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Updates for September 19th

5 Sept - Russia wants this young anarchist to stay in prison forever

The Kremlin wants Azat Miftakhov and other political prisoners behind bars forever, says an exiled Russian journalist

MORE:

by Yan Shenkman (*Open Democracy*)

A few months ago, I received a message from a random social media account in Russia, which asked me to sign an open letter in support of Russian political prisoner Azat Miftakhov.

I knew the man behind the account, which has since been deleted; these days, he is ‘deep underground’, trying to stay completely off the grid. I questioned what help a letter could be but signed anyway. A person who is safe has no right to refuse those who are in danger.

When I saw the letter published in French media outlet Mediapart days later, I learned that hundreds of others had also demanded freedom for Miftakhov: mathematicians, scientists, journalists, trade unionists, from countries including France, the US and Russia.

I know Miftakhov’s story well. Back in 2019, when I was still in Russia, I was reporting on ‘The Network’ case: a group of young men across Russia, who had anarchist and left-wing beliefs, were detained, brutally tortured and then sentenced to long prison sentences – allegedly for scheming to bring down the Kremlin through terrorist acts. It was a very high-profile case, and one that Miftakhov came to be implicated in.

This week, Miftakhov – one of at least 5,000 political prisoners in Russia today – was supposed to be released. But on 4 September, immediately on stepping outside the prison gates, he was detained on another charge – a classic FSB tactic.

As hundreds of thousands die in Russia’s war against Ukraine, it’s hard to come out in support of the Kremlin’s political prisoners. There’s simply too much pain, suffering, blood. But Putin’s regime is built on putting people behind bars.

The case against Azat Miftakhov

Miftakhov, now aged 30, is a talented mathematician, a graduate student at Moscow State University, and an anarchist.

In February 2019, he was detained in Moscow on suspicion of breaking a window in the office of the United Russia political party. Investigators claimed he was standing nearby when it happened “in order to warn accomplices of possible danger”. Miftakhov was beaten and tortured by FSB officers, who used a power drill on him.

Miftakhov, of course, knew what had happened to members of the supposed ‘Network’. He understood that the FSB investigators were not joking or trying to frighten him when they said they would use torture to get him to confess. They really would. In an attempt to prevent himself from being tortured, he slit his own wrists.

Indeed, the whole case against Miftakhov started with ‘The Network’.

As one lawyer told me, Russian investigators were claiming that there were different cells of activists in different cities across the country, uniting several left-wing initiatives – not only the so-called “Network” – in a single cause. But, as quickly became apparent in my reporting and others’, there was no terrorist organisation in reality. No coordination. The investigators’ ‘Network’ had been drawn up by... the investigators. They had no evidence to support their claims, aside from testimony gained via the most brutal torture.

In March 2018, the FSB tried to make Svyatoslav Rechkalov, another anarchist activist in Moscow, into the ‘leader’ of the ‘Moscow cell’ of the ‘Network’. He was also tortured and beaten. I spoke with Rechkalov when he was released on bail. I did not see any signs of torture, but I remember well how he shook and spoke with difficulty. A few days later, he fled to France.

Shortly afterwards, information from the investigators was leaked: they wanted the same confession from Miftakhov. They had failed with Rechkalov, and so they had to come up with another ‘leader’ of the ‘Moscow cell’: Miftakhov. This story is not yet finished, and as long as Miftakhov remains in prison, anything is possible.

Later, human rights activists and journalists managed to prove – definitively – that the young men in the ‘Network’ case had been tortured. Russian society went into shock. People took to the streets in protest.

In autumn 2018, Mikhail Zhlobitsky, a teenager in the north-western city of Arkhangelsk, blew himself up in the lobby of the local FSB building in protest against the torture. This prompted a new wave of repression. Now anyone who talked online about Zhlobitsky’s actions, or even mentioned it, could be prosecuted for “justifying terrorism”.

In 2021, Miftakhov was sentenced to six years in prison for his alleged role in breaking the window in United Russia’s offices. He was supposed to be released last Monday (he had served his time because one day spent in detention in pre-trial proceedings is counted as one and a half days).

But that didn’t happen. At the gates of Prison Colony No. 17 in Kirov region, he was put into an FSB car with Chechen licence plates and driven away. Now, a new case has been opened against him on charges of “justifying terrorism” for talking about Mikhail Zhlobitsky while in prison.

Apparently, the FSB wants him behind bars forever. Just like Alexey Navalny, just like many other political prisoners in Russia today.

5 Sept - Over 60 People Indicted on RICO Charges in Atlanta, Allegedly Promoting ‘Anarchist Ideas’

Georgia prosecutors have indicted 61 individuals under the Georgia Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, or RICO, for their alleged participation in the #StopCopCity movement and for, as they put it, promoting “virulent anarchist ideals.”

MORE:

by Ryan Fatica (*Unicorn Riot*)

The indictments were handed down by a grand jury last week but only made public this morning after being discovered by the Atlanta Community Press Collective. The same grand jury also indicted five individuals on Domestic Terrorism charges and indicted three Atlanta Solidarity Fund activists on 15 counts each of money laundering.

“Defend the Atlanta Forest is a self-identified coalition and enterprise of militant anarchists, eco-activists, and community organizers,” the indictment reads.

“Based in Atlanta, this anarchist, anti-police, and environmental activism organization coordinates, advertises, and conducts ‘direct action’ designed to prevent the construction of the Atlanta Police Public Safety Training Center and Shadowbox Studios (previously known as Blackhall Studios) and promote anarchist ideas.”

Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr’s office is prosecuting the cases, which are filed in Fulton County, where Atlanta is the county seat.

The indictment even includes a short history on anarchism and anarchist organizing principles, at least as the prosecutors understand them. The narrative entitled “Anarchy Background of the Defend the Atlanta Forest” reads like a high school book report on the history of anarchism and is reminiscent of political prosecutions of activists and radicals such as the Haymarket anarchists, Sacco and Vanzetti, and prosecutions during the Red Scare.

The “major factor in anarchist mutual aid,” explained Georgia prosecutors, “is the absence of government and the absence of hierarchy. Indeed, an anarchist belief relies on the notion that once government is abolished, individuals will rely on mutual aid to exist. In doing so, anarchists believe that individuals will work together and voluntarily contribute their own resources to insure that each individual has its own needs met.”

Prosecutors also explained, at length, that “the anarchist ideology” also includes violence, including violence targeting law enforcement. The indictment did not include any statistics about the number of people believed to have been harmed or killed by anarchists. The number of people killed each year by law enforcement, on the other hand, is well known.

The indictment goes on to allege that those involved in the movement to defend the Weelaunee Forest have participated in “vandalizing of private property, arson, destruction of government property, attacks on utility workers, attacks on law enforcement, attacks on private citizens, and gun violence.”

Prosecutors list May 25, 2020, the day that George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin, as the beginning of the alleged “Defend the Atlanta Forest Enterprise.” Prosecutors say that the national movement that emerged following Floyd’s murder also gave birth to the #StopCopCity movement.

Those indicted include many people previously charged for their participation in the movement, including those previously charged with domestic terrorism, three individuals previously charged with distributing fliers in Bartow County, Georgia, several people arrested during a rowdy protest outside the Cobb County offices of contractor Brasfield & Gorrie, and those charged with money laundering for their work with the Atlanta Solidarity Fund, among others. The list of indictments also includes several people who have not previously been charged in connection with the movement.

“The state is setting themselves up for a bigger fall when they fail,” activist Charley Tennenbaum, who is one of those indicted on RICO charges, told *Unicorn Riot*, “which I still believe is the ultimate outcome of the state’s legal fight.”

Charley said that although the new indictments are stressful, they ultimately feel prepared for the legal battle to come: “I can speak for myself personally that I feel prepared for this.”

(Before the RICO indictment, Charley was arrested in April on a felony charge for distributing fliers associated with the #StopCopCity movement.)

The indictments list 225 “overt acts in furtherance of the racketeering conspiracy,” which include actions ranging from throwing Molotov cocktails and punching police officers to requesting reimbursements for

\$14.08 for a lock for a trailer from the Forest Justice Defense Fund. Under RICO, it is not a requirement that such “overt acts” be illegal on their own.

The indictment also alleges for the first time that Marlon Kautz, Adele Maclean, and Savannah Patterson, the three activists arrested in May for their work on the Atlanta Solidarity Fund, are responsible for posting content to the Scenes From the Atlanta Forest blog. The blog is a submission-based platform that frequently posts communiques claiming responsibility for attacks and vandalism on the property of those seeking to destroy the Weelaunee Forest.

The indictment alleges that posting submitted articles is part of a conspiracy, but includes no evidence that the three activists are responsible for running the site.

The indictment includes one act that simply involved writing some letters on a piece of paper: “On or about January 18, 2023,” the indictment reads, an activist “did sign his name as ‘ACAB.’ This was an overt act in furtherance of the conspiracy.”

Atlanta activists warned the public in February that they believed state prosecutors were planning on indicting them under the state’s RICO laws, based upon leaked information. Nearly seven months later, their predictions have come true.

The Stop Cop City Vote coalition criticized the charges on the platform X (formerly known as Twitter), saying “these charges, like the previous repressive prosecutions by the State of Georgia, seek to intimidate protestors, legal observers, and bail funds alike, and send the chilling message that any dissent to Cop City will be punished with the full power and violence of the government.”

The indictments come in the midst of a court battle over a proposed referendum vote on the #StopCopCity project. The proposed referendum would allow residents of Atlanta to vote on whether the proposed Atlanta Public Safety Training Center should be built. The City of Atlanta has repeatedly filed motions in court attempting to suppress the effort to collect enough signatures to get the referendum on the ballot, including continually attempting to raise the bar for the number of signatures activists must gather.

“It seems like the timing is politically motivated with respect to the referendum and the successes we’re winning there despite the state’s ongoing demonstrations of exactly why we do not want to fund a Cop City,” said Charley Tennenbaum. “Their tactics of using fear and oppression times with our successes.”

In June, DeKalb County District Attorney Sherry Boston announced that she would formally withdraw from Georgia state cases connected to the protest at the proposed police training center site, citing differences in prosecutorial philosophy. Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr has defended the charges brought against activists and insists those cases will continue to be pursued at the state level. The recent RICO indictments are signed by Carr and Deputy Attorney General John Fowler.

The Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, or RICO, targets organized criminal enterprises and was created in the 1970s to more effectively prosecute the mafia. Since then, RICO statutes have been used against participants in the 2019 college admissions scandal, anti-abortion groups, insider traders, and now, environmental and climate justice activists.

Rather than charging individuals with specific crimes they committed, RICO indictments target alleged criminal organizations in which people collaborate to commit a series of interrelated crimes in furtherance of a common criminal goal. For charges to stick, prosecutors must prove that those charged engaged in a “pattern of racketeering” activity involving “at least two acts” in furtherance of “one or more incidents, schemes, or transactions.”

Georgia recently leveraged its RICO statute to charge rappers Young Thug, Gunna and dozens of others for their alleged participation in a street gang known as Young Slime Life, or YSL. In that case, the Fulton

County District Attorney alleged in their indictment that participants in the group engaged in a slew of criminal activities in furtherance of a common enterprise, including murder and multiple charges of aggravated assault and armed robbery.

If found guilty, those charged under Georgia's RICO law face "not less than five nor more than 20 years' imprisonment" in addition to fines totaling "the greater of \$25,000.00 or three times the amount of any pecuniary value gained by him or her from such violation."

The same grand jury that handed down the RICO indictments also issued indictments of five individuals on Domestic Terrorism charges. Although a total of 42 individuals have previously been charged under Georgia's Domestic Terrorism statute for their alleged participation in the movement to defend the Weelaunee Forest, until now, none of those charged have been indicted.

The five indicted under the Domestic Terrorism statute were all charged in Fulton County following a January 21, 2023 demonstration called by forest defenders in response to the police killing of Manuel Esteban Paez Terán, a 26-year-old forest defender who went by the name Tortugueta. During the demonstration, a police car was set afire and prosecutors allege that protesters attempted to break into a building at 191 Peachtree street tower, which contains the offices of the Atlanta Police Foundation.

The five indicted on Domestic Terrorism charges are also indicted on one charge each of Arson in the First Degree. The indictment alleges that the five "did travel to the City of Atlanta during a 'Night of Rage,' did possess means of fire and explosive by possessing accelerant and a lighter, and did attempt to break into the 191 Peachtree Street tower, contrary to the laws of this State, the good order, peace, and dignity thereof."

The RICO indictments come shortly after Atlanta activists released a parody called "The People's RICO," in which the people of Atlanta allege that the city, the Atlanta Police Foundation, and its funders are involved in a racketeering effort to build Cop City.

"After an extensive investigation," they declared, "we've determined that there is an active criminal enterprise with clear intentions to extort and conspire to destroy our treasured South River Forest."

Despite its novel and legally questionable claims, the new RICO indictment seems guaranteed to instill fear in activist circles in Georgia and beyond. According to defendant Charley Tennenbaum, this is exactly why it's necessary for those fighting Cop City to be confident and to keep taking care of each other.

"It's important for us to remember that supporters and people can continue to hold in solidarity, to express love and support, donate to fundraisers, do care work," said Charley. "We're winning and that scares them."

September 8th - Understanding the RICO charges in Atlanta

Since the beginning of 2023, prosecutors in Georgia have threatened to charge activists protesting against a planned police militarization facility known as "Cop City" with violating the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act. Last week, Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr indicted 61 people on RICO charges in Fulton County.

In indiscriminately lumping together scores of arrestees, many of whom have ostensibly never met, into a fabricated conspiracy case, the prosecution is attempting to criminalize protest itself. This case represents politically driven repression aimed at suppressing all forms of activism and dissent, in the style of Vladimir Putin. It should be of interest to anyone who is concerned about civil liberties such as the freedom to protest or the freedom to advocate against police brutality and authoritarianism or in favor of preserving the environment.

The indictment does not seem to indicate that prosecutors have any previously unreleased information at their disposal indicating the existence of a conspiracy, in the sense that the word is ordinarily employed.

Rather, they have brought new charges against those whose names they already had as the result of previous arrests, and are now clumsily endeavoring to frame them as participants in a cohesive criminal enterprise.

The defendants include 42 people already charged with “terrorism” for allegedly participating in the movement to #StopCopCity, many of them on the basis of actions as simple as entering a forest or posting to social media; three more people already charged with felonies for allegedly distributing handbills; and another three people charged last May with “money laundering” and other crimes for organizing legal support for activists. None of these previous charges has resulted in a single conviction.

The only thing that connects all of these indictees is that they all appear to have been arrested or detained at some point, however randomly, on suspicion of protesting against the government’s plan to destroy the Weelaunee Forest.

A Tale of Two RICO Cases

Although the indictment took place in Fulton County, it is being prosecuted by the state Attorney General. This seems to indicate divisions within the authorities—but it is worth asking how deep these run.

The Fulton County prosecutor, a Democrat, already withdrew from all the cases related to the police training compound last June, citing irreconcilable differences with the state Attorney General, a Republican. The judge assigned to this new RICO case immediately recused himself from it today. Until now, judges have not recused themselves from cases related to the movement to stop Cop City even when they had clear ties to the campaign to build the police militarization center.

Fulton County now has two competing political RICO cases: one against Donald Trump, prosecuted by the county District Attorney, and one against those accused of protesting the construction of the police training center, prosecuted by the state Attorney General.

It remains to be seen whether there is any substantive conflict between local Democrat prosecutors and state-level Republican prosecutors in Georgia. Republicans would likely have pursued these charges even if Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis had not brought her own RICO case against Donald Trump and his cronies, but now they will cite Trump’s prosecution to rile up their base to support the use of RICO charges against environmental activists. For many Democratic voters, the use of RICO charges against Trump will only serve to legitimize the judicial system as a whole and RICO prosecution in particular, even as both are used chiefly against oppressed communities and protest movements. The fact that Republicans at the state level are pushing this case offers Democratic politicians plausible deniability so they can go on winning elections even if their voters disapprove of the criminalization of dissent. For their part, most Democratic politicians are just as dependent on police as Republicans, just as eager to see Cop City built, and just as eager to see protest movements rendered ineffectual.

Although the two RICO cases represent rival factions of the political class, the same grand jury that indicted Donald Trump is responsible for indicting those accused of “racketeering” for protesting Cop City. The court system is the central infrastructure for directing state violence; though naïve Democrats may portray it as a check on the aspirations of autocrats, it naturally lends itself to all forms of repression targeting the oppressed, and that is the chief role that it will always play.

Criminalizing Ideas

As we explored in May, this is not the first time that corporations and police have frivolously used RICO charges to intimidate those who oppose their power grabs. For example, from 2016 to 2019, the company behind the Dakota Access pipeline brought RICO charges against the moderate nonprofit organization Greenpeace. All of those charges were eventually thrown out, but such prosecutions serve to intimidate and

immobilize the targets, and they represent a continuous effort on the part of corporations and police to further subordinate the court system to their own agenda.

In a press conference announcing the charges, the prosecution maintained that Georgia law is written in such a way that people don't have to know each other to participate in a conspiracy; all that is necessary is that they work towards the same goal. This construes "criminal conspiracy" so broadly as to provide the grounds to implicate practically any participant in any social movement of the past decade in violating the RICO act.

In the indictment, prosecutors emphasize that the defendants are being charged simply for opposing the construction of the police militarization center:

"Defend the Atlanta Forest does not recruit from a single location, nor do all Defend the Atlanta Forest members have a history of working together as a group in a single location. Nevertheless, the group shares a unified opposition to the construction of the Atlanta Police Department Training Facility, construction companies associated with the project, and companies associated with construction properties in the around [sic]1 surrounding the forest."

"Defend the Atlanta Forest is made up of three primary ideologies," the text continues—an "anti-law enforcement ideology," "protection of the environment at all costs," and "an anarchist ideology." **It is ideas that are on trial here.**

Without citing sources, the prosecution attributes the most outlandish statements to "the organization" as a whole—for example, "Tortugueta died trying to kill a cop in defense of the Weelaunee forest." This statement directly contradicts the narrative about Tortugueta's murder that prevails throughout the many movements that seek to preserve the forest.

Early in the indictment, fully five pages are given over specifically to the three defendants accused of association with the Atlanta Solidarity Fund. Their names recur over and over throughout the indictment. In addition to criminalizing "anarchism," opposition to police, and concern for the environment that all of us depend on for survival, another of the central goals of the prosecution is clearly to set a precedent for criminalizing the legal support of people arrested for protest activity.

Likewise, the indictment explicitly frames "distribut[ing] flyers," "occupy[ing] a treehouse," and being present in a forest "with camouflage, camping gear, and living supplies" as overt acts advancing a conspiracy.

The indictment repeats a previously debunked assertion about the supposed "terrorist" status of the movement to defend Weelaunee forest, claiming that

"The United States Department of Homeland Security has classified the individuals as alleged Domestic Violent Extremists (DVE)."

In fact, according to DHS themselves,

"The Department of Homeland Security does not classify or designate any groups as domestic violent extremists."

To justify the "terrorist" label, the indictment cites a DHS bulletin—but this bulletin simply echoes the earlier claim of Georgia prosecutors that the defendants are "domestic violent extremists" while adding the qualifier "alleged" to call that claim into question. Georgia prosecutors are attempting to repeat a lie until it becomes true.

In 2020, DHS was one of the federal institutions that Donald Trump relied on in his bid to subdue protests, notably in Portland, Oregon. It is hardly known for hesitance to support repression. The fact that there is apparent friction between Georgia state prosecutors' representation of DHS and statements from DHS itself only illustrates how far Georgia state prosecutors are prepared to go out on a limb here.

There is a third well-known RICO case in Atlanta—the prosecution of Young Thug, Gunna, and Young Slime Life, which cites lyrics, social media posts, and clothing as evidence of criminal racketeering. In both cases, prosecutors are interpreting the Georgia RICO statutes so broadly as to justify defining people as criminal conspirators on the basis of a constructed narrative about their ideas and identity.

In the tortured phrasing of the prosecution, “violent anarchists attempt to frame the government as violent oppressors.” In pressing these charges, the Georgia state government is affirming its commitment to violent oppression, starting with anyone they suspect of speaking up against their violence.

It is hardly certain that this RICO case will succeed. But if it does, it will have massive repercussions for other social movements around the United States. Whether or not it succeeds, it marks a new low for the use of judicial harassment to target dissent. Anyone who does not desire to live in a totalitarian society should put their weight behind efforts to support the defendants and resist this attempt to set a new precedent for state repression.

¹It continues to boggle the mind that prosecutors and police who struggle with basic grammar and diction in what is presumably the only language they speak are permitted to wield so much influence over other people’s lives.

September 15th - Register Now: Understanding the RICO Indictments Against Stop Cop City

Join the NLG International Committee on Monday, September 25 for an important webinar on understanding the RICO indictments against Stop Cop City Activists. Register today at bit.ly/copcityrico

Learn about the scope and intent of these indictments and the legal and community defense challenging them. In discussion with Susi Durán, Suzanne Adely and Sarina Larson, hear from:

- Stanley Cohen, criminal defense attorney representing movement activists for 40 years
- Devin Franklin, attorney, Southern Center for Human Rights; former Fulton County public defender
- Mo Meltzer-Cohen, educator, attorney, abolitionist
- Don Samuel, defense attorney; former president, Georgia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
- Azadeh Shahshahani, Legal and Advocacy Director, Project South; past president, National Lawyers Guild

6 Sept - Support the Four Comrades From Caso Susaron!

The four comrades accused of the 2022 arson attack against the Susaron Meat Company in Chile are still in prison awaiting trial.

MORE:

It was in November 2022 that four comrades were arrested by the police for an arson attack, which had taken place in September of the same year, against a slaughterhouse in Chile.

The comrades have been in custody since then, for almost a year. Reports indicate that they are in good spirits in prison. But they could always need more support. If you want to write to them, you can send an email to: SOLIDARIDAD.ANTIESPECISTA4@GMAIL.COM. To provide financial support, send money to paypal.me/solidaridad4.

Solidarity with comrades in prison. Direct action for the animals murdered every day in the death factories. The fight continues...

6 Sept - No Place For Old Men

We're happy to share the latest by Mumia Abu-Jamal

MORE:

Quite recently during the height of the ravaging Covid-19 crisis an American health care agency announced a series of projects and programs designed to ease human suffering and indeed to advocate for the abolition of the systems of mass incarceration. The American Public Health Association, known as APHA, watching the harrowing number of deaths in prisons, is determined that the age of abolition has come and has called for the release of the encaged elderly.

One of the vagaries of mass incarceration is the explosion of the elderly as part of the prison population. Today, men in their seventies and eighties roll around here in wheelchairs or hobble on walkers or even stroll with the help of canes. They have a host of health problems from diabetes which is quite prevalent, the COPD from heart attacks, and ailments to cancer.

The APHA has advanced the novel idea that the elderly in prisons have been subjected to “elder abuse” by the state in all the ways they have been mistreated and maltreated, for they are subjected to solitary confinement, to aching joints, to the natural frailties of old age. And APHA, the American Public Health Association, has urged that elderly prisoners be made free of “elder abuse” by release from confinement. They have urged this upon state, county, federal and territorial prisons, jails, and institutions of detention.

7 Sept - Sign the Petition for Leonard Peltier. Rep. Grijalva To Deliver Signatures

Judith LeBlanc (Caddo) helped defend Native people who faced criminal charges and political imprisonment for standing up during the occupation at Wounded Knee 50 years ago.

MORE:

After the occupation, the FBI didn't stop harassing members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) and people on that reservation. Then, when a massive shootout in 1975 ended with a young Native man and two FBI agents dead, the FBI arrested AIM activist Leonard Peltier.

To this day, Peltier continues to maintain his innocence, and there's a LOT of evidence to back him up. The FBI coerced witnesses to get false statements, all of which were later recanted. The FBI also withheld key evidence showing that the bullets that killed the FBI officers did not come from Peltier's gun.

Despite this, Leonard Peltier is still serving time in a maximum-security prison 48 years later, making him the longest-serving political prisoner in the U.S. On Tuesday, he turns 79.

On Leonard's birthday, Rep. Raúl Grijalva will participate in an event in Washington D.C. where he will call on President Biden to free Leonard Peltier. He'll deliver our signatures along with a separate letter he's organized signed by more than a dozen members of Congress, including Rashida Tlaib, Barbara Lee, and Ted Lieu.

Already more than 70,000 people have signed on to our petition to President Biden demanding the release of Native activist Leonard Peltier from federal prison, so he can live out the rest of his life with his family on their ancestral homelands. You can sign at tiny.cc/LeonardPetition23

September 8th - Together, We Will #FreeLeonardPeltier

We're off! Today, the Free Leonard Peltier: 79th Birthday Action caravan departs from Rapid City, South Dakota to Washington D.C. On September 12th, Leonard's 79th Birthday, the caravan of supporters, NDN Collective, & Amnesty International will hold a nonviolent direct action in front of the White House from 12-2 PM EST.

Ahead of the journey, we opened with ceremony at the Jumping Bull Ranch, where the shootout took place back on June 26, 1975 and the false allegations against Leonard Peltier followed. This ceremony and prayer will guide us on a safe journey as we work to secure Leonard Peltier's freedom.

Leonard Peltier is a Native American activist and citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians (ND), who is now in his 48th year of incarceration. Leonard's imprisonment has been recognized globally as the product of a flawed prosecution, trial, and conviction by national and international human rights organizations, leading voices on criminal justice issues, dignitaries from around the world, and many current and former members of Congress.

September 12th - Leonard Peltier's 79th Birthday Action, His Statement to Supporters

Today, far from his traditional homelands and relatives, Mr. Peltier (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and Lakota/Dakota) turns 79 years old. Despite his innocence, Mr. Peltier has spent nearly five decades of his life in a maximum-security prison. He is the longest-serving Political Prisoner in United States history.

Today, we again join the resounding voices of our relatives around the world: #FreeLeonardPeltier. The time for his freedom is now.

Water Protector Legal Collective: As a legal organization devoted to fighting for the sovereignty and self-determination of Indigenous Peoples, we will continue to support the work to free Mr. Peltier no matter the odds.

LEONARD PELTIER'S LETTER TO SUPPORTERS

79 years old. Mother Earth has taken us on another journey around Grandfather Sun. Babies have taken their first breath. People have lived, loved, and died. Seeds have been planted and sent their roots deep below red earth and their breath to the Stars and our Ancestors.

I am still here.

Time has twisted one more year out of me. A year that has been a moment. A year that has been a lifetime. For almost five decades I've existed in a cage of concrete and steel. With the "good time" calculations of the system, I've actually served over 60 years.

Year after year, I have encouraged you to live as spirit warriors. Even while in here, I can envision what is real and far beyond these walls. I've seen a reawakening of an ancient Native pride that does my heart good.

I may leave this place in a box. That is a cold truth. But I have put my heart and soul into making our world a better place and there is a lot of work left to do – I would like to get out and do it with you.

I know that the spirit warriors coming up behind me have the heart and soul to fight racism and oppression, and to fight the greed that is poisoning our lands, waters, and people.

We are still here.

Remember who you are, even if they come for your land, your water, your family. We are children of Mother Earth and we owe her and her other children our care.

I long to turn my face to the sky. In this cage, I am denied that simple pleasure. I am in prison, but in my mind, I remain as I was born: a free Native spirit.

That is what allows me to laugh, keeps me laughing. These walls cannot contain my laughter – or my hope.

I know there are those who stand with me, who work around the clock for my freedom. I have been blessed to have such friends.

We are still here and you give me hope.

I hope to breathe free air before I die. Hope is a hard thing to hold, but no one is strong enough to take it from me.

I love you. I hope for you. I pray for you.

And prayer is more than a cry to the Creator that runs through your head. Prayer is an action.

September 12th - More than 30 Arrested in Washington, D.C. at Leonard Peltier Demonstration

by Darren Thompson (*Native News Online*)

Today, 35 people were arrested and cited for violations in Washington, D.C., during a planned demonstration near the White House advocating for the release of Leonard Peltier from federal prison.

The organized demonstration took place near Lafayette Square, a public park just north of the White House, bringing hundreds of supporters to push an organized message to President Biden to free Peltier from prison on his 79th birthday.

"For 79 years, this warrior, a relative, our elder, walked these lands with purpose, with a fire, and with a calling, a special calling upon his life, and he has galvanized a movement for justice in the United States," said NCAI President Fawn Sharp at Tuesday's rally in front of the White House. "I want to stand here with you, as we celebrate, our Elder, as we celebrate the sacred day he was born."

Among those arrested were "Reservation Dogs" actor Dallas Goldtooth, NDN Collective CEO Nick Tilson, National Congress of American Indians President Fawn Sharp, Amnesty International USA Executive Director Paul O'Brien, Chris White Eagle, and Hermus Bettayoun for blocking a sidewalk. The arrests all came with a \$50 citation and no one was taken to jail.

"Getting arrested today, I'm resisting; I'm dissenting against the 48 years that Leonard Peltier has been illegally incarcerated by the United States government," Tilson said in a statement. "I'm dissenting against the system, white supremacy, the police state and the system of incarceration and we're doing it in solidarity with Leonard Peltier."

NDN Collective and Amnesty International USA organized an event in Washington to increase awareness and pressure on releasing Peltier, 79, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa citizen from North Dakota.

Peltier was convicted for two counts of aiding and abetting the murder of two Federal Bureau of Investigation officers on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation on June 26, 1975. In 1977, he was later sentenced after a trial, and other legal proceedings, including his extradition from Canada after the shootout, that supporters have said unjustly convicted and sentenced Peltier. He is serving two consecutive life sentences.

Peltier wrote a statement to be read in front of the White House saying that he hopes to breathe free air before he dies. "There is a lot of work left to do," Peltier wrote. "I'd like to get out there to join you in doing it."

Peltier's supporters have said that he has been unjustly incarcerated for nearly 50 years. He is currently being held at United States Penitentiary Coleman, a maximum-security prison in Coleman, Florida.

"We're asking President Joe Biden for Executive Clemency," Tilson said. "We will keep coming back to the White House, and we'll be pressuring all parts of the government until we see justice for Leonard Peltier and see him come back with his family, community and people."

Amnesty International considers Peltier to be a political prisoner and many Indigenous leaders consider him to be the longest-serving Indigenous political prisoner in the U.S. Peltier has exhausted all post-

conviction remedies available to him, including all parole requests, and former President Barack Obama denied a clemency request by Peltier in 2017.

Then, former FBI agent Ed Woods, a long-time opponent of Peltier, issued a statement thanking former President Obama, saying, "We are collectively grateful, and humbled, that you chose not to grant commutation to Leonard Peltier," Woods said in a statement. "His brutal attack and murder of two young FBI Agents and his remorseless public statements support that justice should continue as he serves the remainder of his lawful conviction and sentence."

The Washington, D.C., rally was the last stop of a caravan that began at the location of the 1975 shootout in Oglala, South Dakota on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and traveled through Rapid City, Minneapolis, Chicago, and Pittsburgh.

Renowned Native American activist Suzan Harjo, who is the President of the Morning Star Institute, former leader of the National Congress of American Indians, a founding trustee of the National Museum of the American Indian and a Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient, urged Biden to release Peltier in a letter on Tuesday.

"It is with deep appreciation for all you have done to uplift Native Peoples that I write to urge that you use your constitutional power to allow Leonard Peltier to live out his remaining years as a free man," Harjo wrote. "Now in his 47th year of incarceration, he has served a longer sentence than most principals in murder convictions, nearly two-thirds of his life thus far. The gross injustice of Mr. Peltier's long incarceration has been recognized by both federal prosecutors who handled his case and the most prominent human rights voices in the world."

Although the Democratic National Committee unanimously approved a resolution in September 2022 asking President Biden to consider clemency for Peltier, the administration has been tight-lipped about any decisions regarding clemency. Deb Haaland, the current Secretary of the Interior, has previously advocated for Peltier's release, but as a Congresswoman. She has not issued any statements regarding his release as the Secretary of the Interior.

September 14th - 'I just want to free my dad,' Leonard Peltier

by Jourdan Bennett-Begaye and Pauly Denetclaw (*Source NM*)

A young Indigenous girl walked through Lafayette Park in front of the White House with an American Indian Movement flag. Her tiny frame held the six-foot bamboo stake steady as the flag blew in the wind. A stark reminder of how many generations the movement to free Leonard Peltier from prison has gone on.

On Tuesday, NDN Collective, a national Indigenous-led organization, and Amnesty International, held the Free Leonard Peltier 79th Birthday Action in Washington, D.C., to demand clemency for the Native American rights activist who has been incarcerated for nearly five decades.

Hundreds attended the peaceful rally where prayer songs echoed and at times people danced, but still thirty-five demonstrators were arrested, according to NDN Collective. At one point the U.S. Park Police brought out a sonic weapon and U.S. Secret Service created a barrier of agents on the sidewalk.

"Our goal with this event is to raise awareness and bring attention to the plight of Leonard Peltier and his incarceration. Because we're at a point in time where the Biden administration has made it a priority for Native American civil rights, and yet the longest living political prisoner in American history, who is Indigenous, is still in there," said NDN Collective President and CEO Nick Tilsen, Oglala Lakota. "And so we're calling upon (President Joe) Biden and the Biden administration to release Leonard. This is a priority for Indian Country."

Leonard maintains he did not commit the 1975 murder of two FBI agents on Oglala Lakota land.

Context in this case matters. It happened during the Reign of Terror where dozens of Indigenous people were murdered, found dead or just disappeared from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. This happened in the years after the 71-day occupation of Wounded Knee where AIM leaders seized control of the area and declared it the Independent Oglala Nation. The standoff between AIM and the federal government was at times violent.

From 1973 to 1976, the FBI targeted and harassed Indigenous activists in the area. During these years there were more than 60 murders and Pine Ridge had the highest murder rate per capita in the country.

The 1975 murders in question took place during a shootout between Indigenous activists and the two FBI agents. The federal government didn't have enough evidence to charge Leonard with murder. He was charged with aiding and abetting the murder of federal officers and a seven-year sentence for an escape attempt.

"If he was tried today, no way he gets convicted," Kevin Sharp, Leonard's attorney and former federal judge, told ICT. "That is not the law today. The violations that law enforcement committed, that the US Attorney's Office committed at that time, the threats, the intimidation is a constitutional violation."

This is why many call Leonard, Turtle Mountain Ojibwe, a political prisoner and are demanding President Biden grant him clemency.

"We're not asking for a pardon," Sharp said. "Pardon would require someone to admit that he committed a crime, which he did not. But he is clearly a prisoner of politics. This is about politics. So, it's the politics that keep him there. But I think it's the politics that are going to free him."

Leonard's daughter, Kathy Peltier, attended the rally in Washington to demand freedom for her father, "a dad figure" she never had growing up. She advocates for his freedom to younger generations across the country and overseas.

Kathy, Navajo and Turtle Mountain Ojibwe, last saw her dad three years ago. It's difficult for her to calculate how many times she's seen him. She only knows that her and her siblings could only see him for a short time so most of the allotted visitor time for him could be spent with lawyers.

Leonard missed out on a lot of Kathy's firsts, said her mom, Ann Begaye, Navajo.

He missed her high school graduation at 18. Kathy is now 47.

"I was hoping my dad would be there. So, when that day came and left, I was like, 'wow, he's gonna miss many more unless we get him freed.' So, I just want to free my dad," Kathy said as her voice cracked. "I feel like it's too late for me, but get my dad freed for his grandkids. So, they get to know who he is, as a person, and not just locked up behind those bars."

She also wished he could've been at ceremonies with her.

"When I first sat down, I wished my dad was right beside me to protect me in that circle," she said. "Just teachings of what I should know as a woman and him telling me this is your auntie. Those are the moments I wish he was able to do. A lot of my aunties have gone and are not too well. So, I'm not able to learn about what they could teach me as a young Turtle Mountain woman. So, I had to rely on my grandma's side and my auntie to teach me the Navajo side."

Kathy said she would have wanted to know both sides of who she is.

Under the hot sun with plenty of humidity was famed Native American rights leader and advocate Suzan Harjo, Cheyenne and Hodulgee Muscogee, her presence still larger than life and with her signature smile.

She arrived at Pennsylvania Avenue behind the White House after demonstrators displayed a red and yellow banner, nearly as tall as (and perhaps taller than) the White House gates, painted, "President Biden, Free Leonard Peltier Now!"

Her message to Biden: "To reach deep, deep deep inside your heart. My old friend, Mr. Biden, and have all the compassion you can muster for my brother, Leonard Peltier. I'm pleading for family. I'm pleading for a relative. He's not just a cause to me. He's my family. Please, show compassion to this one man, this one Native man who needs to be free now. He wants to get out and look at the sky. He doesn't want to go out in a wooden box. He wants to go out where he can talk to people and breathe free air, he said. Let him do that. He's had two-thirds of his life behind bars. It's time. It's time."

September 15th - Joe Biden Is Going To Have To Talk About Leonard Peltier

by Jennifer Bendery (*HuffPost*)

Maxine was 4 years old when the bullet whizzed by her face. She remembers feeling a burning sensation on her forehead. And then the blood. Her uncle grabbed her, and they ran.

"I have a scar," she said, motioning to a faint line above her right eyebrow. "Just a lot of people hollering. That's all I remember."

Maxine is in her 50s now. Her entire life has been shaped by that near-miss, and it's not just because she could have died that day. It's because of the person who has been in prison ever since that chaotic 1975 shootout between FBI agents and Native American rights activists on Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. And that person — Leonard Peltier, a leader in the Indigenous rights movement — has been on Maxine's mind every day since.

"Every day. Every day we pray for him," Maxine, who requested to only use her first name, said of her tribal community on Pine Ridge Reservation. About 19,000 people live here.

"He should have been released a long time ago," she said. "But they needed somebody to blame."

Maxine was one of hundreds of activists and Indigenous leaders at a rally outside the White House on Tuesday, urging President Joe Biden to grant clemency to Peltier. Tuesday was Peltier's 79th birthday. He's spent 48 of those years in prison, or nearly two-thirds of his life.

Peltier's imprisonment has been rehashed for decades. But if time has made anything more clear, it's that his imprisonment is bookended by obvious, infuriating injustice: The U.S. government put Peltier in prison based on lies and misconduct, with no evidence that he committed a crime.

Today, Peltier is an ailing, 79-year-old man deteriorating in a maximum-security federal prison in Florida. He uses a walker. He is blind in one eye from a partial stroke. He has serious health problems related to diabetes and an aortic aneurysm.

His life is mostly confined to a cell with 18 inches for him and 18 inches for his cellmate.

"I am still here," he wrote Tuesday in an open letter to supporters.

Peltier has maintained his innocence the entire time he's been in prison, which has almost certainly prevented him from being paroled. Last year, United Nations legal experts made the unusual decision to review Peltier's parole process and concluded that it was so problematic that Biden should release him immediately.

"Mr. Peltier continues to be detained because he is Native American," they wrote in a damning 17-page legal opinion.

Biden has the authority to release Peltier at any time. Indigenous rights leaders made it clear Tuesday that they want him to do it now, before it's too late and Peltier dies. For hours, they shouted it at the White House. They held up dozens of "Free Peltier" signs and unfurled a massive banner with the same message that took at least 10 people to hold it up. They chanted, burned sage sticks and banged drums in between speeches and tribal dances.

Their voices should certainly matter to Biden, who is proud of being a strong ally to Native communities and tribes. He should be. His administration has made historic investments in Indian Country, from infrastructure to housing to climate change. He respects tribal sovereignty. He talks about the need for justice in Native communities, particularly when it comes to stopping violence against women. He's put several Indigenous people into senior positions in his administration, not the least of whom is Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, who passionately urged Peltier's release in her former role as a member of Congress.

The president will be increasingly reminding Native communities and tribes of his record leading up to November 2024. Native voters were crucial to Biden's victory in 2020, particularly in key battleground states like Arizona and Wisconsin.

But Peltier's prolonged imprisonment hangs over all of this. For many at Tuesday's rally, and beyond, he has become a symbol of something much bigger than himself. He represents the centuries of pain and injustice that Native communities have endured at the hands of the U.S. government. The longer Peltier remains in prison, the longer the collective wound festers.

Biden hasn't said a word about Peltier since becoming president.

On the one hand, it's weird, considering that this is a president willing to address past wrongs against Indigenous peoples. His administration is very publicly reviewing the country's painful legacy of Indian boarding schools, for example, and taking concrete steps to combat the long-ignored crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women.

On the other hand, Biden's silence puts him in line with his presidential predecessors. The FBI has made it clear, for decades, that it never wants Peltier released. And Biden, so far, appears to be letting the FBI dictate how this goes.

"Biden doesn't want to piss off the FBI because they want somebody locked up, even if it's not the right person. That's a political prisoner."

- Peggy Mainor, executive director of MICA Group, a Native-led organization in Baltimore

But pleas to Biden for mercy for Peltier aren't going away, and are likely only going to get louder as election season picks up. The Democratic National Committee last year unanimously passed a resolution calling on Biden to grant clemency to Peltier. Seven Democratic senators did too, along with a separate group of House Democrats.

"Mr. Peltier meets appropriate criteria for commutation: (1) his old age and critical illness, (2) the amount of time he has already served, and (3) the unavailability of other remedies," Sen. Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii), chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, wrote in his own letter to Biden last year. "Mr. Peltier should be granted a commutation of his sentence."

During Tuesday's rally, 35 people got arrested, including Fawn Sharp, the president of the National Congress of American Indians, the largest and most powerful Indigenous rights group in the country. Sharp told *HuffPost* last month that Peltier's freedom is a top priority for her organization and its membership heading into 2024.

Paul O'Brien, the executive director of Amnesty International USA, also got arrested Tuesday. The massive international human rights organization recently launched a new campaign aimed squarely at urging Biden to release Peltier.

Maxine got arrested, too.

These were planned arrests to make a statement, and everyone was released soon afterward. The protest, organized by NDN Collective and Amnesty International USA, was peaceful the entire time. Perhaps most remarkable about the gathering was its diversity: People of all races and ages, from teenagers to people in their 70s, felt a connection to Peltier's story. Many could talk in detail about his imprisonment.

Peggy Mainor, who is in her 60s, said she organized a march for Peltier in 1978 in Berkeley, California. She said she was deeply disappointed that President Barack Obama didn't release Peltier, and isn't surprised that Biden hasn't done so.

"He probably feels like he doesn't have to do anything because he does have a strong record" with tribes and Native communities, said Mainor, who is the executive director of MICA Group, a Native-led organization in Baltimore that works with Indigenous communities to protect their lands and cultures.

"Biden doesn't want to piss off the FBI because they want somebody locked up, even if it's not the right person," she added. "That's a political prisoner."

Tyler Star Comes Out, a 20-year-old Indigenous woman from Pine Ridge Reservation, said she feels tied to Peltier because he was arrested on her grandparents' land.

"For my entire life, I've heard stories of Leonard Peltier and AIM," she said, referring to the American Indian Movement. "I've been hearing my grandparents advocate for him, and so, considering that I'm the younger generation, I'm continuing on their work."

Star Comes Out, whose father is the president of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, will be old enough to vote in her first presidential election in 2024. She said she'll "most likely" be voting for Biden, but if he doesn't release Peltier before then, "I wouldn't be happy about it."

Asked if she had a message for Biden on Peltier, she replied, "Respect our elders."

At least two of Peltier's children were at the protest, Kathy and Chauncey Peltier. So was Norman Patrick Brown, who was with Peltier during that 1975 shootout. He was only 15 at the time, the youngest AIM member there that day.

Brown said it was "really emotional" being at the gathering for Peltier, whose freedom he's been advocating for his entire life.

"I feel like people will never understand the stand he took," said Brown, tearing up. "They don't realize how much love there was by the Lakota people, the Navajo people. The elders thought of him as their son. ... He stood up against the federal government. The man was fearless, his heart was pure, his love for his people."

Standing a few feet away, Chauncey Peltier said he knew what he would say to Biden if he had five minutes alone with him.

"I would ask him to please release my father from prison and let him go home. That would help the healing of my people [that they] have been going through for 500 years," he said. "That would be a start."

"He's completely failing us on this issue of justice for Leonard Peltier."

- Dallas Goldtooth, an Indigenous rights activist and actor on the television series "Reservation Dogs."

The White House did not respond to a request for comment about Tuesday's protest or about whether Biden is considering clemency for Peltier.

HuffPost has asked the White House about Peltier several times over the last two years. The last time it provided a comment was in February 2022, with this statement from a Biden spokesperson:

"We are aware of Mr. Peltier's request for a pardon and the outreach in support of his request. As many of you know, President Biden has a process for considering all requests for pardon or commutation, which is run through our White House Counsel's Office. I don't have more to share on Mr. Peltier's request at this time."

Peltier's attorney filed a clemency petition in July 2021, which begins the process for the Office of the Pardon Attorney to review his case for being released from prison.

Asked what movement there's been, if any, on Peltier's clemency petition in the last two years, Justice Department spokesperson Dena Iverson pointed *HuffPost* to a searchable database on its website for those details on Wednesday.

Its status here remains the same as it has been for two years: "Pending."

The FBI, which appears to be the only real obstacle to Peltier's release, provided a statement Wednesday on why it still wants him in prison:

The FBI remains resolute against the commutation of Leonard Peltier's sentence for murdering FBI Special Agents Jack Coler and Ronald Williams at South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 1975. We must never forget or put aside that Peltier intentionally and mercilessly murdered these two young men and has never expressed remorse for his ruthless actions.

Peltier's conviction, rightly and fairly obtained, still stands, and has withstood numerous appeals to multiple courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court. No amount of prison time changes the facts surrounding Coler and Williams' deaths and commuting Peltier's sentence now would only serve to diminish the brutality of his crime and the suffering of their surviving families and the FBI family."

But this is the exact same statement the FBI provided to *HuffPost* a year and a half ago, and every sentence of it is outdated, misleading or flat-out wrong.

HuffPost asked the FBI in a follow-up email to explain all the discrepancies in its statement.

There was never evidence that Peltier murdered anyone, and the prosecutors themselves later admitted they didn't know who did it. Peltier was never convicted of murder; he was convicted of "aiding and abetting" by virtue of being present that day.

The statement also doesn't address the FBI's and U.S. Attorney's Office's now-known egregious misconduct in Peltier's case. The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals concluded in 2003 that the U.S. government's behavior in Peltier's case "is to be condemned. The government withheld evidence. It intimidated witnesses. These facts are not disputed."

Furthermore, the FBI statement doesn't address the agency's own role in instigating the shoot-out that day, which has been called out over the years by the 10th Circuit, the late Judge Gerald Heaney on the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, and former U.S. Attorney James Reynolds.

An FBI spokesperson followed up to say the bureau has no further comment.

Some attendees at Tuesday's rally predicted that Biden's inaction on Peltier will depress voter turnout in Native communities in November 2024.

"Absolutely," said Dallas Goldtooth, 40, an Indigenous rights activist and an actor on the TV series "Reservation Dogs."

"He's completely failing us on this issue of justice for Leonard Peltier," Goldtooth said. "All of us grew up with Peltier on our minds, our hearts, in our mouths. The fact that he's still locked up is something that we organize around. Because we want to see him free, but also we want to see our issues acknowledged by this administration."

Maxine said people in her community regularly talk about how disappointed they are that Biden hasn't released Peltier.

"No one is going to turn out," she speculated. "They just say that they made the wrong choice again. Somebody should have done something."

But others saw Biden in a different light.

Suzan Harjo, a longtime Indigenous rights advocate and 2014 Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient, sat in a wheelchair amid the action. Baking in the sun on the cement, the 78-year-old poet and policy advocate said it was important to her to be there because Peltier has come to embody so much, for so many Indigenous people, for so long.

"Leonard has always been a stand-in for us, for all Native peoples," said Harjo, who had addressed the crowd earlier.

"This isn't some abstract guy," she continued. "He was jailed as a symbol for us, for the freedom-loving Native people and the freedom-fighting Native people. He's been in prison as long as he has been a symbol for us."

Harjo said what many people don't understand is that all Indigenous people carry "generations of hurt and pain" caused by the U.S. government's actions.

"We don't want to see the old days come again. We want this to be a new day, and President Biden is just the kind of person that can make that happen," she said. "I don't call him out; I call on him to do it. I believe in him."

Harjo brings the perspective of someone who worked with Biden on and off for decades during his time in the Senate. Last month, she wrote to him to personally appeal to him to release Peltier. She praised him for being a longtime supporter of restoring Native peoples' rights, from his work on the Indian Child Welfare Act to the American Indian Religious Freedom Act to the Violence Against Women Act.

"I think he will do it," she said of Biden ultimately releasing Peltier. "I think that he's a compassionate man and he'll understand that this is our family we're talking about."

11 Sept - Political Persecution Continues Against Miguel Peralta in Oaxaca

Statement from Indigenous Mazatec anarchist Miguel Peralta following the recent legal ruling in his case.

MORE:

While the justice system continues acting as if it is independent and in defense of peoples' rights, the expansion of cacique power continues at all costs, seeking to silence the voice of those who organize.

Recently we were notified of another legal decision in my case which adds to the ongoing legal charade and reaffirms the political interference being carried out by the current Secretary of Women in the state of Oaxaca, Elisa Zepeda Lagunas. From the use and abuse of her political position, she seeks to roll back the long legal process already traced by the prisoners and persecuted of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón.

In August of 2022, my legal team Los Otros Abogados filed an appeal against my sentence demonstrating once again the repeated contradictions and fabrication of evidence in the legal file 02/2015. The recent legal decision was made without considering the merits of the case.

Furthering the simulation of justice, the magistrates decided to return my legal process to the presentation of evidence stage, with the supposed purpose of carrying out cross-examinations between me and the six witnesses, puppets of Elisa Zepeda and her father Manuel Zepeda Cortes.

What this means is a setback of at least seven years of my legal process, and the continued insistence on my imprisonment.

It is important to remember that one of the puppets of Elisa Zepeda admitted that in 2014 they did not give their testimony before the public prosecutor, but were only asked for their signature; another puppet refused to appear to testify; in order to get Manuel Zepeda and his brother to present themselves for testimony, it was necessary that the date was set on the same day that they had to go to the district court in Huautla de Jiménez in order to sign for another legal case in which they were being prosecuted; and finally, Elisa Zepeda and two of her other puppets managed to delay their testimonies for over a year.

Within this context, in addition to the power that Elisa Zepeda currently holds in the state government of Oaxaca, it is impossible to speak of a fair trial under equal conditions, when for nearly nine years since the socio-political conflict in Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón took place, the persecution, incarcerations, repression, and interference of power have only escalated.

Faced with this scenario of the fabrication of crimes in order to continue the political persecution seeking my return to prison, I call on everyone to strengthen the solidarity in the demand for the unconditional freedom of all the prisoners and persecuted of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, Oaxaca.

Let us ignite our fury until we are all free. We want us in the streets! Freedom for the political prisoners!

12 Sept - The Many Ways of Prisoner Support

Organizations and activists around the world regularly organize to support folks in prison.

MORE:

via *UNOFFENSIVE ANIMAL*

We've probably all seen lists with names of prisoners, the contact information of jailed anarchists and animal liberation activists. There are also many suggestions how to show solidarity with prisoners, for example by writing letters, donating books, or providing financial support. Supporting comrades in prison is a cornerstone of a radical movement. We hate the state, and we want to abolish all prisons, physical as well as mental. But as long as the struggle for a better life means that we risk prison, and that some of us will be imprisoned, we must always take care of our comrades in prison. The struggle continues.

But some prisoners do not want their trial, sentence, or prison time to be noticed. There can be various reasons why an inmate does not want to be seen in the media. For example, you may be tired of being exposed in public. Many have a long period of repression, detention hearings, trials, appeals, possibly getting hanged out in the media by fascists and animal oppressors, behind them. Others may be worried that further exposure in the media will make it harder to return to everyday life, once released. We should take notice, respect and support the wishes of these prisoners. Of course, should we not public expose prisoners who do not want that kind of attention.

The fact that some comrades for various reasons do not want attention during their time in prison does not always mean that they do not need help. These prisoners also need solidarity and support. Which they also often get, from friends, families and close peers. The responsibility for taking care is then placed more on individuals, than on organizations for prisoner support to rally help. For this reason, it is important that we who have a friend, comrade or family member in prison, take the time to support, for example by writing letters, donating books or giving a penny, even though the friend's name is not on prisoner lists, or when no photos on the family member circulates online. And sometimes it also is the person who supports a prisoner who needs our solidarity, in order to be able to help their friend throughout his/hers time in prison. There are as many ways to help as there are comrades in prison. Together we take care of each other!

12 Sept - Letter from Anarchist Prisoner Jorge "Yorch" Esquivel

Update from Mexican anarchist prisoner Jorge "Yorch" Esquivel.

MORE:

As you know, they prolonged my legal process once again. This makes me angry, sad, and distressed because I don't know when they are going to tell me if I will stay here or if I will be freed. Now I have another hearing scheduled for October 23, about another month and a half in here. I'm calm, but there are moments in which I can't stand it. Last week I was forced into a fight because I couldn't stand the provocations from another prisoner. Fortunately, I didn't have any more serious problems and everything ended well and I wasn't sent to punishment (part of the prison).

I hope you all will show up for my next hearing to put pressure on the people at the courts because it's evident that they want to leave me in here. They don't have anything that proves I am guilty, and this is all a set-up.

I thank everyone for the support and efforts that folks in other countries have given me by calling their embassies asking for my release. To the compas of Casa Chiapaz (Casa Okupa Chiapaz) for the events in solidarity that they have organized, to the punks in Lima, Perú (Oye Richi) that organized raffles for my benefit, thank you. To the compañeras of Feria anticarcelaria for sharing the writings of anarchist prisoners Mónica, Francisco, Marcelo, Tomás and Mawnhko (ex-prisoner). I am glad that the compa Mawnhko is free and I demand the immediate release of my Chilean anarchist sisters and brothers who are being held hostage by the State. Greetings to Karla and Magda (Libres Ya Comisión por Karla y Magda), to the compa Miguel Peralta (Libres Ya), I wish you all much strength and that all of the prison walls fall down. A big hug to my Mazatec sisters of Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón (Presos Políticos Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón Oaxaca). To the compa Fidencio Aldama, I hope that you soon have full freedom, also to Kenia Hernández (Libertad para Kenia), may she soon be back in her community with her people. To the compas Brandy and Tiara (@malentonadx – IG) who recently reached the three-year mark of their time in prison, I hope your situations are cleared up soon.

17 Sept - Eric King's 2023 Running Down the Walls Statement

We're still recovering from this year's Running Down the Walls (report back to follow), but are happy to share Eric King's statement for the annual event.

MORE:

Greetings friends, comrades, and assorted government voyeurs! This is my second RDTW from ADX. The "Alcatraz of the Rockies" is a weird place, filled with creepy, abusive predators, and a few hundred prisoners!

I'd like to focus on how important things like tangible support and the ABC Warchest are for prisoners. Everything that makes prison somewhat tolerable costs money — stamps and envelopes; paper and pens; emails and phone calls; coffee, non-meat protein like nuts, beans, and peanut butter; supplemental food to deal with abysmal food quality and portions, snacks to add something enjoyable to your day; warm clothes,

athletic clothes, shoes; watches, radios, headphones. MP3s are almost \$1.50 per song. If you're sick, all your medicine costs money, as does just talking to a nurse (a \$2.00 visiting fee). Tooth paste, shampoo, floss, tooth brushes, decent soap, lotion, etc. If you have hobbies to pass the time, they are all crazy expensive — markers, paints, papers, knitting, any craft-work, typewriter supplies to do legal work; copy cards to use the printer for legal/art/gamble-work. Fifty copies for \$5.00. Prison is a for-profit industry. Everything they offer for free is shitty to the point of offensive. Remember also that we are paid peanuts. At Florence Medium, I had two jobs, five days a week and made \$20/month, just enough to cover shampoo, soap, and coffee.

This is why the Warchest — and all tangible support — is so vital. Having consistent support allows you to budget, plan your schedule, and remove that very heavy cloud of stress that can linger over your head. Because of the Warchest, because of Bloomington ABC, because of people sacrificing and caring, I've never had to go into debt. I haven't had to do weird hustles and I've been able to help others who are struggling. Beyond the sectarianism and trendism that exists within the "movement," the Warchest sees the brutality of prison and tries to make it a little less shitty for those who need help. I give the biggest solidarity and warmest hugs to all those who in any way do what they can to help those inside. No matter the custody level or length of the bid, prison exposes you to the worst society has to offer, and the people who care expose us to the best. Thank you all for caring. I hope the weather is nice!

I'll wrap this up by encouraging people to look out for and fight for our elders — harass their prisons or legislators, get ahold of director Collette Peters, demand real health care, compassionate release, more legal representation, more eyes on them, or whatever they personally need. There's no victory without total liberation. Thank you to everyone who has ever helped me in any way. Big love to my support team, legal team, family, and friends. We're almost there.

17 Sept - Support Sekou Odinga

Former political prisoner and local comrade Sekou Odinga was admitted to the hospital on September 3, 2023 for serious health complications.

MORE:

He had been released from the hospital and into a rehabilitation facility. However, he has suffered from complications and is now back in the hospital.

At this time, we are asking for folks to donate what they can to support the family's immediate relief needs and to understand that Sekou has a long journey of healing and recovery ahead. Here's the link to the fundraiser gofundme.com/f/immediate-relief-support-for-sekou-odinga

Sekou Odinga is a globally recognized Black liberation activist, member of Malcolm X's Organization of Afro-American Unity, founding member of both the New York City chapter and the International Section of the Black Panther Party, and former US political prisoner who survived 33 years of state captivity before his release in 2014.

Prosecuted as one of the "Panther 21" in New York City, Odinga is a prominent historical figure, having been featured on Democracy Now! and in numerous documentaries, concerts, mass public events, and major news outlets.

In addition to being featured in the widely circulated social movement texts Can't Jail the Spirit (2002) and Hauling Up the Morning: Writings & Art by Political Prisoners & Prisoners of War in the U.S. (1990), Odinga has published his writing in Look for Me in the Whirlwind: From the Panther 21 to 21st-Century Revolutions (PM Press, 2017) and Black Power Afterlives: The Enduring Significance of the Black Panther Party (Haymarket Books, 2020).

A survivor of state torture and the FBI's notorious Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO), Sekou Odinga is both celebrated and admired by freedom and justice movements worldwide, exemplifying persistence, courage, and principled adherence to freedom struggle under the most repressive circumstances imaginable.

18 Sept - Letter from Thomas Meyer-Falk

From ABC Brighton: Thomas Meyer-Falk has written about his first few days of freedom after serving 26 years in prison, much of the latter part under an old nazi-era preventative detention law.

MORE:

How the wind rustles and the acorns fall: A few days of freedom!

On 29.08.2023, after almost 27 years of imprisonment, I was released from the high-security area of Freiburg prison with two hours' notice. How does a person feel in such a situation? I would like to report on this after the first 14 days.

On 29.08.2023: The release!

At 8 a.m. I was still sitting in the visiting area of the prison with the probation officer, who might be responsible for me in the future, and we puzzled over when and if a release would take place. At 2 p.m. the time had come – I was discharged and on my way to my new place to live.

I should have been overflowing with happiness, but my focus was on the speedy handling of the move and my first official visits. Already around 3 p.m. I was at the job center and then at the health insurance company. The evening became long, ended after midnight. I got to know people in the new living environment, talked to friends on the phone and immediately started texting. The world of the 21st century had integrated me in a short time: thanks to the local group of the Rote Hilfe e.V. from Freiburg, my smartphone and laptop were ready. It felt surreal to sit on the tram and talk on the phone – just hours before I had sat in a cell with a corded phone and was only allowed to call numbers approved by the prison, and the conversations would be monitored and recorded, as it was always said in an announcement text before calls.

At 8 p.m., for the first time in 27 years, I sat together in a circle of people who voluntarily live together, who had voluntarily taken me in, and where I voluntarily went. It felt just as surreal, but really good.

The first night

The rustling of the leaves, the chirping of the crickets and the falling and hitting of the acorns on the roof, something that the residents here experience every day, was for me after 27 years each an event in itself, the stars above me, the sky. There are rarely trees in prison, the stars are outshone by the bright spotlights of the security infrastructure, everything has to be illuminated and illuminated down to the last detail. The night was short, only about 2 or 3 hours of restless sleep.

The following days

This is not meant to be an account of individual experiences that are banal and commonplace for the readership. But many more phone calls followed for me, my first beautiful personal encounters in freedom, without the usual security apparatus of a prison, excursions to the local Schloßberg or even to the nearby Münstertal. At the same time, the smartphone almost grew on my hand because calls came, appointments had to be coordinated – so that I was suddenly more on the move in a week than in the prison in several weeks. The phone calls with friends were and still are particularly good, because the sensory overload was quite pronounced.

Effect of long deprivation of liberty

Imprisonment in general, especially for a long time, has a detrimental effect on the soul and body, as a rule, people break and break over time. Resisting this takes a lot of strength and success is much better with the help of solidarity from outside. Often, even contact with the world outside the walls can give a person the determination that he might not otherwise have to persevere. The neurological-biological side should not be underestimated either: people's brains get used to an unparalleled lack of stimulation in years and decades. Always the same walls, colours, paths, smells, people and sounds.

The "dismissal shock" is particularly pronounced after decades, because so much has changed, dealing with it adequately is a challenge that in turn drains the strength. There is new money (the euro), new technology (smartphone), you don't just pass by offices today, but have to make an appointment via the Internet or telephone, and much more. Quite a few fail because of this. I am fortunate enough to be accompanied in a very friendly and supportive manner, to an extent that probably not many ex-prisoners are allowed to experience.

Thanks to so many people

I thank the people who have accompanied me, some of them for more than two decades, who have allowed me to walk the path with them and who have walked the path with me.

I would also like to thank the organisations that showed solidarity. The Rote Hilfe e.V. (so called: Red Aid), groups of ABC (especially ABC Brighton), gefangenen info ("captured info"), the DreckSack (a Literary Magazine from Berlin). I would also like to thank those who have sent me reading material, letters, books over many, many years and who have also supported me financially.

And my special thanks go to those who typed my articles over and over again, because without their help I would have been doomed to be mute, because in prison I had no access to the Internet. This thanks includes those who have translated my axes and edited translations.

The coming weeks and months

There will be more meetings, events, at some point the attempt to gain a foothold at Radio Dreyeckland (rdl.de/) as an intern and Volunteer service, maybe even a visit to the cinema, finding my way into a life that will often remain just a dream for the thousands of prisoners in the FRG and millions worldwide. I keep hearing the rustling of the leaves and the falling of the acorns!

27 Sept - Radical Publishing in Political Headwinds

WHAT: Discussion

WHEN: 7:00pm, Wednesday, September 27th

WHERE: The Word Is Change - 368 Tompkins Avenue, Brooklyn

COST: FREE

MORE:

Publishers from independent presses such as Feminist Press, PM Press, Common Notions Press, and LittlePuss Press, discuss the imperative of publishing books that uplift marginalized and insurgent voices, create and complicate representation, and spark and amplify movements. This is even more critical during challenging political times, when individuals are being disempowered, and marginalized communities are being scapegoated and stripped of their rights. These publishers will speak on the challenges of publishing radical books against political headwinds, why it matters, and the impact that radical books, writers, and conversations have within their communities and beyond. They'll also discuss their dreams for the future of radical indie publishing and indie literary community.