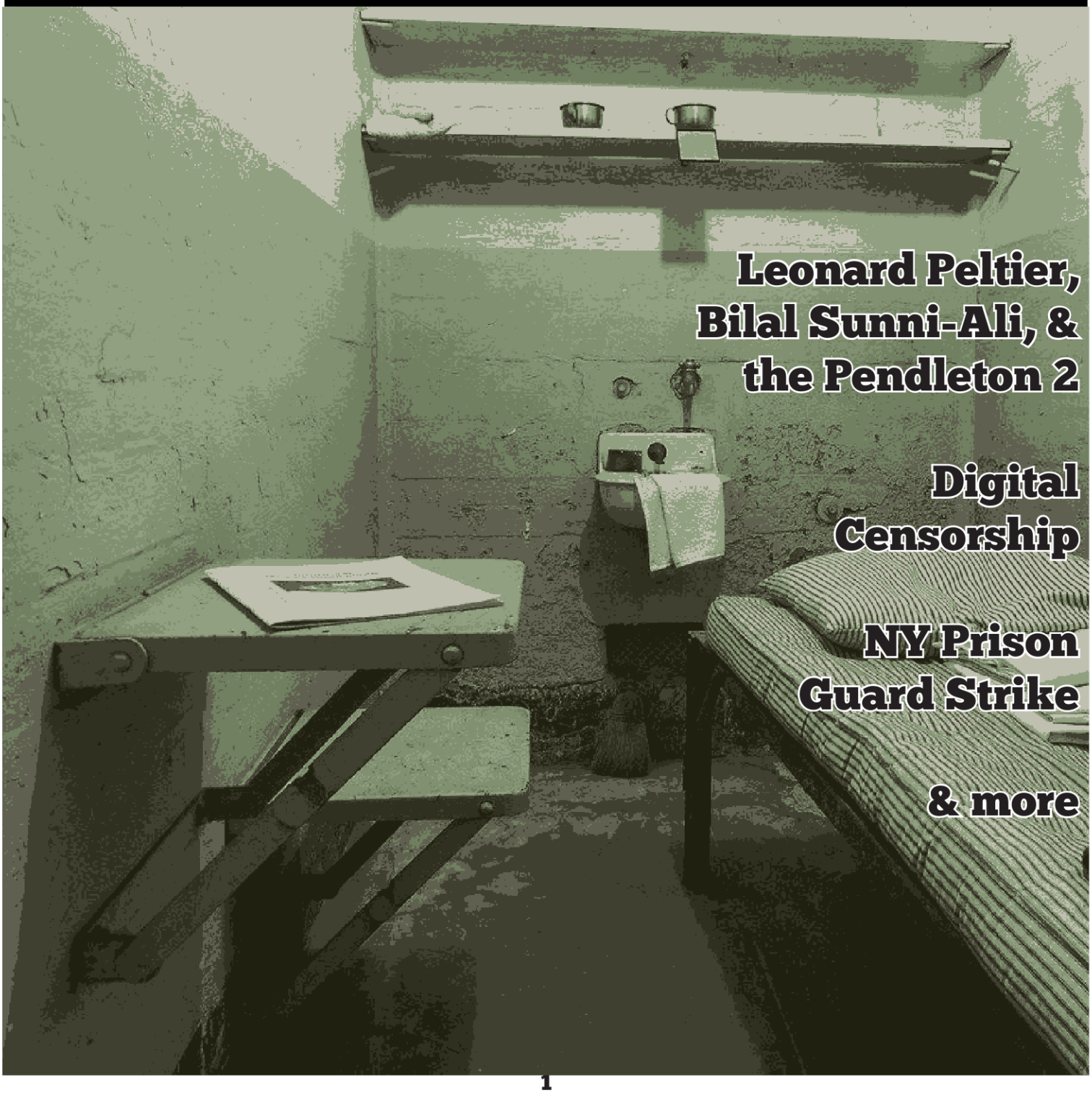
TIME/CUT

Indiana Prison Newsletter

Issue 16 · Spring 2025



Leonard Peltier, Bilal Sunni-Ali, & the Pendleton 2

Digital Censorship

NY Prison Guard Strike

& more

TIME/cut is a quarterly publication for Indiana prisoners and their families and friends. It includes news, analysis, and resources from inside and outside the walls and around the world. The articles in the publication do not necessarily reflect on its contributors, creators, readers, distributors, or readers. Its contents are for informational purposed only. TIME/cut does not provide financial or legal assistance or romantic arrangements.

The following are welcome as submissions, contributions, and responses to TIME/cut: reports of conditions inside, book reviews, poetry and artwork, tips for surviving and navigating prison, advice for mental and physical health, educational history, and offerings toward collective organizing and getting free. Please state explicitly if you would like your writings to be considered for publication and if you'd like your name published with it. This publication depends on participation of those incarcerated in Indiana and their loved ones. TIME/cut may choose not to publish some contributions due to limitations of space or the nature of the content. Send submissions to:

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TIME/cut is free to all prisoners in Indiana. If someone passed this newsletter along to you and you're not already on the mailing list, write to us to add your name to the list. If you would like to be removed from the mailing list, write us for that too. If family and friends on the outside are interested in receiving and engaging with TIME/cut, send them our address or direct them to Timecut.noblogs.org. Thanks for reading and writing!

Table of Contents

Write to us!

We are working on making RMN more intentional, more thorough, and more curated. One of our main goals here is to be more conversational with and among prisoners: more original content and more ongoing discussions and analysis. Each issue will have some prompts, some invitations for engagement. To this end, the questions we have for you all this time are:

- *Have you seen any change in DOC operations or treatment of prisoners since the second Trump administration began?*
- *How can prisoners be included in the organizing and fighting agaisnt rising facsism?*
- *How are prisoners organizing and fighting for themselves, where they are?*

solution to RMN #15's crossword puzzle

K	I	A	■	A	C	D	C	■	O	R	A	N	G	E	I	S
I	D	L	E	C	H	A	T	■	R	I	T	U	A	L	L	Y
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T	H	E	N	E	W	B	L	A	C	K	■	S	E	A	S	■
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A	T	M	■	S	I	R	I	■	S	Y	N	C	H	I	N	G
S	O	U	L	O	N	I	C	E	■	■	■	E	A	R	L	E
K	O	T	O	■	G	O	E	S	F	O	R	■	W	E	A	N
S	T	U	N	S	■	■	■	P	R	I	S	O	N	L	I	T
T	H	E	G	U	L	A	G	■	A	L	V	A	■	Y	D	S
O	Y	L	■	P	I	L	O	T	■	S	P	F	S	■	■	■
■	■	■	M	E	D	I	U	M	S	■	■	■	A	P	E	■
■	T	H	A	R	■	A	R	C	H	I	P	E	L	A	G	O
D	W	A	R	F	I	S	M	■	E	L	E	V	E	N	A	M
Y	O	U	L	L	S	E	E	■	L	A	K	E	S	I	D	E
E	S	S	A	Y	I	S	T	■	L	Y	E	S	■	C	S	N

Solidarity from Solitary and Beyond
by Michelle Pitcher
from TexasObserver.org
Sept. 2024

Julio "Alex" Zuniga ends the messages he sends from his prison cell with the signoff "Solidarity forever." He sometimes includes a postscript with music recommendations, leaning toward vibey alt-pop and indie—a somewhat surprising mix for the self-described anarchist activist. He prefers to be called Alex, but many of his contacts inside and outside of prison know him as "Comrade Z."

He's the man people who have been at the Memorial Unit (formerly called Darrington), a 1,610-bed state prison in southeast Texas, point to when asked about organizing on the inside. Like everyone else locked up in Texas who is physically and mentally able, Zuniga, a 44-year-old from San Antonio, was required to work without pay while housed at Memorial, near the unincorporated town of Rosharon, from 2018 to 2023. He tended livestock and labored in the agricultural fields, where he'd cut weeds and harvest carrots, cabbages, and onions. Before these fields were owned by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), they were plantation land worked by slaves.

While he grew up on the South Side of San Antonio, Zuniga spent some of his youth in the rural outskirts of Laredo. This was the extent of his previous exposure to agriculture, but he took to farmwork somewhat easily. "I love animals, and I love playing with dirt," he told the Texas Observer in a March interview.

But, as he began reading about the history of the land he was working and its roots in slavery—and as he learned more about labor movements—he started advocating for himself. He would occasionally refuse to work, telling officers he wouldn't return to the fields until he received requested safety gear like boots and masks. He'd get slapped with a disciplinary case—prison policy says that anyone who refuses to work can lose visitation privileges, be confined to their cell, or receive other punishments that can affect their chances of parole. Zuniga is currently about 11 years into a 15-year sentence.

In the end, though, Zuniga said that pushing back would usually get him the things he asked for.

In 2019, he became involved with the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC), a prisoner-led arm of the 119-year-old labor union the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). "Sometimes they say it's illegal [for prisoners to unionize], but it's not," Zuniga said. "It's just frowned upon. But it works."

Incarcerated workers are not considered "employees" under federal or state law, and they lack protections guaranteed to other workers—including the right to organize and collectively bargain under the National Labor Relations Act of 1935. That New Deal-era act of Congress is the bedrock legal safeguard for free-world workers who take collective action to improve their terms of employment, but its protection stops at the prison door. Further, incarcerated laborers lack the right to file an Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) complaint, and they generally cannot sue over job-related discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Absent these protections, organizers must get creative when pushing for things like pay for incarcerated workers and recognition as employees.

Zuniga's organizing efforts—which include appearing on podcasts and writing articles, attempting to organize collective work stoppages, and developing relationships with staff to address problems like bug infestations—were bolstered by IWOC's unincarcerated members, including Courtney Montoya.

Based in New Mexico, Montoya works with prisoners nationwide but said she often hears from Texans about being forced to work while sick or in unbearable heat. TDCJ does not track which work areas are air-conditioned, but many job assignments, including agriculture and maintenance, take place at least partially outside, where workers are subjected to increasingly hotter average annual temperatures.

"[Connecting with labor organizers] provides folks with that lifeline," Montoya told the Observer. "There's somebody watching. There's somebody out there. It's not just for the person, but it's also to signal to the [prison] administration that there's eyes on this."

According to TDCJ data, 2,323 prisoners were injured on the job in 2023, more than half in food service. That figure is likely incomplete, as prisoners say they often receive disciplinary cases if they report injuries, so they're less likely to report on-the-job accidents.

Amanda Hernandez, director of communications for TDCJ, told the Observer that officials do not punish prisoners for reporting work injuries. "However, inmates

who do not follow proper safety and security procedures may receive disciplinary action," she wrote in an email.

In 1865, the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolished slavery—except as punishment for a crime. This legally permits Texas to force the incarcerated, including more than 40,000 people convicted of nonviolent crimes, to work for no pay under threat of punishment. Texas is one of only seven states that takes advantage of this free forced labor.

Hernandez told the Observer that the agency follows medical staff's recommendations if someone is hurt, but several currently incarcerated Texans said they received job assignments contrary to medical restrictions or were punished or ignored when too ill or injured to work.

original art from Alex "Comrade Z." Zuniga

Jamon Hestand, who's currently incarcerated at the Robertson Unit, a 3,000-bed lockup in Abilene, told the Observer it's "hard as hell" to get dismissed from work because of a disability or medical condition.

Since 2021, at least 240 work-related complaints have been filed by incarcerated Texans to the Office of the Independent Ombudsman, according to public records obtained and analyzed by the Observer. The ombudsman office reports directly to the chairman of the Texas Board of Criminal Justice, TDCJ's politically appointed oversight board. (Prisoners, employees, and the public can use the ombudsman to request non-criminal investigations or log official grievances.) The most common reason for work-related complaints is being medically unable to work but being forced to do so, according to the records. Other common reasons were harassment, retaliation, or lack of proper equipment.

While TDCJ keeps general statistics on work-related injuries, the same isn't true for deaths. Although the agency reports all in-custody deaths to the state attorney general's office, it is not required to say whether any deaths were due to work-related injuries, including heatstroke. The agency doesn't even track this internally. In an email response to a public information request, a representative with the TDCJ Office of the General Counsel wrote, "Because of the variety of factors that may lead to death, TDCJ does not track [job-related deaths] in this way. We do not capture that particular metric in our reports."

The Observer found multiple reports on in-custody deaths that mentioned work assignments in public records released by TDCJ over the last 20 years, but most reports gave little detail and were unclear about whether the death was work-related. According to a heavily redacted autopsy report released by TDCJ, 41-year-old Michael Wagley died in August 2016 from injuries sustained when the tractor he was using for his job on the farm at the Beto Unit in East Texas rolled on top of him. In 2005, an incarcerated maintenance worker at the Ramsey Unit in Rosharon died after being electrocuted by a live wire. In 2009, two prisoners working on a water line in Huntsville were electrocuted. One died of his injuries. And in December 2021 58-year-old Ronald Lake died of heart disease, TDCJ officials reported, four hours after being allowed to leave his work assignment at Ramsey.

Over the past decade, organizations like IWOC have helped empower people inside prisons to seek better conditions, including the right to be paid and to refuse work. At the same time, outside support for incarcerated workers has increased among legal scholars and advocates, who have sued prisons and fought for legal protections.

In recent years, several states have passed constitutional amendments to outlaw slavery as punishment for a crime—Colorado in 2018; Utah and Nebraska in 2020; and Alabama, Oregon, Tennessee, and Vermont in 2022. Similar amendments are on the ballot in California and Nevada this November. (For Texas to join these states, a supermajority of the GOP-dominated Legislature would be required, followed by voter approval.) These pushes have been the result of outside advocacy groups, prison organizers, and legislator buy-in.

Prison unions don't function like most others. Rather than having strict membership status and dues, IWOC primarily distributes information on how to organize, and its outside "locals"—in more than a dozen states, Washington, D.C.,

and the United Kingdom—answer questions from and advocate for prisoners. Membership is free for prisoners. Because of this loose structure, it's unclear how many incarcerated Texans consider themselves members, but IWOC founding member Brianna Peril told the Observer there are "thousands of people [in prisons] around the United States who have read the materials and the literature and who feel like they are members of the IWW." She said incarcerated workers take ideas "and just run with it."

Because of the unique relationship between incarcerated workers and their quasi-employer, prisoners lack contracts or any legal mechanism for collectively bargaining. "The absence of unions, or collective bargaining more generally, contributes to the exploitation of prisoner-workers by amplifying the imbalance in the labor-management power dynamic," wrote Katherine Leung, an attorney with the National Labor Relations Board, in a 2018 article in the Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review.

Incarcerated workers also have no right to picket or distribute flyers to gain public support. What they more often do, at the risk of racking up parole-threatening disciplinary actions, is strike.

IWOC has backed some of the largest prisoner-led labor strikes in history. In 2016, incarcerated workers from multiple states withheld their labor to honor the 45th anniversary of the historic 1971 Attica Prison uprising—the bloody demonstration during which prisoners took control of the New York facility to fight for better conditions, calling for an end to modern-day slavery. After cellphone footage of the 2016 strike leaked, the U.S. Department of Justice conducted an investigation and published a report on living conditions and violence in Alabama's prisons. Similar strikes took place in 2018 and 2023 in various states, including Texas.

This December, IWOC, along with Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, another national collective involving prisoner activists based in Pennsylvania, is calling for a weeklong work stoppage in prisons nationwide to coincide with outside demonstrations calling for an end to the 13th Amendment's exception clause. Jailhouse Lawyers Speak is offering assistance to prisoners who face retaliation for participating.

Zuniga said he faced severe punishment for his organizing efforts, spending much of his time at the Memorial Unit in solitary confinement. He said he was assigned to work in the fields while he was in solitary, even though TDCJ policy states people on that security level cannot work. He eventually appealed to the prison ombudsman to get a unit change and was transferred in 2023 to the agriculture-focused Ramsey Unit nearby.

"I think it was worth the risk," Zuniga said. "But in the end, I had to pay the price."

Incarcerated workers in the United States have been striking for as long as there have been prisons. People at the Walnut Street Prison, established in Pennsylvania in the late 18th century, would hold "Blue Mondays"—so named in reference to workers' general malaise at the start of the week—during which they would stop work, lay down their tools, and demand better conditions. After the Civil War, prisoner strikes helped stir up public outcry around convict leasing, the practice of hiring out incarcerated workers to private contractors used in Texas and many other states.

The handiwork of Texas prisoners is visible in the state's most iconic building, as incarcerated laborers quarried the pink granite used to build the current Capitol, dedicated in 1888. Union stonecutters, fearing the effect of prison labor on free-world wages, refused to work for a time on the construction project.

Historically, prison organizing has come in waves: after World War II, during the 1960s and '70s, and over the past decade. Still, those unions can be easily stamped out by prison officials. Some states, not including Texas, have laws against prison strikes. When asked whether TDCJ allows prison unions to meet, Hernandez told the Observer, "There are no inmate union meetings held inside TDCJ."

In 1977, the Supreme Court ruled in Jones v. North Carolina Prisoners' Labor Union that incarcerated workers don't have an explicit constitutional right to unionize. The court left it up to prison administrators to decide, based on their opinions of how dangerous unions might be.

In a dissent, Justice Thurgood Marshall noted that the court had previously made strides toward protecting incarcerated people's rights and this was a step back. "The decision today is an aberration, a manifestation of the extent to which the very phrase 'prisoner union' is threatening to those holding traditional conceptions of the nature of penal institutions," Marshall wrote.

In the immediate aftermath, many legal scholars argued that prison unions could be an important tool for rehabilitation and that prison officials should be given less deference. Some pushed back against the idea that prison unions

would be dangerous, with social scholar Stephen Woolpert issuing "a relatively benign prognosis of unionization's impact on the performance of correctional institutions."

The Jones ruling was a blow to prison labor organizing, but it didn't entirely shut the door on "groups like the IWOC who wish to pick up the mantle of inmate labor organizing today," wrote legal rights scholar Keith Armstrong in 2020.

IWOC is not the first group to attempt to unionize Texas prisoners in the modern era. The Texas Prison Labor Union was founded in 1995. Its aim, as described in 1998 by the Prison Legal News, a magazine produced by the nonprofit Human Rights Defense Center, was to "organize Texas prisoners and their supporters into a single body to promote social justice, human rights, and workers' rights." The union, funded by member dues and donations, distributed a flier with updates on lawsuits against the prison system, helped connect prisoners with researchers, and provided other resources (including a booklet of Tai Chi exercises). As recently as 2023, people describing themselves as members of the union have contacted legislators calling for pay for prisoners.

In July 2014, IWOC minted its statement of purpose, which is to build solidarity among incarcerated and nonincarcerated workers and to support "those engaging in collective action or who put their own lives at risk to improve the conditions of all."

Peril, the IWOC founding member, told the Observer that previously no nationwide union had "really tied together and pushed forward ideas about how having prison slavery as a competing labor force undermines everyone's conditions in the workplace."

In 2019, Weldon Thompson worked as a plumber at the Garza East Unit, a small men's prison near Beeville. While locked up, he had been trained and stationed in the unit's maintenance shop. In February of that year, a maintenance supervisor ordered Thompson to weld wheels onto the base of a commercial deep fryer in order to make it moveable, a task that was outside of his job description and beyond his training. But, he "went on and welded the wheels to avoid getting in trouble," according to a lawsuit filed by Thompson against TDCJ and the supervisor. The supervisor who gave the order didn't stick around to oversee the work.

When he was finished, Thompson and another man tried to move the massive fryer. That's when pieces of the appliance fell onto Thompson's hand, pinning and crushing it. His right pinky finger was fractured and his middle finger was smashed, requiring nine stitches to close the wound, according to the lawsuit. He underwent surgery to fix it about a week later, but the pinky finger ended up being amputated. He also suffered nerve damage to his right wrist.

Given the injuries to his hand, prison officials allegedly told Thompson he'd be exempt from work—he'd be what's known as "medically unassigned," the court records say. But, according to the lawsuit, he continued to be assigned work and received multiple disciplinary cases for telling officials he was supposed to be exempted.

Thompson's lawsuit, filed in 2019, is one of at least eight active state and federal suits against TDCJ regarding improper training or equipment and other unsafe working conditions. Another suit, filed in 2023, alleges that officials at the Powledge Unit in Palestine forced metal fabrication shop workers to use tools with incompatible attachments.

In July 2021, Jose Medina was using a grinder when an improper attachment "exploded into his face shield causing high-velocity projectiles to lacerate his face and mouth," per the 2023 suit. In a 2019 lawsuit, a prisoner at the 2,130-bed Gib Lewis Unit in East Texas describes getting injured after slipping and falling while working in the kitchen. He had informed officials numerous times that there were no rubber steel-toe boots in his size, which would protect against slick floors, before he was injured, the lawsuit says.

Taking the prison system to court can be a route to obtain better working conditions, but it's difficult to win a case. The 1995 federal Prison Litigation Reform Act limited incarcerated workers' rights to sue by requiring them to exhaust multiple steps in a grievance process first. Often, personal injury lawsuits apply only to individual workers, so court-ordered improvements wouldn't necessarily improve overall conditions.

By and large, prisoners who can't sue or organize lack control over their working conditions, cannot refuse potentially hazardous tasks, and have little or no recourse after being injured. TDCJ has its own policies that purport to protect workers, but they're often ineffective, according to critics and prisoner lawsuits.

Hernandez, the TDCJ spokesperson, told the Observer via email, "All inmates and employees are required to complete safety training related to their job assignments,"

Cooking in Lock-Up

Spring Rolls

From "Not Your Average Noodle"
The Taste Buds: Jon "D-Boi" Brown, R. Ya'iyr Carter, and Pierre "polo" Pinson.

Ingedients
(Makes 6)
6 tortillas
2 cups coleslaw
cold water
1/3 cup of Asian-style Sweet Chili sauce
½ tsp black pepper

Instructions
Rinse coleslaw thoroughly by mixing cold water and coleslaw in a plastic bag, and shaking. Strain by squeezing coleslaw in bottom of bag, forcing water to the top to dump it out. Refill with water and repeat 3-4 times or until water is clear.

Stir is Asian sauce and black pepper. Set in preheated stinger for 20 minutes. Allow to cool. Scoop 2 spoons of filling onto nearest edge of tortilla. Tightly roll it 2 times. Fold-in sides.
Complete roll. Set in stinger on open foil chip bag with lip side of roll facing down.

Cook for 30 minutes on each side, or longer for crispier rolls.

Tip
Add finely chopped bacon, spicy summer sausage or precooked egg to filling.

"Legacy"

Reginald Dwayne Betts

after George Jackson

Because something else must belong to him,
More than these chains, these cuffs, these cells-
Something more than Hard Rock's hurt,
More Than remembrances of where men
Go mad with cravings-corpuscle, epidermis,
Flesh, men buried in the whale of it, all of it,
Because the so many of us mute ourselves,
Silent before the box, fascinated by the drama
Of confined bodies on prime-time television,
These prisons sanitized for entertainment &
These indeterminate sentences hidden, because
We all lack this panther's rage, the gift
Of Soledad & geographies adorned with state numbers
& names of the dead & dying etched on skin,
This suffering, wild loss, under mass cuffs,
Those buried hours must be about more
Than adding to this surfeit of pain as history
As bars that once held him embrace us

all workers get appropriate personal protective equipment, and each unit has an OSHA-certified risk manager who performs weekly and monthly inspections.

Despite the often dangerous conditions, many incarcerated workers value their jobs, saying they would opt in even if the work requirement fell away. But when accidents happen, even the happiest worker can become frustrated with the lack of protections.

Stephanie Barron received a certificate in 2022 that showed she had completed her on-the-job training to work as an electrician at the Murray Unit in Gatesville. The following year, she was assigned to the maintenance department. She told the Observer she loves her job and working in general; she "prefers to be productive" and is not involved in any prison organizing.

"I have been fortunate to have good working conditions for the majority of my incarceration," Barron said. "Offenders in food service have much poorer conditions. I have truly been blessed not to have had that job for a long period of time."

But, in April, she went with a different boss than usual to inspect generators, which are checked weekly to make sure they'll kick in during a power outage. While walking along the side of a generator, Barron slipped into a tire well, slamming her knee and popping it out of joint. She fell only two or three feet, but the damage was severe enough that she couldn't walk. The supervisor with her alerted medical personnel, who eventually called 911.

It was the first time Barron had been seriously injured on the job. She had torn ligaments and fractured her leg. When she spoke with the Observer in mid-May, weeks after the accident, the only medical treatment she had received was a 30-day prescription for a high dose of ibuprofen. She was given a brace, crutches, and temporary access to a wheelchair, but her requests for something to elevate her leg were ignored until she eventually filed a grievance. And she waited weeks for an MRI.

"That is the extent of 'medical care,'" she told the Observer. In late July, she wrote to say she was finally going into surgery, three months after her injury.

While incarcerated workers sometimes turn to grievances, unions, or the legal system to effect change from the inside, outside advocates are pushing to change how the law treats imprisoned laborers.

Savannah Eldrige, a co-founder of the Coalition to Abolish Slavery-Texas, was part of the successful 2022 push to change the Alabama constitution to abolish forced prison labor. Similar efforts in Texas have been unsuccessful. In 2019, sympathetic state representatives filed legislation to pay incarcerated workers; the bill got a hearing but died in committee. In 2021 and 2023, state Senator Borris Miles and Representative Alma Allen, both Black Houston Democrats, proposed constitutional amendments to prohibit slavery as punishment for a crime, but none of these measures received a hearing. Eldrige said the movement has gotten "little to no response" from most lawmakers.

Eldrige's coalition is part of a larger, nationwide coalition known as the Abolish Slavery National Network. While the goal is to end slavery state by state, each venue provides its own challenges and therefore needs its own playbook, organizers say.

In Texas, Eldrige says this means focusing on raising public awareness—speaking on panels, commissioning murals, appearing on podcasts. "The first part is to get heard, and I don't think that the bill will be heard if we can't reach more people," she said.

On the federal level, Democratic Senator Cory Booker of New Jersey has introduced bills that aim to recognize incarcerated workers as employees under the law and give them at least some of the same protections and privileges as workers outside, including fair wages and OSHA protections. "The current state of prison labor in America is inhumane and unacceptable," Booker said in a statement in February.

Although slow-moving, these legislative efforts give inside activists hope that things could change someday. Hestand, the incarcerated man at the Robertson prison, told the Observer that organizing inside is difficult. "We can't do without legitimate outside help," he wrote.

Texans organizing inside prisons, in the absence of meaningful legal protections, say it can be disheartening to push for change against the all-powerful prison system.

Even Alex Zuniga has had to take a break from organizing. He stepped away from union organizing in 2023 after his friend and fellow IWOC member died in prison and he and other organizers were separated by releases and unit changes. He remembers writing to state Representative Carl Sherman, a DeSoto Democrat, saying: "I lost this battle. They tore us all apart, they broke us all up. It's over

… so how do I go back to being a prisoner?"

In March, he told the Observer he'd become tired of being an adversary to the system and was focusing on his upcoming parole hearing and studying for his GED exam. He's a talented artist, able to create photo-realistic portraits with a No. 2 pencil, so he spent some time honing his craft.

"I'm super scared, but it's natural I guess," he wrote in a hopeful letter after that parole interview. "I'm ready to start living again, I'm ready to begin giving back to the community, and live for helping others. Lately, I've been struggling with my living area, it's so loud all the time. But I just keep trying, and pushing for a better outcome soon." When he got out, he said he wanted to be part of a Christian ministry in Dallas headed by Sherman.

On April 26, the TDCJ Board of Pardons and Paroles rejected Zuniga's request for release. Instead of immediate freedom, he'd have to serve another four-and-a-half years.

On April 30, Zuniga wrote to the Observer, saying in light of that result he was going to contact IWOC about getting involved again. "This will help sustain me for the remainder of my time," he wrote. "I gotta look out for what's best for me now. … It's not about trying to make parole anymore, but doing something with meaning, with love, with camaraderie."

BOOK REVIEW
Tear Down the Bastille

I have a lot of questions about those struggles that issue demands to an authority. I also respect that I can't imagine the circumstances everyone finds themselves in every moment. I try not to legitimize any authority in my behaviors, neither those imposed over me or that I might possibly impose on others. Given the severe limits on movement, communication, or any type of autonomy inside prison walls, however, I do believe hunger strikes are leant a more valuable credence.

Tear Down The Bastille: Hunger Strike as a Means of Struggle -- Voices From Inside the Walls contains texts about the history of hunger strikes in prison and about the struggle of anarchists within them. Half the texts were written by anarchist prisoners themselves who are held in the dungeons of the Greek prisons, with the historical introduction provided by a solidarity committee on the outside. I picked this book up in my travels hoping it might address some of my concerns about validating the state through demand-based tactics.

Originally published in Greek in 2016 and distributed inside and outside prisons, the anarchist counter-info website *Act For Freedom Now!* translated it into English, and Dutch publisher *Revolt Press* issued the new edition in 2020.

The book begins with a note on the context in which it is published, contributing to the publication and dissemination of texts written by anarchist prisoners so as to involve those the state has stolen from us in these important conversations. It continues by briefly analyzing the foundations of this prison society we find ourselves in, created by privitization, patriarchy, class divisions, racialization, the advent of states and organized religions, and other economic accumulation strategies. There is a short, stark medical explanation of the severe effects a hunger strike can have on someone's body, and in turn, the illegal and tortuous method of force-feeding that some states impose -- also harming individuals to whom it's administered. Then on to hunger strikes as social phenomenon, where in pre-Christian Ireland and 5th Century India people might perform a day-long hungerstrike outside the home of someone who had done them an injustice, since it was seen as such a shame to not do someone the hospitality of feeding them when they were at your doorstep.

There are various short mentions of moments, largely against British colonial and patriarchal rule, that this method began taking on political applications. There is short focus on Israel's tendency to force feed hunger striking Palestinians – despite the pleas and conestation of Israel's own doctors and the world courts. It seems there's an intensification of attacks when a Palestinian fighter dies in prison, and so Israel does its best not to inflame the healthy culture of decolonial struggle that exists in the occupied Palestinian terrorities, even through such outright torture.

The chapter on Irish Republican Army fighters and Red Army Faction revolutionaries in Germany touches oncemore on the upheavals against colonization and imperialism in the 1970's. First is the IRA's successes in achieving political prisoner statuses. The longest hunger strike recorded in these pages is actually by Irish Republicans in 1920, 9 of the original 60 strikers going for 94 days before conceding.

Perhaps lesser known today, the RAF also received

international press coverage of their hunger strikes, carrying on their struggle after beginning a campaign of explosive attacks against German state appartuses in protest of their involvement in the US war in Vietnam. The strikes were also in reaction to the extreme isolation they were subjected to in the 'White Cells,' much like the earliest recorded political hunger strikes by Russian revolutionaries in eponymous conditions of 18th Century Czarist Russia. Holger Meins was force fed, and shortly after died, resulting in the transfer of the remaining RAF revolutionaries into regular cells and the end of their final hunger strike. A few months later they were all sentenced to life imprisonment, and three of the four died in what the state called suicide.

The next chapter begins chronicling the rich history of Greek resistance to different authorities and military regimes, beginning with the earliest hunger strike in that territory being attributed to three women in 1930 who sought political prisoner designation (being that they were communist fighters) in the face of the state's terrorism. There are many others profiled including Alekis Panagoulis who attempted to assassinate the Junta-imposed dictator in 1968, and many anarchist fighters from 1978 onwards. The largest occasion was a 10,000 person-strong hunger strike in 2008 across 20 prisons, that only lasted seventeen days before most demands were met. Still, the hundreds who undertook a combination of hunger and thirst strikes suffered severe health issues. Finally, more recent hunger strikes that crossed over with the 2008 insurrection against murderous police, and some by armed anarchist groups like Revolutionary Struggle who had prior to their imprisonment carried out bank expropriations and even fired an RPG into the US Embassy.

"Behind every hunger strike hides usually the arbitrariness of every respective authority and torture, while there are many cases of extreme authoritarianism on a daily basis, hurting with new charges not only the prisoners but also the fighters outside the walls."

At this point I began reflecting that this chronology doesn't get into much detail about why this course of action was taken -- why they chose this "extreme means of self-extermination struggle" was chosen over a more confrontational fight in each instance -- and what sort of solidarity inside and outside the walls carried the momentum toward a critical mass. The rapid-fire list of actions from within immigrant detention camps in the islands leant some insight into their specific situation. As Moroccan refugee Shanaa Taleb said druing her struggle that began after her arrest for working "without papers," "if I have to choose between deportation and death, I choose death." The punitary imprisonment of family members of anarchist guerilla groups like Conspiracy of Cells of Fire in 2014 also illustrate cases where there were many more lives in flux in the course of these actions.

The personal writings of some Greek anarchist prisoners round out, and really carry the book.

Kostas Gournas of Revolutionary Struggle speaks to some of my questions in his analysis of the internal discussions of this course, and how the US position of non-negotiation with terrorists has influenced the Greek State who was possibly more prepared to handle the death of a hunger striker than it was before. He asks, "How long can the regime be blackmailed, and what kind of message will a passive attitude send to other social groups?" While giving respect to those, like him, who have used hunger strikes before (and acknowledging the tradition), he also proposes strategizing which tools we use, when, and not glorifying any tactic in particular. "...a pistol, a molotov, or a hunger strike does not make someone a revolutionary," and that the "fighter who has a conflict strategy defines the means she/he uses." Trying to differentiate a succesful anarchist action from a reformist one, he speaks of the moments fom this "negotitation process" that create moments fertile for solidarity and upheavel as a success; whereas even when demands are met, they can leave the strikers in a disadvantageous position.

Tasos Theofilou speaks of the practical feelings involved in the strike: how your breath begins to smell like your insides are rotting, how you can never get warm, how the usual ways of breaking up the day are gone, and how aware you are of the way food dominates the images on television. Smoking helps, and even though there's a clarity of mind during the day, the nights can feel like an eternity contemplating death. "Finally, it's the shouts and chants of comrades that reach your ears and literally sate your appetite. But it is also the bitter taste that prevails when low level petty politics win after all, and the mournful conclusion about how easy a great struggle can turn into a miserable game of hegemony."

Antonis Stampoulos speaks to processing a newfound confinment as you adjust to prison, the difficulty of a fighter becoming accustomed to that, and the realization that you must risk a lot to win even a little in such a place. He speaks of things hunger strikers in Greece have won, like the (heavily-conditioned) release of the family members of the CCF, or the restrictions on gathering DNA from arrestees. He speaks too, to the importance of

horizontal processes and collective organizing, and how they feed solidarity and cooperation, but how purity can sow discord. “In the revolutionary milieu, critical thought and cooperation have to prevail, not as a tradition or a fetish, but as tools that secure our political existence as anarchists.”

Giannis Naxakis speaks of last resorts, and when this tactic is not a last resort, and making demands of an enemy. He worries about strengthening the enemy by asking something of it, but also recognizes the necessity of hunger strikes in such a carceral world. In his own 8-day participation in a hunger strike, he didn’t like that he didn’t feel like he was fighting at all. At the core of his perspective: “Society (as a structure) and democracy are derivative of the permanent crime against the animal and natural world called civilization.” The reality to him though, is that even if there is a loss of dignity in hunger strikes, that experience is inherent to being imprisoned -- and what’s most important is to not lose the “confrontational attitude to prison authorities” and other such figures in our fight toward freedom.

Giorgos Karagiannidis speaks to how a lack of militant solidarity while undergoing a hunger strike specifically strengthens the role of the state, rather than undermining its nature and role. This very unfortunate scenario furthers the veil of humanity and democratic rights imposed by the state, in addition to risking a self-destructive “special” type of suicide. Martyrdom is not the goal, he emphasizes. “...the strike is not found only in the cell or the hospital ward, but mainly in the occupations, the demonstrations, the clashes, the arsons, and anywhere else where solidarity is spread.” Highlighting the importance for anarchists to destroy the state, capitalism, and authoritarian relations as a constant process, too, he speaks against defining stuggles in militaristic terms as victories or defeats.

An earlier mention of the importance of outside collaborations with imprisoned hunger strikers in order to achieve results resonates a great deal, consdering a hunger strike too recent to have made it into the book: the case of Alfredo Cospito. In response to 22-hour a day confinement and nearly no outside communication from within the 41 bis prison in Italy, he took up a hunger strike in October 2022. Lasting an amazing 181 days, his hunger strike inspired attacks on state infrastructure the world over, but particlarly in Europe -- including arson of police infrastruture and package bombs being mailed to authority figures. It was an event that even received quite a bit of mainstream news coverage. Cospito had resigned himself to death after being denied life, but in the throws of paralysis and other health-effects the state took his case under consideration. When they reduced his sentence for shooting a nuclear executive from life to 23 years, he began eating again and attempting to restore is health. While his accrued cases stay in a sort of pergatory, the struggle continues, and this discussion within the book about what footing the movement is left on resonates -- given the strength it was able to manifest in solidarity with Alfredo.

The only mentions of hunger strikes in US territory pertains to the frequent use of the tactic by detainees in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where many have never been charged with a crime. There have also been occasions for US Black Liberation fighters, anarchists, and other revolutionaries using hunger strikes in prison that didn’t make it into these pages, with our friend Malik Muhammed in Oregon being the most recent I can think of. For context, he received ten years for attacks on police during the 2020 George Floyd Uprising, and has recently been transferred to solitary in yet another prison, with much o fhis communication cut off. His struggle is ongoing at the time of this writing.

In closing, I can’t speak to how this might pertain to specific struggles against prison in the US, but I think it a useful contribution to the sturggle against prison society in general. Unfortunately, this book is hard to obtain in North America, and probably can’t be shipped into prisons themselves, but I hope I have conveyed some things from it that create worthwhile considerations.

Leonard Peltier Is Released After Nearly 50 Years in Prison

by Julia Conley
from CommonDreams.org
Feb. 2025

Indigenous rights and criminal justice reform advocates on Tuesday celebrated as Native American political activist Leonard Peltier, who has maintained his innocence for nearly 50 years since being sentenced to life in prison for the killing of two FBI agents, walked out of a high-security prison in Florida and headed home to North Dakota.

“Today I am finally free,” said Peltier in a statement to the Native news outlet Indianz.com. “They may have imprisoned me but they never took my spirit! Thank you to all my supporters throughout the world who fought for my freedom. I am finally going home. I look forward to seeing my friends, my family, and my community. It’s a good day today.”

"Confinement"

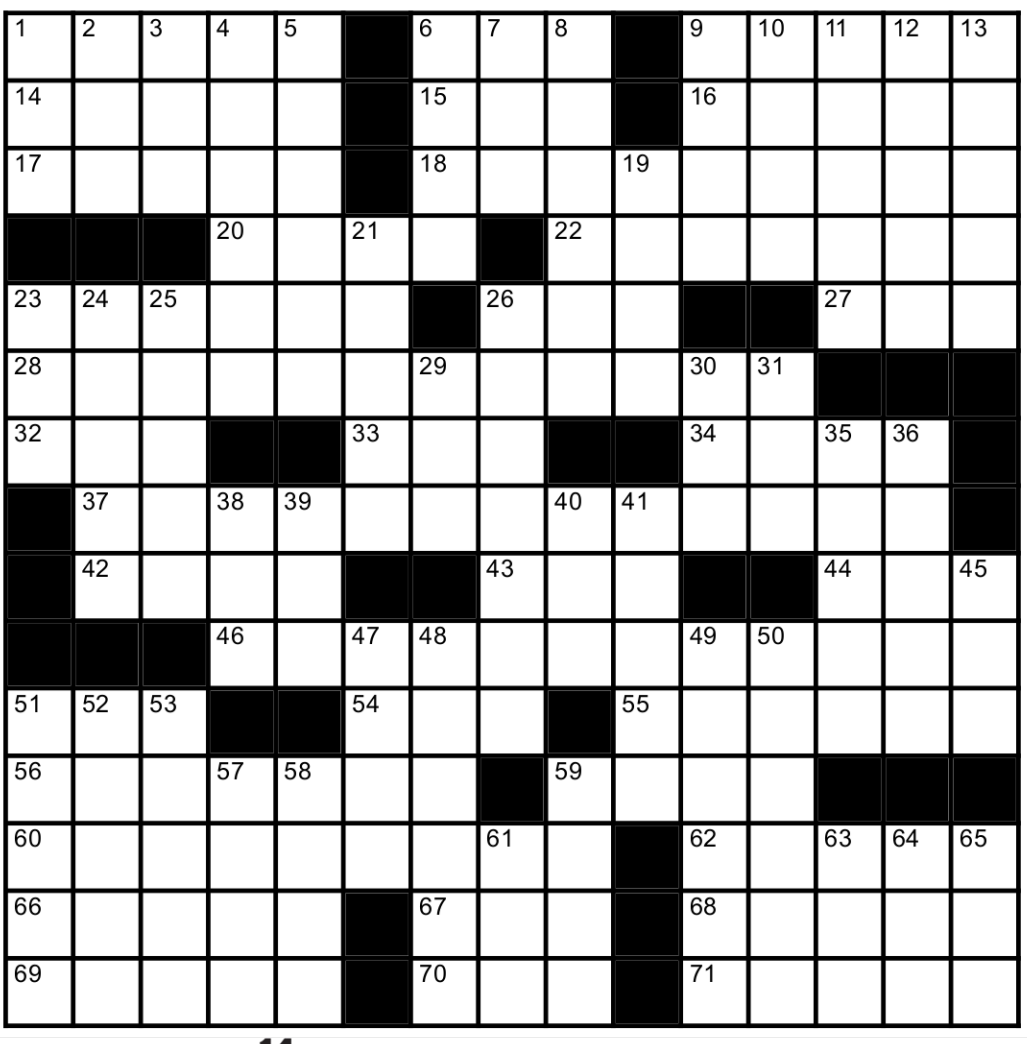
by Leonard Williams

Across

1. Brew some tea leaves
6. Comedian Nataro
9. Corrective eye surgery
14. Hip-hop artist with controversial views
15. Suffix for lemon or lime
16. "Für ___" (Beethoven work)
17. Espionage product
18. Weather that might keep one indoors
20. Anxiety induced by social media: Abbr.
22. Poison used in Christie's "Murder is Easy" (1939)
23. Level charges against
26. Stop for a bus: Abbr.
27. Silverback gorilla, e.g.
28. Heat exchanger
32. UN delegate
33. Title for Elton John or Paul McCartney
34. Athletic footwear brand
37. One who keeps to themselves
42. Singer known for "Smooth Operator"
43. __ Lingus (Irish airline)
44. Amazing!
46. Store inventory
51. NCO who drills recruits
54. Some AL batters
55. Stands out, in a way
56. Gear for a ballerina
59. Big 12 team in Salt Lake City
60. Spam in a folder, not a tin
62. Some balletic moves
66. More strange
67. Lil boomer?
68. Type of street art
69. Let up
70. Jamaican export
71. Put on, as an ointment

Down

1. Take to the slopes
2. Sun bathing result
3. Otolaryngologist, for short
4. Real looker
5. Only female Speaker of the U.S. House
6. Tuesday fare for some
7. Words spoken at a wedding
8. Italian ice alternative
9. Fewer
10. Mont Blanc, par exemple
11. Tuscan city whose university was founded in 1240
12. Town on South Shore of Long Island
13. Notable Swiftie?
19. Take a tile in Scrabble
21. Smart set
23. Obamacare, for short
24. Gives someone a free ticket, say
25. "___ Kai" (TV Series)
26. Certain hair colorings
29. Beat it!
30. Site for a lobe
31. Short motorhomes?
35. Ames resident
36. Battery's negative terminal
38. Asks for proof of age, perhaps
39. One who served
40. "Anne of Green Gables" setting: Abbr.
41. German Dadaist Max
45. "Asteroid City" director Anderson
47. Leslie who played Aaron in "Hamilton" on Broadway
48. Counts cards in a casino
49. In film, Louise's partner
50. Riot or rebel
51. Ft. Wayne river, informally
52. Dutch yellow cheese
53. Manages, as a bar
57. ___-Ball (arcade game)
58. Bison band
59. ___ Beauty (cosmetics chain)
61. Tat
63. French Dadaist Jean
64. Chum
65. Stone or Stallone



Advocates for Peltier, who is 80 years old, have long called for a presidential pardon and celebrated in January when former President Joe Biden announced he was commuting Peltier's sentence. He will serve out the rest of his sentence in home confinement.

Nick Tilsen, CEO of the advocacy group NDN Collective, noted that before his conviction Peltier was one of thousands of Indigenous children who were taken from their families and sent to boarding schools, where many suffered abuse.

"He hasn't really had a home since he was taken away to boarding school," Tilsen told The Associated Press. "So he is excited to be at home and paint and have grandkids running around."

Peltier, an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians in North Dakota, was convicted of two counts of first-degree murder and given two consecutive life sentences after prosecutors accused him of shooting two FBI agents at point-blank range during a confrontation at the Oglala Sioux Indian Reservation in Pine Ridge, South Dakota in 1975.

Peltier has always maintained that he did fire a gun during the confrontation, but from a distance and in self-defense. A witness who claimed that she saw Peltier shoot the agents later said she had been coerced into testifying and recanted her testimony.

Lynn Crooks, the federal chief prosecutor in the case, later admitted that the government "knew we hadn't proved" that Peltier was guilty.

The American Indian Movement, which fought for Native American treaty rights and tribal self-determination and in which Peltier was active, was subject to FBI surveillance and harassment when the shooting took place.

Kevin Sharp, an attorney and former federal judge who has represented Peltier and filed numerous clemency petitions for him, said the violent confrontation in 1975 was "unquestionably" a tragedy that was "only further compounded by the nearly 50 years of wrongful incarceration for Leonard Peltier."

"Misconduct by the government in the investigation and prosecution of Mr. Peltier has been a stain on our system of justice," said Sharp. "Leonard's step outside the prison walls today marks a step toward his long overdue freedom and a step toward reconciliation with Native Americans."

The AP reported that Peltier left USP Coleman in Sumterville, Florida in an SUV on Tuesday morning and didn't stop to speak to members of the press who were gathered outside.

Amnesty International, which has long campaigned for Peltier and considers him a political prisoner, applauded his release.

"Leonard Peltier's release is the right thing to do given the serious and ongoing human rights concerns about the fairness of his trial, his nearly 50 years behind bars, his health, and his age," Paul O'Brien, executive director of Amnesty International USA, said in a statement. "While we welcome his release from prison, he should not be restricted to home confinement."

Tilsen said that Peltier's "wrongful incarceration represented the oppression of Indigenous Peoples everywhere."

"Peltier's liberation is invaluable in and of itself," said Tilsen. "His release today is a symbol of our collective power and inherent freedom."

A New United Front: Next Steps
by Shaka Shakur
from ShakaShakur.org
March 2025

The Need for a United Front against u.s. Imperialism

Imperialism is like a chameleon, it morphs and transforms. It wears different hats and faces while sticking to its mission of the expansion of kapitalism, the infiltration, monopoly, and exploitation of other markets while hiding behind multinational and transnational corporations, as well as military interventions.

My personal experiences has been to try and beat back the genocidal nature and impact of imperialism on the New Afrikan Nation in particular and oppressed people in general. Attempting to deconstruct the false narrative created by imperialist forces while trying to strip the legitimacy of the State. Deconstructing the mis-education of its representatives and neo-kolonial institutions. This includes engaging militarily some of the security forces while trapped behind enemy lines.

Imperialism, like neo-kolonialism, sometimes takes on a life of its own and those who are the victims of such, tend to be its biggest proponents, while not fully overstanding the nature of the beast.

This is why, strategy-wise, We need a United Front. This is why We need some form of centralization of genuine revolutionary forces where We are at least communicating and organizing around basic points of unity.

It is critically important that We pass the baton, while educating a whole new generation of activity and radicals. It is important that We introduce to this generation the history and legacy of previous movements; some that have come and gone and others that still remain. That We teach about pass a mistakes, that We engage in healthy debates and ideological struggle. This is while actually agreeing on Points of Unity and having something concrete manifest out of these events.

i'm calling on organizations to register for a conference, where We actually have at least two reps of that organization or movement and We meet to decide upon at least 3-5 issues or areas of importance that We can organize or mobilize around.

Political Prisoners for example…. With each group maintaining its own autonomy and areas, zones, regions of responsibility, and focus; while perhaps issuing a Declaration.

This basic centralization and communication can lead to a sharing of resources, intelligence, and other forms of critical and concrete support to some of the work that is already being done (e.g. the work that Jalil Muntaqim is doing with the People's Senate, the Spirit of Mandela, and effort to Liberate Our Elders).

To defeat u.s. hegemony and imperialism, We have to attack its tentacles globally while arresting its internal development and ability to function. We infect its most vital origins.

Part of this strategy is to first overstand the intersectionality of Our various struggles and various forms of oppression. It all traces back to the same source.

When We have a United Front that is coordinated, We can effectively call for general strikes and boycotts. We can effectively reach behind enemy lines and give rear guard support to prisoners and cultivate the support for other endeavors.

Such a strategy helps Us undermine the divide and conquer tactics used by the state. It helps Us defeat the bullshit racial polarization and having Us fighting each other over crumbs from the master's table. It minimizes some aspects of class conflict amongst workers.

Let's talk about it people…
Free The Land!!
Shaka A. Shakur

After Writing About Prison Censorship, I Got Blocked From Messaging My Sources
by October Krausch
from TruthOut.org
Dec. 2024

A few months ago, I logged into my online Securus account to send an electronic message to a friend in a Washington State prison. To my shock, I found the word "blocked" on my account and I was not able to send any messages. The block came just a few weeks after I had published an article with Truthout on censorship inside of prisons and had sent the finished article to some of my sources over the e-messaging system. It's hard to know for sure, but the block is either the result of my journalism, or it is a result of facilitating a book club that connects people inside with those on the outside. Since my Truthout article was about how difficult prisons make it to access information, especially for LGBTQ+ people, the block seems ironic, to say the least.

People in prison do not have direct access to the internet or to any standard email services, nor can they generally receive phone calls. Instead, any communication other than paper mail (which is increasingly rare) takes place over services managed by for-profit companies like Aventiv, ViaPath and IC Solutions. If one of these services chooses to implement a block on an account, as in my case, an outside user cannot send e-messages, put money on a loved one's books or pay for phone calls — for anyone who lives in a prison, anywhere in the United States, that uses the service that has implemented the block.

The only remedy for this is apparently to appeal to the state Department of Corrections (DOC), but unsurprisingly, there is no obvious method for such an appeal available to an outside family member or friend. Figuring out how to appeal required several calls and emails, and in the end, did not yield any change to my situation. This block is inhibiting my ability to do my work, and more than that, it's isolating my friends in prison from contact with the

outside world.

Privatized Prison Communications Companies Exert Outsized Control

Censorship in prisons has expanded with the monopolization of prison communications in the hands of only a few private companies. For instance, the services I use the most — JPay and Securus — are under the parent company of the behemoth Aventiv. I have not yet found any information on how blocks like this are processed and how frequent they are, but it seems the Washington State Department of Corrections did not actually mean to block me from communicating with people in other states. That is just a side effect of monopolization.

When Aventiv implements a block, it is companywide, meaning that I'm unable to message anyone who uses JPay or Securus, or where the phone service is provided by either Aventiv company, even though Washington State does not even use JPay. Half of all states that have e-messages in their prisons (22) use JPay as their e-message provider. Meanwhile, 42 percent of phone calls are managed by Securus, meaning that my block is a significant barrier to communicating with a large segment of the total prison population. According to the Securus helpline, blocks like this are not uncommon.

My ban was upheld on appeal (an email) because I was sharing messages that included more than one person in the prison. Not only is barring people in prison from communicating with one another enforced in more draconian ways than in the past, but prisons are increasingly banning people on the outside from being in contact with more than one person in prison. Given the reality that almost 2 million people are imprisoned in the U.S. each year and the disproportionate impact of the criminal legal system on particular communities, it is arbitrary for prisons and communication companies to act as though no one will have two family members or two close friends in prison at the same time. It is also unfair and punitive to further limit the outside support available to those inside.

Running an "Illegal Book Club"

My rule-breaking activities were related to the Abolitionist Book Club, a reading group that brings together people inside and outside prisons. I co-founded the group in 2023 with a close friend of mine, Vincent "Tank" Sherrill, who lives in a Washington State prison, and another outside organizer, Matthew Charlebois. Our original goal was to create a space for political education about abolition for our comrades outside and inside prison through reading Mariame Kaba and Andrea Ritchie's book No More Police together. We have since finished the book and become a tight-knit community who meets together virtually once a month to grow our abolitionist imaginations through our relationships with each other.

Organizing a group like this is not easy. Our meetings are held over Zoom, with each person in prison joining the video call via a buddy system with the outside members. We were pleasantly surprised that everyone in the prison received the copies of the book despite its title, but as soon as we held our first online meeting, book club members at the Washington Corrections Center for Women received a warning from the facility's investigator telling them that they were not allowed to participate in this "illegal book club." One member came to a second meeting — mainly to talk about how to proceed — and was punished with a major infraction (reduced to a minor infraction upon her appeal). This member submitted a formal proposal to the prison to make the group official, since our work fits the prison's definition of "pro-social behavior" that it supposedly encourages, but she never received a response to the proposal and was not able to join any more of our discussions.

After this intimidation, members from the women's prison were too afraid to join our meetings, but punishment of some members of the book club did not stop us. The Abolitionist Book Club continues, building solidarity and shared analysis between comrades inside and outside prison. This experience has affirmed the value of doing collective work, rather than individual or even centralized work.

Prisons Can Isolate Us — But They Can't Stop Our Work Completely

I was the main outside instigator of the Abolitionist Book Club, and most of the first contacts were mine. I'm proud, though, that as we have grown, everyone in the group has taken ownership and I'm no longer any more central than anyone else. This meant that when I was cut off, other people in the group were ready to step in. Being formally cut off from my friends and comrades inside has been yet another lesson about creating dense webs of relationships rather than jealously guarding our relationships or contacts; it's much harder for the DOC to destroy that whole web than to sever one particular line of communication.

I would love to say that if we organize in this way, the DOC can't touch us, but unfortunately that's not true. Since the block, it has been much harder to be in touch with some of my close friends in prison, and I have dearly

missed talking regularly with these folks. Nonetheless, I'm thankful for not being totally cut off since I am still able to communicate with the help of others in the book club.

The block has a direct impact on my journalism as well as my personal relationships. It would be bad enough if I had only been blocked from communication inside Washington State, where I'm working with people on various projects, but I also can't send messages to people I know in Michigan or in Missouri. Even worse, I can't reach out to speak to people in any state or facility that uses an Aventiv service to report on their experiences, unless I reach out to them via another friend of theirs. That, however, would be third party contact, which is the same rule I'm accused of violating. I am stuck either continuing to violate that rule or ceasing to do journalism about the experiences of people in prison.

Like so many people before me, most especially those in prison themselves, I have been censored by the prison for writing about censorship in the prison. I am outraged that this has happened; that the prison has extended its reach to censor those of us outside prison in this way is dangerous and disturbing. But the real travesty here is the regular, ongoing censorship that people in prison are subjected to daily, like the women in our book club who were cut off from one of the few sources of outside support and communication available to them.

Worse yet, people in prison don't necessarily have a way of knowing why I'm not responding to them — and Aventiv takes their money to send messages that are not delivered. I keep receiving emails from JPay telling me that someone has sent me a message, but I'm unable to read these messages. One person has been released from prison altogether after sending me a message I couldn't read, and we've completely lost touch.

The monopolization of communication technologies combined with the system's bans on "double contact" significantly expands the existing regime that destroys relationships between people in prison and their communities on the outside. Ultimately, the result of blocking communication is to keep people in prison away from those who want to offer support, and away from people like me who might be able to tell their story to the broader world.

40th Anniversary for the Pendleton 2

In February 1985, Christ "Naeem" Trotter and John "Balagoon" Cole fought back against racist guards who were attempting to kill their friend Lincoln "Lokmar" Love. In doing so they sparked an uprising. They also got 142 and 84 additional years to their sentences for their righteous acts. There is now a movement to support and to free Naeem and Balagoon. February 2025 was the 40th anniversary of this event. To mark the occasion there was a screening of the documentary about their story, "They Stood Up" at the Indianapolis Liberation Center. The Bloomington Anarchist Black Cross also hosted a letter-writing night to the 2 of them, along with a member of the Pendleton 2 defense committee.

Film Credit:
Director: THEKINGTRILL & Too Black
Producer: THEKINGTRILL & Too Black
Editor: Too Black
Filmed by: IDOC Watch & Focus Initiative
Narrator – THEKINGTRILL
Musical score by Jorel Jebre, Clint Breeze, and THEKINGTRILL
Transcribed by Ben Wrubal Artwork by THEKINGTRILL, and Allistor King

Former correctional officers get prison for using inmates stolen identities in international fraud scheme

by Deja Studdard
from WXIN-TV Indianapolis
Oct. 2024

Two former correctional officers have been sentenced to three years in federal prison for their part in an international fraud scheme.

Martins Tochukwu Chidiobi, 34, and Lawrence Onyesonwu, 38, of Muncie, have each been sentenced to three years in federal prison after pleading guilty to aggravated identity theft and making false statements to a financial institution.

"It is simply reprehensible for correctional officers to exploit their positions to steal inmates' identities and further the financial exploitation of scam victims," said Zachary A. Myers, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Indiana.
Former CEO of Tindley Accelerated Schools accused of defrauding non-profit, school system of $1 million

"Transnational fraud schemes have lasting repercussions

for victims all over the country, and everyone who commits these crimes must be held accountable. The federal prison sentences imposed here should serve as a warning that the FBI and U.S. Attorney's Office are committed to pursuing financial criminals and holding them accountable."

According to court documents, between 2015 and their arrest date in January 2019, Chidiobi and Onyesonwu worked as Correctional Officers at the New Castle Correctional Facility. During that time, they stole at least five inmates' personally identifiable information, including names, dates of birth, and social security numbers. They used the stolen identities of the victim inmates to open at least nine accounts at various Indiana banks using fraudulent passports.

Judge orders Trump administration to return two transgender inmates to women's prisons

by Michael Sisak
from APNews.org
March 2025

A judge on Wednesday ordered the federal Bureau of Prisons to transfer two transgender women inmates back to federal women's prisons after they had been sent to men's facilities in the wake of President Donald Trump's executive order that truncated transgender protections.

U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth in Washington issued a preliminary injunction after the women were added as plaintiffs in ongoing litigation over the impact of Trump's executive order on transgender women in federal prisons.

Lamberth ordered the federal Bureau of Prisons to "immediately transfer" the two women – identified in court papers by the pseudonyms Rachel and Ellen Doe – back to women's facilities and said the agency must continue to provide them with hormone therapy treatment for gender dysphoria.

The women said in court papers that they were living in constant fear of sexual assault and other violence after being moved to male prisons. Male inmates repeatedly propositioned them for sex and male officers subjected them strip searches without female officers present, they said.

"The fact that they have already been transferred and, allegedly, have been abused at their new facilities can only strengthen their claims of irreparable harm," Lamberth wrote.

A Bureau of Prisons spokesperson declined to comment.

The preliminary injunction is the latest in a series of rulings thwarting the agency's efforts to comply with the executive order, which calls for housing transgender women in men's prisons, and for halting gender-affirming medical care.

Lamberth, who was appointed by Republican President Ronald Reagan, previously blocked the bureau from transferring a dozen other transgender women inmates to men's prisons.

In a ruling last month, he order that their "housing status and medical care" remain as they were prior Inauguration Day, when the president signed the executive order. Separately, in January, a federal judge in Boston halted the transfer of another transgender women's to a men's prison.

At the time, Rachel and Ellen Doe were not plaintiffs to any lawsuit challenging Trump's executive order and were not covered by Lamberth's initial rulings.

In a court filing last month, a Trump administration official said that as of Feb. 20, there were 22 transgender women housed in federal women's facilities. That's about 1% of the nearly 2,200 transgender inmates the agency said it has in its custody.

With Lamberth's order Wednesday, at least 15 people are now covered by orders blocking or reversing the moves.

Lamberth has yet to rule in a lawsuit filed last week by three other inmates – a transgender woman housed in a men's prison and two transgender men housed in women's prisons. They are challenging the executive order's ban on gender-affirming hormone therapy and other care.

Community-based Indigenous organization acquires property on proposed federal prison site as part of grassroots effort to create a different future for Eastern Kentucky

from The Appalachian Voice
Feb. 2025

On January 22, 2025, the Appalachian Rekindling Project (ARP), an Indigenous woman-led community building and land restoration group, held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to commemorate its recent purchase of a 63-acre plot of land

Guided Imagery: Safe Place

Allow yourself to be in a comfortable position, either lying down or sitting up. If you're sitting up, place a pillow behind your back, and allow your neck and your back to be nicely supported, not leaning back too much if you have difficulty staying awake.

Remember that if you feel afraid at any time, just open your eyes and ground yourself in today. You are safe and you are in control today. How does it feel? Let your body being to relax by releasing the areas of tension by breathing. Take slow deep breaths and as you exhale let the tension go. Where is your body feeling tense? Focus your attention on this area as you take another breath in. Feel this area relaxing as you breathe out. Allow your breathing to gradually slow down. Breathe in and out.

As you do this, allow yourself to picture in your mind's eye, a safe place. What is the first place that comes to mind? What type of place does your mind choose as a safe place? In this place of safety, no one can come without your invitation. In this place of safety, you are always at peace.

Maybe you are in a beautiful garden, or in the mountains, or in an open field or the beach. Picture a place that feels calm, safe, and serene. A place you feel safe and protected. Each time you come to your safe place, you may develop it and allow it to become more and more beautiful. Allow yourself to see what is here today.

Imagine the details of your surroundings. Notice the foliage and beautiful colors and hues. What season is it? Notice the ground. It is earthy soil, rock, or sand? Are you barefoot? What does it feel like beneath your feet?

What smells do you notice? Is it sweet, pungent, or refreshing? Are there birds overhead? Listen to their singing. What other sounds do you hear? Let these sounds lull you peacefully.

Notice if there is any water. Is there a pond or waterfall or waves? Can you hear the sound of the water? Let the water flow over your skin. Notice how it feels on your skin. Can you taste it? Imagine the water washing over you and taking away any tension left in your body. Notice if there is a breeze or wind. What does it feel like on your face? Is it warm or cool? Allow yourself to take in all the senses feeling calm, serene, and peaceful. Breathe in and out.

Now allow yourself to lie down in the safe place and feel the ground beneath your body. Notice the gentle earth below warming you. Imagine the earth cradling you allowing you to relax even more and feel safe during this meditation. Breathe in and out.

Now look above and notice the color of the sky. Notice the sun. Feel the warm rays of the sun on your skin. What else do you see? Are there clouds? Are there any trees around? What kind of leaves do they have? Notice their beautiful colors. Breathe in and out.

Now look around, notice a bench, rock, or tree stump in this place, and go sit on it. Feel the sun warming you and further relaxing you. Breathe in the warmth and vibrancy of the sun allowing it to fill you with a sense of calm and peace from the top of your head to the tips of your toes. Notice as you become part of your safe place that you feel more rested, more relaxed, more at peace. Breathe in and out.

Allow yourself to create a place of safety and peace that is always yours, always safe… And breathe in the safety. And breathe out the dear. And breathe in the safety. And breathe out the fear… As you breathe in, you can even smell some of the smells of safety. Perhaps you would like to build a shelter of some kind, a cottage, and cave, a tent, a tree house. And if it's already there, you may add to it. Plant flowers, adding a splash of color. Add special places or rooms to your safe place. Create anything that you would like.

After you have thoroughly visualized this place and you are ready to leave, allow yourself to come back into the room and leave your safe place for now, knowing that you can return to your safe place any time you like.

Open your eyes but stay in a relaxed position, taking a moment to reawaken completely. Continue to breathe smoothly and rhythmically. Take a few moments to experience and enjoy your relaxing guided meditation. Your safe place is available whenever you need to go there.

within the currently designated boundaries of a federal prison proposed for construction in Letcher County, Kentucky. ARP procured the land with a very different goal than that of the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP): to collectively restore the strip-mined property through Indigenous land rematriation practices and to provide an alternative to the harms of incarceration.

The Institute to End Mass Incarceration (IEMI), a legal organization that works closely with grassroots partners to challenge our country's system of mass incarceration, represents ARP and facilitated this land purchase. "Across the country, prisons built in the prison boom of the 80s and 90s are crumbling," said Joan Steffen, an attorney at IEMI. "Now is the time to ask ourselves: what kind of future do we want to build? We support ARP in helping to build one that is rooted in human and ecological flourishing, not incarceration."

ARP is developing a variety of possible land restoration initiatives for the property, including returning native species like bison which used to inhabit the region. "This marks a historic moment for this land. Years of strip mining have taken their toll on the land, which has been out of Indigenous care for too long. We are beyond happy to have access to the land, to care for it, and to offer non-extractive, non-carceral ways to enrich the community. ARP purchased it first and foremost to restore the land through Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge practices, but also to show that Native people deserve a say in what happens to our homelands," said ARP's Co-Executive Director Tiffany*, who was raised in Letcher County. Prior to colonization and forced removal, this region was occupied and cared for by the Cherokee, Shawnee, and Yuchi Tribes.

In contrast to ARP's plans to restore the land, the FBOP intends to burden it and the surrounding community with an unnecessary, unwanted and harmful new federal prison. On October 28th, the FBOP released its Record of Decision (ROD) to spend more than half a billion dollars to build FCI Letcher, a proposed 1,408-bed federal prison and work camp. If built, FCI Letcher would become the seventeenth state or federal prison in Central Appalachia, a region already beset by the harsh environmental, economic and public health hazards caused by decades of coal mining and mountaintop removal. Despite its decision to proceed to the next stage in implementing the prison plan, FBOP has previously called on Congress to rescind funding for the project.

ARP acquired the land with support from the coalition Building Community Not Prisons (BCNP), a grassroots coalition of local and national members working to oppose the construction of FCI Letcher and create better opportunities for the people of Letcher County and for the communities of color most impacted by mass incarceration. "A federal prison in Eastern Kentucky will devastate more than the environment—it will tear apart families, disproportionately harm Black and Brown communities, and further disenfranchise those already oppressed. This is not the path to economic revival. What we need is sustainable jobs, clean water, and investments that heal our land and uplift our people—not a prison that perpetuates harm and injustice," said Dee Parker, a member of Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC) and BCNP, who has lobbied Congress to rescind funding for FCI Letcher.

Concerned Letcher Countians (CLC), a BCNP member organization of local residents working to dispel myths about the purported benefits of the prison, also worked closely with ARP throughout the acquisition process. According to CLC representative Dr. Artie Ann Bates, "As we watch parts of Appalachia pick up the pieces after recent flooding, it's clear that we need investments in projects that uplift our people and repair the environmental harms of coal mining. Nearby prisons were promised as jobs programs, too, but those communities continue to struggle with the same economic hardships. We believe that ecotourism, local agriculture initiatives and land restoration work by groups like ARP can help create an alternative vision of Letcher County's future."

Tiffany, of ARP, grew up in Letcher County, Kentucky — not far from the purchased land. For her, this project is deeply personal. "As someone who grew up in this community, I know firsthand how badly this county deserves economic opportunity and a chance to thrive. I know the proposed prison is not how we get that. We can collectively choose a different, more restorative future for our community, for the land that has been through so much, and for everyone who this prison would hurt. Repairing the land together is how we say that there is more to this place than what some say there is, that a prison was not the only option here. We, at ARP, believe that building connections to the land and to each other is the future we need to pursue."

New York Prison Guards Strike, Denouncing Limits on Solitary Confinement

by Amy Goodman & Juan González
from Democracy Now!
Feb. 2025

We speak with Jose Saldaña, director of Release Aging People in Prison, about a wildcat strike by New York prison guards who claim limits on solitary confinement have made their work more dangerous. “The people who are living in a dangerous environment are the incarcerated men and women,” says Saldaña, who notes the strike began the same week murder charges were announced against six of the guards who brutally beat to death handcuffed prisoner Robert Brooks in an attack captured on body-camera video. “The whole world saw it, and they’re questioning: How long has this been going on in the prison system? This illegal strike is to erase that consciousness that’s building,” says Saldaña. We are also joined by anthropologist Orisanmi Burton, who studies prisons and says the proliferation of solitary confinement and other harsh measures is directly linked to political organizing behind bars starting in the late 1960s. “Prisons in the United States are best understood as institutions of low-intensity warfare that masquerade as apolitical instruments of crime control,” says Burton, author of Tip of the Spear: Black Radicalism, Prison Repression, and the Long Attica Revolt.

AMY GOODMAN: This is Democracy Now!, democracynow.org. I’m Amy Goodman, with Juan González.

We end today’s show here in New York, where state prison guards are on the second week of a wildcat strike over what they say are unsafe conditions. The National Guard have been called in.

Some say the timing of the strike is curious. It started the same week charges were filed against prison guards at the Marcy Correctional Facility in Utica, New York, who brutally beat to death handcuffed prisoner Robert Brooks in an attack captured on video footage by body cameras. Brooks was Black. All the officers who took turns beating him appear to be white.

Meanwhile, prison officials have responded to the prison guard strike by indefinitely suspending provisions in New York’s HALT Solitary Act, which stands for Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement, which limits solitary confinement to 15 consecutive days or 20 days over a 60-day period.

For more, we’ve got two guests with us. In Washington, D.C., Orisanmi Burton is assistant professor of anthropology at American University, author of a book about the 1971 Attica prison uprising, upstate New York, titled Tip of the Spear: Black Radicalism, Prison Repression, and the Long Attica Revolt. And here in our New York studio is Jose Saldaña, director of Release Aging People in Prison, known as RAPP. He was released from New York state prison in 2018 after 38 years behind bars.

We welcome you both to Democracy Now! Jose, welcome back to Democracy Now! You’re just back from the state capital here in New York, from Albany.

JOSE SALDAÑA: That’s correct.

AMY GOODMAN: Talk about the significance of the wildcat strike and how it’s affecting the prisoners.

JOSE SALDAÑA: Well, first of all, you know, for those who don’t know, this is an illegal strike. The correction guards had just finished negotiating a contract a few months ago, and now they are going on strike. And the reason why they are going on strike is because the world saw that video. We call it a lynching. Fourteen to 16 correction prison guards lynched a Black man. And the whole world saw it, and they’re questioning: How long has this been going on in the prison system? So, this illegal strike is to erase that consciousness that’s building. We are building a consciousness to dismantle that type of racial brutality and sexual violence in the prison system that’s been going on for decades. They’re trying to erase that.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And, Jose, could you talk about their demand that the reforms around solitary confinement be removed?

JOSE SALDAÑA: Yes. They want the Solitary Confinement Act repealed. And the Solitary Confinement Act does not only restrict them from putting people in the box for decades, actual decades, it also stops them from putting pregnant women in the box, women breast-feeding in the box, people who have mental health problems, people who have physical disabilities, paralyzed people, wheelchair-bound. It prohibits them from putting these people in solitary confinement. They’re trying to repeal that. They’re trying to say that this whole Solitary Confinement Act has made their work dangerous, it has created a dangerous environment. And they actually are trying to erase what we saw in that video. The people who are living in a dangerous environment are the incarcerated men and women.

AMY GOODMAN: Is it true that a prisoner died this week? I’m not talking the one who was beaten to death.

JOSE SALDAÑA: Absolutely. One that has been reported

Rest in Power

Bilal Sunni-Ali
1948-2024

by Dianne Mathiowetz
from Workers.org

Born in Harlem in New York City in 1948 to Robert and Lois Johnson, at eight years old he taught himself to play the clarinet, tenor saxophone, flute and other woodwind instruments.

As a teenager, Bilal built lifelong relationships with liberation fighters such as Sekou Odinga, Mutulu Shakur and others who eventually founded the Bronx and Harlem chapters of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense.

At age 22, Bilal's musical talent brought him into the Midnight Band with Gil Scott-Heron, Brian Jackson and other outstanding musicians. In addition to performing, he also composed and arranged music such as "Liberation Song (Red, Black and Green)," which has become an anthem in the Black Liberation Movement.

In 1976, Bilal married Fulani Nandi Adegbalola, a leader of the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Africa, forming a dynamic partnership and expansive loving family. In addition to her many skills as a revolutionary activist, she too possessed musical talent, singing on tour with Miriam Makeba. Whether living in New Orleans, Washington, D.C., or Byrdtown, Mississippi, both of them were always engaged in the struggle for liberation, combining political education, cultural expression and community organizing.

In 1987-88, the Sunni-Ali family moved to Decatur, Georgia, and then to the West End neighborhood of Atlanta where Bilal joined the West End mosque, whose spiritual leader was Imam Jamil Al-Amin.

Baba Bilal combined his political and cultural skills in helping to found a public affairs program on Atlanta's progressive, community radio station, WRFG 89.3FM. Entitled "What Good is a Song? The Friday Night Drum," the program is still a platform for issues impacting African people worldwide.

When Imam Jamil Al-Amin was falsely charged in 2000 and convicted in 2002 of killing a Fulton County deputy and injuring another, Baba Bilal immediately organized a defense effort with demonstrations outside the court, community meetings and public speaking engagements. This eventually morphed into the Imam Jamil Action Network (IJAN) which continues to this day to seek the release of Imam Jamil Al-Amin.

Sheikh Baba Bilal Sunni-Ali died on Dec. 30, 2024, surrounded by his children and grandchildren. Fulani Sunni-Ali had died several years earlier on July 17, 2016.

The commemoration of life program, which included a number of his political allies, was really a reflection of the deep love and respect Bilal's children and grandchildren have for the revolutionary teacher they called "Dad" and "Poppy."

—

AMY GOODMAN: A 61-year-old man?

JOSE SALDAÑA: At least one person has been reported to have died since then.

AMY GOODMAN: And this is after the National Guard —

JOSE SALDAÑA: After the National Guard, yes.

AMY GOODMAN: — were moved into these prison facilities.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, I wanted to bring in Orisanmi Burton, assistant professor of anthropology at American University, author of the Tip of the Spear: Black Radicalism, Prison Repression, and the Long Attica Revolt. Could you talk somewhat about the role of correction officers? Especially in your book on Attica, you went back in time, of course, the Attica revolt being one of the biggest in American history in its impact on reforms within the prison system.

ORISANMI BURTON: Yes. Well, the role of the guards is really to enforce domination. And Jose was exactly right in talking about the role of solitary confinement in all of this. Of course, a repeal of the HALT Act is really the primary demand of the guards. And this is a legacy of Attica. So, in the wake of the Attica rebellion, we saw nationally the proliferation of solitary confinement and the extension of the lengths of time to which people were subjected to solitary confinement. And this was really an effort to assert control and domination over the prison population. People might be aware of this popular narrative that solitary confinement is about confining the worst of the worst. But you just heard from Jose the different categories of people that the HALT Act was designed to prevent from being put into solitary confinement.

And there's also a pronounced political dimension to the use of solitary confinement. So, for instance, in the 1980s, the warden of the Marion control unit, which is a supermax prison in Illinois, said that the purpose of the Marion solitary confinement unit is to control revolutionary attitudes within the prison system and within the society at large. And so, part of this is the use of the prison as a form of counterrevolution. And the guards are really in place to enforce that dominance and to ensure that prisons remain quiet. And for the most part, people don't hear about it, but because this video was released, people have no choice but to be faced with the kinds of violence that happen all the time in prisons.

AMY GOODMAN: Professor, if you could talk about — and you talk a lot about this in your book — what you think needs to happen now, the whole issue of abolition versus reforms as the legacy of what happened after Attica? And explain what happened then.

ORISANMI BURTON: Right. So, I mean, the dominant narrative of Attica is that it's a four-day rebellion that unfolded largely within Attica prison and that the demands were primarily oriented towards improving prison conditions. I don't think that that's wrong. I just think that it's incomplete. My book shows that Attica was a protracted struggle that lasted for at least 13 months, that it traversed multiple prisons, and that it was revolutionary and abolitionist in its politics, that it was informed by anti-colonial movements unfolding throughout the world and that it had material links to those movements.

Part of the response to Attica was massive repression and violence, as many of your viewers will know. But the focus on the intense violence waged by the state often obscures the extent to which reforms were used as a counterinsurgency method designed to suppress political consciousness and suppress activism. And so, one of those reforms was the proliferation of solitary confinement, as I just mentioned. Other reforms were just the proliferation of prisons in general, which were used as a method to separate out more prisoners so that they couldn't organize.

But, importantly, the proliferation of prisons was also used as a way to market prison growth and development to white rural populations whose economies had been ravaged by deindustrialization. So it was a way to sort of shore up support for rural white workers who had very few other employment options, especially in light of the fact that during the repression at Attica, the New York state assault force that went in to suppress the rebellion also killed several of the guards, 10 guards. And so, the building of prisons became a marketing tool to try to build support for prison development among rural white populations. And much of this is what we're dealing with now in terms of the — some of the demands and conversations around what's happening with the strike have to do with animosity around the recent closure of prisons that has been unfolding in New York over the past decade.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And you mentioned earlier solitary confinement used as a means of political repression of revolutionary movements. Could you talk about what your book found in terms of Attica specifically, the

level of political activism that occurred in the prisons? I know when I was in the Young Lords back in the ’70s, we actually had members in Attica as part of the Inmates Liberation Front. But the Black Panther Party, the Nation of Islam, many other political groups, Republic of New Afrika, had membership and developed membership in Attica and other prisons, as well.

ORISANMI BURTON: Absolutely. And the Inmates Liberation Front is discussed in my book. I mean, part of what I want people to understand is that prisons in the United States are best understood as institutions of low-intensity warfare that masquerade as apolitical instruments of crime control. And so, part of what we see in the late 1960s is the use of prisons to repress and contain and neutralize political activism on the outside, groups like the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, as you just mentioned.

But, in fact, what happens is that the strategy backfires. And prisons, in fact, become schools of revolutionary political education. And these groups, in fact, proliferate in the prisons. And that politicization interacts with the intense repression that these groups were facing, which gives rise to these different forms of rebellion that emerge all throughout the prisons. Attica happened to be one of the most brutal prisons in New York state and, in fact, in the country, where many of the most political and most intellectual, most charismatic people were transferred and repressed. And it turned into a tinderbox.

AMY GOODMAN: Professor Burton, that’s where the wildcat prison guard strike is. Jose Saldaña, we just have 20 seconds. What you’re calling for?

JOSE SALDAÑA: This is to say that they have engaged in illegal activity, and they will continue to escalate that illegality. We are building a movement to dismantle this racial brutality. But in the meantime, we have to get people out of that brutal system. We have legislation, elder parole, fair and timely, second look at. These legislations will help relieve people out of these systems of brutal oppression and unite them back to their families.

AMY GOODMAN: I want to thank you both for being with us, Jose Saldaña, director of RAPP, and Orisanmi Burton, author of Tip of the Spear: Black Radicalism, Prison Repression, and the Long Attica Revolt. He’s also professor of anthropology at American University. That does it for our show. I’m Amy Goodman, with Juan González.

The strike ended in mid-March with 2000 guards being fired.

It Was You
by Reo Thompson
from Pendleton Correctional Facility
Dec. 2024

Theme: Family. I wrote this for all free and incarcerated individuals that deal with not having support, care, or love around these holiday times.

Greetings to each of you with peace and love! I greet you with such because peace is sometimes hard to find, while at other times heartfelt true love is never given. So I give you my peace and love freely today as I open myself to you all like a gift on this theme called: family…

See family isn’t what most of us are to one another by blood, but 100% who we are to one another by chose. So I choose to care about each of you without these words because I sympathize oh so well with them thoughts and them feelings which has shown me that blood ain’t always thicker than water, so vibe with me my family because I have been accustomed to people who said they love me with their mouths but real deep in their hearts they were far from me.

I’m talking family...Do you hear me tho! (It was you.)

It was you who was there for me when my Momma took her last breathe, it was your shoulder I cried on. It was your voice I heard speaking life back into me, it was you who understood my pain and embraced me with that brotherly love and told me it was going to be ok. As I tried hard to drown myself with liquor in my suicidal state, it was your words of wisdom which brought me out that homicidal state of mind. So I thank you beyond recognition because it was you who open my eyes again, you pulled out my potential, you unlocked greatness. It was you who took the time out of your life to understand me, it was your belief in me that gave me hope as your inspiration inspired me to help and encourage others. It was the astonishing things you seen in me which gave me the ability and mobility to be better so I could do better by my family, it was you who pushed me towards education, it was you who shifted my focus as you told me if I wanted my freedom then I must get dedicated in learning the law and very much determine into changing my lifestyle, it was you who instilled that discipline in me. It really was your constructive criticism which paved my way to a new

understanding, your tuff love built character within me and gave me strength. It was you who told me to love myself and to learn myself at that time when I thought I needed to be loved by somebody else...It was you family! And you alone...It was you who read me rights when I was dead wrong, it was you who truly cared about me and my well-being. It was you who was there when the letters and pictures stopped coming, it was you who was there when the GTL lady said that your call was not accepted, it was you who reached out to me when I sat hopeless in G-lockup, it was you who put money on my link units, it was you who gave me that soap. It was you, family... So shout out to G-lockup because I'm still here for you brothers...Do you hear me tho! As I motivate each of you to send prayers up to them brothers in lockup, as I refrain from going back to lockup...pray for me, as I will pray for you because a family that prays together unit in divine Truth where we leave this place together and connect with our divine roots for you is me and I am you and as we leave here today let's really reflect on who played duck and who played goose and who really abandoned who, let's see who really want to sit around the lake of lies which resemble selfish pride keeping you trapped in the old you or who going to chase life with perseverance to become all your family needs of you, I believe in you!

Who are the Palestinian prisoners released in exchange for Israeli hostages?

by Isabel Debre & Julia Frankel
from APNews.com
Feb. 2025

Israel released about 600 prisoners overnight, including the longest-serving prisoner and a man convicted of killing an American peace activist, in the latest exchange for Israeli hostages held by Hamas.

They were supposed to have been released last weekend after Hamas freed six living hostages. But Israel delayed the release to protest Hamas' practice of parading the captives before crowds during handovers. Hamas handed over the remains of four hostages overnight without any public display.

Israel released the 600 prisoners, but the Palestinian prisoners club, a group representing current and former prisoners, said Israel held back the release of 24 Palestinians detained in Gaza after the Hamas attack on Oct. 7, 2023 that sparked the war. They include 23 teenagers and men aged 15 to 19 and a woman who is 35. The group were set to be released later on Thursday, along with 22 more minors and one woman whose names were subsequently added to the list.

Israel views the prisoners as terrorists. Palestinians often see them as freedom fighters resisting a decades-long Israeli military occupation.

Nearly every Palestinian has a friend or family member who has been jailed by Israel for militant attacks or lesser offenses such as rock-throwing. Most are convicted in military trials that rights advocates say often lack due process. Some are incarcerated for months or years without trial in what is known as administrative detention. Israel says it's needed to prevent attacks and avoid sharing sensitive intelligence.

Among those being released overnight into Thursday, 151 had been sentenced to life or long sentences for involvement in deadly attacks against Israelis. Forty-three were to be returned to the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem, while 97 were to be sent into exile.

Around 500 others had been detained in Gaza after Hamas' attack on Oct. 7, 2023, which sparked the war.

Israeli forces have arrested hundreds of people in Gaza and held them without trial. As part of the ceasefire, Israel committed to releasing more than 1,000 detainees who hadn't participated in the Oct. 7 attack.

A look at some prominent prisoners released since the truce took effect on Jan. 19

- Nael Barghouti, 68

Barghouti, 68, from the West Bank village of Kobar, has spent over 45 years in Israeli prison and was serving a life sentence. Guinness World Records has called him the world's longest-serving political prisoner. Israel says he is affiliated with Hamas. First arrested in 1978 for his role in an attack that killed an Israeli bus driver, he was among more than 1,000 prisoners released in 2011 in exchange for an Israeli soldier held by Hamas in Gaza. Israel re-arrested Barghouti in 2014 and says his offenses include intentional manslaughter, membership in an illegal organization,

producing a bomb, possessing explosives and conspiracy. He will be deported.

- Bilal Abu Ghanem, 31

Ghanem, 31, from east Jerusalem, was serving three life sentences and 60 years for a bus attack in 2015 that killed three Israelis. One of those killed was Richard Lakin, an American educator who marched for civil rights and coexistence between Muslims and Jews. Ghanem, who Israel says is affiliated with Hamas, will be deported. Israel says his offenses include intentional manslaughter, membership in an illegal organization, building a bomb, possession of explosives and conspiracy to commit a crime.

- Ammar Al-Ziben, 50

Al-Ziben, 50, is from Nablus, in the West Bank. He was sentenced to 27 life terms for planning a bombing in a Jerusalem market in 1997 that killed 16 people, including a U.S. citizen. Israel says he is affiliated with Hamas and his offenses include possession of firearms, incitement, forgery, throwing firebombs and attempted murder. He will be deported.

- Ahmed Barghouti, 48

He is a close aide of militant leader and political figure Marwan Barghouti, who is still imprisoned. The two aren't closely related. Ahmed Barghouti was given 13 life sentences for dispatching assailants to carry out attacks that killed Israeli civilians during the second intifada, or Palestinian uprising, in the early 2000s. As a commander in Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, an armed offshoot of the secular Fatah Party, he was also convicted of possession of firearms and attempted murder. He was sent to Egypt.

- The Sarahneh brothers

Three brothers from east Jerusalem were released after more than 22 years in prison for their involvement in suicide bombings that killed Israelis during the second intifada. Israeli authorities brought Ibrahim, 55, and Musa, 63, to their homes in the West Bank. The third brother, Khalil, 45, who was convicted of attempted murder and sentenced to life in 2002, was sent to Egypt. Ibrahim Sarahneh's Ukrainian wife, Irena, had been sentenced to life in prison in 2002 for organizing with her husband a suicide bombing that killed two people in the Israeli city of Rishon Lezion. She was released in 2011 as part of a swap for Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier captured by Hamas.

- The Aweis brothers

Hassan Aweis, 47, and Abdel Karim Aweis, 54, from the occupied West Bank, were released on Saturday after nearly 23 years in prison. Hassan Aweis was sentenced to life in 2002 on charges of voluntary manslaughter, planting an explosive device and attempted murder. He was involved in planning attacks during the second intifada for the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade. Abdel Karim Aweis — sentenced to the equivalent of six life sentences for throwing an explosive device, attempted murder and assault, among other charges — was transferred to Egypt.

- Iyad Abu Shakhdam, 49

Abu Shakhdam was sentenced to the equivalent of 18 life sentences over his involvement in Hamas attacks that killed dozens of Israelis during the second intifada. They included a suicide bombing that blew up two buses in Beersheba in 2004, killing 16 Israelis, including a 4-year-old. Abu Shakhdam was arrested in the West Bank in 2004 following a gunfight with Israeli security forces in which he was shot 10 times. During 21 years in prison, his family said, he finished high school and earned a certificate for psychology courses. He was released on Feb. 8.

- Jamal al-Tawil, 61

Al-Tawil, a prominent Hamas politician in the occupied West Bank, spent nearly two decades in and out of Israeli prisons, in part over allegations that he helped plot suicide bombings. Most recently, the Israeli military arrested al-Tawil in 2021, saying he had participated in riots and mobilized Hamas political activists in Ramallah, the seat of the semiautonomous Palestinian Authority, Hamas' main rival. He was held without charge or trial. Too weak to walk, al-Tawil was taken to a hospital after his release in Ramallah on Feb. 8.

- Mohammed el-Halabi, 47

The Palestinian manager of the Gaza branch of World Vision, a Christian aid organization, was arrested in 2016 and accused of diverting tens of millions of dollars to Hamas in a case that drew criticism from rights groups. He was freed on Feb. 1. El-Halabi and World Vision denied the allegations and independent investigations found no proof of wrongdoing.

- Zakaria Zubeidi, 49

A prominent militant leader in the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade during the second intifada, Zubeidi later became a theater director in the Jenin refugee camp, where he promoted what he described as cultural resistance to Israel. His jailbreak in 2021 — when he and five others used spoons to tunnel out of one of Israel's most secure prisons and remained at large for days before being caught — thrilled Palestinians and stunned the Israeli security establishment. In 2019, after Zubeidi had served years in

prison for attacks in the early 2000s, Israel arrested him again, accusing him of being involved in shooting attacks that targeted buses of Israeli settlers but caused no injuries. Zubeidi had been awaiting trial when he was sentenced to five years in prison for his jailbreak. He was released on Jan. 30 into the West Bank.

- Mohammed Odeh, 52, Wael Qassim, 54, and Wissam Abbasi, 48

They hail from east Jerusalem and rose within the ranks of Hamas. Held responsible for deadly attacks during the second intifada, they were handed multiple life sentences in 2002. They were accused of plotting a suicide bombing at a pool hall near Tel Aviv in 2002 that killed 15 people. Later that year, they were found to have orchestrated a bombing at Hebrew University that killed nine people, including five American students. All were transferred to Egypt on Jan. 25.

- Mohammad al-Tous, 67

Al-Tous held the title of longest continuously held prisoner in Israel until his release on Jan. 25, Palestinian authorities said.First arrested in 1985 while fighting Israeli forces along the Jordanian border, the Fatah party activist spent a total of 39 years behind bars. Originally from the West Bank, he was sent into exile.

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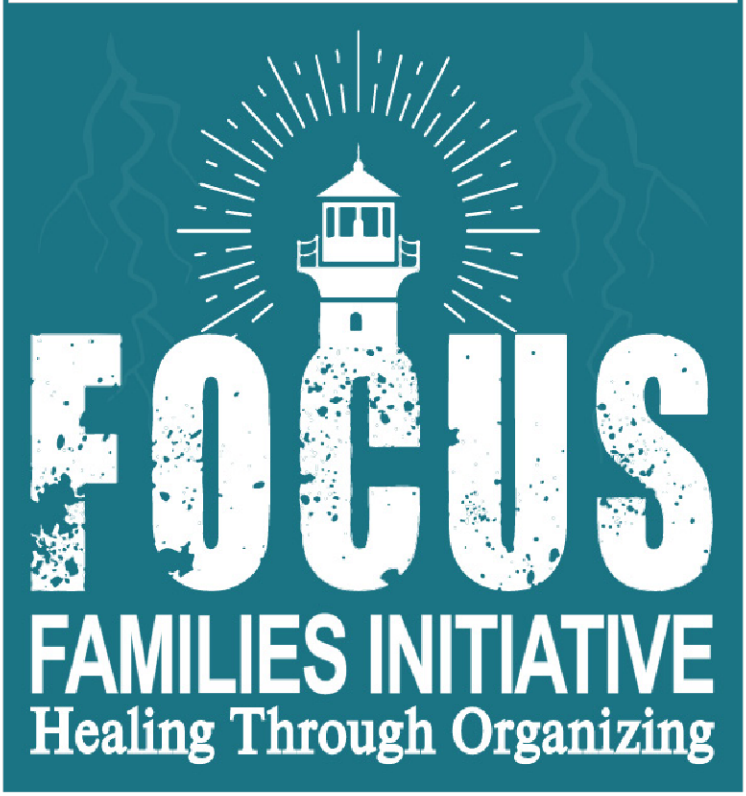

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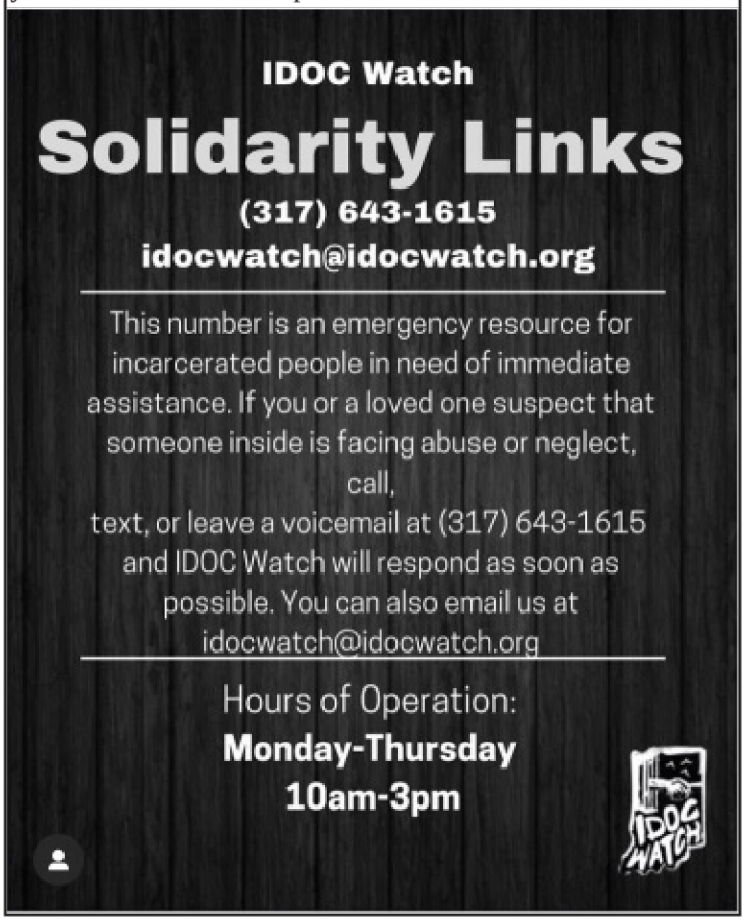
We want to hear your experience with the program and potentially connect you with projects that are using the trees you grew. Reach out to us at the mailing address on the back of this paper.

Solidarity Links is a new alert system for abuses in the Indiana Department of Correction and Indiana county jails. Call during the hours listed, or send a voicemail, text, DM, or email with reports of abuse or neglect! We will get back to you ASAP and devise a plan to address the issue!



Writing to Prisoners

Since prisoners are often transferred between facilities, we won't print addresses that can quickly become outdated. Instead, we'll direct you to the Indiana DOC "Offender Database" on their website. You can look up their current location with their DOC# (listed on Table of Contents). We use the number because the names they use are often not the state name that the DOC lists them under. And then look up the mailing address for that facility. Correspondence and engagement with what they've written here is welcome.

Some tips for writing to prisoners: Be clear about your intentions. Share something of yourself and also be curious to learn more about them. If you're not sure where to start, reference ideas they have written about. Don't say anything sketchy or incriminating for yourself or others. Assume that everything you write is being copied and read by prison administrators. Use only blue or black ink on white, lined paper in plain, white envelopes. Keep in mind that prison is, in many ways, the epitome of toxic masculinity and saturated with problematic and harmful ideas and social norms. Prisoners often will not have the latest language or frameworks for social justice. Be generous and seek to understand their different experiences, but also don't be afraid to engage and share your own experiences. Be mindful of power disparities between people who are incarcerated and those who aren't.

If you prefer to correspond online, you can set up an account at web.connectnetwork.com

Physical Health

Welcome to the exercise portion of the issue! It's likely many of you have developed routines for increasing or maintaining fitness inside, but for those who are looking to build up your practice or learn new work-outs, we aim to provide some options here. We would love to hear requests for content, should you be curious about increasing strength and flexibility, or making sure you're doing a move correctly-let us know what you'd like to see.

Push-ups!

A great push-up works multiple muscle groups including the chest, anterior deltoid (between chest and shoulder), and triceps (back of arm). This exercise can be easily modified to increase difficultly and work different muscle groups. Start with building good form with a basic push-up (as seen in picture). Then you can incorporate variations to focus different muscle groups, build stamina and keep the exercise interesting.

VARIATIONS

Narrow/Wide Hand Placement. By simply adjusting the placement of your hands, you can emphasize different muscle groups. Narrow hand placement works the triceps, while a wider hand placement emphasizes the chest/pecs.

Diamond Push-up. To activate triceps, place your pointer finger and thumbs together to create a diamond shape on the ground. You can then position your hands below your chest or below your head to activate different muscles.

Isometric Push-up. Isometric push-ups create constant tension on muscles and are great for developing muscle endurance. Assume a standard push-up position. Lower yourself to the ground, and hold the position there instead of pushing yourself back up. Hold for 10 seconds, or longer if you want. Flex and unflex your muscles while you're holding it for an even deeper burn. Push back up and repeat.

Further variations include elevating your feet on a bench or bed to perform a push-up, which will activate your shoulders more.

You can work your way up to a one-handed push up, or for some variation and to work your core and glutes more, try a two-handed, one leg push up.