

THE ABOLITIONIST

SPRING-SUMMER 2024

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

ISSUE 41: Ecological Justice

FEATURES ANALYSIS

Abolition from the Forest to the Mountain Top: Fighting for a Livable Future

By Judah Schept

On March 1, 2024 the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) released a draft **Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)** for **Federal Correctional Institute (FCI) Letcher County**, officially moving a renewed attempt to build another prison in Eastern Kentucky into the environmental review phase. If built, FCI Letcher and an adjacent Federal Prison Camp would imprison over 1400 people on a former mountaintop removal strip mine, adding significant capacity to Central Appalachia’s already expansive carceral geography. Rising rates of imprisonment—and the frenzy to build more cages—is not the only crisis for which prisons and jails have been purported solutions in Central Appalachia. Additionally, they serve as the state’s primary way to address the consequences of decades of environmentally extractive development, and that development’s inevitable collapse. That is, with the precipitous decline of the coal industry, prisons and jails have become “answers” to everything from unemployment to dilapidated infrastructure to revenue shortages to declining school enrollments.

After an earlier attempt to build a federal prison in the county was defeated in 2019, the proposal for FCI Letcher has galvanized significant opposition. **Building Community Not Prisons (BCNP)** has formed to fight against FCI Letcher’s construction. The coalition has strong roots in Letcher County, where residents are organizing their neighbors to demand better for their community and region. BCNP also has active members rooted in organizational formations around the country, whose expertise in areas of environmental, property, and criminal law; research and policy; environmental conservation and defense; and organizing and movement work poses a formidable challenge to the prison boosters.

“That is, with the precipitous decline of the coal industry, prisons and jails have become “answers” to everything from unemployment to dilapidated infrastructure to revenue shortages to declining school enrollments.”



“Emergency” by Roger Peet, Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative.

Central Appalachia’s history of extractive and carceral violence looms large in the FCI Letcher fight. But this seemingly provincial struggle in Eastern Kentucky is, in fact, part of a broad front of principled political work that defends land and life from the violence of capitalism and the carceral state, from water protectors at Standing Rock to forest defenders organizing to stop Cop City, to tree-sitters fighting to stop the Mountain Valley Pipeline. Spotlighting the struggle in Letcher County can help illuminate **the broader connections between ostensibly distinct expressions of extractive and punitive infrastructures and the crucial links between abolitionist and environmental justice movements** that are necessary for our movements to free us all and save the planet.

RESISTANCE SINCE THE BEGINNING

If there is a political and geographic epicenter of the prison industrial complex (PIC) in the US, it may well be Central Appalachia. If built, FCI Letcher would be the ninth prison in Eastern Kentucky and the 17th in the broader Central Appalachian region. Erected mostly since the 1980s, these prisons mark the US’s extensive construction of carceral infrastructure to justify and fuel rising rates of imprisonment. This growth has occurred across every scale of the state. FCI Letcher would join what is already the densest concentration of federal prisons in the

country. US Congressman Harold “Hal” Rogers of the US fifth congressional district representing all Eastern Kentucky already brought three federal prisons to his district in the 1990s and early 2000s. Today, the counties of those three federal prisons remain among the poorest in the country, countering claims about prison-based economic development. In addition, the region includes numerous state prisons, including Virginia’s notorious Red Onion and Wallens Ridge “supermax” prisons, built in the late 1990s as part of that state’s tough-on-crime regime, as well as four state prisons in Eastern Kentucky, which continue to expand as Kentucky’s rate of imprisonment remains among the highest in the US. The federal and state prisons sit alongside an extensive network of jails, almost all of which are overcrowded.

A prison in Letcher County was first proposed in 2005, when Congressman Rogers and local political leaders began discussing the prospect of siting what was then known as US Penitentiary (USP) Letcher. The project gained momentum in 2013 with the commencement of the BOPs official scoping period, the first stage in a federal agency’s movement through the environmental impact process required under **the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA)**, which since its passing in 1969 requires all federal agencies to conduct such a process, culminating in a series of Environmental Impact Statements with public comments and an official **Record of Decision (ROD)**.

In 2015-16, as Congress allocated \$444 million for the construction of USP Letcher and the BOP released its first draft EIS, opposition began to emerge in the form of a coalition that stretched across scale, site, and strategy. With roots in Letcher County as well as around the country and inside prisons, the coalition included attorneys pursuing environmental challenges through the NEPA process, local property owners and residents refusing to sell their land to the BOP, and local organizers who struggled to shift local common sense around economic impact. Activists organized people to submit comments during the NEPA process that directly opposed the project, undermining the argument of universal support for USP Letcher and challenging the prison on environmental grounds, including its potential disturbance to habitats, threat to water, proximity to old growth forest, the pos-

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Letter from the Editors

Dearest Readers,

Welcome to the first issue of 2024! In these harrowing times, we hope Issue 41 of *The Abolitionist*, focused on ecological justice, sheds light on how **abolishing the prison industrial complex (PIC) is a necessary steppingstone in saving the planet.**

As every single month from June 2023 to May 2024 has been the world’s hottest on record, making 2024 likely even hotter than its preceding year as the top runner historically, climate crisis is one of the most pressing causes for urgent strategy, mobilization, and concern. As various crises have hit us with increasing frequency for the past few decades, we know that today’s climate disasters and tipping points aggravate the economic damage done by the COVID-19 pandemic. Examining how crises are compounded, we see more and more that the climate crisis has more to do with institutions, economic priorities, and political systems than weather.

It is important now more than ever for imprisoned people, anti-prison advocates, and abolitionists to join forces with environmentalists and ecologists. Because the PIC has gravely altered the economic and infrastructural landscape of the US, the PIC also poses numerous implications for the sole contributing factor to climate change—the use of fossil fuels. While **20 percent of all global greenhouse gas emissions caused by humans are due to deforestation**—exceeding the emissions from all passenger vehicles on the planet (according to Conservation International)—**it is the PIC that incentivizes further industrial development through the maintenance and construction of existing and new cages.**

Moreso, **corporations and police are especially salient in the fossil fuel industry**, as Associate Professor of Philosophy and African Studies at Georgetown University, **Olúfemi O Táíwò argues in his 2020 *Dissent Magazine* article “Climate Apartheid Is the Coming Police Violence Crisis”**: As executives and leading capitalists profit from polluting and destroying Black, Brown and poor communities, they evade regulation and accountability by commandeering political systems and processes. Then, police continue to use military weapons and tactics to protect profiteers from the oppressed and activists who seek to forestall apocalypse once crises accelerate. Similarly, we see this dynamic in what has become a **“Great Climate Migration”** from the Global South to the Global North. Consequently, concentration camps on the US-Mexico border detain climate refugees—the many who flee homelands struck by climate disaster due to imperialist practices and extractive economies. Rather than mitigate climate change, imperialist countries like the US expand walls and fortify border militarism. It is no coincidence, then, that **with the hastening of ecological collapse, we see the rise of fascism globally.**

Given the interconnectedness between the PIC, ecological destruction, and crises, those concerned with saving our ecosystems must **consider strategies that address how the PIC drives ecological collapse**, while anti-prison advocates and abolitionists must remember that **we cannot build a world without cops or prisons if we destroy the planet.** And the clock is ticking. Táíwò, many ecological and climate justice leaders, as well as the United Nations have warned already about the possibility of **“climate apartheid”**—a world in which only elites are able to access basic forms of protection and ecological security while everyone else faces the devastating effects of climate crisis and ecological destruction. Not only has the PIC played a major role in exacerbating climate chaos, but again, since the PIC congealed institutions of policing, imprisonment, and surveillance to manage perceived crises of social control, the PIC will remain the enforcer of climate apartheid, protecting the elites from ecological demise.

This issue’s features of *The Abolitionist* Newspaper span four different continents, covering **grassroots examples of resistance and strategy that bind PIC abolition together with ecological justice** in a range of fights from **resisting displacement and houselessness in South Africa**, to **fracking in Argentina**, **ecocide and genocide in Palestine**, the aggressive expansion of policing through **Cop City in Atlanta**, the brave work **against pipelines in Appalachia**, **Indigenous wildfire management** in California to **sovereignty amidst “mega-projects” in México**, and more. These feature action articles are anchored by a central feature analysis from **Judah Schept**, who’s currently organizing as part of a national campaign to stop the **aggressive expansion of the federal prison system in Letcher County**, Kentucky, coupled with reflections from **imprisoned environmentalist lawyer Bryant Arroyo**. Exploring the connections between the PIC and ecological disaster, harm & collapse, and amplifying the intersection between PIC abolition and ecological justice, as well as specific cross-sector strategies within these two movements, this issue’s features flow from decades of work by abolitionists and environmentalists joining forces to fight for the world that all our communities, ecosystems, and the planet at large need to live.

Because the features section is packed full of more articles than usual (including a **centerfold photo essay on the tactic of blocking boats!**), we kept the return of our columns brief. Be sure to check out **Stevie Wilson’s compelling 9971 column**—this time engaging fellow prisoners in conversations around guns and safety—as well as the **Inside-Outside Fishing Line** featuring a cross-wall conversation with CA prison closure campaign organizers on the Just Transition the statewide fight demands. Also be sure to see the **heartbreaking news of CR co-founding member Masai Ehehosi’s sudden passing this spring** in the political prisoner news column—**“Until All Are Free”**—along with some other important announcements from us in the **CR Bulletin**, which is substituting the more full CR Updates news column we usually do (Unfortunately we had to cut Movement Highlights this issue to make page count).

Also note the **Call for Content** on page 25 — we will be dedicating our final issue of 2024 to Masai, his legacy of revolutionary sacrifice and undying commitment to abolition while Issue 42 feature articles focus on and complicate conceptions of anti-war organizing. **Review our submission guidelines and send us a submission** (artwork or writing) **for one of our columns**, or convey an abolitionist message surrounding **anti-war organizing (past or present)** for us to consider publishing as a feature next issue. You can also reflect on how your resistance moves in rhythm with our dear Masai, his legacy, and all he taught us; then share those **reflections honoring Masai** with us to publish.

Onward toward a world worth living in for us all, -Critical Resistance & *The Abolitionist* Editorial Collective

THE ABOLITIONIST

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

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What is “ecological justice”?

A DEFINITION & PRINCIPLES FROM MOVEMENT GENERATION

Ecological justice (“home” + “justice”) is the state of balance between human communities and healthy ecosystems based on thriving, mutually beneficial relationships and participatory self-governance. We see ecological justice as the key frame to capture our holistic vision of a better way forward—away from profit and pollution—, by bringing ourselves into right relationship with seeds, soil, each other and the ecosystems that hold us.

A commitment to ecological justice inspires us to engage in transformative action towards the liberation and restoration of land, labor, and culture. This work includes creating an intentional pathway – a **Just Transition** – towards local, living, loving economies. To usher in a just and equitable transition towards the economies that meet our needs, leadership must come from communities on the frontlines of ecological disruption.

Check out Movement Generation at: movementgeneration.org



By Hendrik Voss, Climate Justice Alliance.

sibilities of light pollution, and public health concerns. Forcing the BOP to resubmit the EIS four different times, these challenges successfully delayed the project by years, enabling the coalition to devote more time to organizing. Meanwhile, a declining federal prison population, a Trump Administration focusing its racist sights on immigration, and a BOP forced to admit its projections for economic development were overstated all undermined the prison’s legitimacy.

Undoubtedly, people in prison played a crucial role in the campaign. A community radio show in Letcher County called “Calls from Home,” which broadcasts messages of love and support from people on the outside to imprisoned loved ones, provided proximity to the human costs of prisons. The show’s DJs were compelled to fight USP Letcher and joined the organizing effort. In addition, people in prison worked with attorneys to file a lawsuit against the BOP. After the agency announced its ROD, essentially moving the prison project out of the NEPA phase and into construction, those attorneys filed the lawsuit featuring prisoners as plaintiffs who were joined by local individuals and organizations. It was the threat of this lawsuit, following years of challenges to the project’s credibility from an environmental and economic standpoint, that effectively forced the BOP to withdraw the ROD in 2019.

This eventual victory would not have been possible without a strong base of opposition that bridged anti-imprisonment, environmental justice, and just-economy movements in Central Appalachia. Indeed, a number of organizers against USP Letcher were part of the just transition movement, which aims for a departure from fossil fuel dependency that is attuned to issues of racial, economic, and environmental justice. Their work was rooted in a politics of solidarity between poor communities impacted by the myriad harms of imprisonment and on the frontlines of economic abandonment and climate disaster. Yet, as the counterinsurgency and repressive apparatus we know it to be, the PIC stops at nothing to survive and expand even in the face of clear ecological and human consequence. Within a few years, organizers on the ground would have to contend with the BOP’s resurgent efforts in Eastern Kentucky to feed the PIC’s need for mass capture and ecological demise in the region.

ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND THE PRISON FIX

On July 28, 2022, heavy rains across Eastern Kentucky led to catastrophic floods. Shallow streams surged more than 18 feet in ten hours. 45 people died as a result, and 9,000 homes were devastated. Just two months to the day later, while residents were still sifting through the wreckage and struggling with FEMA to receive support, the BOP announced it was relaunching the campaign to build a prison in Letcher County. According to climate modeling featured in one prominent study, Letcher County is one of two US counties with the nation’s largest hidden flood risk. Roxana, Kentucky, the community where FCI Letcher would reside, has a “99 percent risk of six feet of flooding within the next 30 years.” As Letcher County resident Dr. Artie Ann Bates recently wrote, while the prison would sit on a mountain top removal (MTR) site and thus above the flood plain, *“the risks to the incarcerated and staff are due to deluged roads and bridges below, causing an inability to transport food, drinking water, to evacuate*

an ill person, or manage flooded sewage infrastructure.”

While the flood was uniquely devastating, a different environmental disaster in Eastern Kentucky offers some perspective on Letcher County’s recovery and the role of the prison. In 2000, a coal slurry pond burst two counties north in Martin County, sending 306 million gallons of the toxic substance down hundreds of miles of tributaries and rivers, eventually seeping into the Big Sandy and Ohio rivers—a spill thirty times larger than the Exxon Valdez spill in Prince William Sound in Alaska. In many of the smaller bodies of water, the toxic slurry killed all the aquatic life. In total, water for 27,000 residents was contaminated and killed 1.6 million fish. At the time, the EPA referred to it as “the worst environmental disaster ever” in the US southeast. Three years later, the BOP would complete the construction of USP Big Sandy on an MTR site in Martin County. Before the prison could open, the agency had to invest millions of dollars in additional site remediation as the guard tower was sinking into an old mine shaft below it. (People now sometimes refer to the prison as “Sink Sink”.) Because of those additional costs, USP Big Sandy is on record as the most expensive federal prison ever built.

These histories of environmental damage and prison building demonstrate the effects of decades of absentee landownership, expropriation of resources, and the harms of MTR. Such violence against the landscape has brought dramatic change to Appalachian communities in the form of decapitated peaks, denuded mountains, devastated streams, and depopulated communities. MTR has literally reshaped the terrain of the region, including the loss of one million acres of forest, the leveling of hundreds of miles of ridgeline, the burial of thousands of miles of streams, and the razing of more than 500 mountains. MTR’s putative efficiency as a form of extraction is directly related to its seeming independence from actual workers; one operator on a mountaintop removal strip job can perform the same amount of work as 22 underground miners. In flattening mountains while also devastating once-reliable work opportunities, MTR created both the spatial and economic conditions for new ideas of economic development, including prisons, to be projected.

Indeed, MTR likely exacerbated the effects of the 2022 floods. The detonations of explosives required in the practice uproot trees, plants, and topsoil, all of which act as natural water catchment. The floods and slurry spill also demonstrate that prisons remain central to the overall extraction, depletion, and waste disposal processes that characterize dominant development strategies for the region. With over half a billion dollars allocated for construction, FCI Letcher is poised to receive more funding than the combined amount that the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Housing and Urban Development have earmarked for flood relief in Eastern Kentucky. In the process, it would surpass USP Big Sandy as the most expensive federal prison ever built.

The renewed proposal for FCI Letcher by the BOP in a moment of clear environmental disaster in Eastern Kentucky demonstrates the ways in which the carceral state has so consumed public money that the PIC presents itself as the expensive and ineffective solution to environmental devastation it has helped to create. The flexible and stable capacity of the PIC in Eastern Kentucky reflects the ways in which the carceral state exploits crises. As Jamaican-born Marxist theorist and writer Stuart Hall revealed, crises occur when the social formation can no longer be reproduced based on the pre-existing system. This signals inevitable systemic change whose outcome is determined through struggle. The opportunism of the BOP to seize on a long moment of crisis, and the work of organizers to stop it, connects the struggle in Central Appalachia across time and space to the long history of both the PIC and the abolitionist work that has always organized in opposition. In New York, as the scholar Orisanmi Burton has shown in *Tip of the Spear: Black Radicalism, Prison Repression, and the*

Long Attica Revolt (2023), state actors instrumentalized the prison in an attempt to punish, repress, and exterminate Black rebellion. Crucially, Burton shows that the prison maintained a certain flexibility over time, from the outright violent repression of dissent to offering the “velvet glove” of in-prison programs as a counter-insurgency strategy. In California, the most aggressive prison expansion project in US history was a pillar of the “Golden State’s” political economy. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore demonstrates in her foundational study *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (2007), California navigated numerous crises in the 1970s – surpluses of land, labor, state capacity, and finance capital, as well as a crisis of legitimacy. In response, the state turned to “the prison fix,” or the socio-spatial “solution” of transforming the state through building prisons.

A similar pattern of capitalist crisis and carceral resolution is playing out in Kentucky, where coal mining employment is at its lowest total since the 1890s, with 4,000 jobs in the industry spread across the state. In the words of Jordan Camp, following Stuart Hall, the PIC has “incarcerated the crisis,” with prisons and jails offered up as solutions to unemployment, revenue generation, dilapidated infrastructure, and surplus land in the coalfields while also, as always, serving as the primary response to the criminalization of poverty across the country, and particularly concentrated in communities of color. As proponents try to naturalize the PIC into the environmental landscape and political common sense of communities experiencing precarity, organizers must work to “unfix” the prison, a struggle that occurs on both material and ideological terrain.

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RACIALIZED DISPOSSESSION AND ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

Due to capitalism’s need for land for both the generation of commodities and storage of surpluses, prisons—generally, and especially in Eastern Kentucky—share the landscape with other infrastructures of extraction and disposal. The prison, a repository of racialized surplus humanity, functions similarly to waste disposal sites and often sits proximate to sites generating value through toxic forms of agriculture or mining. USP Big Sandy sits atop former underground and strip mines, adjacent to coal slurry impoundments, and near a planned incinerator. If built, FCI Letcher would sit atop a former strip mine and just down the road from active mining sites. These environmental harms threaten the residents of these counties, including people caged there against their will. FCI Letcher would imprison a multi-racial population in a county that is 98 percent white. Martin County, home to USP Big Sandy, again offers an instructive tradition of the insidious overlap in environmental harm and racism that FCI Letcher would carry on. While the 2000 census for Martin County noted that the county was 99.25 percent white, by the 2010 census, the percentage was down to 92 percent, largely due to the dramatic increase in the African American population from a total of four Black residents in 2000 to 892 ten years later. The misleading 92 percent figure conceals in its inaccuracy the very work of capitalism to naturalize race and produce a racialized social order through criminalization and imprisonment.

What could possibly be the reason for such a massive demographic shift—a growth of 22,200 percent in the Black population in a decade—in a county of thirteen thousand people? The construction of USP Big Sandy in 2003, of course—the subsequent imprisonment

Continues on next page

within it of hundreds of Black people, and the counting of each as residents of the county in which they are imprisoned. Known as prison-based gerrymandering, this tactic has garnered considerable and warranted attention by scholars and activists who rightly decry that even as prisoners are denied the right to vote, their “residency” in the rural community leads to political and economic benefits in the form of increased political representation as well as eligibility for state and federal grant monies and expenditures, including for infrastructure, schools, and other areas outside of corrections. These processes confirm geographer Laura Pulido’s point that “*racial processes also produce the environmental landscapes of white people.*” In Eastern Kentucky, the coal ash dumps, trash landfills, and incinerators—the depots of capitalism’s waste—sit proximate to the prison, threatening the health and environment of Central Appalachia as they also reproduce the environmental racism of low-income urban communities of color in places where there are few Black people outside of the prison. As Pulido argues, land, even in predominantly white spaces, is “thoroughly saturated with racism.”

It is important for us to remember that while ordinary people with a variety of political experiences come together to fight for the survival of themselves, their people, and their communities, the toxicity against which they’re fighting isn’t only chemical, but also political, economic, and racial. Nearly twenty years after Rose Braz and Craig Gilmore published “Joining Forces: Prisons and Environmental Justice in Recent California Organizing” (2006), we are seeing increased repression of people fighting for some sort of sustainable life, whether battling bulldozers to stop the MVP, fighting RICO charges in the struggle against Cop City, or simply trying to survive amidst a genocide and ecocide in Gaza. In many cases, the threats to life aren’t chemical toxins, but rather the lack of housing, lack of food, and lack of water that characterize the organized abandonment of our cities and rural towns internationally, and the organized violence of the global PIC.

FEATURES REFLECTION

Climate Chaos and Imprisonment

By Bryant Arroyo

Editors’ Note: Dubbed the “first jailhouse environmental lawyer” by Mumia Abu-Jamal, Bryant Arroyo has been a longtime subscriber to **The Abolitionist** newspaper. A repeat contributor to the paper, Bryant’s last published article with *Critical Resistance* (CR) was in the *Inside-Outside Fishing Line* printed in Issue 38 in December 2022. There, Bryant discussed with Richard Thomas of **Fight Toxic Prisons** the intersections between climate catastrophe and the prison industrial complex (PIC), as well as inside-outside solidarity in environmental justice fights, and major environmentalist victories won by imprisoned people. Of the many fights Bryant has waged from behind the wall, he organized nearly 1,000 fellow prisoners to stop the construction of a \$860 million coal gasification plant sited for 300 feet away from the prison yard he was located in. Bryant has recently filed a lawsuit in federal court in response to retaliatory actions taken by prison personnel against the exercise of his First Amendment rights. The lawsuit is *Arroyo v. McGinley, et al.*, 1:23-cv-01083 (Middle District of Pennsylvania).

If you didn’t receive Issue 38 in 2022 and would like to learn more about Bryant’s organizing, write to us at CR and **The Abolitionist** and request a photocopy of that issue’s *Fishing Line*. Below, we offer Bryant’s original submission he wrote in 2022 that inspired Issue 38’s *Inside-Outside Fishing Line*, now printed for Issue 41’s feature on ecological justice and PIC abolition.

EXAMINING THE CONDITIONS, STRATEGIZING FOR THE FUTURE

As we can see, the fights occurring today against cop cities, pipelines, and prisons are about more than the sum of the overlapping corporate interests involved, the agencies that might be implicated, or the technologies deployed across them. In addition, these struggles must be thought and fought together because they are indexes of the way the state is navigating climate and capitalist crises, which is to say the way the state is planning for our futures. Organizers in Eastern Kentucky, like those fighting everywhere, will not allow a carceral state invested in the devastation of land, the organized abandonment of our most vulnerable populations, and the organized violence of imprisonment to determine their futures, despite its best efforts.

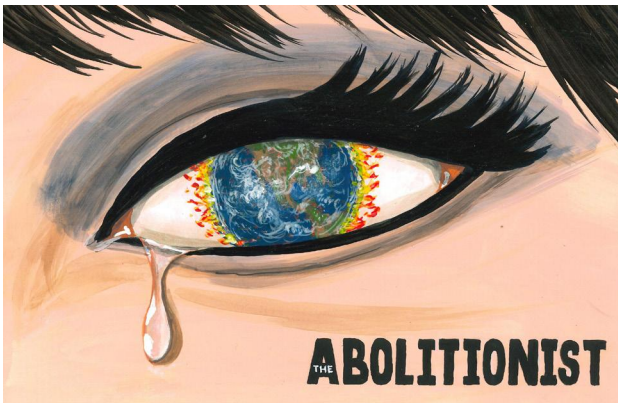
In July 2023, Congressman Rogers inserted language into Section 219 of the House Appropriations Subcommittee Bill intended to fast track the prison and circumvent challenges posed by the campaign against USP Letcher. Specifically, the language instructed the Attorney General to: (1) end the legally required NEPA process; (2) pre-empt and circumvent public comment by issuing a ROD; and (3) eliminate judicial review for both construction and operation. These baldly anti-democratic and authoritarian moves would ensure that even the most basic environmental assessments could not account for the ways that the floods have affected the region. Despite these blatant moves to advance the prison project, the previous bloc of state and private actors who were willing to collaborate across party lines and scales of the state to ensure that the facility be built today seems fractured and contains numerous contradictions at and across those same scales. In one particularly telling example, every budget proposal from the Trump and Biden Administrations since 2017 has called for the recission of the \$510 million dollars appropriated by Congress for the federal prison, citing the prison’s cost, its lack of need due to the declining federal prison population, and the complex physical terrain of the area. What this means now with the BOP’s pursuit of FCI Letcher is that the agency would seem simultaneously to admit that the prison is unnecessary and

is moving forward through the NEPA process toward construction.

“These struggles must be thought and fought together because they are indexes of the way the state is navigating climate and capitalist crises, which is to say the way the state is planning for our futures.”

BCNP, however, stands in the agency’s way. In May 2023, two dozen people gathered in Letcher County to spend a weekend together to cohere and align a strategy against FCI Letcher. With several from Letcher County, others arrived from elsewhere in Eastern Kentucky, like Harlan and Prestonsburg, or drove down from Lexington and Louisville, and still others flew in from Chicago, Pittsburgh, Cambridge, New Haven, Detroit, and Washington, DC. We were brought together by shared commitments to making change: to defeat a prison; to demand the kinds of infrastructures and development that don’t require or rely on extraction, expropriation, and incarceration; to plan something different. It was, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore argues in her Foreword to *The Jail is Everywhere: Fighting the New Geography of Mass Incarceration*, an example of people building “energetically stretched solidarities, connecting issues and people across space and sector.” These solidarities – against a proposed prison on a former mountaintop or a proposed cop city on a forest – demonstrate that the global fight for abolition is nothing less than the global fight for a livable future for all. ♦

About the Author: Judah Schept is a Professor in the School of Justice Studies at Eastern Kentucky University. He is the author of **Coal, Cages, Crisis: The Rise of the Prison Economy in Central Appalachia** (New York University Press, 2022) and **Progressive Punishment: Job Loss, Jail Growth, and the Neoliberal Logic of Carceral Expansion** (NYU Press, 2015). He is co-editor of *The Jail is Everywhere: Fighting the New Geography of Mass Incarceration* (Verso Books, 2024). Judah has been active for more than two decades with organizations and campaigns fighting for decarceration and abolition.



“We are burning our mother nature...Nature is the mother of the world and if I am a child of nature you are my sibling.” By imprisoned artists and subscriber, Niko Purata.

When thinking about climate crisis and imprisonment, it is not often that we make an immediate connection between the two. However, once you begin dissecting the crisis existing within the two subjects, you’ll quickly learn that the two coincide. In fact, in more ways than one, climate crisis and imprisonment—or more broadly the prison industrial complex (PIC)—contribute to each other’s unfortunate success.

More often than not, when we talk about climate crisis, we think of what is relatable, like natural disasters, global warming, or air pollution. No one is truly to blame for the fact that discussions on climate change and imprisonment are silent and uncommon, other than the actors who are in charge of creating the crisis. At the same time, those people are silencing the very ones who pay the ultimate price. In this instance, we are talking about those who are imprisoned. Or-

ganizations such as **Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM)** have done an excellent job reporting on the horrors of the prison system. According to one of their reports in 2019, Pennsylvania imprisoned more than seven times the number of people it did in the 1970s. Although this is a shocking statistic, it is not surprising. The US imprisons more people than any other country in the world, including China. It is also interesting to note that the US is the world’s number one PIC, building prisons on toxic “superfund sites” across the country.

The corporate raiders and destroyers are directly responsible for both the boom in the prison system and the mistreatment and destruction of Mother Earth. These so-called elites exploit, stockpile, harbor, misuse, and control all of the natural resources. Did you know that about 600 US prisons are intentionally built on or near toxic dump sites? These serve as an easy band-aid solution for the “toxic dump sites,” or, as the corporate elites would call it, a “superfund site,” a term derived from the superfund trust that was set up by Congress to handle emergency and hazardous waste sites. So how exactly do they address the issue at hand? Their solution is none other than to generate a wealth of revenue at the expense of the lives of 1.9 million prisoners, all residing within a three-mile radius of a superfund site. We all know that toxic dump sites contribute to the climate crisis as a result of increased emissions, so what exactly do you assume happens when you bury the waste in our grounds and build a prison on top of one?

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A plethora of health conditions and cancers among the imprisoned. The average rate of cancer deaths in Schuylkill County, PA, is 190 per 100,000 people, which is about 50 more people than the average county in the US. Many of those deaths happen in Black, Latinx, poor, and imprisoned communities. It's a vicious cycle: they pollute our air, then place a prison band-aid on our polluted soils, from which the pollution then seeps into our waters/aquifers, which in turn poisons imprisoned people.

"Superfund sites" insidiously slow-kill our progeny, family members, and generations via the nexus of pipelines or extractive industries of the PIC. The historical blueprint created by corporate raiders of exploitation, destruction, and obliterating humanity's and the earth's natural resources in exchange for the almighty dollar has caused many casualties in our communities. Corporate destroyers' "greed on wheels" philosophy is guided by their Currency Rules Everything Around Me (CREAM) principle at all expense. This has greatly contributed to the environmental catastrophes we see today. Planet Earth is at the red level, indicating future global climate chaos and catastrophic impending doom because of the playbook of corporate destroyers to deplete earth's resources with impunity.

Climate chaos caused by climate change—a result of racial capitalism—also directly affects

the imprisoned. ***Are you aware that not every prison facility is equipped with air-conditioning and proper ventilation?*** Increased temperatures (an impact of climate change) place huge risks on the imprisoned. More specifically, those who are ill and or have chronic conditions, such as asthma, are the most severely impacted. These prison facilities are also overcrowded and essentially overheated, amplifying the brutal impact of climate chaos on those who are imprisoned.

"It's a vicious cycle: they pollute our air, then place a prison band-aid on our polluted soils, from which the pollution then seeps into our waters/aquifers, which in turn poisons imprisoned people."

So how exactly do we help or push for change? It is no coincidence that the only groups who have primarily pushed for change are the so-called high-school dropouts, uneducated, poor, impoverished, imprisoned, neurodivergent, disabled, welfare and social security recipients, sex workers, the LGBTQ generation, and taxpayers. Of course, those who are most vulnerable to the harms of climate chaos and capitalism are those resisting and leading the fight. They are the in-

clusive ones who are ready and willing to sacrifice all their material possessions and are willing to die for what they believe in (namely, to protect Mother Earth at all costs, regardless of the consequences, be they imprisonment, or death).

We need to educate and bring awareness. Nelson Mandela said: "No one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens but its lowest ones." The imprisoned population is one that is always left for last. Almost always in research we are not even accounted for. In times of climate crisis, prisoners are experiencing the effects of climate crises at an all-time high, not only due to its structure, but also the foundation upon which the structure is built.

As a whole, we need to energize, strategize, mobilize, organize, and synergize to fight for our First Amendment rights, to stay alive. ♦

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FEATURES ACTION

"The Atlanta Way": Driving Ecological Destruction and Expanding the Prison Industrial Complex

By Eva Dickerson & Rehana Lerandeau

Since the introduction of the proposal in 2017 to build a **\$90 million facility—known as "Cop City"**—which could become **the largest police training center in the US if built**, much attention has pointed to Atlanta, Georgia. With construction slated on top of what locals call **"the lungs of Atlanta,"** also known as the **Weelaunee Forest**, organizers have swiftly mobilized to stop the project by occupying the forest, calling in the support of the displaced Muscogee Creek Tribe, targeting contracting companies that endorse the construction of the site, and applying immense pressure on the city to cancel the project. Organizers are not just calling for an immediate stop to the destruction of the forest and rivers that are home to hundreds of plant, animal, and neighboring human life - the campaign is also driven by a critical intervention point: *To halt the expansion of militarized policing in Atlanta.* The fight to Stop Cop City provides a unique perspective into the interlocking fights for environmental justice (EJ) and prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition.

Atlanta is viewed by many as the picture of "progress" that liberal cities across the US are striving towards. Home to civil rights titans like Martin Luther King Jr and John Lewis, and often referred to as "the Black Mecca," Atlanta is recognized as an epicenter of culture, education, and wealth for the Black bourgeoisie. These conditions complicate the fight to stop Cop City. We are seeing in real time how **"The Atlanta Way"**—a term used to describe "the strategic partnership between Black political leadership and white economic elites that work in service of corporations and upper-class white communities to the detriment of lower-income Black and working-class communities" (to quote Micah Herskind)—is fueling the expansion of the PIC at the expense of over 381 acres of forest, critical watershed, and natural canopy. The multi-racial, multi-generational, multi-political-tendency, decentralized campaign to stop Cop City highlights these historic tensions while also providing organizers across the US with strategies and tactics to fight back. As the severity of climate and ecological disaster hastens worldwide, the fight to stop Cop City reminds abolitionists to hold one fact clearly in our praxis: *EJ is dependent on our fight to abolish the prison industrial complex (PIC).*



"No Forest, No Peace," by Zola, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

NEOLIBERAL CARCERality IN THE BLACK MECCA

Living in the so-called "Black Mecca" is a radical experience of dissonance. Atlanta mythos follows the struggle of a small urban center working to cement its identity as a business and economic hub in the years following reconstruction. According to legend, thanks to the savvy maneuvering of Southern white elites and the willingness of newly freed Africans to contribute to the "birth of a new nation," Atlanta became a capital of industry, culture, and innovation. Ostensibly because of its unique Southern character, but more obviously to avoid disruptions to capital flow, the post-Reconstruction "peace" was transformed into a governance policy where white capital aligned with Black leadership to develop a new way of being in Atlanta. Thus, "The Atlanta Way" was born and has been credited for moving Atlantans through the latter half of the twentieth century.

Today, Atlanta is viewed by liberals as a cultural capital and an instructive model for the "post-racial" city. It represents everything liberals

champion—Black leaders in positions of power, from City Hall to the pulpit and the sheriff's office, who are open to innovative business but "tough on crime". Atlanta has a consistent "vote blue no matter who" block of canvassers and a free flow of capital for businesses looking to benefit from Georgia's lax tax policy. Conversely, the experience of daily life in the city paints a very different picture in which racial capitalism, the city's elite, and forces of repression of those who challenge the status quo are thriving.

"As the severity of climate and ecological disaster hastens worldwide, the fight to stop Cop City reminds abolitionists to hold one fact clearly in our praxis: ecological justice (EJ) is dependent on our fight to abolish the prison industrial complex (PIC)."

As class systems are enmeshed across the city and locals are pushed out for the sake of capitalist development, Atlanta has arguably become one of the most carceral cities in the US. Atlanta is the most surveilled city in the US and is also home to the notorious Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange (GILEE)—a deadly exchange program between Atlanta PD and the Israeli Defense Force. Fulton County (where Atlanta is located) also has a billion-dollar jail contract in the works, while the proposal to build Cop City has sparked an **eruption of over 69 similar projects across the US.** Everywhere policing, surveillance, and imprisonment are expanding while access to life affirming resources—including natural resources like the Weelaunee Forest—are under attack or facing complete destruction.

Contemporary Atlanta is a cautionary example of the ways that neoliberalism in a "post-racial" city can emerge. The faces and identities of the social and political elites change, but the underlying capitalist structure remains unaltered. Make no mistake that the fight for the forest and against the expansion of policing in Atlanta is a fight in which organizers are up against a Black mayor, a Black sheriff, a predominantly Black police force, and the Black elite. The dissonance between what local leadership espouses as the

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great success of Atlanta and the daily lived experience of regular people is maddening, and as Atlanta “develops” with capitalist aims, it’s destroying all life in its wake.

THE ECOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF COP CITY

While the Stop Cop City campaign is, at its core, an effort to challenge the advancement of policing and its immediate disastrous impacts on working class communities of color, the chosen site for the proposed project in the Weelaunee Forest has created a remarkable opportunity for PIC abolition and ecological justice fights to come together in one campaign. Since the plans for Cop City were discovered, organizers have been alerting residents— predominantly Black working-class communities— and decision makers behind the project of the severe environmental impact that would result if the facility were to be completed.

Organizers from an incredibly broad range of struggles— from forest and water defense to clean air collectives and parents living in East Atlanta worried about the safety and psychological impact on their children if they are forced to hear and inhale the toxins associated with mock urban warfare— have all come together for this fight. An immense amount of legal, historical, and environmental research conducted by campaign organizers all point to the same conclusion: *cutting down a forest to build a warfare facility at the height of the climate collapse will increase our susceptibility to severe weather events, divert critical funds away from life-affirming resources, and expose our residents to more contact with violent policing.* Every element of the plan for Cop City poses an existential and material threat to our world.

One such threat is aimed at the **South River Watershed**, a major water source to Atlanta that flows through the proposed build site. Dr Jaqueline Echols, Board President of South River Watershed Alliance, and fervent opponent to the Cop City construction site, has been uplifting the combined racist and environmental implications of building Cop City on the South River. Echols argues, *“The neighborhoods surrounding the South River are predominantly Black and never meet water quality standards while the Chattahoochee River, a predominantly white area further north, remains picturesque.”* Prior to the Cop City proposal, the city failed to maintain the same water standards for surrounding Black neighborhoods as those in white northern neighborhoods - even in the Black Mecca. The city’s leadership seems to be saying: *not only do we not care about your environment or health, but we would rid you of critical greenspace and water access entirely if it means policing you more thoroughly.*

Additionally, just over a year ago the Center for Biological Diversity released a statement emphasizing the importance of the South River Forest while also condemning the Atlanta police’s murder of comrade and forest defender Tortuguita. In their statement, they highlighted that the South River Forest protects the headwaters for Georgia’s largest and most diverse watershed home to hundreds of species of wildlife, insisting that *“as we seek justice for Tortuguita, we have to continue their mission to save this precious forest habitat and prevent a destructive development from further polluting a watershed that serves so many people.”* The Cop City project would clear cut over 85 acres of essential forest land that protects the watershed and provides critical urban canopy over the city during continuously rising temperatures in the face of climate disaster. A 2018 study of Atlanta’s tree canopy found that **“at 47.9 percent, Atlanta has the highest percentage of overall urban tree canopy in the nation** when compared to other cities that have conducted UTC Assessments.” According to the same study, more than keeping Atlanta residents cool at a time of record-breaking temperatures, tree canopies are important for offsetting the urban heat island effect, cleaning the air and soil of particulate matter, and constituting a storm water management system. Furthermore, “for many residents and visitors, Atlanta’s mature

and vibrant urban tree canopy is its signature environmental feature.”

“An immense amount of legal, historical, and environmental research conducted by campaign organizers all point to the same conclusion: cutting down a forest to build a warfare facility at the height of the climate collapse will increase our susceptibility to severe weather events, divert critical funds away from life-affirming resources, and expose our residents to more contact with violent policing.”

Poisoning the water, razing tree cover, and creating violent noise pollution and increased contact with policing for the Weelaunee Forest’s predominantly Black and working-class neighboring communities is all Cop City promises. The campaign to stop Cop City has mobilized powerful action in opposition to these violent advances and has been effectively putting a stop to destruction while fighting for dignified and healthy life for all living beings in Atlanta.

MOVES AND COUNTER MOVES: FIGHTING TO STOP COP CITY

Over the past year alone, forest defenders have been labeled **“domestic terrorists”**, **bail funds have been raided by militarized SWAT teams**, festival goers in the public forest have been hit with **“organized crime” RICO charges**, and over 116,000 Atlanta residents who oppose the project have been doxed by the city. This level of repression against organizers fighting to preserve critical watersheds, forest, and the peace of Black working-class neighborhoods should be studied seriously by movements across the US. It indicates rising fascism and the resulting crackdown on dissent. It also reveals what the state is planning for our futures—we can expect a violent expansion of policing to continue sustaining racial capitalism and PIC expansion at the expense of the environment. While we need immediate, organized responses, we can see that powerful organizing has forced the state to respond through violent counter moves in a failed attempt to squash resistance. The will of the people to cancel the project is unstoppable.

The Cop City project— originally proposed by Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms as a “pick me up gift” to a disgruntled police force after the 2020 uprisings following the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police— has been delayed for years. Forest defense has been one of the primary campaign tactics that supported the initial stall in the project. Anonymous forest defenders took up residence in the Weelaunee Forest, physically living in the trees themselves to obstruct destruction. Supply runs for the forest defenders, “Forest Fridays”, group meals open to the public, guided forest walks, raves, and festivals were all tactics used to build a movement that established community, built investment in the forest, and kept the land protected from destruction around the clock. Simultaneously, organizers targeted construction companies and corporate funders of the project like Reeves and Young, the Atlanta Police Foundation, Coca-Cola, Verizon, Target and others pressuring them to pull out of the project. Marches, call-in campaigns, destruction of construction equipment and cop cars, tagging facilities, and simple agitation all supported delaying and complicating the construction timeline.

During forest defense, organizers effectively worked to expand the struggle outside of Atlanta. Popular and earned media efforts emphasized that Cop City would change the idea of police militarization across the US and was not simply a local issue affecting some south Atlanta residents. Cross-country teach-ins were held, local protests were conducted at various sites of

corporations and construction companies supporting the project across the US, and in cities from San Francisco to New Orleans, New York, and Chicago “Stop Cop City” was spray painted on walls and sidewalks.

Immense pressure has also been put on the city officials in Atlanta who have the power to cancel the project. Organizers and residents in the city have broken records for public comment in opposition of the Cop City project twice since the inception of the campaign. Wheat pasting and canvassing to raise awareness about the harmful proposal to city residents has made the project immensely unpopular— **98 percent of Atlantans oppose the project**— which has put pressure on city council representatives and the mayor. Most recently, organizers executed a referendum campaign with the goal of moving the final decision on the project to the ballot to let the people decide. **Over 116,000 signatures— more than double the number needed to achieve the referendum goals— were gathered** showing strong opposition of the city to the project. The Stop Cop City movement is stronger than our enemies and has shown in action how building collective power and healthy ecosystems and rejecting the logic of racial capitalism can subvert and overpower the forces invested in seeing Cop City built.

WE MUST ABOLISH THE PIC TO ACHIEVE ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

If we understand ecological justice as **Movement Generation’s** definition of *“the state of balance between human communities and healthy ecosystems based on thriving, mutually beneficial relationships and participatory self-governance,”* then we understand that a project like Cop City is in direct contradiction to EJ. The insistence of Atlanta’s electorate on pursuing the project despite the severe costs to the ecology of Atlanta is a demonstration of their priorities at the height of climate crisis. In the face of chaos and upheaval caused by both major weather events and social unrest (both of which are in turn a result of the unchecked racial capitalism), the city will continue to ensure the ability of those in power to extract our material and natural resources, our planetary potential, and continue to use policing and surveillance to squash dissent.

As organizers, we must fight for an approach to revolutionary change that fosters political unity and exposes the underbelly of white elite motivations enmeshed within the social structures of the city. *If we don’t, the PIC will continue to recruit the “come-up class” and Black bourgeoisie of Atlanta to advance carceral and capitalistic aims and will swallow everything in its path: our people, our precious resources, and our protective landscape.*

Historic conditions are manifesting in tenacious resistance to Cop City, in turn met with unimaginable repression. Though this fight is not a unique phenomenon, but a reflection of the pattern of the state and capitalism more broadly to advance and abuse the rest of us at all costs, we can look to the movement to stop Cop City not only as a tactical case study but a lesson in how directly impacted communities across the country fight together for ecological justice against institutions of mass death. As comrades on the streets and in the forests have taken up all manners of resistance—from forest occupation to construction site lockdowns and airport blockades—the call to “Stop Cop City” can be heard around the world. To achieve true ecological justice in the Black Mecca, we must abolish all manifestations of the PIC in Atlanta, end the insidious “Atlanta Way”, join forces with environmental protection movements, and —of course —**stop Cop City now.** What we achieve in Atlanta could certainly become a global model.♦

About the Authors:

Eva Dickerson: *Starseed eva (they/themme/baby girl) believes in a freer, greener future and is on a*

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journey alongside their world-expanding friends to get there. The apple of their eye is the city of Atlanta, where they live, work, play, and experiment with the people in the city about how we might practice a more compassionate way of being together. Much of their organizing in the city is concentrated within the Ashview Heights, Vine City, West End, Bush Mountain, and now Gresham Park neighborhoods

where their abolitionist ideology comes to life by way of childcare collectives, neighborhood farmers markets, community gardens, popular education campaigns, and earth-based projects.

Rehana Lerandeau: Rehana is the **National Membership Organizer for Critical Resistance (CR)**. Based in Atlanta, Georgia, Rehana’s roots flow from

her hometown of Oakland. A previous member of CR’s Oakland chapter, Rehana supports CR members develop abolitionist projects and campaigns across our chapter regions of Oakland, Los Angeles, Portland, New York, and (newly) Kentucky. In Atlanta, Rehana is supporting the campaign to stop Cop City and the **campaign to end the Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange (GILEE)**.

FEATURES ACTION

Palestine as a Lab for Climate Apocalypse: When Worlds Are Threatened by Colonialism

By Rawan Masri

In Amsterdam in November 2023, 21-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, known for challenging world leaders to take immediate action for climate change mitigation, expressed her solidarity with Palestine and her understanding of the interconnectedness between movements for a free Palestine and for environmental justice. As she inspired the crowd to chant, “Palestine will be free,” a man walked across the stage and took the microphone away from her to declare he was there for “a climate demonstration and not for a political view.”

The fight against climate change is inherently political. Palestinians have been intimately acquainted with this fact due to the US-backed Zionist settler-colonial project and its political experiment of the apartheid state of Israel, wreaking havoc on Palestinian land and natural resources all the while branding itself as green and environmentally friendly, a tactic called “**greenwashing**”. When examining the violence that apartheid Israel deploys to destroy Palestinian life and unraveling Israel’s greenwashing of its military occupation and escalating ongoing genocide in all its manifestations, we are also examining the fight against climate change. As imperialist forces attempt to neuter the environmental movement via greenwashing and obscure the distinction between the oppressors versus the oppressed, the struggles against US imperialism, environmental racism, and the prison industrial complex (PIC) are essential to the struggle for Palestinian freedom, freedom of the land, and freedom of our planet.

ZIONISM, ECOCIDE, AND THE DESTRUCTION OF PALESTINIAN LIFE

In Gaza there is no “climate anxiety”; there is only the apocalypse. At the time of writing this article, apartheid Israel has carried out seven-going-on-eight straight months of a genocidal war on the Gaza Strip of historic Palestine—which has only exacerbated the catastrophic conditions created by the 17-year-long blockade and closure and all the wars and clashes since settlement withdrawal in 2005. According to the *Guardian*, since October 2023, Israel has dropped tens of thousands of bombs on Gaza, with satellite analysis from January indicating that between 50 and 62 percent of all buildings have been damaged or destroyed. While much destruction has been caused by constant aerial bombardment, ground troops also invaded and dismantled greenhouses while tractors, tanks, and vehicles uprooted orchards and fields of crops, ultimately destroying an estimated 38 to 48 percent of tree cover and farmland. **Forensic Architecture’s** Assistant Director of Research, **Samaneh Moafi**, describes this systemic destruction of agricultural land and infrastructure in Gaza as not only genocide but “**a deliberate act of ecocide.**”

The climate apocalypse Palestinians are facing did not start in October 2023. Rather, apartheid Israel has been deploying ecological warfare on Palestinians for decades. As stated in the 2012 report “Israel’s Worldwide Role in Repression” released by **the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN)**, the colonization of Palestine was once part of the British and French attack on the movement for Arab unity and independence that threatened European control of the region’s resources, hence Israel’s tight



Palestine landscape with sign saying “Danger of collapse, no passage!” Courtesy of Rawan Nemer.

partnership with the US for the same control of those resources. Therefore, a major component of establishing Western dominance in historic Palestine through military occupation since 1948 has been the intentional use of environmental destruction as well as resource extraction, making environmental oppression an insidious strategy for Zionist settler-colonial and apartheid practices.

While land has always been central to the settler-colonial imagination, Israel has refined this colonial staple to frame the environment as separate from humans, which exists as a site to be owned and controlled by technologically advanced, “deserving” people. As explained by **DA Jaber** in her research on settler colonialism and ecocide referencing Al-Khader in the Bethlehem area of the West Bank as a case study, “**the ability to dominate and manipulate an ecology for power benefits contributes to the settler goal of native elimination. Therefore, ecocide as the destruction of native ecology is simultaneous with the creation of settler exclusive space.**”

Safe and clean water should belong to everyone. Instead, the wastewater Israel reuses for irrigation is an environmental and health hazard, given its poor pretreatment, inadequate oversight, and lenient standards in areas where Palestinians live—another manifestation of separate and unequal apartheid policies. Palestinian environmental scholar **Sharif S Elmusa** describes Israel as being a water sponge, and a greedy sponge at that: **Israel uses 73 percent of the West Bank’s water**, diverting an additional 10 percent of it to illegal settlements, and selling to Palestinians the remaining 17 percent. Meanwhile, in the nearby settlements, settlers have ample water supply. They have swimming pools and lush irrigated vineyards, herb farms, and lawns—verdant even at the height of the dry season—standing in stark contrast to the parched and arid Palestinian villages on their doorstep. This is not an isolated case. It has been found that, overall, water consumption by Israelis is at least four times that of Palestinians living in the occupied Palestinian territory.

As IJAN and other organizations have exposed, the Israeli government assumes a major, world-

wide role in enforcing limitations on the freedom of movement, the policing of communities, and undermining peoples’ struggles for liberation. **Israel’s occupation of historic Palestine and routine military campaigns “serve as a laboratory” in the global development and business of weapons, surveillance technology, and tactics of population control.** Israel’s concurrent use of ecocide further advances its military and political objective—to destroy all Palestinian life—an experiment for sale and export.

Today there are 9,500 Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank caged in Israeli captivity, including 3,660 prisoners in administrative detention (without charges or a trial). One in every five Palestinians has experienced arrest or charges in their lifetime, a dramatic increase since October 7 that has targeted released prisoners and, specifically, women activists. Many behind Israeli bars have made the connection between the occupation and the need to protect the environment, as reflected in their research, writing, and activism. All, however, have been met with detention because of the ways their very existence has been deemed resistance to Zionist settler colonialism, a dynamic that should inform our organizing not only in Palestine regarding our fraught relationship to our land but in solidarity movements globally.

RESISTING ISRAEL’S GREENWASHING: NO SUCH THING AS A GREEN GENOCIDE

A pillar of Israel’s Western-backed apartheid regime from its inception has been racist, anti-Arab propaganda. It is no wonder, then, that Israel has invested in a huge amount of **greenwashing** as a propaganda tactic and broader political strategy to shield against scrutiny into its military operations and to hide genocide. Stemming from colonialism’s separatist staple, Zionist propaganda portraying Israel as an environmental steward to justify the subjugation of Palestinians and destruction of Palestinian land has since only evolved to be a bit more subtle. In the context of Palestine, **greenwashing is a form of environmental racism** in which Zionists pay lip service to ecological preservation and **ahistorically depict Israel as “making the desert bloom.”** All the while, Israel continues polluting Palestinian land, planting invasive species, building “ecological preserves” to cover up ethnically cleansed villages, and presenting its theft of Palestinian water as a miraculous answer to the water scarcity that Israel itself is actively contributing to. **This propaganda serves to cover up and distract from the displacement and uprooting of Palestinians** in service of the Zionist colonial project.

“Israel’s concurrent use of ecocide further advances its military and political objective—to destroy all Palestinian life—an experiment for sale and export.”

While greenwashing is deployed to excuse or hide the different tools for ecocidal destruction as mentioned, another greenwashing method includes seemingly environmental initiatives by the Israeli state that undermine Palestinian (and therefore Indigenous) stewardship of the land. Tree-planting campaigns, for instance, are

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cynically exploited for colonial ends, with the trees themselves used as proof that Zionism is “bettering” the land in ways Palestinians could not and as a symbol of an imagined Israeli past. According to **Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East**, the **Jewish National Fund (JNF)**, despite its racial justice based mandate and its involvement in settler-colonial projects, deceptively depicts itself as an environmental charity, boasting of having planted over 240 million trees, having had large successes with reforestation, rehabilitating forests, and preventing forest fires. In reality, the practices of planting extensive non-native trees and using hazardous chemicals have been disastrous, killing off much of the native habitat and resulting in massive deadly forest fires.

These trees are also intentionally planted over the remains of Palestinian villages ethnically cleansed and destroyed during the 1948 Nakba; the aforementioned pine trees, for example, were planted over the remains of the Palestinian village of Al-Trina. The purpose of this is to make Palestinian life and Indigeneity physically invisible, by literally obscuring evidence of their previous existence on the same land. Furthermore, designating certain areas as national parks aims to first obscure Palestinian life and then make it impossible by concealing remnants of Palestinian heritage on the land, putting a “green face” on Israel’s colonial expansion. This is what happened in Wadi Qana, leading to an absolute ban on Palestinian farming, which meant the loss of an important source of income and way of life. One organization that supports Palestinian farmers in the face of farming bans and other apartheid policies is the **Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC)**, which, according to an Equator Initiative 2014 case study, is one of the oldest nonprofit organizations in the state of Palestine that works with farmers, herders, and fishermen to attain food sovereignty by restoring and conserving natural resources and fighting for Palestinians’ rights to access them.

Sites like Al-Trina are not spectacular exceptions, as the Zionist settler-colonial project aims to turn mass burial grounds and the destruction of communities and ways of life into places of leisure and entertainment. This thinking is applied in different ways across historical Palestine, reaching a fever pitch through the Gaza genocide. Former senior advisor to the Trump administration Jared Kushner is openly daydreaming about dollar signs in the form of “valuable waterfront property” in Gaza. The Harey Zahav settlement real estate company, following the December 2023 Practical Preparation for Gaza Settlement Conference in Tel Aviv organized by a coalition of settlement organizations funded by the Israeli government, published an “artistic rendering” of luxury homes superimposed over an actual photograph of a Gaza neighborhood destroyed by Israeli attacks. Essentially, as Khaled Odetallah has theorized in Arabic regarding the shift in violence against Palestinians in Gaza, once Israeli settlements were withdrawn in 2005, strategies of imprisonment, exploitation, and elimination of the existing population have become inherent in the production of a new reality and geography in Gaza.

The impact of this violence since then has been devastating. Tens of thousands of unrecovered bodies are decomposing under rubble and pro-

liferating inside homes, public places, and the streets, with the whole Gaza Strip being referred to not only as an “open-air prison” but as an “open-air graveyard”. The lack of proper burial poses a health and environmental threat, to say nothing of the psychological torture of seeing these bodies and makeshift mass graves. Furthermore, thousands of explosives from the current and previous wars have polluted the air and ground, including highly incendiary white phosphorus, leaving another toxic layer of chemicals in Gaza’s air and soil. The carbon emissions generated in just 60 days (of 170 days and counting) of the war are greater than the annual carbon footprint of more than 20 of the world’s most climate-vulnerable nations. This is likely an underestimate, with researchers attributing over 99 percent of the 281,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide emitted to Israel’s aerial bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza.

However, despite the genocidal violence enacted against Palestinians and the ecocidal war being waged on their land, Palestinians have continuously resisted and challenged Israel’s greenwashing. *Al Jazeera* reported in 2022 that in Naqab, historic Palestine’s largest district covering 5,000 square miles that has faced unrelenting colonization since the establishment of the state of Israel, Palestinians have been protesting Israel’s rapidly accelerating land theft and greenwashing efforts, organizing sit-ins and sometimes blocking the invading Israeli forces from entering their villages and townships. Despite facing arrest, violence, and repression for their organizing, “*Palestinians in the Naqab have no intention of giving up and allowing the theft, use, and abuse of their ancestral lands without resistance.*”

Similarly, **Science for the People Magazine** published in 2020 that “*a significant movement for environmental justice and sustainability is growing even under the very difficult conditions of occupation and colonization.*” They cited the power of the growing **boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement** and the work of Palestinians at the grassroots level to build popular institutions to enhance and promote sustainable, natural, and humane communities in the context of a larger anti-colonial struggle. This grassroots work is also educating new generations of Palestinians about their culture and history—conjoining the fights for environmentalism and Palestinian liberation as one.

IN ORDER TO SAVE THE PLANET, WE HAVE TO SAVE GAZA FIRST

The Zionist colonial project has constituted an environmental and existential war against all of historical Palestine since its inception. Nowhere are the stakes clearer than in the Gaza Strip. Ambiguous and abstract “climate anxieties” would be a privilege to Palestinians, especially in Gaza. Instead, the worst-case scenario is unfolding before our eyes. Whether it will continue this way now and repeatedly is a matter of the political will and organization needed to grind the machinery at play to a halt. Until then, Gaza is being put through the end of the world, and time will tell if the West Bank will be exposed to the same.

At this critical juncture, Palestinian climate activist, Manal Shqair in her article “No, Israel Is

Not Making the Desert Bloom,” published in *Jacobin* in October 2023, asserts that environmental movements must support the Palestinian struggle for self-determination “by centering and valuing eco-sumud (‘steadfastness’) as an Indigenous knowledge that can inform solutions to, and strategies to mitigate, the climate crisis.” Shqair goes on to declare: “*The dark tunnel that is Palestinians’ life under Israeli oppression is getting darker. Yet a glimpse of light can be seen that illuminates the Palestinians’ long path to liberation: that light is the increasing resistance of the Palestinian people, who refuse to be isolated, dehumanized, and obliterated.*”

“The Zionist colonial project has constituted an environmental and existential war against all of historical Palestine since its inception. Nowhere are the stakes clearer than in the Gaza Strip.”

These existential considerations regarding Palestinian land and our right to life and dignity have long been central to Palestinian political movements and resistance, with Land Day honoring the six Palestinians murdered by Israeli police during the 1976 mass protests against land seizures and settler-colonial practices of erasure being a noticeable example. In his October 2023 op-ed published in *Al Jazeera*, Muhanad Ayyash reminds us that “*Palestinians will not be erased.[...] People from across the world will continue to see their struggles reflected in the Palestinian struggle, ensuring that Palestine as a political story, a political vision, and as a revelation of the current political conditions and systems of power, will never be erased from the hearts and minds of people the world over. [...] The Palestinian revolutionary spirit that shows the foundational violence and injustice of this colonial world order and insists on liberation and the creation of an alternative system will outlast all of the powerful states who are currently ruling the world and plotting to erase Palestine from the map.*”

This piece should be seen as one of many contributions to how the Palestinian cause is, among other intertwined things, an environmental cause that is part of the struggle against Global North domination and exploitation. Just as there are no national borders for capital, there should be none for our solidarity against the forces of violence and oppression stacked against us, especially the most peripheral and marginalized among us most threatened by climate change. ♦

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FEATURES ACTION

Bodies on the Line: Appalachians Against Pipelines to Stop the Mountain Valley Pipeline

By Nutmeg and Mr Charley

In the early hours of November 2, 2023, Appalachian grandfather of four, **Jerome Wagner**, put his body on the line to stop the construction of the **Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP)**. Fearing for the futures of his grandchildren, the land and water defender locked himself to pipeline

drilling equipment preparing to drill under Elk River, the largest and most expensive river crossing of the 303-mile pipeline route that winds its way through the green countryside of Virginia and West Virginia. In return for his dedication to future generations, Jerome was sentenced to a year in jail and a year of probation.

A few months later, in February 2024, **Mama Julz**, an Oglala Lakota Nation land and water defender and co-founder of the **Mothers Against Meth Alliance**, and her direct-action support companion sacrificed their bodies to stop the MVP from helicoptering pipeline workers to a construction site on top of West Virginia’s Poor Mountain, which holds some of the most dangerous 45-degree angle slopes on the pipeline route. While her companion held a section of steel pipe around a piece of the helicopter, Mama Julz reached inside to lock chain-link bracelets worn around her wrists to posts cemented inside the pipe, encircling part of the

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helicopter and preventing it from taking off. The pair stayed there, halting construction until cops arrived on the scene hours later to saw Mama Julz out of the pipe. They were subsequently arrested, denied bond, and remained in jail for four days until bail was set at outrageous amounts of \$25,000 and \$10,000.

Mama Julz and Jerome’s treatment follows a frightening trend of increasingly escalatory state repression against activists protesting the construction of the MVP. Their actions are part of a larger community-driven direct-action campaign, **Appalachians Against Pipelines (AAP)**, that has fiercely contested MVP construction for the last six years. This pipeline, 42 inches in diameter, is twice the diameter that currently supplies Virginia and the Carolinas and would **transport 90 million metric tons of fracked natural gas from the Marcellus and Utica shale deposits of West Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York.**

AAP’s organizing body is non-hierarchical on principle, but our strategy is driven by Appalachians whose accountability to the land comes from generations of family from the region. Our actions are supported by a dedicated community of climate, “Land Back”, and prison industrial complex (PIC) abolitionist activists who have shown up to fight other fossil fuel infrastructure projects in the past, including the Dakota Access Pipeline, Enbridge’s Line Three Pipeline, and the Keystone XL Pipeline. Our primary tactics involve direct-action strikes to produce work stoppages and delays that drive up the cost of construction. AAP activists frequently trespass onto pipeline construction sites, locking their bodies to equipment, trees, or well-placed cars filled with concrete. These direct-action tactics are used to slow construction while other branches of the movement work to stop or delay the project in the courts. Due to AAP’s direct-action techniques, MVP construction is approximately six years behind schedule and four billion dollars over budget.

The broader goal of AAP and our movement partners is to free Appalachia from extractive industries. Since the decline of coal mining in the 1970s, the region has experienced an economic decline that has rendered land cheap and left communities struggling with high rates of poverty and unemployment. The nature of all extractive industries, from coal to fracking to pipeline construction, is to further exploit these conditions, inviting the rise of the next quick-profiting replacement industry to the area with offers of tempting economic security for residents, and the cycle repeats. While coal mining has long dominated its economy, Appalachia has also witnessed the rise and fall of extractive exploitation through waste dumps, fracked natural gas, and gold mining. As mining and resource extraction projects dry up, they are now being replaced with another extractive industry: prisons.

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Prisons and pipelines are the state’s short-term solutions for dealing with the symptoms of poisonous extractive industry without meeting the crisis at its root cause. The process of **Mountain Top Removal (MTR)** and its links to the, perfectly illustrate this. MTR is a coal industry practice that uses explosives to blow off the ridgelines of mountains for quicker extraction of coal, and then dumps the now-exposed rock into valley fills that expose life of all kinds to extremely toxic chemicals and heavy metals. This process

creates a “**sacrifice zone**” of land so hazardous that it can no longer be lived on or cultivated. The PIC serves the interests of racial capitalism by restoring value to this “**surplus land**,” putting it to use caging human beings.

Similar to the state’s claims to sway the public in favor of prison expansion projects, the MVP fails to provide good short-term or long-term jobs to the area despite its monopolization of the region’s economy. **Pipeline manufacturing is largely outsourced to contracts in India, and 87 percent of the gas itself is intended for overseas export.** Rather than training local workers, the pipeline conglomerate company fills local hotels and builds temporary housing camps for workers they’ve hired from out of state. MVP construction also poses a serious risk of environmental disaster. The multi-state-spanning pipeline runs through approximately 50 miles of karst, a geological phenomenon that creates unpredictable sinkholes and ever-shifting unmapped underground water drainage caves. It also includes construction through the very active Giles County Seismic Zone, which is best known for its twelve earthquakes across two decades. 74 percent of the route has high landslide potential, which means the pipeline is extremely likely to experience slippage, damage, and explosion. It **threatens the lives and homes of communities within the 11,115-foot blast radius** as well as the **42 percent of West Virginia residents** relying on groundwater for domestic use. Ultimately, it will be their drinking water that will be most neglected when the pipeline inevitably toxifies the groundwater supply. The MVP deeply endangers all who live around it while failing to fulfill its empty promises of economic opportunity to the region.

AAP originated from coalition efforts to stop both the MVP and **Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP)**. One of these goals was accomplished in July 2020 when the ACP project was canceled, thanks to the movement’s diverse arsenal of protest tactics. AAP activists have used bicycles to block traffic for construction workers commuting to worksites, placed cars filled with concrete in strategic locations to disrupt construction, and locked themselves to construction equipment. Jane and Ted, a married couple of 45 years, locked themselves to a giant wooden opossum they built together. AAP also organized the **2018 Yellow Finch Tree Sit**, an aerial blockade that stopped MVP construction for 932 days—the longest recorded tree-sit east of the Mississippi.

The success of efforts to block construction on the ACP shows that victory is possible when communities come together to voice their demands and put their principles into action. But successes like these have also spurred the PIC to intensify policing and repression as communities mount coordinated efforts to disrupt construction. This is why AAP is grappling with the prospect of increasingly severe sanctions and longer jail times for protestors as our campaign becomes more effective at stopping the MVP. Direct-action tactics are becoming increasingly criminalized under **Critical Infrastructure Laws (CIL)**, which originate from state and corporate backlash against powerful Indigenous resistance led by the **Standing Rock Sioux Tribe** at the **Dakota Access Pipeline** and the **Ojibwe people** at **Enbridge’s Line 3 oil pipeline**. CIL language is intentionally ambiguous, so it can remain as flexible as possible during the targeted prosecution of land and water defenders and those who support them. They aim to criminalize resistance that builds on the work of movements fighting to stop pipeline construction that scars the land we cherish and contributes to carbon emissions driving our current climate emergency.

This national escalation in state repression is codified into law through CIL in 19 states, including West Virginia, where it threatens AAP’s work. The anti-protest legislation functions to protect fossil fuel infrastructure by dramatically raising criminal charges, often from misdemeanor to felony charges, that specifically target anti-pipeline protests for any willful “trespassing,” “tampering,” or general impedi-



AAP activist sitting inside a section of the MVP, stopping work on Peters Mountain within the Jefferson National Forest.

ment to the functioning of pipeline infrastructure. It also criminalizes any person or organization that “recruits, trains, aids, advises, hires, counsels, or conspires” to do the same. Unsurprisingly to those fighting within the PIC abolition community, the CIL legislative language was drafted and spread to state legislatures by the notorious American Legislative Exchange Council, which specializes in writing copy/paste legislation that secures and increases prison funding at state and national levels.

“The anti-protest legislation functions to protect fossil fuel infrastructure by dramatically raising criminal charges, often from misdemeanor to felony charges, that specifically target anti-pipeline protests for any willful ‘trespassing,’ ‘tampering,’ or general impediment to the functioning of pipeline infrastructure. It also criminalizes any person or organization that ‘recruits, trains, aids, advises, hires, counsels, or conspires’ to do the same.”

Another tactic the MVP uses to intimidate impacted communities into complacency is a lawfare tactic called a **Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation**, or “**SLAPP suit**.” Recently, the MVP sued approximately 40 protestors, seeking increased criminal charges and recoupment of their estimated **\$4 million in losses** experienced due to halted construction pace. The police have also ratcheted up repressive tactics, regularly holding activists **without bond** or with abnormally **high bail** for simple misdemeanors (such as with Mama Julz). And, in a move to appease West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer placed language into the **Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023** that both fast-tracks all MVP permits and also moves any appeals out of the US Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals—where environmental lawyers were fighting and winning the revocation of permits—to the more conservative DC Circuit Court, where they are almost certain to lose. Organizers recognize these threatening tactics as part of a larger national trend to escalate criminalization of leftist resistance.

As Mama Julz said on her day of action against MVP in February: “**Without water there is no life.**” This battle cry reflects Indigenous knowledge that tells us how modern extractive industry furthers the ongoing project of colonialism. The process of commodifying and plundering the earth requires the removal of land stewards while it poisons what all life relies on most: water. The threat of this pipeline has radicalized many

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Appalachians into an aligned understanding with Indigenous folks in their fight to protect the earth. AAP’s campaign is grounded in protecting the land that feeds and nurtures life, while battling systems of oppression like the PIC, racial capitalism, and neocolonialism, all designed to benefit a fossil fuel-dependent economy that destroys not only the land, but also our relationship to it through commodification.

FEATURES ACTION

Dispatches from the Trenches: Anti-Fracking Resistance in Argentina

By Fernando Cabrera Christiansen, Observatorio Petrolero Sur

Thursday, August 17, 2023. Sunrise. A vehicle caravan arrived in Sierra Grande, a small town in the Río Negro province in the Argentine Patagonia and located 18 miles off the Atlantic coast, and the rain welcomed the protesters. A crowded gymnasium awaited the beginning of a public hearing. This was to be the last administrative act before the provincial government authorized a massive infrastructure project: The installation of an oil pipeline and export port, as part of the policy implemented by the former progressive and populist president Alberto Fernández, who left office last December.

A seven-block column of protesters marched through the mud toward the building, while close to 10 people waited for them by the door. These were municipal workers who, directed by an official, verbally attacked and laughed at them. At the gymnasium’s door, police prevented anyone from entering, but two members of a socioenvironmental assembly were able to dodge the door and squeeze into the packed room.

Around 400 neighbors witnessed the event, hoping that the installation would bring economic improvements to their lives. In dozens of meetings, the communal president, the provincial secretary of the environment, and the oil company promoting the activity had thus assured it. As a provincial clerk initiated the process, a yell pierced the serenity of the room: “This is not a democracy!” The demand came from a 40-year-old woman who warned that there were people who had been unable to enter the room to voice their criticism. The other activist from the local socioenvironmental assembly spoke out and welcomed the delegations coming from other towns and provinces, uttering a phrase that would be repeated all morning: “This hearing is a sham!” It was necessary to reach a political milestone and demonstrate that the project had a mass opposition. The police promptly expelled the activists out of the gym.

Outside, banners bearing the names of different neighborhoods and groups reading “Yes to the pipeline” illustrated the “awareness” work conducted by the oil company and the provincial and municipal governments. In an impoverished city with limited job offers, the authorities had made promises they wouldn’t keep. Demonstrators were soaking wet, and tension inside the gymnasium grew. For some decades now, different governments have outsourced repression, hiring union goons to avoid using their own police. That morning, a mob of goons rushed toward the protesters, driving them off.

Minutes later, a small delegation of the local Indigenous people arrived—the **Mapuche**. The goons insulted them, claiming their demands were harming the community. The protesters, in turn, embraced them. The Mapuche—whose name means “**people of the earth**”—were massacred by the Argentine state 140 years ago, when the Army appropriated Patagonian territories. The surviving Indigenous population went on to inhabit the poorest lands and eventually started to gather in the slums across the region. In the 1990s, they began reorganizing as a people and, since then, they have put up fierce struggles against different government administrations and businessmen who now

Our movement calls on people to redefine their relationships to the land, not through the commodification of its resources, but by recognizing how it holds and homes us. We understand that the fight to protect Appalachia is also the fight to disrupt the projects of the PIC, racial capitalism, climate change, and neocolonialism. All our struggles are interconnected. *No prisons! No pipelines! Defend the forest everywhere!*♦

see in those formerly waste lands new sources of wealth. In this particular case, the territories that Mapuche communities claim as their own will be impacted by the pipeline piercing through and the subsequent maritime effects caused by the oil port. The entire column of protesters eventually decided to leave, for there was no security to continue demonstrating without endangering the rest of the group.

Since December 10, 2023, the far right has governed Argentina. A force with little over two years of existence has reached the higher echelons of power based on a disruptive discourse—antagonistic of established democratic institutional standards—with the promise of changing many of the social agreements the country adhered to over the last decades, part of a global trend of right-wing leaders, such as Donald Trump in the US and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. Javier Milei’s government is conservative and enjoys the support of business sectors and the traditional right-wing party. His policies thus far have been marked by skyrocketing inflation rates that have devalued wages, a radical liberalization of the economy, and a reduction of state intervention and assistance. **Social conflict triggered by these types of policies and the inability of the government to forge alliances forecasts uncertain times.**

In regard to the energy sector, the administration maintains the foundations of previous policies (such as **hydrocarbon exploitation through fracking**), but modifies others (the imperative of achieving maximum corporate profitability), further accelerating hydrocarbon exports and the **sector’s liberalization**, as well as imposing an excessive **increase in fuel prices**. While corporations welcome these measures, communities are incapable of foreseeing the impact this new reality will have on their pockets. In the vast territories directly affected by oil extraction, Indigenous rights are being infringed, serious environmental issues have been registered, and social indicators continue to be very poor. Resistance, however, has not been widespread, even though dozens of conflicts are unfolding.

VACA MUERTA OIL SUR

“**Vaca Muerta Oil Sur**” is a project designed by **YPF—the oil company headed by the Argentine state**—to install an oil pipeline and port in the Atlantic coast of the Argentine Patagonia. This initiative, an extractive infrastructure project with a fraught significance for Latin America, seeks to link the town of Añelo, the hub of fracking exploitation, to the San Matías Gulf, an area of unique biodiversity. The pipeline, extending over 370 miles, would transport 360 thousand daily barrels of oil, multiplying the export opportunities of what aims to become the largest oil port in the country.

The strange name of “**Vaca Muerta**” (“**Dead Cow**”) refers to a geological formation comprised of hydrocarbons that are extracted through fracking. This unconventional hydrocarbon reservoir spreads over 18 thousand square miles—a surface similar to that of the state of Maryland—under the subsoil of the Argentine Patagonia region. There are currently 2,700 unconventional active wells that produce 60 percent of the country’s gas and 42 percent of the country’s crude oil. On average, each drilling operation involves the injection

About the authors: **Appalachians Against Pipelines** works collectively to fight corporate greed and defend Appalachia from environmental destruction. Due to surveillance and the threat of repression, the authors write under the pseudonyms *Nutmeg* and *Mr Charley*. To support the work of AAP, please follow and engage with our social media accounts (Instagram and Facebook: @appalachiansagainstpipelines, X: @stopthemvp), and **donate to our Legal Solidarity Fund** at: bit.ly/AppLegalDefense.



Protesters against the construction of an oil pipeline in Sierra Grande. Photo courtesy of Pablo Pirovano / OPSur.

of almost 16 million gallons of drinkable water mixed with dozens of chemicals and hundreds of truckloads of sand, tremendous amounts that continue to increase year after year. Commonly compared with the Permian Basin, Vaca Muerta is the country’s decade-long, largest energetic and economic effort, and previous administrations have unsuccessfully clung to it in hopes of overcoming the structural economic crisis of the country.

Vaca Muerta and the fracking debate became part of the political agenda in 2011. Since then, many instances of resistance and challenges to this type of activity have taken place. First, different social, political, feminist, trade union, ecological, and human rights organizations—in tandem with those of the Mapuche people and individuals of a wide range of educational, professional, and political backgrounds—established links to oppose fracking. Focused in the province of Neuquén in the Norpatagonia, resistance hit head-on and gained popularity, bringing up for debate the ways the state formulates hydrocarbon policies that prompt this extractive activity through benefits and legal security for corporations and the use of experimental extractive practices, all of which are detrimental to the population and the regional economies. To achieve this, they turned to multi-pronged strategies—occupation of oil wells, “escraches” (public denunciations) at corporate offices or business meetings, rallies, flyers distribution, educational activities, lectures, etc.

The epitome of this type of resistance was a massive march on August 28, 2013, the day in which the Legislature of Neuquén province—across which a large patch of Vaca Muerta stretches—ratified the agreement between the national oil company YPF and the **US company Chevron**, which paved the way for this kind of exploitation. On that day, some 5,000 people rallied toward the legislature to protest against the provincial law that would license the implementation of the agreement between both companies, with police cracking down on demonstrators for seven hours. The protest saw a confluence of left-wing parties, legislators across the political spectrum, union representatives from progressive sectors, the Confederación Mapuche (Mapuche Confederation) of Neuquén, environmental organizations, and the Catholic bishop, among others. Despite resistance, the law was enacted. To those protesting, the agreement meant relinquishing hydrocarbon goods to Chevron, facilitated by government leaders based on their particular interests in these types of businesses. They claimed that what represented a benefit to Chevron actually meant a detriment to the whole society. An anti-imperialist demand against the plunder by an American company thus converged with another of socioenvironmental char-

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acteristics and against pollution. “Vaca Muerta is pillage and pollution” was one of the slogans deployed at the time.

Since then, Indigenous rights are being trampled on throughout the territories impacted by oil extraction. Until now, not a single oil project has abided by the right to consultation established by the International Labour Organization’s Convention Number 169—ratified by Argentina—and, in the face of Indigenous protests, the number of judicialization and criminalization demands filed by governments or businessmen against Mapuche leaders have been on the rise. Moreover, several environmental issues have been registered in those lands affected by fracking, such as the millions of gallons of contaminated water left abandoned after being used for hydraulic fracturing, the thousands of tons of oil-covered soil poorly processed laying feet away from populated areas and in violation of the convention, the multiplication of earthquakes in the region, and the astronomical rise in emissions product of this exploitation. Social statistical data in Neuquén province—where fracking extraction has advanced the most—are still critical: despite being a region where significant investments have been made, poverty and homelessness figures are similar to those of the rest of the country in the context of an acute social crisis.

“While corporations welcome these measures, communities are incapable of foreseeing the impact this new reality will have on their pockets. In the vast territories directly affected by oil extraction, Indigenous rights are being infringed, serious environmental issues have been registered, and social indicators continue to be very poor.”

Not only has oil exploitation sparked a concern about environmental incidents of all kinds that are multiplied with every oil well or with the deaths of oil workers, but also about the earthquakes that have occurred in a region where there were no previous records of the earth shaking before. According to researchers, more than 400 earthquakes have taken place since 2015. Some sectors also question the fact that fracking expansion is being carried out on top grade soils in which export pears and apples have been historically harvested.

CRIMINALIZATION OF SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL RESISTANCE

Months after that day of repression in 2013, the province’s vice-governor, Ana Pechén, called on oil companies to educate the population on non-conventional hydrocarbons to counteract what she labeled “**environmental terrorism**”—**criticism expressed by those opposed to fracking**. Already in June 2014, when a reform to the national law on hydrocarbons was being debated, Neuquén’s Governor Jorge Sapag had requested, without much success, the incorporation of an article establishing harsh penalties to all those who blocked access to oil wells and stalled production.

In 2017, when former president Mauricio Macri (Ferndandez’s predecessor) was in office, the state and the “owners of the earth”—gathered

at the **Sociedad Rural** (Rural Society), an organization composed of country’s main landowners, who exert strong economic and political leverage—**launched a campaign to stigmatize the Mapuche**, turning them into public enemy number one. In that context, the government ordered the **National Gendarmerie**—a militarized law enforcement task force—to enter the territory of the Mapuche community **Campo Maripe**, allowing YPF to move forward with the laying of the oil pipeline that was resisted by the Indigenous communities. This intervention by the National Gendarmerie was the precursor to a militarization process in the making.

The following year, the **Comando Unificado de la Patagonia** (Patagonia’s Unified Commando) was created, and the presence of the National Gendarmerie increased in the country’s two main oil basins, the one in Neuquén and the one in the San Jorge Gulf. The goal was to have fast deployment forces ready to intervene in any situation that could be considered a threat to oil extraction. Organizations of all kinds (Indigenous, worker, socioenvironmental, etc.) had to be prevented from halting the flow of hydrocarbons with their demands. During Alberto Fernandez’s administration, these kinds of interventions were kept at bay, although the stigmatization and criminalization of the Mapuche continued in different latitudes across the country. In this regard, Milei’s government is yet to resume the efforts driven by former president Macri, but no one doubts that he will harshly stifle any dissent against oil or mining extraction.

PROGRESS, EMPLOYMENT, AND A BETTER FUTURE

Promises of progress, employment, and a better future provided the backdrop to the advance over Vaca Muerta 10 years ago. In 2012, the Argentine state reclaimed management of YPF—the historic state energy company—expropriating 51 percent of its share package at the hands of the Spanish company Repsol. This decision allowed the state to take over YPF, even though it still operates as a limited liability company (*sociedad anónima*) seeking profitability for its shareholders. The government took control of the country’s main enterprise, looking to resolve the lack of energy resources through fracking in Vaca Muerta in alliance with transnational corporations like Chevron. Since then, Vaca Muerta has been the focus of the energy debate and one of the greatest hopes to overcome the crisis.

The nationalization of YPF represented a legitimizing role of the oil policy that would follow. The reclaiming of the historic Argentine company was a demand deeply rooted among the people. Nationalization and fracking became intertwined, and this helped build the consensus that this activity now enjoys. Vaca Muerta is located more than 600 miles from the City of Buenos Aires, where the national political debate takes place, and this makes it harder to expose its environmental impact in the media at a national level. **Expressing criticism of Vaca Muerta is not easy in a country where the seriousness of the climate crisis is still undermined and oil publicity is one of the main sources of profit for the media.**

Since 2017, Vaca Muerta’s exploitation has accelerated, and outright criticism has gradually waned, giving way to challenges to the political agenda linked to specific effects of the activity.

This is how the initial confluence scattered into themes and regions. **Vaca Muerta has also involved a multiplication of oil drilling activities**, which generate an extraordinary volume of hazardous waste containing highly toxic chemicals and heavy metals. The infrastructure in place to process that waste fails to meet requirements. Landfills or “**oil dumps**,” therefore, function as storage spaces spread across acres of toxic waste muds for indefinite periods of time. Urban Mapuche activism in those neighborhoods most impacted has played a significant role in the resistance against this practice.

In 2015, as a result of neighbor protests, a regulation forced waste treatment plants to move more than five miles away from the communities, a demand that has yet to be fully enforced. In February 2024, those responsible were prosecuted for pollution detrimental to health and fraud. Popular mobilization raised this unyielding demand for 10 years.

NEW HORIZONS OF STRUGGLE

While the fight is asymmetrical, we have had but a few victories. **Vaca Muerta is like an ever-growing octopus, with its tentacles reaching out over railroad tracks, sand mines, ports, and pipelines.** Publicity campaigns have articulated the popular sentiment toward YPF, and the expectation of extractive output has been very difficult to dispute. In the last three years, extractive activity has accelerated, and new “records” of oil and gas extraction are announced almost every month. A new administration seeks to radicalize exploitation and increase the state’s capacity to audit the activity. The outlook is bleak. While former social demands are still strong, those issues that prompted them are now being normalized, and new demands regarding the inequality this type of activity generates—coupled with other effects in more remote geographies—are beginning to emerge. Although pressure through activism and its demonization is increasing, **only popular mobilization and organized struggle can change the expansive course of fracking.** Nevertheless, 10 years after the onset of the project, promises made at the early stages have yet to materialize. We continue the struggle, which today spreads across several of the country’s provinces to stop this endeavor that pollutes, sickens, and loots us.♦

About the authors: **Fernando Cabrera Christian-sen** is a journalist with Master in Social Sciences. He has specialized on the impacts of hydrocarbon exploitation. He works as coordinator of Observatorio Petrolero Sur (OPSur) and the Enlace por la Justicia Energética y Socioambiental (EJES—Li-aïson for Energy and Socioenvironmental Justice) and is an activist in the Corriente Social y Política Marabunta (Marabunta Social and Political Current). He edited the volume *Polos: Injusticias ambientales e industrialización petrolera en Argentina [Poles: Environmental injustices and oil industrialization in Argentina]* (Jinete Insomne, 2015) and collaborated in the book *Just Transitions. Social Justice in the Shift Towards a Low-Carbon World* (Pluto Press, 2019), among other publications and participations.

Observatorio Petrolero Sur is an organization established in 2008, which currently has active work-groups in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and the provinces of Neuquén and Río Negro (Argentina). Our main challenge is to attain a fair, democratic, healthy, and sustainable production and use of energy. To achieve this, we lean on a variety of tools such as communication, education, research, and leverage on public policies based on the articulation and creation of a social movement.

FEATURES ACTION

Socialism is Land in the Hands of the People

By Yvonne Busisiwe Phyllis, Craig Gilmore, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore

The Gilmores sat down with Yvonne Busisiwe Phyllis in Johannesburg, South Africa to discuss policing, land, and dignity. The three had just concluded facilitating political school on abolition, land use, and internationalism, thinking together with **Abahlali baseMjondolo communities** in KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng.

The Gilmores: We’d like to talk to you about how control of land is central to struggles in South Africa today in both rural and urban contexts.

Yvonne: Yes, thank you, comrades. The control of land in South Africa is very central to both the urban and rural land struggles, because many people in the land struggle agree on at least one factor: **land is life**. There is a difference, in many cases, between those who control the

land and those who don’t, about what the land should be used for. Those who own—and control—the land decide what the land should be for. For instance, if we think about agricultural sectors, land is there for produce, for profit, for maintaining the generational wealth of landowners. But for people who share a life in the same environment, which is to say in the farms in South Africa, land is for them to live. When

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the latter claim their belonging to the land, they are using different words. They are not using “profit,” “produce,” or “generational wealth”. They are using *being part of* the land, or “the land is there for them to raise their children,” and the land “is their home”. There’s that contestation between the people who control the land and the kinds of decisions they are making about what the land is for.

The Gilmores: Why are people with those sorts of emotional familial connections to the land leaving for the city in such numbers?

Yvonne: Well, the rural areas can be understood in two ways: the villages and the farms. There is not much for people in either, especially for work. People leave to go and find work in the city. This reality is similar to the experiences of their forefathers, because the geography of opportunity is still structured in the same way: not much is provided. Now people still go and look for better opportunities, because otherwise either you work in the farms or what is available in the small towns, and there is not much.

The Gilmores: And who owns the farms?

Yvonne: Well, in the last **outdated 2017 land audit** by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, **72 percent of individual agricultural land is owned by white men**. They haven’t published another since. But if they were to, I would predict the same numbers—mainly white people owning the farmlands.

The Gilmores: Is it your sense that people of your generation or maybe even a half generation younger than you are leaving the farm in greater numbers than your uncles and fathers and grandparents did? Do you have a different relationship to the farm than they did?

Yvonne: Yes, we definitely have different relationships to the farm. My father makes claims that would make him stay there regardless of the work and living situation, regardless of the exploitation and what people refer to as “**paternalism**”—the fact that four generations before him not only worked on the farm and lived on the farm, but are buried on the farm. That makes the farm part of him, the farm his ancestral home and *his* home. Even though that is part of my lineage, I understand the farm differently; even with that history, I would still choose not to stay.

The Gilmores: As people migrate to cities, they’re finding no housing available. People are living in housing they build for themselves on land that they have no legal right to be on. Can you explain how that process works and the sort of policing apparatuses that make it difficult for people to establish new homes?

Yvonne: Because of the difficulty finding opportunities in the rural areas, people then come to the city finding it’s difficult to make homes. People have been building their own homes, since housing is frequently not provided by the government, even though housing is a constitutional right. If housing is available, people must pay rent, which is very high, but people are not getting paid enough. The government is not understanding people building their own homes as creating communities, rather as “land invaders,” as “land grabbers”. Then **police**—including units such as the **Anti-Land Invasion Unit (ALIU)**, or **private police companies** such as the Red Ants—push people off the land. **Bulelani Qolani’s story** is telling: In 2020 he was dragged out of his home in Cape Town naked by the ALIU. The reality in South Africa is that when people move to the cities in search of a better life, they find other struggles, and the main struggle—still—is the land struggle—the struggle for a home, for a life. They are not secure, so they keep moving and starting over. Some people start over in the same place, some move. People get evicted, violated, assassinated—all because they’re looking for a home and therefore looking for a place to make a life.

The Gilmores: As people in urban areas are faced with the police, the ALIU, the Red Ants, or perhaps private landlords or landowners, do they face these struggles alone or do they come



Ruthie Gilmore speaking at Abahlali baseMjondolo event. Photo courtesy of the Gilmores.

together to protect these communities? Even though they’re often torn down the minute they’re built, and it’s not like everyone already knew each other, people are forming communities which are forming movements to defend themselves, right?

Yvonne: Definitely. People are still coming together as communities, realizing it’s going to take them working together collectively. It’s going to take insisting on the idea of dignity and resisting all this repression. People are forming movements in the face of all this repression and assassinations. The **Abahlali baseMjondolo social movement**, for example, has created a landless people’s movement based in the urban areas. The idea behind the formation of the movement is that **people are coming together to fight for housing, land, and dignity**, because they’re realizing the government will not come to their rescue. They’re not waiting for someone to come and rescue. People are creating, to use Ruthie’s words, this idea of “**life in rehearsal**”: coming together and creating for themselves, with what is available to them, *ways* to come together to get some kind of protection by being in community.

The Gilmores: Could you expand upon that further? It appears to us that people are, as you said earlier, not waiting for things to happen for them. They’re *making* things happen. They’re creating new communal lives for themselves.

Yvonne Abahlali has various communes that bring the communities together as **135,000 members spread across dozens of branches**, each a **self-built community**. One of the main things of course is this idea that everybody deserves to live a life of dignity. Housing—and land—is one of the struggles towards attaining our dignity. But they also realize that even at the point when you have won that struggle for land and housing, there are other aspects of a human life which also require a fight towards dignity. The main reason why people are moving—economic opportunities, education, and realizing that idea of “life in rehearsal”—these are the things that show the people what could be made possible by coming together. Things like having a tuck shop at a commune, where the money made is kept aside for people to take a taxi to the town for an interview; having solar panels, because they understand that the environment is an integral part of the struggle for land; but also community gardens, because of the understanding that food is also another struggle in the struggle for land and dignity. All this is done by the community in community. There’s that understanding that what we want as human beings is **dignity**, that **our struggle has to be that of land, of housing, of food, of the environment, and creating with what we have the possibilities for what we want to happen**—like giving somebody an opportunity to go to an interview

that could land them a job, that could make at least some possibility for themselves and for their family.

“The Abahlali baseMjondolo social movement, for example, has created a landless people’s movement based in the urban areas. The idea behind the formation of the movement is that people are coming together to fight for housing, land, and dignity, because they’re realizing the government will not come to their rescue. They’re not waiting for someone to come and rescue. People are creating, to use Ruthie’s words, this idea of ‘life in rehearsal’: coming together and creating for themselves, with what is available to them, ways to come together to get some kind of protection by being in community.”

The Gilmores: Some of what you’ve been talking about seems like basic collective survival skills in a racist capitalist society. Some of it sounds like a social movement that understands the need to overthrow a system of private property and especially one that is the result of colonial appropriation. So, it **sounds a lot like socialism...**

Yvonne: Yes.

The Gilmores: What about the political awareness of people at different, say, stages of political development in the movement—Do people in this movement see it as transformative of South Africa as a whole?

Yvonne: Definitely. Movements are very clear that **capitalism is not the system that’s going to help people get to that dignity**. There’s a clear call for a life in socialism. These movements have slogans—“Socialism or death”—written on their regalia or in songs. One song, “**Yin’iSocialism**”, contains a call and response with the question, “What is socialism?” And everybody else responds to the song leader, “Umhlaba wonk’ezandleni zabantu”, which is to say “**All the land in the people’s hands.**” So, it is very clear to comrades involved in the land struggle that it is socialism—or death.

Craig: That’s fantastic. You mentioned some examples of people who, whether they fully embrace socialism yet, reflect the politics they bring into the movement in the name of the communities. Could you share some of those names?

Yvonne: It’s very interesting, because they’re naming places to reflect how they live and how they insist on creating homes in community. When families and people on farms are forced to move away, they name the places where they have come to live and build their own homes. One of the places is “Sizakhele”, which means “We have built this community ourselves”, or “We have built this community with our own hands”. Another is “Endlovini” or “Ukundlova”, which means “You stay by force” [Laughter]. Interestingly, some of the names reflect the kinds of places or homes they are forced to live in. One of the places is “Edakeni”, or “a place of mud”, because most are mud houses. You find the same with comrades in the movement. Abahlali has communities like “Sihlalangenkani”, which means “We are staying here by force”, or “Enkanini”, which means “this is a place of *inkani*”, of staying here forcefully and fearlessly. You find this not only in the movements, but in communities where people have come to create places and communities together.

The Gilmores: One of the things we talked about was how the settlements *do* turn to the

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state, whether it’s the municipality or another entity, for services such as water, sanitation, and so forth. **But it’s not a service-seeking movement; it’s something else.** These relations are important, but distinct from, say, non-governmental organizations or NGOs. Could you talk about that more?

Yvonne: The movements are very clear that what they’re fighting for is not service delivery, but *dignity*. The reason why certain parts of the country don’t get those services is because people living there are not afforded dignity. The movements make a very clear distinction between fighting for services and the bigger fight. Services are part of the bigger fight in that it is because people are treated without dignity that they’re not given those services. The comrades are very clear to say, “We’re not fighting for services. **Our struggle is not for us to get these services, but our struggle is for dignity**, and part of being afforded this dignity is to ensure that people have **proper sanitation**, people have **clean drinking water**, people have **access to healthcare** facilities.”

The Gilmores: Anything else about the NGOs?

Yvonne: NGOs don’t genuinely seek to serve the political cause of the social movements. I find that they have resources available, which social movements and unions could use to serve a particular cause of their struggle. For instance, Comrade Craig asked a question earlier about whether or not I’m finding that movements across the cities, and in the rural and urban areas, are working together, and my answer to that was “not nearly enough”, because of the lack of financial resources. NGOs sometimes do the work of enabling connections, of making these conferences available where activists can come together. It’s very clear that for the NGOs it’s a “tick-the-box” exercise for the next funding cycle. But to me, the conferences are also an opportunity for movements, unions, activists, wherever they find a home, to make something of that moment—even with the knowledge that the conferences are not there to serve the greater purpose of their struggle, but that of the NGO. Still, there is an opportunity to use that for their gains in the struggle.

The Gilmores: Fantastic. You’ve talked about the **role of public policing**, of private security, of **landlord or farm-owner violence** or threat of violence in terms of **disciplining workers who are reclaiming the land**. To what extent are we seeing that the movement of the landless to control land is either coming together with, or developing its own critique of, policing and state violence as something that has to be dealt with as part of the struggle to control land?

FEATURES ACTION

Defending Land and Sovereignty in the Yucatán Peninsula: An Interview with Pedro Uc Be

By Susana Draper

The Abolitionist Editorial Collective’s Susana Draper interviewed **Pedro Uc Be**, a Maya poet, teacher, and land defender from the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico. Together they discuss the threats that Maya communities have been facing due to the imposition of various megaprojects and how the defense of the land, the food, and the culture of the Maya people are all interconnected.

The Abolitionist: *To begin, we would love for you to introduce your political work in relation to past movements and to this moment of intense militarization, escalating fascism, multiple genocides, and ecological destruction, all of which have endangered and will continue to endanger our collective survival.*

Pedro: Before convening in the **Assembly of Defenders of Múuch’ Xiinbal Maya Territory**, many of us were struggling for human rights, identity, culture, and language. It is in this context that **Zapatismo** emerges. I began to partici-

Yvonne: The government uses, as you say, violence to keep people off land, and they use the police to keep people off land, and **they use private security to keep people off land**, and they use surveillance to keep people surveilled—their movement—and so to control the movement. In Bulelani Qolani’s case, and many other cases during COVID when police were very visible on the street—people understood that dramatic police presence and violence are manifestations of something that has always been there, and that is how the government and private property keep people off the land: by using police and private security. Comrades understand **that part of the struggle for land is also realizing how these units work to interrupt their work and to make it impossible**. Comrades are strategizing about how to make this fact an integral part of the struggle. There was a statement with the Qolani case where comrades including Abahlali came on board and supported the **South African Human Rights Commission** when it took the ALIU to court. Across struggles they understand that some of the factors that make the work difficult, that interrupt the work, and sometimes make it impossible, and sometimes take comrades away from them—and I mean killing comrades—is done through the hands of the police and the hands of these Anti-Land Invasion Units, Red Ants, etc. They are very clear that their struggle is also against all these other forces. There are moments when you see comrades coming together, like when people released a statement about the Qolani case, which made it very clear that people understand that this has always been the case and something must be done about it.

The Gilmores: Perfect. Is there anything you want to add?

Yvonne: In 30 years **since the end of apartheid, land redistribution hasn’t happened in South Africa**. It is very clear that the government is going to have to be pressured to do this, to **redistribute the land** in ways that work for people. We still have a situation of landlessness, of land injustice—that 72 percent of the farmland is owned by white men. What the government has done repeatedly is ignore people, to the point where, what Comrade Craig said, **the government can no longer ignore the people**. I don’t think that we should leave it up to the movements alone, because the movements are doing the work: organizing communities to struggle against landlessness, applying pressure on the government to take land redistribution seriously, occupying land as form of political contestation against the privatization and commodification of land. I think that **different groups in the struggle have to come together**

and bring together what is available to them: the resources, the skills, whatever they can bring. I think there’s [special] value [here], because we’ve seen the gains of this.

There’s value, for instance, when lawyers meet movements where they are. I don’t think “lawyers need to come and rescue the movement”, but **lawyers should meet movements where they are, interpret the law, and change it to serve the people where they are**. Farm workers are very clear in saying, **“Redistribute the land amongst us in a way that works for us as well.”** Movements in urban areas are very clear that people are in desperate need of homes. Lawyers need to come on board, and other comrades with knowledge, numbers, and skills. There must be **a clear policy for land redistribution**, because **“land reform” is very vague**, and movements and farm workers have said that over and over again:

We’ve seen great collaboration in the domestic workers’ Compensation for **Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act**, where domestic worker unions worked together with lawyers and brought a case up to the Constitutional Court, so that in 2019 it was ruled that domestic workers can now be included to claim for compensation when injured at work, or the children or family of the deceased can claim for compensation after the person has passed on. That was work that was done in community, where lawyers interpreted the law and turned it upside down, such that it served the concerns and aspirations of the people, and met people where they were, taking seriously the work done by the domestic worker unions. I think the same is possible for the land struggle. It will take all of us, me included, to make all of that possible.

The Gilmores: What is socialism?

All: It’s **land in the hands of the people**. (Laughter) ♦

More about the Authors: **Yvonne Busisiwe Phyllis** is co-Director of **The Forge** in Johannesburg, South Africa, a space for progressive culture and thinking together that works closely with a wide range of left organizations, including community groups, social movements, and trade unions. An organizer and writer, her research and advocacy focuses on agrarian questions, land and labor.

The Gilmores: **Craig Gilmore** was among the founders of **California Prison Moratorium Project** and co-edited **Prison Focus**. He is one of CR’s Community Advisors. **Ruthie Wilson Gilmore** teaches at the **CUNY Graduate Center** where she is **Director of the Center for Place, Culture, and Politics**. A longtime organizer and co-founder of many grassroots organizations including **Critical Resistance**, she is author of *Abolition Geography* and also *Golden Gulag*.



Celebration of the EZLN Anniversary by Francisco De Parres Gómez.

eral megaprojects, one of which was for genetically modified soy. When **Monsanto** arrived, it began to take over land and destroy thousands of acres of jungle to turn it into a field for soy monoculture. This was of great concern to us because (1) the Maya people are not used to destroying large swathes of jungle and (2) our relation with nature is one of life, one that cannot be understood in economic or productive terms but rather as a spiritual bond with its cor-

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Resistance to Tren Maya by Francisco De Parres Gómez.

responding symbolisms that help structure our cultural identities as Maya. Along with other politically aligned communities, we began filing lawsuits in response to those projects and lodging complaints against this land occupation. That was the beginning—20 to 25 years ago. Other development projects began after that, including pig farms, which breed thousands of pigs and occupy large spaces across Maya territory. Pig farms are built in what is known as the Ring of Cenotes in Yucatán, the most precious water reservoirs that we have here in the Peninsula. Pig waste was thrown into the cenotes, causing massive pollution. Today, out of approximately 250 farms, only 20 are legal; all the rest are illegal and mired in corruption.

Another megaproject appeared later: the construction of **aeolic and photovoltaic parks** for the production of renewable energy—“clean energy,” they say. This also **involved the invasion and displacement of entire communities**. Then companies building large hotels and restaurants in places attractive to tourists—like patches of jungle, archaeological sites, cenotes—showed up. They began appropriating and turning these places into sites for mass tourism, which create pollution because tourism isn’t always sustainable.

As we were putting up this fight, the current government began the so-called **Tren Maya**, or Maya Train, a 1,554-kilometer intercity railway project that pierces through the Yucatán Peninsula and connects the rest of the country with the world. We called on communities that disagree with these megaprojects and organized ourselves in response. The initial idea was to spread information and raise awareness, but this gathering ended up becoming an assembly named Múuch’ Xiinbal, which means *walking together*, and we began working as a collective defending Maya territory.

The Abolitionist: *As abolitionists, we want this issue to amplify the intersections between prison industrial complex (PIC) abolition and ecological justice. How are struggles for land and food sovereignty linked with a larger movement toward decolonization and agroecology? How do they challenge the conditions of confinement, surveillance, and control that characterize and constitute the PIC?*

Pedro: One way of decolonizing or confronting colonization is continuing to grow our own food, speak our own language, and ensure that corn remains our healthy staple, which is so important to us, and **educating our children** about our beliefs, our celebrations that are, in general, agricultural and related to the spirituality of the rain, the wind, the mountains, the water. This allows us to maintain our heart as people, a heart

that is capable of clear thinking and is part of the territory that is being defended. It is not just a matter of land; it is a matter of territory, of territorializing. We believe that if there is a strong Maya identity, then there will be a Maya people for a long time, even if colonization clashes head-on with this strong Maya identity, this strong Maya language and spirituality. This is why we maintain our way of being as Maya people. This is why we face militarization, too. We face charges of “organized delinquency” and public policies of co-optation, which are programs that the government has spread across the train’s path to control people—counterinsurgency strategies against people who disagree with these projects of death targeting the Maya people.

“One way of decolonizing or confronting colonization is continuing to grow our own food, speak our own language, and ensure that corn remains our healthy staple, which is so important to us, and educating our children about our beliefs, our celebrations that are, in general, agricultural and related to the spirituality of the rain, the wind, the mountains, the water.”

When we think about land, we see how people in the West think about resources, think about money, think about those things that are useful for them not only for living but also for creating wealth in an anthropocentric sense. For them, the destruction of nature yields greater development. **For Maya people, land is not necessarily territorialized by being made into capital.** The territorialization of land is what we *do along with it, in coordination with it, building* community and *communion* with it, not profit. In this sense, territorializing land through indigeneity rather than capitalism means making it an Indigenous territory through a relationship of spirituality, of respect—a moral, familial, and political relationship that is lived in such a way that one can no longer make a distinction between land as territory and the people with whom one lives. In other words, we are not beings juxtaposed with the earth but rather beings that correspond with the earth. A territory is more than land, because words, thoughts, celebrations, dreaming, struggle—these are also territory. This is how we understand the territoriality of our land.

The Abolitionist: *Could you talk about some of the ongoing threats and challenges that the movements you are part of are currently facing and how you are organizing to actively resist them?*

Pedro: There is an ongoing struggle against the devastation of the jungle and the cenotes (which are underground caves with water, sacred in Maya culture, where they represent duality). We have a government that is incapable of dialogue. It does not listen; it only dictates. The “Maya Train” robs us of our name; they call it Maya, and we cannot understand why. If this project succeeds, then perhaps the only Maya that will be left will be the train and not us. The train causes real damage and destruction. It is like a projectile aimed right at the heart of Maya culture. The Maya Train is not something separate but encompasses all the megaprojects in

the Yucatán Peninsula and their relation to the rest of the country and the world. For example, the person or businessman growing soy can use wagons on the train to transport their crops. The person who raises pigs has a train to carry soy to their pigs and then to sell their meat even in China because the train runs into the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The person who produces renewable energy has a train to sell it. Real estate agencies have a train to attract tourism.

The Múuch’ Xiinbal Assembly is a popular assembly made up of directly affected communities. We are not a nongovernmental organization, nor do we request resources from foundations because foundations have their own policies and often do not understand what we do; rather, they only subsidize what is in vogue. We said that we wouldn’t engage in dialogue with political parties either, that we wouldn’t play into government’s or state’s hands, and that we don’t want to be associated with religion. All of us in the Assembly work voluntarily; anyone can come and go whenever they please because the only thing that unites us is our will. There won’t be a legal registry because we do not need one since *the land is not to be sold or leased*.

The Abolitionist: *In your opinion, what does this moment demand of us? What lessons can we learn from Black and Indigenous ways of knowing, of tending to life, and of being in relationship to land? How can readers across prison walls put those lessons into practice?*

Pedro: There is a sort of brutality today, a stupefaction of humanity at all levels. Those who kill more people are rewarded even with the Nobel Peace Prize. I think what is going on is outrageous, what is taking place in Palestine and in many other places where people are being killed. Meanwhile, the president here is committing **ecocide** where we live. We believe it is important to begin reflecting on who we are, who we are going to be, what we are going to do with our children, and what kind of thinking and heart we are going to leave our children with in a world that is now full of lies.

We are living in a complex situation in which the first and most important victim is life itself. Those of us closest to the razor’s edge are the Indigenous groups, whom the West perceives as useless, “backward,” and “weak,” with “idle lands.” They say, “I just don’t understand why they want to look after that mountain if it’s idle and is not producing anything.” And we reply, “Where does honey come from? And the bees, the birds, and the animals?” Their perspective is based on their insistence on putting a cash price on everything, whereas we see the mountain from the point of view of the pleasurable and fulfilling life we want to lead.

We see that the greatest risk is that our language, our culture, and ourselves as a people begin to disappear. We defend our territory by strengthening our identity as Maya people. In this sense, we need to know, think, feel, and believe ourselves to be Maya and reclaim that way of living—our way of feeding ourselves. ♦

About the Author: **Pedro Uc Be** is part of the **Assembly of Defenders** of Múuch’ Xiinbal Maya Territory and of the **Indigenous National Congress**. He has been on the frontlines of the struggle to stop megaprojects that are destroying many ecosystems and that attempt to displace and expropriate Maya communities from their land.

FEATURES ACTION

Indigenous Abolitionist Fire Futures: Cultural Burns in California

By A, Tony Marks Block, and Billy Ray Boyer

Billy Ray Boyer (B): Please share a bit about **who you are, and what brought you to this work** at the intersection of (wild)fires and Indigenous and anti-colonial resistance in California.

A: Being an Indigenous person, it just is what it is; Indigenous life inherently threatens the se-

curity of the state and the validity of the government. We are a constant looming threat, and one way of controlling us and our existence is criminalizing things that are essential to our livelihood. The US stole my family’s land. They made our language illegal. Resistance is a natural reaction to all that violence. California missions burning down got me interested in fire as

a way of healing and re-connecting to land, recognizing that fire is also politically used in a lot of powerful ways.

Tony Marks-Block (T): What brought me to this work was my own family’s anti-colonial struggle and solidarity with Indigenous struggle globally. Growing up in California, I was interested in how Indigenous communities’ relationship to land was a key component of the anti-colonial struggle. My family’s relationship to the state and the prison system got me thinking about how prisons have been used to criminalize Indigenous life and culture. Through my work in solidarity

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with Karuk and Yurok peoples, I learned about the importance of fire for sustaining Indigenous cultures and landscapes. My ongoing relationship with Karuk and Yurok peoples inextricably informs my worldview and analysis of fire and the prison industrial complex (PIC).

B: What is the history and purpose of controlled, cultural, prescribed burning as a practice within Indigenous communities?

A: It looks different for every community, but my understanding of cultural burning is an ancestral practice of using fire to tend to the land and be in a good relationship with the land that people are from. There’s a lot of plants that rely on fire, a lot of culture, whether it’s weaving materials or food, that also relies on fire, so there is an entire scientific practice that’s been cultivated for millennia. Yet the criminalization of fire is reproduced in everything from Smokey the Bear to keeping people from the land in general.

“Fire is integral to Indigenous livelihood. Especially in California, Indigenous peoples continue to be extremely reliant on “wild” foods medicines and fibers whose abundance and qualities are enhanced when they are burned.”

T: Fire is integral to Indigenous livelihood. Especially in California, Indigenous peoples continue to be extremely reliant on “wild” foods medicines and fibers whose abundance and qualities are enhanced when they are burned. This includes other-than-human relations and relatives such as salmon, oak acorns, deer, elk, and other plants that produce seeds, stems, roots, and tubers. For example, the understory of oak trees is burned to eliminate pests and to make it easier to gather acorns, and meadows are burned to increase forage for deer and elk. Burning also increases the amount of surface water in creeks that allows salmon and other fish to reproduce and survive in the dry season. **Without the use of fire, we see many of these habitats are in decline and threatened,** much like Indigenous culture has been negatively affected by forced removal of Indigenous peoples from their lands. These colonial outcomes contribute to the crisis upon us now with massive wildfires that are extremely destructive, consuming everything at high severity and threatening the ecological systems that people rely on. The capitalist and colonial systems don’t allow people to live locally due to the dispossession of colonial privatization. It forces communities to compete on a global level and get everything they need from global markets. As a result, communities are forced into greater alienation from the land, and Indigenous cultural fire, among other things, is less frequent and widespread. Indigenous peoples need to be able to have access to land and be able to practice these time-tested practices that are fundamental to Indigenous culture, land, and survival.

One of the ways Indigenous peoples describe their culture is that it is **“fire dependent.”** But, the colonial state and capital want people to be dependent on them to maintain their wealth and power, so the state severs fire-dependent relationships through its policies of fire suppression and land dispossession. **Bringing fire back is then a struggle for Indigenous independence and autonomy.**

B: I appreciate both of you grounding us in thinking about the way that the settler state approach is to categorize and organize everything into distinct categories to control them. That interconnectedness and interdependence you’re talking about is always seen as a powerful threat.

Tony, you spoke about the real escalation in massive wildfires in California. We often see the PIC deployed as a reaction to these fire emergencies. We know that prisoners made up 30 percent of all wildland firefighter crews in California, and that number is growing. **What are some key differences between these carceral responses to**



“Cambium” by Pete Railand, Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative.

fire and the indigenous practices we were just talking about?

T: What A said earlier about the mission system is important for this question. It was Spanish colonization that brought the first prison system in California – the missions where Indigenous peoples were used as enslaved labor to support the Spanish colony, Alta California. During colonization and the mission system, the Spanish governor of California outlawed Indigenous burning, in part because he saw Indigenous peoples could be independent if they were able to burn.

Fire was a threat to maintaining control over Indigenous labor in the missions. Indigenous peoples responded to enslavement by burning the missions down. **The blueprint was written right there in the mid 1700s when the Spanish first came, and the missions were burned as the first prisons in California.** For so long, Indigenous burning was derided as something that was savage or inferior. Indigenous burners, or fire lighters, have been labeled as arsonists under the colonial system, when they’re taking care of the landscape, and making sure it stays healthy.

Fire threatens the reproducibility of capital. Settler capitalists have chosen to interact with the earth by maximizing the number of certain trees of a certain species on the landscape to maximize profits, after the Anglo-colonization of California, timber production became one of the primary reasons why the colonial state decided to eliminate and suppress fire. To ensure the expansion of the capitalist, colonial project worldwide, the use of timber was vital for various war efforts (eg the expansion and development of the colony in California, and in the Philippines), and so the forests of California that had formerly been cared for by Indigenous peoples were stolen for this purpose. Settlers thought that they could eliminate fire and that this would help their timber plantations. Trying to control the environment in this way leads inevitably to disaster. Post-WWII, surplus war technology is applied to the earth for fire suppression. A massive investment in planes, bulldozers, and chemical retardants are then routinely poured on the earth to protect capital through suppression. This technology and mindset are borrowed from the military, so it makes sense that such inhumane technology that is used to commit genocide worldwide contributes to other-than-human extinctions as well. But these technologies are often ineffective at protecting capital from fire without human labor on the ground.

“Fire threatens the reproducibility of capital.”

A: I think that the word that you used earlier, autonomy, is the key difference. **Autonomy for whom?** If you’re thinking about fire and interacting with fire, traditional, cultural ways are very respectful. It’s the autonomy of all living things involved, including fire as a living thing, versus forcing people who are imprisoned, who have the least amount of autonomy into this situation, to “fight” fire. It’s a pretty stark contrast.

B: How have Indigenous communities who are engaging in these burning practices been targeted by the PIC, and what strategies have been effective at resisting the criminalization of cultural burning and the larger destruction of Indigenous ecosystems? What strategies do you think could be deepened or developed further?

A: When you think about the US as a whole, it was stolen Indigenous people from Africa being forcibly removed and brought to this stolen land to create the foundation for this entire state to continually and intergenerationally enact violence in so many different ways. Back in the day, my people were setting Spaniard ships on fire, and that’s resistance to the destruction of Indigenous ecosystems. People were poisoning missionaries’ food, or the first anti-work movement in California where people in the missions said, “Fuck that, I’m not doing that,” and it worked.

T: Presently, being on an imprisoned fire crew in California is in some ways thought of as better than being in a prison yard for imprisoned people. But it’s a way that the state divides the communities that are in prison and encourages compliance through the incentive of marginally better living conditions.

With a disproportionate overrepresentation of Indigenous people in California locked up, we need to understand prison as a key tool in taking away the autonomy and economic self-sufficiency of Indigenous peoples. Hundreds of years after the mission system, they are still stolen and captured and then used to support a fire suppression system which struggles to recruit people to work in it. **Why?** Because the work is extremely backbreaking, and the conditions are inhumane. If you have been in prison “fighting fire” then you are taught to see fire as an enemy. It feeds into this macho approach to dominating and controlling the earth.

And so, while the state is now shifting (at least rhetorically) to say that it supports Indigenous fire, **there remain a number of hurdles for Indigenous peoples to actually burn autonomously.** There’s so many different laws and bureaucracies that Indigenous people must navigate, including that they don’t have access or jurisdiction to their lands. Often, Indigenous peoples are not the landowners, or if they did burn on areas that are their historical lands, then they would be confronted with vigilante opposition from settlers or they would be challenged by the police.

Because of the ways in which the state holds power, a lot of Indigenous peoples are forced to engage in “collaboration” or partnerships with state agencies. **Strategically, Indigenous people have been bringing people together who work for formal fire agencies** or even jobs within the fire suppression system, to burn with them to generate better understanding of Indigenous practice and philosophy. Indigenous peoples are trying to create a movement of folks who are reconnecting with the land in a different way, because unfortunately there are so many laws that govern burning.

There are a variety of autonomous networks of Indigenous peoples that are trying to reclaim ancestral knowledge and share it internally, to ensure next generations have a different relationship with fire than generations that were not taught so that they wouldn’t be targeted by the state. It might not be a protest in the street, but it is a lot of the resistance. Because for so long all of this knowledge and land has been stolen, it’s critical to let Indigenous folks lead. There’s a lot of settler-type and environmental organizations that have done a lot of political work on fire that excluded Indigenous peoples. Instead, they should step back and put the resources where they’re needed so that Indigenous people are not invited to the table only when it’s convenient and tokenistic.

If you’re engaging in land, fire, or water defense or protection, and it’s challenging the state, you will likely get caught up in the carceral system. We have so many people from various direct action and protection movements against pipelines, dams, etc, that are doing time as a result. It

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continues to be a tool the state uses, and it really is effective in that it encourages people to be less confrontational tactically. We don't need more people behind prison walls. Using state-sanctioned ways to achieve these goals often doesn't really lead to what the people need. At the same time, those tactics may keep people at home with their loved ones. These are real challenging tensions that organizers need to grapple with.

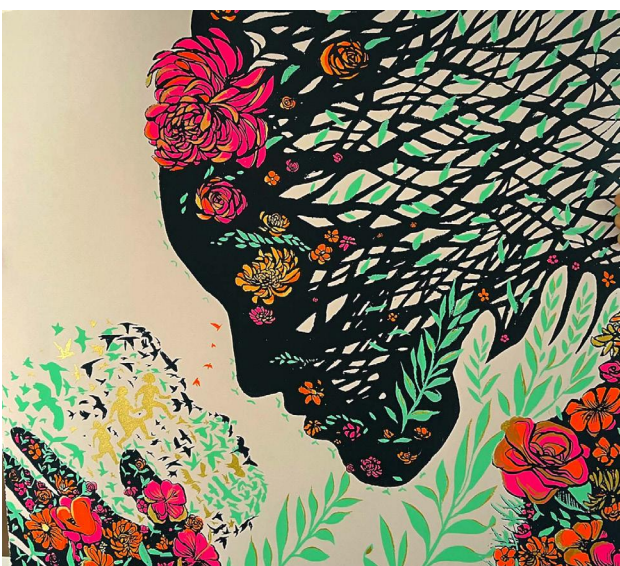
B: I'm curious what you both think about the 2021 senate bill that codified cultural burning practices, and how that has or hasn't changed things. *Is it resulting in meaningful collaboration? Is it the state trying to look progressive but not actually allowing the leadership of Indigenous people to guide?* I say this with the full sort of caveat that I know none of us expect the state to save us.

A: Shout out to people who worked on that bill! Speaking for myself, I just don't really hold my breath for anything that the government does. Ultimately, the state will never allow for its own downfall.

T: Critical Resistance (CR) talks about reformist reforms versus steps toward abolition. I believe that some folks trying to get the state to reform its fire policies are doing so from a radical place and to create greater Indigenous sovereignty.

B: So what does an abolitionist and anti-colonial future look to you regarding relationships between land, fire, people, and the state?

A: I would say people and land coming together to set fire to the state. The concept of getting land back has been majorly co-opted. *How are*



By Jess X Snow, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

you making people pay for something that you stole? It blows my mind reckoning with the fact that a lot of these concepts were co-opted almost beyond recognition from their original form. The phrase “land back” started with some young urban natives in Edmonton, Canada; they just went and took some land back. Even just rethinking our approaches in the future and fighting for a future where seven generations from now, our descendants could feel the effects of all the love and resistance that we're working towards now. And always paying all love and respect to those generations prior who had to endure and fight through everything that they went through too.

T: Some of the answers are already in existence, wherein Indigenous peoples have greater au-

tonomy. There's overlap between the Indigenous movement of land back, of bringing fire back, that is in direct alignment with an abolitionist, anti-colonial future. It's more a question for abolitionists in terms of trying to build a skillset around taking care of the land and how abolitionists see that as a part of their practice.

There's also a lot to learn from Indigenous peoples on the margins of the colonial-capitalist system in other parts of the world where fire suppression is less pervasive. There are parts of the world where people are able to burn freely, which allows them greater independence. Because fire autonomy is one of the ways people retain their freedom, we need to build and maintain those connections with fire even if we've been trained not to. A, I hope we interact in real life soon, maybe even lighting a fire or two. ♦

About the Authors:

A is an Indigenous (Chamorro) young person born and raised in occupied Yelamu also known as San Francisco. They are involved in urban land projects with an affinity for their local Native community, and they like to focus on herbal knowledge and Native plants. Above all else, they are passionate about sparking anticolonial fires in their world.

Tony Marks Block is a settler scholar and fire practitioner, who teaches and studies critical fire ecology at California State University, East Bay, in the unceded lands of the Chochenyo Ohlone peoples. Tony was a member of CR Oakland from 2008 to 2013.

Billy Ray Boyer is an abolitionist harm reduction organizer and facilitator living in Lenapehoking/Philadelphia. They have been a member of The Abolitionist Editorial Collective since 2017 and CR since 2015.

“WE AREN'T GOING ANYWHERE” A History of Blocking Boats

By Dylan Brown and Billy Ray Boyer

For decades, people across the globe have mobilized to stop vessels from embarking on genocidal and ecologically destructive missions. Blocking boats is a powerful tactic that has been used successfully across geographies and social movements. This photo essay highlights historic moments—ranging from anti-whaling campaigns by Greenpeace to direct actions in solidarity with Palestine—in which organizers across disparate regions and movement sectors took to the seas, targeted ports, and put their bodies on the line to achieve their demands. The US military is the single largest institutional source of greenhouse gas emissions in the world, according to Brown University's Costs of War Project. Therefore, we feature images from the environmental and ecological justice (EJ) movement and anti-war demonstrations to highlight how direct-action tactics are shared across struggles, as well

as how imperialist wars and militarism accelerate the degradation of land and our ecosystems.

As the military industrial complex continues to expedite global climate collapse and ecological disaster, boat-blocking has been a strategy deployed by both anti-war and EJ organizers throughout movement history. Tools of the prison industrial complex (PIC) are also repeatedly used in attempts to crush resistance by boat blockers—through physically harm, arrests, imprisonments, and sanctions. Yet in the face of mounting repression, forces of ecological devastation are met with organized resistance globally across time. The people's tactic of blocking boats remains powerful and relevant as organizers stay committed to advancing a new political and ecological horizon for our world.

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INSIDE-OUTSIDE FISHING LINE:

Closing Cages for a Just Transition: Organizers Talk Ecological Justice Across Prison Walls

By Timothy Peoples, Duane Palm, Patrick Noel, and Brian Kaneda with Mar Golub

Editor's Note: This Inside-Outside Fishing Line carries issue 41's focus on ecological justice cross-wall by exploring the **California Prison Closure Campaign**, organized by the **Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB)** coalition. For the conversation below, Critical Resistance (CR) and The Abolitionist Editorial Collective brought together CURB coalition organizer **Brian Kaneda** and three imprisoned campaign organizers: **Duane Palm** (Wasco State Prison); **Timothy Peoples** (San Quentin State Prison); and **Patrick Noel** (Folsom State Prison). The group discussed how and why the fight to close 10 prisons across the state by 2025 uses an **environmentalist strategy** and the role imprisoned people can play in the solutions for building a new California with the life-affirming infrastructure for all of our communities to thrive. **Special thanks to Courtney Hanson with California Coalition for Women Prisoners (CCWP)**, a longtime CURB member organization also working on the prison closure campaign, for helping to bring Timothy and Patrick into this conversation.

The Abolitionist: Introduce yourself and your relationship to the California prison closure campaign. What work do you do on the campaign and how?

Brian: Hello, I'm Brian Kaneda, **Deputy Director at CURB**, where we coordinate the Close California Prisons campaign. Our primary goal is to urge the state to commit to closing 10 prisons by 2025. In my capacity, I co-lead our Media Workgroup and help craft our campaign strategy.

Duane: My name is Duane Palm. I'm an inside organizer for the campaign. I was incarcerated at **California Corrections Center (CCC)** in Susanville, CA during one of the worst wildfires in California history, the **Dixie Fire in 2021**. This was, undoubtedly, one of the worst times I've experienced in prison, however it was during this time that we were able to connect with CR and CURB, who helped us establish ourselves in the fight to close more prisons. Early in the fight I helped gather **over 100 signatures** from other prisoners at CCC to petition for the prison to be closed.

Timothy: My name is Timothy Peoples. Currently imprisoned at **San Quentin State Prison**, I also first became involved in the campaign during the **Dixie Fire while at CCC**. In our efforts to defend our rights and gain attention about the life-threatening conditions that were being kept a secret from our families and the public, we sent petitions to the governor and Senator Feinstein, who never responded. However, it was their lack of response and the fearlessness of Courtney and other CURB organizers, along with the courage of my imprisoned comrades, that increased my motivation. When CURB introduced the prison closure campaign, I began researching international humanitarian civil rights laws that could present an effective case and the active role the governor could take in closing hazardous prisons for good. As our resistance grew, so did my ambitions – I have continued to write and co-author op-eds in support of prison closure with a focus on ecology and the impacts that prisons have on California's environmental landscape.

Now at San Quentin, I'm still working on the campaign and challenging the governor's **new "California Model"** attempt (mimicking the "Norway Model" of imprisonment) to renovate San Quentin into a "rehabilitation" center



"Unfence the Future" by Roger Peet, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

(SQRC). On March 8, 2024, I spoke at the assembly subcommittee hearing on SQRC construction and requested that the committee reject the costly and wasteful remodel.

Patrick: My name is Patrick Noel. I was imprisoned at **CCC with Duane and Tim during the Dixie Fire**, and it was through our organizing with the prison closure campaign that we won victory in the closure of CCC, which was eventually deactivated on July 30, 2023. I've continued fighting for prison closure ever since.

The Abolitionist: How do you see prison closure as a strategy for climate disasters and ecological justice? Why do you think given what's happening ecologically or environmentally around the world, but also particularly in California, these conditions present the need to close prisons once and for all?

Timothy: We know that prisons are sites of toxic air, land, and water that affect our climate's ecology, environment, and natural resources. One example of this is how the prison industry uses **toxic chemicals** to maintain the overcrowded prison's **septic tanks, recycled water filters, HVAC** (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) systems, and **cell cleaning**, which for decades have contributed to **deadly illnesses** and **chronic health problems** among prisoners. What most people don't know is that the public is also being affected by toxic prisons, especially in surrounding communities. I challenge the public to research how many of their neighbors have developed **asthma, hepatitis, kidney failure, cancer, cataracts**, and other illnesses that doctors can't seem to explain. While billions in taxpayer dollars continue to be spent on toxic prisons, worsening the health of our economy, we must also contend with the debt that our future generations will inherit before they are even born.

Duane: Prisons in California were built on irrigated land in wildfire hazard zones without the ability to alleviate risk, and with no consideration to the health and safety of prisoners. It's no wonder **Valley Fever** has claimed the lives of Black prisoners warehoused in Central California, and the smoke from the wildfires will continue to ravage through these prisons.

Brian: In addition to the damaging impacts on our health, prisons in California are also significantly impacted by climate change, with increasing threats from wildfires, heatwaves,

and floods. Prioritizing the closure of facilities vulnerable to these threats could be very important. The Ella Baker Center released a great report on this called "Hidden Hazards: The Impacts of Climate Change on Incarcerated People in California State Prisons." Prison closure is a vital step in addressing the impacts of climate change and promoting ecological justice.

"We know that prisons are sites of toxic air, land, and water that affect our climate's ecology, environment, and natural resources... While billions in taxpayer dollars continue to be spent on toxic prisons, worsening the health of our economy, we must also contend with the debt that our future generations will inherit before they are even born."

The fight to close 10 prisons by 2025 is pivotal for the future of California. By closing more prisons, we can not only shift state spending away from carceral systems to invest in equitable community solutions, particularly affecting Black and marginalized folks as well as rural economies misled by the supposed economic promises of prisons, but also save California's ecology.

The Abolitionist: Much of the initial inside organizing at CCC was directly related to those kinds of concerns – about the prison's total failure to meet even the most basic human needs of people trapped in cages as the **Dixie Fire** grew closer, **threatening the lives of over 2,000 people imprisoned**. Throughout the three-and-a-half month wildfire and into 2022, the US Air Quality Index rated the air quality in Susanville as "beyond the index," meaning quite literally that the hazardous air pollution level in the area is off the charts. Meanwhile, families of prisoners were left in the dark with zero access to crucial information about the health of their loved ones.

How did prisoner demands move from focusing on conditions of confinement to full-blown demand to shut the CCC down?

Duane: Initially, we were fighting to get the power turned back on. We were without electricity, **sitting caged for 28 days with no power, living in a smoke-filled building, no lights, no air conditioning**, everything was on lockdown. There were other issues transpiring inside the prison: when it rained the **cells leaked**, toilets didn't work properly, and **rodents and bugs** were rampant. We were trapped in a cycle of filing 602 complaints that went unanswered, and when we asked about evacuation plans, we weren't given any, because there weren't any. It was clear to us that if the fire got close enough to the prison, they would have left us in there. **But we weren't going to let ourselves be stuck in a predicament where our lives didn't matter—no matter how expendable we were in the eyes of the prison system. Our fight for getting the power turned back on turned into the fight to close the prison down, because the prison couldn't be fixed.** It just had to be shut down.

Timothy: We ended up co-authoring an amicus brief in the legal case that was blocking the closure of CCC.

The Abolitionist: Yes, and the organizing you all did together with the amicus brief was a game

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changer for the campaign. The six-decade-old facility required **\$503 million in repairs** and was selected by Governor Newsom in his 2022-2023 Enacted Budget for closure by June 2023. Since the mandate was announced in April 2021, **Susanville residents pushed back on the closure order through a lawsuit due to fear and panic** of loss of jobs resulting from economic dependency on the prison and stemming from racist stereotypes of imprisoned people. For a year in a slow, arduous process, CCC remained open even after the governor sited it for closure. The amicus brief you filed in May 2022 demanded CCC’s closure be expedited. Because of your work, the campaign was able to effectively persuade **a California judge to rule that the state close CCC**. The ruling would not have been possible without the steadfastness of people imprisoned in CCC.

“But we weren’t going to let ourselves be stuck in a predicament where our lives didn’t matter—no matter how expendable we were in the eyes of the prison system. Our fight for getting the power turned back on turned into the fight to close the prison down, because the prison couldn’t be fixed.”

A multi-year, ambitious campaign, California’s prison closure fight isn’t only about dismantling the state’s prison system through facility closures, but also **changing the political, economic, and ecological landscape** – where and how we invest our resources, energy, and power – to build a new California with the life-affirming infrastructure for all of our communities to thrive.

What specific solutions is the campaign fighting for? Which solutions directly address ecological crisis? And what role do you think imprisoned people can play in developing these solutions?

Duane: Prisons should not be the basis of our economy. California **prison expansion made rural areas dependent on prisons to sustain their economy**, which means keeping people locked up to for the primary purpose of keeping prison staff employed and keeping prisons running. In *Susanville v. CDCR*, the city tried to claim a right to make money off our imprisonment as if they had a legal right to profit from us being caged in their town, and they didn’t care that we were sitting there, suffering during the Dixie Fire with no way out. We didn’t have clean air, clean water, or habitable living conditions. It was dangerous to our health. If people lost their lives, they could just transfer more people to fill prison beds. We’re not animals, we’re human beings.

California needs to realize that **prison expansion has set us back generations**. The impact of oppression and gentrification has damaged Black and Brown communities beyond easy repair. Closing California prisons would allow us to shift life-affirming resources back into our communities and empower our communities most impacted by imprisonment as well as the environmental devastation that prisons have imposed on our ecology. We must prioritize people and our planet over punishment.

Patrick: The Department of Corrections (DOC) is making a lot of money off us being locked up, and in California this year alone, the state plans to spend \$14.6 billion on prisons. This is money that could be spent in our communities instead. Prisons create a toxic environment of racism, trauma, and more harm, destroying the land and natural habitats that surround them.

The fight for prison closure provides a path forward for imprisoned people to return home to their families, and a plan for the state of California to adopt a just transition for California’s economy and environment. **When we close prisons, the state should return the land back to its rightful owners and support Indigenous-led land movements to heal the ancestral lands that the prison system has caused so much harm to and so that we can have sustainable environments.**

Brian: Our campaign seeks to implement what’s called a **“decarceral just transition,”** redirecting resources from prisons into equitable community investments. That means creating **green jobs** and **building infrastructure** that supports all Californians. Our partners in environmental justice have done a great job creating the **just transition framework**, which can help us move from extractive economies that rely on things like big oil to more sustainable ones. Imprisoned individuals can offer valuable insights about these proposals, and part of CURB’s role is to make sure we are making moves with input from the inside, like through our Close California Prisons Inreach Workgroup.

“When we close prisons, the state should return the land back to its rightful owners and support Indigenous-led land movements to heal the ancestral lands that the prison system has caused so much harm to and so that we can have sustainable environments”

Prison closure is both a moral and a fiscal issue. Budgets are a statement about our values. Our campaign’s **Roadmap to Prison Closure** shows how we can reallocate funds from prisons to

community care. Prison closure is real abolitionist reform in action, actively shrinking the carceral state. We can close prisons and save billions, money that can be spent on programs that truly keep people safe.

The Abolitionist: Anything else you want to add?

Brian: Let’s keep the conversation going. Plugging into Critical Resistance or another CURB member organization is a great way to get involved. Together, we can drive meaningful change. ♦

More about the Authors:

Brian Kaneda is a Black queer feminist organizer and a founding member of the **California Coalition for Women Prisoners (CCWP) Los Angeles chapter**. He has spent the last decade advocating for **Care First** economies, the rights of incarcerated individuals, and the closure of prisons and jails in California. Brian came to CURB in 2019 with over 20 years of experience in business and media. In 2021, Brian became the Year 1 Community Co-chair of LA County’s **Measure J** subcommittee on Mental Health, Behavioral Health & Diversion, and assumed the role of Deputy Director at CURB. He serves on the Executive Teams of **JusticeLA** and **Budget 2 Save Lives** as well as the Coordinating Committee for **Re-Imagine L.A. County**.

Duane Palm is an imprisoned organizer with the **CURB California Prison Closure campaign**. He can be reached via “Getting Out” (CA # AF1521) or by mail at:

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701 Scofield Avenue; P.O. Box 4400
Wasco, CA 93280

Timothy Peoples is an imprisoned organizer with the **CURB California Prison Closure campaign**. He can be reached via “Getting Out” (CA # H63933) or by mail at:

Timothy Peoples # H63933
San Quentin Rehabilitation Center
San Quentin, CA 94974

Patrick Noel is an imprisoned organizer with the **CURB California Prison Closure campaign**. He can be reached via “Getting Out” (CA # V88778) or by mail at:

Patrick Noel # V88778
Folsom State Prison
PO BOX 715071
Represa, CA 95671

Mar Golub is a member of **Critical Resistance, Los Angeles** and The Abolitionist Editorial Collective. With CURB, their work on the California Prison Closure campaign has focused on inside-outside organizing and relationship-building with families and loved ones of prisoners at California Rehabilitation Center (CRC) in Norco, CA. If you are imprisoned in California and would like to connect with the campaign, you can write to our InReach team at:

Critical Resistance
Attn: CURB Campaign
P.O. Box 22780
Oakland, CA 94609

ABBY THROWBACK:

The following is a reprint from **Issue 16 of The Abolitionist**, printed in the Spring of 2012. Issue 16 imagined what life might be like once we abolish the prison industrial complex (PIC). For the issue, Critical Resistance co-founder Rose Braz and Craig Gilmore examined what the environment, or people’s relationship to our environments, might be like after we dismantle the PIC given how the PIC shapes society and the conditions in which we live.

We selected this piece for Issue 41’s Abby Throwback, because Rose and Craig’s organizing in the late 1990s and early 2000s to stop California’s prison construction boom was a foundational fight that ultimately informed not only CR’s approach to campaign work, but also multi-sector organizing—specifically **joining forces between environmentalists and communities targeted by and resisting imprisonment**.

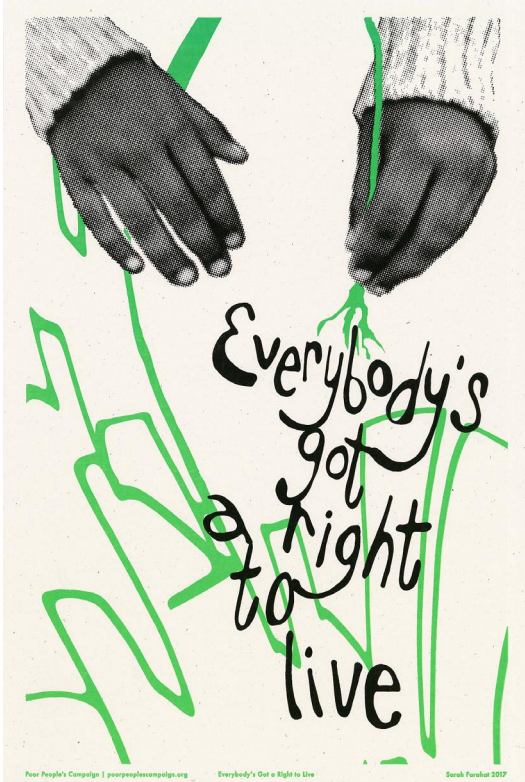
Life after Prisons: What’s the Environment Got to Do with It?

By Rose Braz and Craig Gilmore

To imagine the environment in a world without the prison industrial complex (PIC), we have to first understand the impact of the PIC on the current environment. While environmental

issues and concerns are widely discussed today, many have not identified prisons and the PIC as a toxic industry. We can’t truly have a society based in values of community and environmental sustainability while the PIC exists.

Prisons are often sold to poor communities as “clean industries” with a promise of hundreds of decent jobs and tax benefits. In reality, the effects of prisons on a community are almost entirely negative. **Prisons suck up local natural resources**. Prisons **overwhelm city infrastruc-**



By Sarah Farahat, Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative.

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ture, which can lead to toxic spills. Prisons require local communities to pay for roads, sewers & utilities used by the prison. Prisons **generate tens of thousands of miles of commuting pollution**, often in the most polluted parts of the state. Prisons take irreplaceable land out of any productive use or natural setting. **Prisons waste valuable public resources** that could go toward cleaning up our air, water and land, but rather are spent on locking people in cages. Water is a key example the vital resources squandered by the PIC. Water is quickly becoming a truly precious entity in many communities as the pace of climate change quickens, bringing with it increased drought that threatens food security worldwide.

Additionally, **aging infrastructure and overcrowding** have resulted in prisons and jails leaking environmentally dangerous effluents both inside prisons and into local rivers, water tables and community water supplies. In 2000, Folsom State Prison (originally built in 1880) was fined \$700,000 for a massive 700,000-gallon sewage spill into the adjacent American River. Five years later in 2005, Folsom was **implicated in water pollution again** when 17,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil were removed from the prison property from an area that had formerly housed scrap metal and drum storage, industrial manufacturing, and a firing range. Despite removal of this toxic waste, nearby wells still show excessive levels of contaminants and are unsuitable for drinking water.

A report from **Prison Legal News** shows **environmental degradation from prisons nationwide**. Raw sewage from pipes underneath the Miami-Dade County Jail in Florida had been sickening prisoners and guards for years. A 2007 report from the Indiana Department of Corrections noted feces leaking from toilets into latrines and leaking water/sewage inside the building being diverted into open gutters at Marion County Community Corrections Center.

Prisons follow the template of other toxic industries, not just in their literal environmental contamination, but also in their exploitation of the communities in which they are located. Environmental racism is broadly defined as racial discrimination in environmental policy making,

selective enforcement of environmental laws, and the targeting of communities of color and/or poor communities for environmentally disastrous land uses, such as toxic waste disposal sites, oil refineries, power plants or other polluting industries, including prisons. Communities of color and poor communities bear an unequal and unfair number of environmentally destructive land uses, land uses that take from the community but don’t give back to it.

Fighting against environmental degradation is linked to fighting against prisons. It is about addressing root social problems and the forces that cause these problems. We know what we need to do to **slow climate change**, for example: stop burning so much fossil fuel. We also know what we need to do make our communities truly safe: **invest in health, food, clean air and water, employment, and housing**, rather than locking people in cages.

“Fighting against environmental degradation is linked to fighting against prisons. It is about addressing root social problems and the forces that cause these problems.”

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

to the ever-expanding number of prisons, jails, and immigrant detention prisons that line the main thoroughfare through the valley, Highway 5.

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

So, even if you’ve never thought much—or at all—about the deep connections between abolition of the PIC and clean air, water, adequate and good food, and a place for all creatures great and small, abolition can provide a framework. This is because our struggle to abolish the PIC is not just about “education, not incarceration.” It is about freedom, not imprisonment; self-determination, not police control. It is about a society that values the earth and its resources and creatures, rather than the PIC.♦

About the Authors:

Craig Gilmore is a long-time abolitionist organizer, close comrade and advisor of **Critical Resistance (CR)**, and founding member of the **California Prison Moratorium Project**. Together with Rose Braz and CR, Craig organized the fight to stop the construction of California’s 33rd prison, Delano II—a struggle that effectively ended the state’s historic prison construction boom.

Rose Braz was a co-founding member of CR. Rose was a national staffer of CR for many years, including **CR’s National Campaign & Media Director**. Rose tragically passed away in 2017 from brain cancer. Her significant contributions to CR—including developing CR’s winning campaign approach and strategies along with joining environmental and abolitionist struggles in analysis and practice—remain foundational to the organization today.

KITES TO THE EDITORS:

The following contains letters and submissions from imprisoned people to The Abolitionist Editorial Collective. Printed as “Kites to the Editors,” some reference content from the previous issue of The Abolitionist, while others address different topics of the authors’ choosing. Two Issue 41 Kites reference the initials of a revolutionary who was mentioned in Issue 40 (“GLJ”), whose legacy is used for gang validation to repress cross-racial organizing and resistance of Black freedom fighters. We print his initials instead of his full name to minimize potential risk to our imprisoned readers and subscribers.

If you like what you read in this issue’s Kites, share your thoughts, and keep the conversation going by sending us another Kite with your response that we can print in Issue 42 in the fall. See the Call for Content on page 25 for more details on submission guidelines..

 Hi: I am an **eco-anarchist political prisoner** whose act was **disappeared by the state**. I do not know how many more like me there are: People quietly arrested and sentenced, given minimal time, and put in a **Residential Drug Abuse Program (RDAP) unit**. It is odd that the state tried to cover up my case and send me to a low-security federal facility. It is reminiscent of that old policy of labeling political prisoners “criminally insane” and quietly disappearing them into psychiatric facilities. It all sounds rather sinister when I put it on paper. Of course, I expect that the gloves may come off as the result of me writing this, so I will be **requesting a copy of the new Surviving Solitary toolkit** mentioned in Issue 40. As my **action against Exxon Mobil** failed, my family and I can be said to be the primary victims in my case. It is out of respect for them that I do not dwell on or glorify what I tried to do. In any event, I can accomplish far more with the pen than a bomb.

While RDAP units are low security, they are the **Federal Bureau of Prison (BOP)’s most inten-**

sive “treatment” programs, where imprisoned people can socialize with each other more than in high-security units. They apply many of the same brainwashing tactics used in control units, merely expanded and modified for use on prisoners in general population or conditions where we are allowed to socialize more. This expansion from targeting active political dissenters to entire “dangerous classes” is a thread that runs through the history of capitalism and empire, as seen through the development of the institution of policing, especially during the 1800s–1900s with the creation of the London Metropolitan Police, the anti-Irish Peace Preservation Force, and the New York Police Department’s Red Squads. RDAP continues this tradition by building on the work of Edgar Schein, the doctor who advised BOP officials to use brainwashing tactics in their creation of the control units. The techniques used in RDAP include: The creation of an arbitrary system of rewards and punishments; behavioral modification programs; lack of privacy; and public shaming. A fellow prisoner described RDAP’s methods as: “*They break you down completely and build you back up from nothing. That is why we are so mentally and physically tired at the end of each day.*”

“This expansion from targeting active political dissenters to entire “dangerous classes” is a thread that runs through the history of capitalism and empire, as seen through the development of the institution of policing, especially during the 1800s– 1900s with the creation of the London Metropolitan Police, the anti-Irish Peace Preservation Force, and the New York Police Department’s Red Squads.”

The guard-“therapists” (an intentionally blurred line) tell me that RDAP is a **behavioral modification program** intent on “challenging your core beliefs” to orient you toward a “pro-social lifestyle.” RDAP contends that all “criminal” activity stems from correctible thinking errors and not material conditions. It is fiercely atomizing—attacking and neutralizing prisoner solidarity by reforming it as an anti-social

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“In Dark Times” by Meredith Stern, Justseeds Artists’ Cooperative.

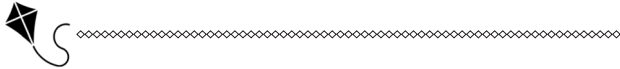
“criminal” lifestyle. Prisoners are required to break solidarity and publicly shame their peers, often creating escalating cycles that regularly destroy the few social bonds that have formed. Racist, sexist, and transphobic events have gone unaddressed as the prisoners who did them are protected (encouraged and even facilitated) by guards.

What is to be done? I have bided my time, quietly becoming more politically educated through books and zines, while educating and building cross-racial solidarity. While I will eventually go free, the system of cages and death will continue until we end it. I lend my pen in hope. Long live GLJ! Long live Alfredo Cospito!

In solidarity,
Menlo ♦

About the Author: Menlo is the penname of a political prisoner in Texas. If you’d like to send a Kite back to Menlo, CR and The Abolitionist Editorial Collective will relay the message. Write to:

The Abby
c/o Critical Resistance
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Oakland, CA 94609



To our dear comrade Ed Mead,
¡Frente, fuerte, y presente! Live on in power and rest (GLJ Brigade). Peaceful greetings to the revolutionary spirit of the movement. I read the Fall 2023 Issue 40 of *The Abolitionist* newspaper on Control Units. Solitary confinement now seems to have found a new life as it has once again mutated into a different form. While the movement against solitary confinement is still young, we must be aware of the sacrifice— blood, sweat and the serious tears that were shed for what we all fought for. That brings me to discuss the hard, **tireless contributions and work by Ed Mead** — a valued man of honor with a heart for revolution throughout the past four decades.

The news of Ed’s passing reached me when I received *The Abolitionist* Issue 40, at the same time I arrived in Ad-Seg. Unfortunate and painful, we must learn to move forward with our lessons from the successes and accomplishments over the years. Without the organization **California Prison Focus (CPF)**, things have changed in the information imprisoned people now have access to and have lost. As the editor of CPF, Ed was a teacher and comrade who was outspoken with the frank truth of radical resistance. Ed fought hard for liberation and made a lot of sacrifices for the collective.

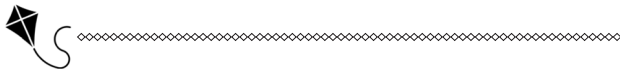
Thank you to our comrade Ed Mead for your honor, education, and hard work. You showed me how to care about my environment and situation. Ed Mead’s years as CPF’s editor in chief taught me what it was to be able to “voice” a real opinion in the throes of a beast that is only obstinate and oppressive in nature and strategy. Never doubt that I will continue to work as I was born to do as an activist that began with the Peli-

can Bay Project, a 1989 organization that started CPF and others over the years. Thanks to them, prisons were finally shut down and thousands of lifers have been released. The revolutionary spirit only lives in those parts of the solidarity, the real struggle, and the life of the movement we all fight towards a better tomorrow. We will forever be grateful to our dear comrade.

Live on, in the power of the people, Ed Mead!
—Frank Gonzalez ♦

About the Author: Francisco “Frank” Gonzalez is a longtime imprisoned organizer in California and was a comrade of Ed Mead when imprisoned at Pelican Bay. Ed Mead was a former political prisoner and longtime revolutionary organizer who passed away in 2023 (a tribute for Ed was shared in the “Until All Are Free” column on political prisoner news in Issue 40).

Write to Frank at:
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RJ Donovan Correctional Facility
480 Alta Road (B7-114)
San Diego CA 92179-0001



Death Row: One Way Out

By Antwann Johnson

For just a brief moment, I would like the reader to visualize themselves only having one week to live; knowing that you only have seven days left to speak to loved ones, cherish fond memories, breathe the sweet breath of life, and to make peace with your fate in the best way you can. Imagine waking up every day and counting down the hours, minutes, and seconds until your eyes will close for the last time. On that final day, you wake up to what you know will be the last 24 hours of your life on this earth, pondering what your last words will be, and praying that God truly does have mercy on your soul for all the wrongs you have done in your lifetime.

My desire is to tap into the hearts of humankind to ensure that people fully grasp the agony inflicted on the minds and souls of prisoners on death row. It’s been said that death by lethal injection is one of the most inhumane ways to die. Taking one life for another is not the solution, yet the prison industrial complex (PIC) has a way of removing the humanity of prisoners, including those of us on death row, by labeling them as monsters who are the outcomes of what they’ve been charged for, incapable of change. Despite the ways prisoners have been criminalized, we are human beings, although it is hard to carry on when you feel as if no one loves you.

When I first arrived at Potosi Correctional Center in January 1999, I did not know what to expect. Being surrounded by men on death row was somewhat confusing; however, there was something different about death row prisoners. Their presence had a unique energy. For the ones I remember dearly, I can still hear their names: DJ, SD, Stan, Rambo, Marlone, Jarome Mallette, and Big Moe. I quickly noticed that despite being sentenced to die, they were not filled with bitterness, only love and worry for what was to come. The precious moments I spent with these individuals were priceless and I still remember them as if they were yesterday.

I watched how these men interacted with one another, doing their best to be in good spirits. We debated over politics, religion, law, entertainment, or whatever the hot topic of the day was. I would listen in humble silence as one by one they poured their hearts out to me with their stories, each one carrying a deep sadness and expressing sincere remorse for the harm they caused. Yet despite coming from various backgrounds and being on death row for different reasons, each of them expressed something similar to me in their stories: “It may be too late for me, and I’m ok with that...but for you, Antwann? You still have a fighting chance...”

One of the guys I had grown closest to was named Moses Young, but we all called him Big Moe. We had deep, meaningful conversations.

He once told me, “If just one of us on death row makes it back out alive, a part of all of us made it.” I watched the tears roll down his face, heard the sincerity in his voice, and it was in that moment that reality took on a whole new meaning for me. Each of the men I grew to know on death row made it very clear that they had lost trust and hope in the judicial system, and that gaining faith in their maker, God, was their only desire now.

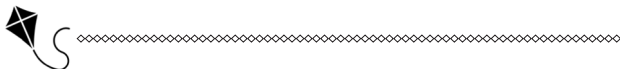
“If just one of us on death row makes it back out alive, a part of all of us made it.”

For those living on death row, the stress and anxiety of not knowing when your final hour will come creates an emptiness of fear deep inside. I found this to be especially true when we all mourned the loss of Rambo, the first person to be executed after I arrived. Later, when Big Moe was taken to be executed, I was in tears because of the deep bond we had developed. I will never forget watching him walk out that door knowing he would never return. However it wasn’t long after he left that breaking news came across the TV screen; it was the St Louis City assistant circuit attorney, D’Joyce Haynes, giving a press statement to the media expressing that she was being threatened with the loss of her career if she revealed the truth that there was corruption involved in the conviction against Big Moe, and when she announced that he would be given a stay of execution. We all rejoiced! However, the excitement was short-lived and the stay order was later revoked, which meant that Big Moe would indeed be executed. When we learned of this devastating news, one of the men in our wing placed their radio next to the two-inch gap at the foot of their cell door. “Life Goes On” by 2Pac came on.

Throughout my time at Potosi Correctional Center, all seven of these men have been executed; however, I’ve managed to not focus so much on their deaths. What really matters is what I’ve learned from them while they were alive. It took me 47 years to finally realize and accept that death is inevitable. Everyone has a dash in between their birth date and the date of their death. Only God has the power to decide who goes and who stays, but it’s up to all of us to decide how we choose to live our lives and what to fill in that dash with. For me, being told by detectives during my arrest and interrogation that I was facing the death penalty was overwhelming. While I was not sentenced to death row, being around these men helped me understand how precious life truly is—to be grateful for the things I used to take for granted. Oftentimes we don’t understand how truly blessed we are until we are placed in a situation when what we should have been holding sacred is taken away. ♦

About the Author: Antwann Johnson is a writer imprisoned in Missouri. Write to him at:

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Prison Scars: Cruel and Inadequate Medical Treatment at an Indiana Prison

By Kenneth L. Zamarron

Prisoners suffer from higher rates of mental illness, chronic medical conditions, and infectious diseases compared to non-imprisoned people. In 1976, the US Supreme Court in *Estelle v. Gamble* explained, “[a] prisoner must rely on prison authorities to treat his medical needs; if authorities fail to do so, those needs will not be met.” My story exposes how medical “authorities” willfully ignore prisoners’ medical needs.

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“Artists Against Catastrophic Climate Change” By imprisoned subscriber Brian Fuller.

I entered the prison system in 2007. I was only 16-years old when sentenced to 97-and-a-half years under what is commonly called a “Methu-selah sentence”, named after a biblical figure who reportedly lived to be 969 years old. When I entered prison, I was like most of the other mixed-race Latino and white, urban kids I had met. I was unable to read and write. In a word, I was illiterate. However, that all would change. In 2013, I began noticing what appeared to be little pimples developing on my neck and scalp. Subsequently, I inarticulately filled out a health care request form, which prisoners use to notify the medical department of health issues they are experiencing. At that time, the medical provider for the Indiana Department of Corrections was named Corizon, Inc, which I would soon learn was responsible for providing cruel and woefully inadequate medical care to prisoners in every state where it operated.

As the years passed, my condition worsened. I submitted numerous health care request forms and grievances to prison officials: 1) to be seen by a dermatologist for a proper evaluation and new treatment options; 2) for medical staff to stop prescribing me medication that had already proven ineffective; and 3) to be given adequate bandages and wraps since the pimples had turned into large cysts that would drain constantly. Prisoners are not allowed to possess these types of medical supplies without the approval of the medical department, as they are otherwise considered contraband. As both my physical and psychological health worsened, my requests had been ignored.

As Corizon was taken over by another profit-driven prison health provider in 2017 and the quality of healthcare we received did not change, I fell into deep despair and seriously contemplated suicide to end both my physical and mental pain. I feared the fight against the colossal power of multiple goliaths—the prison’s medical provider and the Indiana Department of Corrections. **How could I ever succeed against these high-pow-**

ered entities when I did not even possess a stone (the ability to read well) or a sling (the ability to write well)? However, I thought of the pain that taking my life would cause my family, who I had already let down. I thought of my ancestors who were stigmatized and ostracized based on their nationality, ethnicity, and color of their skin—they too had received cruel and inhumane treatment. So, like them, I would stand up and fight for justice. I would fight for medical care, and to be treated like a human being—I would stoically face my goliaths.

“Learning to read and write helped me claim my freedom and develop the tools I needed to fight for my rights to receive medical care with meaning, substance, and significance.”

How did I do this? I formulated a plan: Learn to read, learn to write, and learn civil law to the best of my ability to protect my constitutional rights, and the rights of other prisoners. I sought to become more patient, persistent, and compassionate, and what was once burdensome and difficult became demystified. I had a newfound respect for **Fredrick Douglass’s** quote, **“Once you learn to read, you are forever free.”** Learning to read and write helped me claim my freedom and develop the tools I needed to fight for my rights to receive medical care with meaning, substance, and significance.

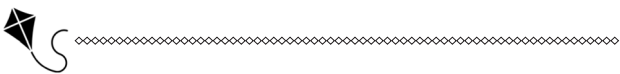
I continued to write healthcare request forms and grievances for my chronic bacterial infections and painful, pus-filled lesions that ruptured and drained daily while my requests for bandages and wraps went ignored, forcing me to use old, unsanitary cut-up t-shirts, rags, and toilet paper as bandages. However, the medical negligence and dehumanizing treatment I experienced only fueled the red flames for the justice I sought. After nearly seven years of unrelenting suffering and submitting at least 80 health care request forms, numerous grievanc-es, and an anatomical drawing of my face and head detailing the wounds I had sustained because of medical malpractice, I finally received a consultation with a dermatologist and within minutes, I was diagnosed with a rare condition that, due to repeated painful swelling, rupturing, and drainage from being untreated, had devel-

oped into gruesome scarring on my scalp and body. I am lucky to be alive given the fact that if left untreated, my condition can lead to sepsis, necrotizing fasciitis, and ultimately death.

While I may be scarred for life, due to my diligent efforts, I am still alive despite the horrific and unconscionable treatment I received from both privately contracted prison medical service providers, their collective profit over prisoner care philosophy, and the negligence of the prison industrial complex (PIC). Finally, in 2021, I filed a federal lawsuit for the delay and denial of adequate medical care in violation of the Eighth Amendment of the US Constitution, which prohibits cruel and unusual punishment. While I continue to navigate the federal court system and file motions, I must admit that I’m scared and intimidated. However, with the assistance of other prisoners and with my new ability to read and write, no matter what happens in court, I will forever have freedom in what I have learned through my scars. ♦

About the Author: Kenneth L. Zamarron is a writer imprisoned in Indiana. Write to him at:

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Carlisle, IN 47838



Sanitary

By Max Reynard

Dirt
is a matter out of place
uneaten crumbs of food that could nourish us,
strands of hair defiantly proving our aliveness,
clothing with the stink of constrained lives,
scraps of paper with remnants of our minds
all marring the perfect orderly rightness
of angles of bricks, machined locked doors,
metal containers of our riotous possessions
spilling into contraband uncleanness,
stubbornly insisting on the messy humans
eating and dreaming and defecating
outside the lines of a blueprint made solid
the only perfect facility an empty one
our presence here persistent tarnish
the source of the first of dirt,
for we are the dirt
we are the matter
out of place ♦

About the Poet: Max Reynard (Ivan Boothe) is locked up in Oregon. Write to Max at:

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St. Helens, OR 97051

**9971:
Gun Control**

By Stevie Wilson with Robert Patterson & Andre Johnson

Gun violence is a hot topic in the US. Stories of shootings are reported daily. The public demands solutions. Elected officials point fingers. Mainstream news outlets re-bake discussions, platforming the same voices. Promises are made. Nothing changes.

Ironically, **the voices of the people most impacted by gun violence are never heard.** In the US, the most likely victim of gun violence, fatal and nonfatal, is a young Black male. And it’s been this way for some time now. *But when was the last time anyone asked those young men what to do about gun violence? When have they been asked about the causes? When have they been asked about solutions? Aren’t those closest to the problem closest to the solution?*

Instead of talking to them, we talk about them. They are demonized and vilified by mainstream media. Invariably, they are depicted as perpetrators of violence, never victims. **Dichotomizing people into victims versus perpetrators precludes us from reaching real solutions** to the violence that permeates our communities. The reality is these young people have been indirectly and directly harmed by, as well as done harm when using guns, many from a very young age. Gun violence has not only impacted but also circumscribed their lives. We need to listen and learn from them if we are going to eliminate gun violence.

A common, but ineffective proposal offered by elected officials and law enforcement is further criminalization. **Stiffer laws and longer sentences don’t and won’t deter young people from possessing or using firearms.** They have a saying: *“I’d rather be caught with it than without it.”* The resolutions put forth by politicians, prosecutors, and police will not get these young people to drop their guns. Until they do, we have a problem.

We need to start by connecting and listening to young Black men who are experiencing and perpetrating gun violence. So, I asked two of them, both 23 years old and both currently imprisoned, why they won’t put their guns down: one from Philadelphia and the other from Norristown, PA. Even after being locked up, they still won’t drop their guns. So those who haven’t been caged yet are even less likely to do so. This should tell us something. Maybe if we listened to them and worked to address their safety concerns, we will come closer to a solution. As an abolitionist, I want safety for everyone everywhere. These young men deserve to feel safe just like everyone else, so let’s listen to them.

• • •

ROBERT PATTERSON, 23, PHILADELPHIA:

It’s simple. I don’t want to die. And yes, I know you can die with your hand on your gun. But you have a better chance of surviving with a gun on you. Since I was twelve, a gun has been a part of

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my daily wardrobe. I started selling drugs at an early age, so I needed a gun for protection.

Where I live, there is always beef. And people aren't fist fighting anymore. That's been dead. For us, it's all gunplay: people are throwing bullets, not jabs. If you don't have a gun, you are in danger, a target.

I have also been involved in robberies, sometimes without wearing a mask. So, I have to worry about those people recognizing me in the streets and seeking revenge. And they're coming. I have been on both sides of robberies. A dude tried to rob me and my friend one night in front of the corner store. My friend saw the guy's gun before I did and fled. I had my gun in my pocket. While the robber was busy looking around, keeping an eye out for anyone coming, I crept my gun out and waited for the right moment. When he looked around again, I took my shot. Literally.

I carry a gun also because there is little trust in the streets. The streets are grimy. The guy you call a friend could be setting you up, back-dooring you for money or drugs. Sometimes, the expectations of friendship put me in situations where I need to carry a gun. If someone is snitching on your homie and the only way you can get your friend out of jail is to handle the snitch, you do what you have to. Other times, I have gotten caught up in a friend's beef. His enemies become my enemies. When they see me, they shoot at me like I am him. And if they shoot or kill my homie, I have to get revenge. I was involved with different women, so I had to carry a gun. Some of them have jealous boyfriends who will shoot or kill you. So, I'd rather be caught with my gun than without it.

I don't feel safe without a gun. Anywhere. The police are supposed to protect and serve, but they are out there killing young Black men. Nobody is going to protect your life like you will. People get robbed everyday walking down the street. It doesn't matter if you are young or old, you need a gun. That is why I make sure everyone around me gets one. If they can do so legally, I encourage it. I told my mother and sisters to get one. Any woman I am in a relationship with has to get a gun and a license. Because I am a convicted felon, I can't legally get one. But that won't stop me from carrying a gun. I would rather stand before a judge than have my mother stand before a coffin crying over my dead body. I won't let that happen.

One day when I was younger, I skipped school. My old head saw me and put me in his car to drive me to school. It was still early in the morning. We were four blocks from the school when a car hit us from behind. My old head got out the car to talk to the driver. The person in the passenger seat jumped out the car, masked up, and shot my old head in the neck and shoulder. My old head's gun was still in his stash spot in the car. Something can happen *that quickly*, no matter what time of day.

Years later, my nephew and I went to the store. I didn't carry my gun. As we went inside the store, a car with tinted windows drove by and then backed up. We tried to walk off. But a dude I had an altercation with before jumped out and



By Bec Young, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

jammed his gun into my side. He demanded I give him whatever was in my pockets. No doubt, if my nephew weren't there, I would have been killed.

I also believe social media plays a role in gun violence. Dudes make and post videos bragging about who they shot or robbed or killed. When the person who was shot or robbed sees it, they want revenge. If a person was killed, their friends want revenge. With all these things happening, I won't put my gun down.

• • •

ANDRE JOHNSON, 23, NORRISTOWN:

I know gun violence is a major issue in the US, but I am still not going to put my gun down. I have too many reasons not to. First, my case. Originally, I was charged with a homicide, but beat it and pled out to a robbery and "criminal" use of a communication device. There are people who will try to retaliate for the homicide I beat. There are situations I have gotten into in the past that I must be prepared for someone seeking revenge. My life in the streets requires me to always be aware of my surroundings and always to be armed.

"Get back" is a major reason I stayed armed. There are situations that have happened, and I need to retaliate. This underlines a lot of gun violence in the streets. I have had friends killed that I need to retaliate for their deaths. Even since I have been locked up, situations like this have happened and I feel somebody should have to answer for them.

I was 14 the first time I owned a gun. Before this, me and my friends would get guns from the older guys in the neighborhood or steal them. I began committing robberies with the gun. Also, I felt that me and my friends had a lot of haters, so we started fighting with a lot of other groups of young men. It was fist fighting at first, then it turned into shooting. By the time I was 16, I had lost friends to gun violence.

I strongly believe social media doesn't help when it comes to gun violence. People post guns on their pages. I was one of them. People use social media to disrespect people who were victims of gun violence. This only adds fuel to the fire, to the "get back."

The first time I possessed a gun, I went out with friends that night and robbed three or four peo-

ple. When I saw the reaction, I got when I pulled my gun out, I fell in love with that feeling. I felt powerful. I felt like I was the one in control of the whole situation. I liked the reputation I gained. When people in the neighborhood know you play with guns, they treat you differently. They respect you. They fear you.

So many young Black males have to jump into the streets at an early age. We don't fully understand what we are getting into. We are just trying to survive, to make money. There is a lot that comes with that, including gunplay. So much gun violence stems from heritage beef. Two groups or two blocks have been at war for generations. Some of the people involved don't even know how the conflict got started. They grew up being told not to like a certain group, block, or neighborhood and to hurt them whenever the chance comes.

Trauma plays a big role in gun violence. My squad and I would have a problem with another squad. We started out fighting each other. Eventually, someone in the group gets tired of fighting and pulls a gun out. This is how shooting at each other starts. Now you have a friend who has been shot or killed; you have to decide: am I going to ride for my friend or not? Almost always, we ride for our friend because we want to be loyal. This is how an ongoing war starts; people will continue to get shot or killed.

Men beefing over women is a problem, too. I know a lot of young men who have died over women. They had sex with someone's girlfriend, and the boyfriend gets mad at the guy and takes his anger out on the guy, shooting at him.

These young men have provided us with some insight into why gun violence happens in their neighborhoods and why they won't drop their guns. We don't have to agree with their rationales, but we do need to listen to them, especially if we want to get closer to a solution to gun violence. They have shared their truth, their experiences. I believe that by engaging young men like Robert and Andre, connecting with them, listening, and creating community with them, we begin to pave the road to a solution.

These two young men aren't the only people who answered the question, either. They recruited at least nine others to answer the same question. With some variation across their experiences and reasoning, one trend remains clear: despite politicians and the media's claims, these men are primarily concerned with their safety and figure they must take their safety into their own hands since no one else will guarantee it. We'll be sharing more of their responses and conversations around what it would take for them to put their guns down in the next issue of *The Abolitionist*.

Always,
Stevie ♦

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

UNTIL ALL ARE FREE: POLITICAL PRISONER NEWS

In this issue's political prisoner news column, we highlight winter-to-early-summer 2024 updates on a few political prisoner cases we've been following. We also reprint the tribute statement Critical Resistance (CR) wrote to honor former political prisoner and CR co-founder Masai Ehehosi. Free them all!

KEVIN RASHID JOHNSON

In late December 2023, well-known prison policy influencer Kevin "Rashid" Johnson and a group of comrades announced they began a

hunger strike to protest and shed light on Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC)'s continued practice of long-term solitary confinement. Despite Virginia officials insisting they had stopped using solitary confinement long ago, the torture continued at the state's remote super maximum security prisons Red Onion State Prison (ROSP) and Wallens Ridge State Prison (WRSP). Rashid released a series of demands including a stop to the censorship of his writings and correspondence, to return him to a state prison where he can receive medical care for symptomatic chronic heart failure and chronic edema, and to remove him from solitary

confinement and referral to long-term segregation/step down program.

Rashid reported: "On Feb 5, 2024 attorneys acting on my behalf filed a federal lawsuit against VDOC officials concerning my strike, my retaliatory transfer to ROSP, my need of care at major medical facilities unavailable in the VDOC's western region, and other related matters. After several hearings and VDOC stonewalling, it became clear that I was pushing the strike to the extreme and would not relent. State officials admitted fearing the political consequences of me dying from the strike. It

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was then agreed to move me to a medium security prison in the VDOC's central region where I was near my loved ones and major medical facilities. Meantime the matter of the VDOC's continued abuse of solitary confinement at ROSP and WRSP was set for trial in federal court beginning in mid-March 2024 with the court having already ruled the status illegal. With [the] demands having been largely satisfied, I thus ended my strike on Mar 5, 2024. I'd gone 2 1/2 months (71 days) without any food, days on end without drinking, and had lost 70 pounds."

On March 23, 2024 the Virginia legislature passed a new law restricting the use and duration of solitary confinement in the state's prisons.

LEONARD PELTIER

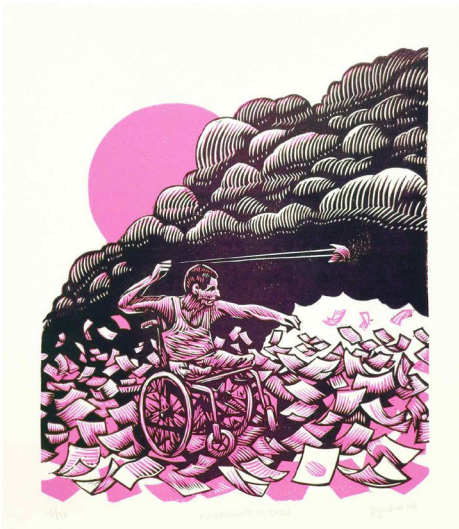
On June 10, **American Indian Movement political prisoner** Leonard Peltier had his first parole hearing in 15 years. He was last denied parole in 2009 and former President Obama denied his request for clemency in 2017. The hearing was held in Florida at a high security lockup that is part of the Federal Correctional Complex Coleman. The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) said in a statement that the hearing is not open to the public. A decision is said to come in the next 21 days from the hearing date. Peltier supporters, friends, family, and admirers anxiously await the parole decision, as this effort may be his last chance at freedom. Peltier is now 79, having been locked up for nearly 50 years, and his health is failing. If this parole request is denied, it might be a decade or more before it is considered again.

After the 7-hour long hearing, Peltier's legal team released a statement declaring they will not give up the fight, that "the struggle for Leonard's freedom is not over until it's over," and they will pursue "every legal mechanism to secure his release." They also shared: "Leonard, in his own words, expressed his profound gratitude to all who stood with him in Spirit throughout the hearing, making it clear how much your support means to him. Thank you to those of you who have donated to fight this battle."

Free Leonard Peltier! Donate now to his fight for freedom: www.freeleonardpeltiernow/donate

MUMIA ABU JAMAL

Imprisoned for 42 years now, Mumia Abu Jamal has survived three execution attempts: one on the streets of Philadelphia in 1981 and two literal execution warrants. In the last eight years, Mumia has had many health struggles, including **severe hepatitis C**, which there was a cure for, but the prison was preventing him from treatment. Mobilization and outside pressure made sure that Mumia was given that life-saving cure in 2017. In April 2021 Mumia underwent **open, double bypass heart surgery**. Since then, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has denied him cardiac rehabilitation care including a cardiac diet and adequate outdoor exercise. As his health has worsened, advocates, supporters and comrades organized email and phone zaps for people to call the PADOC and demand Mumia receive immediate care. **Stay updated on action alert to support and free Mumia:** freemumia.com/ ♦



"Aboveground in Gaza" by Roger Peet, Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

LONG LIVE, MASAI EHEHOSI!

Dear friends & comrades of Critical Resistance,

With heavy hearts, we honor the sudden loss and long legacy of our beloved co-founder and longtime member Masai Ehehosi. Masai passed away peacefully in his sleep on April 1, 2024. **A former political prisoner** targeted for his revolutionary activity with the **Black Liberation Army (BLA)**, at the time of his passing **Masai was Critical Resistance's (CR) longest-standing member.**

Masai worked for the liberation of his people for over 50 years, and held a profound presence in the multiple organizations he was in. A **co-defendant of Safiyah Bukhari** captured by police in 1973 as a BLA member, Masai began working with the **American Friends Services Committee (AFSC)** and was staff of the AFSC's **Criminal Justice Program** in Newark, NJ after being released from 14 years of prison in Virginia. At AFSC, Masai worked to close security housing units and end torture against imprisoned people through **AFSC's Prison Watch Program**. At the time of his passing, Masai was also the current **Co-Minister of Information** for the **Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika**, an advisory board member of **The Jericho Movement** working on the **Jericho Medical Project** for both state and federal prisoners, and was supporting the **Prison and Gang Program of Al-Ummah** and the **Imam Jamil (Al-Amin) Action Network**.

It is hard to put into words what Masai meant to CR and the movement to abolish the prison industrial complex (PIC), because in a way Masai was everything—representing so much of where CR comes from and sustains. A pillar of CR, it was Masai's experience and expertise that helped CR as an organization generate a revolutionary purpose and vision. Masai's involvement with CR began **on the steering committee** for our second conference, **CR East: Beyond the Prison Industrial Complex**. After helping to start CR as a national organization two months later, Masai remained **an active national CR member from 2001-2024**. For over two decades he was a consistent presence: struggling with his comrades; showing us how to make connections and build power across communities, across sectors, across geographies, and movements; representing the **New Afrikan Independence Movement**; and teaching us the utmost importance of political unity to our struggle. From his start with CR until his final days, Masai relentlessly and persistently maintained a commitment and accountability to Black liberation, sovereignty, self-determination, land and nationalist struggles here and globally, and an unwavering focus on solidarity with political prisoners, or, as Masai reminded us and insisted, "**prisoners of war.**"

Masai will be remembered for so much in CR—his kindness and warmth, full and pure heart, deep and abundant generosity, loyalty, sweet and affectionate smile, tenacious discipline, and more. Over the years, Masai helped to grow, strengthen and inform CR's membership and methods across generations, teaching younger organizers the PIC's design as well as the purposes of counter-insurgency and



¡Masai Ehehosi, Presente!

political repression. In addition to organizing CR's conferences, Masai helped build CR through our previous National Organizing Body and National Political Education and Membership workgroups. A repeat contributor to our newspaper, *The Abolitionist*, from its second issue in 2005 to its fortieth issue most recently on control units, it was Masai who suggested doing an issue on control units and abolitionist struggle. Soft spoken and humble, yet persistent—and never one to make a fuss—Masai had a way of breaking down complex systems, histories, and strategies in straight-forward, grounded ways, while still holding nuance and profound depth.

Always describing himself first as a Muslim, Masai lived up to his name and was a true, devoted warrior for liberation and revolutionary change. Remembered dearly by his five children, three grandchildren, two siblings, a plethora of nieces and nephews, countless comrades, and each of his organizations, we know Masai's teachings, guidance, sacrifice, and commitment will live on in us. We will continue to stay the course Masai and others set us on years ago—dismantling, in Masai's words "*the whole complex*" of capture, control and caging, changing our conditions, and building an *international movement for PIC abolition*.

CR is processing this big loss and will continue to reflect on Masai's contributions to our organization and the broader struggle. CR is in discussion with Masai's daughters about hosting a movement memorial in honor of Masai to rejoice in his memory and uplift his legacy. *The Abolitionist* Editorial Collective has decided to dedicate our next issue of the newspaper, Issue 42 with features on anti-war organizing, to Masai and his profound legacy. **If you'd like to write a tribute honoring Masai, please send it to the editorial collective to consider for publishing by August 16, 2024.**

Echoing Masai's long-term involvement in the New Afrikan Independence Movement, as he would often say in greeting & passing, "**free the land!**"

Long live Masai Ehehosi!
With Love and Solidarity,
-Critical Resistance

Critical Resistance (CR) Bulletin

✦ Prisoner Solidarity Phone Lines: New Schedule!

Call Critical Resistance anytime between
8am-6pm PST any Friday-Monday
Phone Icon: 510-444-0484

✦ Each CR chapter now has their own prisoner mail program!

Write to us **at our National Office** and we'll
direct your mail to the corresponding chapter
in **Oakland, Los Angeles, Portland, or New
York.**

Critical Resistance
Attn: Mail Program
PO Box 22780
Oakland, CA 94609

✦ *The Abolitionist* Newspaper: Project Updates!

The Abolitionist Editorial Collective had a
retreat at the historic Highlander Center in
Tennessee in January and made some excit-
ing decisions for the project

→ **Imprisoned subscribers of the newspa-
per can now receive a lifetime subscrip-
tion to *The Abolitionist* once released.** Just
be sure to keep your new mailing address or
email updated with the collective, and we'll
keep sending each issue to formerly impris-
oned subscribers once out.

→ **Sign up for a Lifetime Subscription at:**
[criticalresistance.org/subscribe-to-the-
abolitionist](http://criticalresistance.org/subscribe-to-the-abolitionist)

→ The Editorial Collective is going to start
**a project zine to accompany the news-
paper.** We hope to work with imprisoned
comrades to generate **tips and tools** for
inside subscribers of *The Abolitionist* to
**study each issue together, challenge cen-
sorship, set up study groups, workshop
their writing** and more.

If you'd like to **contribute to the zine, write
to us:**

The Abolitionist
Attn: Zine
PO Box 22780
Oakland, CA 94609

✦ Report Back on Issue 40:

Printed in December 2023, Issue 40 on control
units and resistance had some trouble reach-
ing our imprisoned subscribers. Our database
of imprisoned contacts didn't generate the
correct mailing addresses for over 1,000 in-
side subscribers who are in facilities that have
different addresses for publications vs letters.
Some states like Texas also changed their mail
regulations during the time we printed and
mailed the issue, making most state prisoners
unable to receive the latest issue. The topic
(control units) also likely raised some alarms
by mailrooms. We were able to run a supple-
mental printing for the 1,000 or so prisoners
who's issues we sent to the wrong addresses;
however we were unable to reprint the issue
for many folks inside beyond that.

→ We are now out of Issue 40, but one of the
feature articles announced a new toolkit
CR created called "Surviving Solitary." To
receive a copy of this resource at no cost to
imprisoned people, request one at:

Critical Resistance
Attn: Surviving Solitary
PO Box 22780
Oakland, CA 94609



✦ Masai & Linda Photo Caption Correction on page 4 of Issue 40:

While in a frenzy rushing to print, we made
a mistake in a photo caption (re-pictured
above). On page 4 of Issue 40, we accidentally
identified a person on the left as Linda Thur-
ston, but in actuality she is Linda Evans. We
were able to edit this mistake in the digital
copies and only the print copies of the supple-
mental mailing, but not the original printing
order.

Sincere apologies to both Lindas, each of
whom is near & dear to CR and the struggle to
abolish the prison industrial complex in her
own right. <3

CALL FOR CONTENT

Help shape the content of *The Abolitionist*

Make your voice heard in our paper!

Write a piece for either our Features section **OR** one of our columns!

The Features of Issue 42, the final issue of 2024, will focus on **an-ti-war organizing** and will print in December. 2025’s first issue, Issue 43, will focus on **censorship and repression**, printing in June.

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

- **Issue 42 Submission Deadline: Friday, August 2, 2024.**
- **Issue 43 Submission Deadline: Friday, February 28, 2025.**

There are many ways for you to shape the content of *The Abolitionist*, including submitting a piece to our Features section or supporting one of our columns:

1. Write a piece for our Features

- Pieces can be in many different forms of writing — from the theoretical to the reflective and action-oriented — but they will all share a common focus, theme, or topic of consideration. **Check the box above for Issue 41 and 42’s Feature focus!**
- **2. Submit content for one of our columns**
- Request to be an author of an **Inside-Outside Fishing Line**.
- Contribute a report or an update on organizing inside for our **Movement Highlights** column.
- **Write a poem or song lyrics.** It can relate to the Features or any topic of your choice!
- **Make visual art** to complement the Features section or one of our columns.
- **Create a political cartoon** for our Features focus for either Issue 41 or 42, or work with us to become a regular political cartoonist for the paper!
- **Reflect** on how you use *The Abby* in your study and **share that reflection for our 9971 column on study for abolition** to respond to in future issues of the column.
- Send a **Kite to the Editors**.

Some approaches to writing Kites to the Editors:

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

Send submissions for the Kites to the Editors section to:

The Abolitionist Paper
Attn: Kites to the Editors
P.O. Box. 22780
Oakland, CA 94609-2301

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

Send your submission to:

Critical Resistance
Attn: The Abolitionist - Submission
PO Box 22780
Oakland, CA 94609-2301

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:

SEND US YOUR WRITING AND ARTWORK!

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

IDEAS FOR ARTICLES AND ARTWORK

- Examples of prisoner organizing
- Practical steps toward prison industrial complex abolition
- Ways to help keep yourself and others physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually healthy while imprisoned
- Updates on what’s happening at the prison you’re in (for example: working conditions, health concerns, lockdowns)
- Legal strategies and important cases that impact prisoners
- Alternatives to policing, punishment, imprisonment, and surveillance
- Experiences of life after imprisonment (or before!)
- Creative or reflective writing with an abolitionist message
- Freedom dreams and imaginative pieces with radical vision
- Your opinion about a piece published in a recent issue
- Reflections on how you’ve used the paper (in your conversations, work, study groups)
- Empowering, liberatory art of resistance and community power (that will print well!)

LENGTH

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

HOW TO SUBMIT

- **If you want your name and address printed with your article, please include it the way you would like us to print it.** If you do not wish to have your name or address included, please let us know that when you submit your piece. Instead of your name, you can choose an alias, publish your piece anonymously, or use your initials.
- If possible, send a copy of your submission (not the original)

WRITING SUGGESTIONS

- Even if writing is difficult for you, your ideas are worth the struggle. Try reading your piece out loud to yourself or sharing it with someone else. Doing this might help you clarify the ideas in your submission.

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

SUBSCRIBE TO *THE ABOLITIONIST*!

Free to people in prisons, jails and detention centers;
Paid subscriptions help us send the paper to thousands of prisoners for free.

ARE YOU LOCKED UP?

Sign up for a free subscription!

Name: _____

Prisoner Number: _____

Mailing Address: _____



***Make sure to let us know if you are transferred or released.**
Formerly imprisoned subscribers can receive a ***free* lifetime subscription** if you keep your mailing address or email updated with us.

***Return your slip to:**

Critical Resistance
Attn: Abby subscription
PO Box 22780 Oakland, CA 94609

ARE YOU NOT LOCKED UP, BUT WANT TO SUPPORT?

Sign up for a paid subscription!

- ➡ **Single Subscriptions for individuals outside of prisons**
□ **\$10, \$15, or \$45** for 2 issues / year, supports 3-16 readers (you + 2-15 prisoners)
- ➡ **Bulk Packages for Movement Partner Organizations**
□ **\$75 - \$525** for bundles of 10, 25, 50, 75 or 100 copies of each issue / year, help distribute the paper and sponsor 17-88 imprisoned readers
- ➡ **Subscribe on our website:**
criticalresistance.org/subscribe-to-the-abolitionist

“WE AREN’T GOING ANYWHERE” A History of Blocking Boats | “NO VAMPO”



Greenpeace anti-whaling action in the summer of 1976. Photo taken by Rex Whelyer.
Acción de Greenpeace contra la caza de ballenas en el verano de 1976. Fotografía de Rex Whelyer.

40 years later, Greenpeace organizers have continued to utilize and refine boat-blocking as an escalatory tactic in their campaigns. In Summer 2015, the Shell Oil-leased icebreaker ship MSV *Fennica* tore a hole in its hull enroute to the Chukchi Sea in the Alaskan Arctic and was brought to the Portland shipyard for repair. A group of 13 Greenpeace USA activists suspended themselves from North Portland’s St John’s Bridge over the Willamette River, accompanied by a legion of blockaders in kayaks. Creating multipronged physical resistance to the ship’s departure, the climbers hung 100 feet below the bridge for 40 hours while the flotilla of “kayaktivists” from Portland Rising Tide and 350PDX with other EJ organizations from the Pacific Northwest, occupied the waters below, preventing the ship from proceeding on its extractive mission.

After over a day, Oregon Governor Kate Brown signed an extraction order allowing the US Coast Guard to forcibly remove the climbers from the bridge. At the same time, Shell won an emergency injunction in the US District Court of Alaska, fining Greenpeace USA \$2,500 for every hour they stayed on the bridge. Climber activists then lowered themselves enough so that the ship would cause serious bodily harm to them if it attempted to pass, while kayaktivists held their positions in the water. After several minutes of a tense standoff on the bridge, the 381-foot-long *Fennica* made a full 180-degree turn and headed back to its dock. Even though the ship eventually sailed, the kayaktivists and Greenpeace organizers successfully delayed its harmful Arctic mission and cost Shell millions of dollars.

Cuarenta años después, lxs activistas de Greenpeace continúan utilizando y perfeccionando el bloqueo de barcos como táctica para intensificar sus campañas. En el verano de 2015, el casco del buque rompehielos MSV *Fennica* arrendado por Shell Oil se perforó camino al mar de Chukchi en el Ártico de Alaska y fue llevado al astillero de Portland para reparaciones. Un grupo de 13 activistas de Greenpeace USA se suspendieron desde el Puente de St. John al norte de Portland sobre el río Willamette, acompañadxs por una legión de compañeros en kayaks. Desplegando una resistencia física a lo largo de diferentes frentes, lxs activistas colgaron desde más de 30 metros durante 40 horas mientras la flotilla de “kayaktivistas” de Portland Rising Tide (Marea Creciente Portland) y 350PDX junto con otras organizaciones por la justicia ecológica del noroeste del Pacífico ocupaban las aguas a sus pies, evitando que el barco continuara su rumbo hacia su misión extractivista.

Después de más de un día, la gobernadora de Oregon Kate Brown firmó una orden de extracción que le permitió a la Guardia Costera de Estados Unidos remover por la fuerza a lxs activistas que colgaban del puente. A su vez, Shell obtuvo una orden judicial de emergencia en la Corte de Distrito estadounidense



Filipino climate activists block the Shell import terminal on kayaks in Batangas City, Philippines, on November 29, 2023. Credit to Noel Celis/Greenpeace.
Activistas climáticos filipinxs bloquean la terminal de importaciones de Shell a bordo de kayaks en la ciudad de Batangas, Filipinas, 29 de noviembre de 2023. Cortesía de Noel Celis/Greenpeace.

In the 1990s, International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10, based in the San Francisco Bay Area, was dubbed “the conscience of the labor movement” by the San Francisco Labor Council. This well-earned reputation stems from ILWU Local 10’s long-standing organizing tradition rooted in a principled commitment to anti-racism, class struggle, and internationalism. In December 1962, a Dutch ship arrived at Pier 19 in San Francisco carrying apartheid South African cargo. Soon after the ship’s arrival, a picket line of around 20 activists formed—which included representatives from the American Committee on Africa (ACOA), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Members of ILWU Local 10 refused to cross the picket line to unload the cargo, which, according to historian Peter Cole, marked one of the first times an anti-apartheid action was ever undertaken by a labor union within the US. This refusal to cross the picket line to unload South African cargo was not an isolated incident but rather an early example of ILWU Local 10’s commitment to being in unconditional solidarity with the South African anti-apartheid movement.

In 1984, ILWU Local 10 held a 10-day-strong boycott and refused to unload South African cargo from the Dutch ship *Nedlloyd Kimberley*, propelling the union into the national spotlight. Its organizing work highlights how politicized maritime workers, dockworkers, and sailors have been, and continue to be, an essential base of support for boat-blocking direct action. ILWU Local 10’s practice of principled solidarity with the South African anti-apartheid movement from the 1960s through the 1990s laid the foundation for the chapter’s support when called upon by the movement for Palestinian liberation in the mid-2010s.

En la década de 1990, la Sección 10 del sindicato internacional de trabajadores portuarios —International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU)—, con sede en el Área de la Bahía de San Francisco, fue denominado “la consciencia del movimiento obrero” por el Consejo de Trabajo de San Francisco. Esta bien merecida reputación parte de la tradición de larga data de la Sección 10 del ILWU y está arraigada en un compromiso de principios con el antirracismo, la lucha de clases y el internacionalismo.

Continues on next page / Continúa en la página siguiente

Today, Greenpeace is one of the world’s largest environmental advocacy organizations but in 1971, it was just a small group of anti-war activists based in Vancouver, Canada, that was developing a reputation for its nonviolent direct action tactics in opposition to war and the destruction of natural ecosystems. Greenpeace organizers have invaded nuclear testing sites, occupied oil rigs, blocked boats from dumping radioactive waste into oceans, and much more. The image above is from one of Greenpeace’s early campaigns against commercial whaling in the summer of 1976 in the North Pacific Ocean when they used sailing vessels to disrupt the transfer of whales from a harpoon ship to a Russian factory ship.

En la actualidad, Greenpeace es una de las organizaciones más grandes que actúan en defensa del medioambiente, pero en 1971 consistía en apenas un grupo de reducidos de activistas contra la guerra con sede en Vancouver, Canadá, que se iba ganando una reputación por sus tácticas de acción directa no violenta en contra de la guerra y la destrucción de los ecosistemas naturales. Lxs activistas de Greenpeace han invadido sitios de pruebas nucleares, ocupado plataformas petrolíferas, bloqueado barcos evitando que descarguen desechos radioactivos en los océanos, etc. La imagen de arriba pertenece a una de las primeras campañas de Greenpeace contra la caza comercial de ballenas durante el verano de 1976 en el Pacífico Norte cuando utilizaban veleros para disrumpir el traslado de ballenas de un barco ballenero a una buque factoría ruso.



Greenpeace Kayak Flotilla #ShellNo blockade of Shell Arctic drilling ship, Willamette River, Portland, OR, July 2015. Image from Steve Dipaola/Greenpeace.
Bloqueo de Greenpeace del barco de perforación petrolera del Ártico de la empresa Shell con una flotilla de kayaks en la campaña #ShellNo, río Willamette, Portland, Oregon, julio de 2015. Imagen de Steve Dipaola/Greenpeace.

en Alaska, mediante la cual se multó a Greenpeace USA a pagar 2500 dólares por cada hora que sus activistas pasaron en el puente. Lxs activistas procedieron a descender lo suficiente para que el barco ocasionara daños físicos graves si intentaba pasar, mientras que lxs kayaktivistas se mantuvieron firmes en sus puestos en el agua. Tras varios minutos de una confrontación llena de tensión en el puente, el *Fennica*, de más de 100 metros de longitud, realizó un giro de 180 grados y regresó al puerto. Si bien el barco finalmente zarpó, lxs kayaktivistas y lxs organizadores de Greenpeace lograron demorar su dañina misión en el Ártico, lo que le costó a Shell millones de dólares.

On an early morning in late November 2023, 29 Filipino climate activists in individual kayaks blocked access to the Shell import terminal in Batangas City, Philippines. The activists closed in on two jetties from different locations, disrupting fossil fuel giant Shell’s import operations in the coastal city. The activists demanded that Philippine President Marcos and world governments make Shell and other fossil fuel companies pay for losses and damages experienced by impacted communities. The direct action was launched on the eve of the COP28 international climate summit and after Shell UK filed an intimidation lawsuit against Greenpeace UK and Greenpeace International demanding they stop protests against its infrastructure at sea or in ports across the world forever or face an \$8.6 million damages claim and an injunction. Unintimidated, the Filipino kayakers made their message clear: Communities across the Philippines are being destroyed by unprecedented climate catastrophes such as massive typhoons, due in large part to the climate collapse exacerbated by fossil fuel companies like Shell. From Portland to the Philippines, boat-blocking has been pervasive in EJ campaigns for over 50 years. Similarly, within this same period, anti-war and anti-apartheid organizers in the US have strategically targeted ports and military vessels.

En las primeras horas de la mañana a fines de noviembre de 2023, 29 activistas climáticos filipinxs en kayaks individuales bloquearon el acceso a la terminal de importaciones de Shell en la ciudad de Batangas, Filipinas. Lxs activistas se acercaron a dos embarcaderos desde dos ubicaciones diferentes, disrumpiendo las operaciones de importación del gigante Shell en la ciudad costera. Lxs activistas exigían que el presidente Marcos de Filipinas y los Gobiernos mundiales obligaran a Shell y a otras compañías petroleras a pagar por los daños y pérdidas sufridos por las comunidades afectadas. La acción directa se lanzó en vísperas de la cumbre climática internacional COP28 y luego de que Shell UK presentara una demanda por intimidación contra Greenpeace UK y Greenpeace International en la que se les exigían un cese a las protestas contra su infraestructura en alta mar o en los puertos de todo el mundo o en consecuencia afrontar una demanda por 8,6 millones de dólares en daños y una orden judicial. Sin inmutarse, lxs activistas a bordo de los kayaks dejaron en claro su mensaje: las comunidades de todo Filipinas están siendo destruidas por catástrofes climáticas sin precedentes, como tifones masivos, en parte como resultado del colapso climático exacerbado por empresas de combustibles fósiles como Shell. Desde Portland hasta las Filipinas, el bloqueo de barcos ha liderado las campañas por la justicia ecológica durante más de 50 años. Asimismo, durante el mismo período, activistas contra la guerra y el apartheid en Estados Unidos han atacado de manera estratégica puertos y navíos militares.



Photo courtesy of International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Library and Archives. Photo printed in The Dispatcher, the official newspaper of the ILWU, vol. 20, no. 26, published on December 28, 1962.
Fotografía cortesía de la Biblioteca y Archivo del sindicato internacional de trabajadores portuarios (ILWU), publicada en The Dispatcher 20(26), el periódico oficial del ILWU, 28 de diciembre de 1962.

OS A NINGUNA PARTE” Una historia de bloqueos de barcos (Continued)

En diciembre de 1962, un buque neerlandés arribó en el Muelle 19 en San Francisco con un cargamento proveniente del Estado de apartheid de Sudáfrica. Poco tiempo después del arribo del buque, se formó un piquete constituido por unos 20 activistas —entre ellxs representantes de la American Committee on Africa (ACOA—Comité Estadounidense sobre África), la National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP—Asociación Nacional por la Promoción de las Personas de Color) y el Congress of Racial Equality (CORE—Congreso de Igualdad Racial). Integrantes de la Sección 10 del ILWU rehusaron cruzar el piquete para descargar el barco, lo que para el historiador Peter Cole representó una de las primeras ocasiones en las que un sindicato obrero implementó esta acción antiapartheid en Estados Unidos. Esta negación a cruzar el piquete para descargar el buque sudafricano no fue un



Block the Boat for Gaza, Oakland, CA, 2014. Public domain photo posted on Facebook.
Block the Boat for Gaza (Bloqueemos el Barco por Gaza), Oakland, California, 2014. Fotografía de dominio público posteadá en Facebook.

In the wake of apartheid Israel’s ongoing and escalating genocidal campaign against Palestine, organizers throughout the San Francisco Bay Area—including members of Critical Resistance—joined the AROC-led effort for the third time to mobilize at the Port of Oakland to stop a US military vessel destined for Israel. Before dawn, organizers set up pickets and blockades at the port entrance and successfully delayed the US military vessel for more than 10 hours. Amid freedom songs, chants, and demands for a permanent ceasefire and a free Palestine, one contracted worker on the military ship walked off the job in response to organizers on the ground.

As depicted in the image above, three brave comrades boarded the ship and held on to the rope ladder for nearly five hours until they were forcibly removed. In the words of CR’s Campaigns & Projects Director Mohamed Shehk: “People here are outraged. We have people here that have lost loved ones, have lost family members in Israel’s attack on Gaza. Those in power in the US have made it clear that they are going to continue fueling this genocide of Palestinians, so it is on us to put our bodies on the line, to do everything in our power to stop them and attain a ceasefire. Direct actions and protests at ports to stop the transfer of weapons to oppressive regimes have a long history—not just against apartheid Israel, but also against apartheid South Africa. Through a long-fought struggle, people were able to topple the racist regime in South Africa, and we’re here to continue the legacy to bring down Israeli apartheid.”

En el contexto de la actual campaña genocida del Estado de apartheid de Israel contra Palestina, lxs activistas de toda el Área de la Bahía —entre ellxs, integrantes de Resistencia Crítica— se unieron a AROC en su tercer esfuerzo por movilizar a las masas en el puerto de Oakland para evitar que un navio del Ejército estadounidense zarpara hacia Israel. Antes del amanecer, lxs activistas armaron piquetes y bloqueos en la entrada del puerto y lograron demorar al navio del Ejército estadounidense durante más de 10 horas. Entre canciones de libertad, cánticos y demandas por un cese al fuego permanente y una Palestina libre, un trabajador contratado a bordo del buque militar dejó su puesto de trabajo en repuesta a lxs activistas en tierra.

Tal como lo ilustra la imagen de arriba, tres valientes camaradas abordaron el buque y se sostuvieron de la escalera de cuerdas durante casi cinco horas hasta que fueron removidos por la fuerza. En palabras de Mohamed Shehk, director de campañas y proyectos de Resistencia Crítica: “La gente está indignada. Tenemos personas aquí que han perdido seres queridos, han perdido familiares en el ataque israelí en Gaza. Quienes gobiernan Estados Unidos han dejado en claro que van a continuar alimentando este genocidio de palestinxs, de modo que recae sobre nosotrxs poner nuestros cuerpos en riesgo, hacer todo lo que esté a nuestro alcance para detenerlos y lograr un cese al fuego. Las acciones directas y las protestas en los

The bold actions these images depict do not represent all recorded instances of boat-blocking but rather a non-exhaustive sampling of actions from the last 60 years. The organizers in these images not only blocked boats with their bodies and additional vessels but built strategic alliances against a common enemy. Without a doubt, interrupting the global flow of capital used to (re)produce war, militarism, and environmental degradation has been a long-standing strategy shared across movements to disrupt “business as usual”. As seen in these photos, boat-blocking direct actions can be sites of convergence—bringing together PIC abolitionists, anti-war activists and Palestine solidarity organizers, EJ campaigners, organized dockworkers, and many more to resist the forces of racial capitalism. Organizing across movement sectors, exchanging tactics and strategies, and engaging in meaningful acts of solidarity is how we build power to win the world we deserve—one boat-blocking action at a time. By highlighting the clear interconnectedness of fights to halt extractive industries

Estas imágenes ilustran valientes acciones que no representan la totalidad de casos registrados en los que se bloquearon barcos en protesta, sino más bien una muestra no exhaustiva de las acciones de los últimos 60 años. Lxs activistas en estas imágenes no solo bloquearon barcos con sus cuerpos y otros barcos, sino que también establecieron alianzas estratégicas contra un enemigo en común. Sin duda, la interrupción del flujo global de capitales utilizado para (re)producir la guerra, el militarismo y la degradación medioambiental ha sido una estrategia de larga data compartida por todos los movimientos que han buscado disrumpir “los negocios de siempre”. Como puede observarse en estas fotografías, las acciones directas del bloqueo de barcos pueden tornarse sitios de convergencia —donde se reúnen abolicionistas del complejo industrial penal, activistas contra la guerra y organizadores en solidaridad con Palestina, organizadores de campañas por la justicia ecológica, trabajadores portuaries organizadxs y muchxs más a fin de resistir contra las fuerzas del capitalismo racial. Organizándonos más allá de los movimientos, intercambiando tácticas y estrategias, e involucrándonos en actos significativos de solidaridad es cómo construimos poder

incidente aislado, sino uno de los primeros ejemplos del compromiso de la Sección 10 del ILWU con la solidaridad incondicional hacia el movimiento contra el apartheid en Sudáfrica.

En 1984, la Sección 10 del ILWU realizó un boicot de 10 días y rehusó desembarcar el cargamento del buque neerlandés Nedlloyd Kimberley proveniente de África, lo que llevó al sindicato a ser foco de atención a nivel nacional. Su activismo destaca la politización de lxs trabajadores marítimxs, los trabajadores portuaries y lxs marinxs, quienes han sido y continúan siendo un pilar esencial para la acción directa y el bloqueo de barcos. La práctica de solidaridad de principios de la Sección 10 del ILWU para con el movimiento sudafricano contra el apartheid desde los sesenta hasta los noventa allanó el camino para que volvieran a brindar su apoyo a la liberación palestina a mediados de la década de 2010.

In 2014, the Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) led a massively successful boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) effort against apartheid Israel with community supporters and workers, launching the Block the Boat Coalition in Oakland, CA. This action was called for by Palestinian workers and trade unions in Gaza after the August 2014 massacre by Israeli occupation forces where they bombed the designated UN humanitarian shelter in the Jabalia refugee camp, killing 20 civilians and wounding at least 150 people as they slept. Three days later, the US Congress approved \$225 million in additional military aid to Israel.

The #BlockTheBoat initiative was aimed at stopping the Israeli ZIM company—Israel’s largest and oldest cargo shipping company—from docking and unloading its goods at the Port of Oakland, California, an action that inspired dockworkers elsewhere in the US to follow suit. Following their legacy of supporting people’s struggles everywhere, Oakland port workers with ILWU Local 10 respected AROC’s picket and refused to handle Israeli cargo in solidarity. Following this major and historic defeat, the Israeli ZIM ships did not return to Oakland again until 2021.

En 2014, el Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC—Centro Árabe de Recursos y Organización) dirigió una acción masiva muy exitosa de boicot, desinversión y sanciones (BDS) contra el Estado de apartheid de Israel junto con simpatizantes comunitarios y obreros, lanzando la Block the Boat Coalition (Coalición Bloquear el Bote) en Oakland, California. Lxs obrerxs y sindicatos palestinxs llamaron a esta acción luego de la masacre de agosto de 2014 a manos de las fuerzas de ocupación israelíes, quienes bombardearon el refugio humanitario designado por las Naciones Unidas en el campo de refugiadxs de Jabalia, asesinando a 20 civiles e hiriendo a al menos 150 personas mientras dormían. Tres días después, el Congreso de Estados Unidos aprobó un paquete de ayuda de 225 millones de dólares adicionales a Israel.

La iniciativa #BlockTheBoat tuvo como objetivo evitar que la empresa israelí ZIM —la empresa de transporte de cargas más antigua y más grande de Israel— anclara y descargara sus materiales en el puerto de Oakland, en California, una acción que inspiró a otrxs trabajadores portuaries en Estados Unidos a hacer lo mismo. Siguiendo los pasos del legado de solidaridad con las luchas en otras partes del mundo, lxs trabajadores portuaries de Oakland y la Sección 10 del ILWU acataron el piquete de AROC y rehusaron manipular la carga israelí en solidaridad. Luego de esta importante derrota histórica, los barcos de la empresa ZIM no regresarían a Oakland sino hasta 2021.



Photo by Brook Anderson, November 3, 2023.
Fotografía de Brook Anderson, 3 de noviembre de 2023.

puertos para detener el traslado de armas a regímenes opresores son de larga data —no solo contra el Estado de apartheid de Israel, sino también contra el apartheid de Sudáfrica—. Mediante una larga lucha, la gente pudo derrocar al régimen racista de Sudáfrica, y nosotrxs estamos aquí para continuar con ese legado y derrocar al apartheid de Israel”.

destroying Indigenous lands with the need to end the imperialist war machine, abolitionists can sharpen our ability to identify and deepen shared sites of struggle across our movements.

May all ships setting sail on missions to destroy life be blocked, for the people and for the future of our planet. ♦

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para alcanzar el mundo que nos merecemos —una bloque de barcos por vez—. Al resaltar la clara interconexión de luchas para detener la destrucción de las tierras indígenas a manos de las industrias extractivas y la necesidad de poner fin a la maquinaria bélica imperialista, lxs abolicionistas podemos perfeccionar nuestra capacidad de identificar y profundizar los puntos comunes de lucha entre nuestros movimientos.

Que todos los barcos que zarpan en misiones destructivas de la vida sean bloqueados, por el pueblo y por el futuro de nuestro planeta.

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