert Woodfox:** *Rest in Power!* Member of the Angola Three, who was imprisoned in solitary confinement for 43 years, died on August 4 at age 75. **Woodfox** was wrongfully convicted of the 1972 murder of a Louisiana prison guard and was only released in 2016 at the age of 69. *Long live Albert Woodfox!*

**Mutulu Shakur:** After 36 years of imprisonment, **Dr. Shakur is finally coming home!** A 72-year-old grandfather, respected healer and community health worker, Dr. Shakur was granted parole in early November 2022. Given six months to live in May 2022, activists and supporters have been campaigning for his compassionate release, gathering over 60,000 signatures in support. A former Black liberation fighter targeted by COINTELPRO, Dr. Shakur was a vital part of the Lincoln Detox Center from 1970 to 1978, a revolutionary community health project at the Lincoln Hospital in New York created by the Black Panthers and Young Lords parties. He has been a pioneering champion of acupuncture for addiction treatment ever since. Mutulu will reunite with his family and loved ones this December. We welcome him home!

**Lore Elisabeth:** *Welcome home!* After serving more than 26 months in federal detention for charges related to the 2020 uprisings against police brutality in Philadelphia, the community care worker is finally free. Below is a message from Lore to her supporters published by her solidarity committee:

"It's Lore here! I am out of prison and safely in the arms of family! Thank you all for your two+ years of urgent work and generous donations that all built up to my liberation! These efforts sustained myself and my peers in FDC (the Federal Detention Center). You filled my heart, my hands, and kept my mind free. I look forward to bringing you all in for continued support of the disproportionately affected Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people and parents incarcerated right now. If you can, please continue donating to my commissary drive, and keep your attention and action focused here for upcoming ways you can support those on the inside. Your sweet support in the future will swell my big dreams for those who remain stolen. Thank you all for being a light for punished people who need love, healing, accountability and liberation most of all. Please stay in touch with me on email ([freelore@protonmail.com](mailto:freelore@protonmail.com)), if you have ever written to me please send me your address again, I'm excited to stay in touch!"

**Kevin "Rashid" Johnson:** The revolutionary, writer, artist, social activist and Minister of Defense of the Revolutionary Intercommunal Black Panther Party, who has been imprisoned for 32 years (18 of which have been in solitary confinement), was diagnosed with prostate cancer on July 1 after a long wait for test results. Since receiving this diagnosis, he has been routinely denied any medical care and held in solitary confinement without the majority of his possessions. To support the call to **Free Rashid Now**, you can take action by calling or emailing the stakeholders below. He requests to please not copy/paste the script in emails or read a script verbatim, as this makes little impact. Please mention that you are phoning for your



Acrylic painting on Canvas by Melanie Cervantes, Dignidad Rebelde.

friend Kevin Johnson, inmate number 1007485, imprisoned at Sussex 1 State Prison in Virginia.

### Points you may want to raise when calling:

- › Mr. Johnson has been diagnosed with prostate cancer, and needs to receive appropriate medical care, including access to doctors, a healthy diet, and any treatments immediately.
- › Mr. Johnson does not belong in solitary confinement and must be granted access to all of his property immediately.

### People to Contact:

Beth Cabell, Lead Warden  
Phone: (804) 834-9967

Harold W. Clarke, Director of VADOC  
PO Box 26963  
Richmond, VA 23261  
Phone: (804) 674-3000  
[docmail@vadoc.virginia.gov](mailto:docmail@vadoc.virginia.gov)

Steve Herrick, Health Services Director  
[healthservicesinquiries@vadoc.virginia.gov](mailto:healthservicesinquiries@vadoc.virginia.gov)  
Phone: (804) 887-8118

**Anti-Line 3 Pipeline Anishinaabe Water Protectors:** A not guilty verdict was handed down in July for **Indigenous water protectors** in so-called Minnesota. The group was arrested while holding a prayer ceremony at the Mississippi River headwaters during Enbridge's Line 3 Pipeline construction, in exercise of their treaty-reserved rights to protect sacred waters and all life that flows from it. *A victory for Indigenous sovereignty!*

**Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin:** Supporters of the former Black Panthers leader, who is caged in a federal prison in Tucson, are calling for his exoneration. **Al-Amin** was a Black Panthers leader and a former chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the 1960s. He was targeted and convicted of murder in 2002 and sentenced to life in prison in Georgia, challenging his imprisonment in 2019 on the ground of constitutional rights violated at trial. The Supreme Court declined to take his case. Despite serving a life sentence for a Georgia state offense, **Al-Amin** is currently imprisoned at the United States Penitentiary in Tucson and supporters are calling for him to be transferred back to the custody of the state of Georgia so that he can effectively fight for exoneration. Supporters also are calling on the federal government to provide proper medical treatment as he has recently become legally blind due to denial of cataract surgery for three years. *Free Jamil Al-Amin, free 'em all!*

**Palestinian Prisoners on Hunger Strike:** On Sunday, September 25, 2022, 30 Palestinian pris-

oners under Israeli "administrative detention" announced an open-ended hunger strike to #EndAdministrativeDetention. According to the Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network, over 740 prisoners are currently jailed without trial or knowledge of evidence against them. At a press conference outside the Ofer military prison, Palestinian prisoners' institutions and family members of the hunger strikers, including the Palestinian Prisoners' Society and Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, read the following message from the hunger strikers:

"Our demand is: clean air, a sky without bars, a space of freedom, and a family gathering around the table. The demand of the occupation is to separate us from our social reality and our national and humanitarian role and turn us into dry fragments. Between our demand and their demand, the occupying power carries out the abhorrent policy of administrative detention. We are the sons of the land, the heirs of Abu Ammar, al-Hakim, al-Yassin, al-Shiqaqi and al-Qassim, and the heirs of all the martyrs. Wherever we find that space of struggle, we cut the path and raise the sword, realizing what awaits us: repression, abuse, isolation, confiscation of our clothes and photos of our children, being thrown into cement cells devoid of everything except for our bodies and our pain, constant searches, ongoing transfers, no cigarettes, no bottles of water, we can barely catch a breath of air."

**Leonard Peltier:** On September 1, **Peltier's** Walk to Justice departed from Minneapolis, Minnesota, a 15-week march passing through multiple Midwest cities, ending in Washington, D.C. on November 14. Rallies and prayer sessions have been held along the route, including in Eau Claire, Madison, Chicago, Southbend, Toledo, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh. The walk is being coordinated by the American Indian Movement (AIM) Grand Governing Council to demand Elder Leonard Peltier's release from federal prison. As always, *free Leonard Peltier!*

**Chris "Naeem" Trotter and John "Balagoon" Cole:** Call to action! Also known as the Pendleton 2, Trotter and Cole are political prisoners from Indianapolis who were wrongfully convicted and extremely harshly sentenced to a combined 226 years in prison for leading the 1985 Pendleton Correctional Facility prisoner rebellion against white supremacist guard brutality. The state is currently attempting to block Trotter's sentence modification hearing. The judge can either side with the state or give him the hearing he's owed. Sign the letter TODAY to let Judge Dudley know you stand with Chris: <http://bit.ly/FreeThePendleton>. Supporters of the two are also pushing a campaign for clemency from Indiana governor Eric Holcomb. Visit [linktr.ee/freedomcampaign](http://linktr.ee/freedomcampaign) for more information, and *free the Pendleton 2!*

### Other updates:

**Francisco "Franky" Velgara Valentín:** The dedicated independentista, revolutionary socialist, and internationalist died in NYC on August 25 at the age of 78. He was a lifelong fighter for Puerto Rican independence, supported Revolutionary Cuba, stood with the Vietnamese revolution, gave his unyielding support to mass movements in Latin America, helped to found revolutionary formations in Puerto Rico and the Diaspora, and worked to free all US-held political prisoners. *¡Franky Velgara Valentín, presente!*

**Running Down the Walls** is held in cities across the globe. Check to [abcf.net](http://abcf.net) to see a report back. Every year, prisoners and supporters of political prisoners organize solidarity events with Running Down the Walls. All funds go to the Warchest, which go directly to political prisoners. The Warchest program was initiated in November 1994. Its purpose is to collect monthly funds from groups and individual supporters, and send that money to political prisoners and prisoners of war via monthly checks. ♦



# CALL FOR CONTENT

## Help shape the content of *The Abolitionist*

Make your voice heard in our paper!

Submit content by writing a piece for either our Features section  
OR one of our columns

The Features section in **Issue 39**, to be released by **June 2023**, will focus on struggles for **reproductive justice**. **Issue 40's** Features will focus on **control units**, and will be released in late Fall 2023.

Send us an essay, an article, research, a poem, a story, a play, a comic, art, a personal reflection, or questions on these topics for our upcoming Features sections!

- **Issue 39 Submission Deadline: Friday, March 3, 2023.**
- **Issue 40 Submission Deadline: Friday, September 8, 2023.**

There are many ways for you to shape the content of the paper, either by submitting a piece to our Features section or by supporting one of our columns. Check out all of the ways you can submit content for *The Abolitionist*:

### 1. Write a piece for our Features

- Pieces in Features can be different functions of writing—including theoretical, to reflective or action-oriented—and they will all share a common focus, theme, or topic of consideration. **Check the Feature focus for issues 39 and 40!**

### 2. Submit content for one of our columns

- Send a **Kite to the Editors**
- Request to be an author of an **Inside-Outside Fishing Line**. Suggest a few topics you would like to discuss for the fishing line's discourse.
- Contribute a report or an update on organizing inside for our **Movement Highlights** column.
- **Write a poem or song lyrics** that relate to the features or any other topic of your choice.
- **Make visual art** to complement the Features section or one of our columns.
- **Create a political cartoon** for our Features focus for either Issue 39 or 40, or work with us to become a regular political cartoonist for the paper.
- **Reflect** on how you use *The Abby* in your study and **share that reflection for our 9971 column**, or send us your responses

to "The Work and Us" survey and write up a reflection on your relationship to labor for a future Kite.

### Some approaches to writing Kites to the Editors:

- Elaborate on something that you agreed with in an article and explain why you agreed with it.
- Elaborate on something that you disagreed with in an article and explain why you disagreed with it.
- Relate an article to other things you have read, watched, heard, or experienced.
- Write a note to the editors sharing questions that you believe are timely and necessary in this political moment and that you would like answered by Critical Resistance.

Send submissions to the Kites to the Editors section to:

The Abolitionist Paper  
Attn: Kites to the Editors  
P.O. Box. 22780  
Oakland, CA 94609-2391

**Please make sure you read our Submission Guidelines before working on a submission to ensure your piece aligns with how we decide what to print..**

Send your submission to:

Critical Resistance  
Attn: The Abolitionist  
P.O. Box. 22780  
Oakland, CA 94609-2391

### SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:

SEND US YOUR WRITING AND  
ARTWORK!

We accept articles, letters, creative writing, poetry, interviews, and artwork in English or Spanish.

### IDEAS FOR ARTICLES AND ARTWORK

- Examples of prisoner organizing
- Practical steps toward prison industrial complex abolition
- Ways to help keep yourself and others physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually 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, imprisonment, and surveillance
- Experiences of life after or before imprisonment
- Creative or reflective writing *with an abolitionist message*
- Freedom dreams and imaginative pieces with radical vision
- Your opinion about a piece published in a recent issue
- Reflections on how you've used the paper (in your conversations, work, study groups)
- Empowering, liberatory art of resistance and community power (and that will print well)

### LENGTH

- Articles should not be more than 1500 words (about five handwritten pages)
- Letters should not be more than 250 words

### 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. Instead of your name, you can choose an alias, publish your piece anonymously, or use your initials.
- If possible, send a copy of your submission and not the original

### WRITING SUGGESTIONS

- 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.

**Notes on Editing:** We edit all pieces for both content and grammar. We will send you a copy of the piece before printing it. **As an abolitionist publication, we do not print material we find in some way perpetuates oppression or legitimizes the prison industrial complex.** Given that institutional mail can be slow and purposefully delayed at times (or even disappeared), please make note in your submission of phrases or sections you would like the editorial collective to print unedited if there are any.

## SUBSCRIBE TO THE ABOLITIONIST!

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