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Updates for June 20th

5 Jun - New York's Parole System Is 'Broken,' But Cuomo Can Help Fix It

Parole denials based on the nature of the crime are so common that critics have called the parole system "broken."

MORE:
by Victoria Law (*Village Voice*)
Judith Clark is what many would consider a model prisoner.

During her 35 years at a maximum-security women's prison in Bedford Hills, New York, she created and worked in many programs for her fellow inmates, including those dedicated to AIDS counseling, college education, and parenting.

For Governor Andrew Cuomo, these deeds showed that the 67-year-old had changed drastically from the 32-year-old who, in 1981, acted as the getaway driver in a Brink's armored car robbery in which a guard and two police officers were killed in Rockland County. She was convicted and sentenced to 75 years to life in prison, and she would not have been eligible for parole until she turned 106 if not for Cuomo commuting her sentence in 2016.

Even so, the parole board unanimously denied Clark's request for parole in April, after interviewing her for seven hours over a two-day period.

"We do find that your release at this time is incompatible with the welfare of society as expressed by relevant officials and thousands of its members," the board stated, noting the nearly 10,000 signatures opposing her release. "You are still a symbol of a terroristic crime."

In March 2017, little more than 1/3 (259) of the 704 people who appeared before the parole board were released. Ninety-five applicants had violent felony convictions; only 36 (or 38 percent) were released. Among the 445 people denied and forced to wait two years for another hearing, 20 were aged 60 or older.

"People think of parole as early release," said Laura Whitehorn, a formerly incarcerated woman and current organizer for the Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP) campaign. "It's not. It's release after your minimum term is up. If you have a sentence of 25 to life, 25 is the minimum you have to do. Parole doesn't mean you get out early."

Parole board members are appointed by the governor, usually at the behest of a local state senator. These appointees must be confirmed by the New York State Senate Standing Committee on Crime Victims, Crime and Correction, a committee currently chaired by Patrick Gallivan, a former commissioner himself and a staunch opponent of Clark's release, who went so far as to collect signatures against it on his state senate page.

The members, called commissioners, can serve an unlimited number of six-year terms, though they must be reappointed and reconfirmed. To qualify, a potential commissioner must have a college degree and five years' experience in criminal justice, sociology, law, social work, or medicine. The annual salary is $101,600; the chairperson is paid $120,800.

The parole board can have up to nineteen commissioners; it currently has twelve. The terms of four commissioners, three of whom were appointed by Governor George Pataki, are ending this summer, while

another is currently in “holdover,” meaning that, though her term has technically expired, she continues to make parole decisions. Cuomo’s office is currently interviewing candidates, who must be confirmed before June 21, when the legislative session ends.

Robert Dennison, a former commissioner, served on the board from 2000 to 2007, participating in hundreds of parole hearings. The average parole hearing, he told the Voice, lasted fifteen minutes. During that time, the applicant had to articulate how he or she was no longer a threat to society and why he or she deserved to be paroled.

“In practice, one commissioner presides over the hearing while the other two try to pay attention as they read files for upcoming cases,” he said. They saw forty people a day. Now, hearings are, for the most part, conducted by video.

By law, commissioners must consider not only the crime, but factors such as participation in rehabilitative programs, release plans, and the risk of recidivism. In reality, Dennison said, commissioners feel pressured to deny release to those convicted in the deaths of police officers or other high-profile cases.

“It’s so easy to hold a person, because you never get criticized for keeping a person in,” Dennison said.

He recalled one instance in which a fellow commissioner told him that he had voted to deny parole to Diana Ortiz, a woman convicted as a teenager in the death of an off-duty police officer. After more than seventeen years, she had served more time than her co-defendants, whose sentences were reduced on appeal.

“We should have let her go,” Dennison recalled his colleague telling him. But the junior commissioner was “intimidated” by another commissioner on the board and afraid of the backlash he might suffer if he granted parole to a woman convicted in the death of an officer.

Two years later, Dennison was on the board that allowed Ortiz to go home.

He does think that political pressure “occasionally” plays a role in parole denials. For example, the two commissioners who granted parole to Clark’s co-defendant Kathy Boudin in 2003 were not reappointed.

“That sends a message to any parole board commissioner,” he noted.

That message has also made its way to parole applicants — and can sometimes lead to despair.

On August 4, 2016, shortly after his tenth parole denial, 70-year-old John Mackenzie committed suicide at Fishkill Correctional Facility in Beacon, New York. He spent 41 years in prison on a sentence of 25 years to life for fatally shooting a police officer in 1975.

Though acknowledging his many programs and accomplishments as well as his low-risk assessment score, commissioners based each denial on his decades-old crime. His final parole denial stated, “After a review of the record and interview, the panel has determined that if released at this time, there is a reasonable probability that you would not live and remain at liberty without again violating the law.”

Mackenzie’s daughter Danielle is now advocating for changes in the parole system. These repeated parole denials meant her father not only missed out on her life, but will not get to see his ten-year-old granddaughter grow, either.

Danielle filled out the paperwork necessary to retrieve his belongings. She wanted the one existing photo of them together, taken in the prison visiting room during their very first visit when she was 21. She had let her father keep it.

“That was the only thing from Fishkill I wanted,” she said. But prison staff had thrown it away.

Instead, they returned the bed sheet that he had used to hang himself.

On April 24, 2017, Danielle took the day off from work and drove to Albany with members of RAPP to speak before the board’s monthly business meeting.

“I represent the somewhat voiceless in this process, the children of the incarcerated parents,” she told the commissioners. “In his last letters, my father expressed hopelessness. He felt there was nothing he could do to express how much he had changed. There was nothing left.”

She recalled that two commissioners were crying by the time she finished speaking.

Danielle wants more than tears and regrets. She wants the parole process to have more accountability and more recourse for inmates.

Dennison, the former parole commissioner, says “the only thing a judge can do is assign a new hearing.” But a new hearing does not necessarily mean a different result.

In June 2016, Cuomo nominated five new commissioners, but the senate committee never held their confirmation hearings.

With more commissioners’ terms set to expire, advocates see an opportunity for change.

“He can appoint seven new people,” Whitehorn, the formerly incarcerated activist, said. “And he can fight for them.”

A spokesperson for the governor’s office did not respond to our requests for comment — we’ll update if they do.

11 Jun - June 11th Reportback and Interviews

There were several interviews with former prisoners and supporters of currently imprisoned anarchists for June 11. We’ve included some transcripts below.

MORE:
Grace from Jeremy Hammond Support
In this interview for the June 11th International Day of Solidarity with Marius Mason and All Long-Term Anarchist Prisoners, we talked to Grace from Jeremy Hammond support.

Jeremy Hammond is a long-time anarchist and hacker who is serving 10 years in prison for leaking information about Strategic Forecasting, Inc. (Stratfor), a private intelligence firm engaged in spying at the behest of corporations and governments. Jeremy was arrested in March 2012, and has remained vocal and defiant behind bars.

JUNE 11TH: Can you start by telling us about yourself and your experience with prison and prisoner support?

GRACE: Sure. My name is Grace North. I’ve been heading up the Jeremy Hammond committee since 2013. Before that I had really no formal experience in prison support. I had participated in it tangentially through other activist work that I did, but before that I had never really done any formal prison support. When Jeremy asked me to do it I said, “Sure!” not really realizing what I was getting myself into. All of my experience with prison support has really been learning as I go along. I joke with people that my strategy is to just bumble along and hope I don’t mess things up too badly. It seems to be going okay so far.

J11: Can you speak to the importance of prisoner solidarity as part of the anarchist project and other liberation struggles, in specific to the necessity of long term prisoner support?

G: Absolutely. I feel that prisoner support, especially for us anarchists, is inextricably tied with our values as anarchists. One of our core principles is the principle of solidarity, especially solidarity with the oppressed, and honestly prisoners are some of the most oppressed and the most marginalized people in this country, especially because most of the prison population is made up of black and brown people. If we as anarchists are not engaging in all areas of solidarity, we really have no business calling ourselves anarchists in the first place because anarchy is all about solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized. I think it's hugely important for us to engage in this and so often it is a little bit overlooked.

We do a really good job in the beginning where there's all this hype and energy, but sustaining that energy can be hard in any activist project. For long term prisoners, we need to especially keep that going because prison is so brutally dehumanizing that the longer you're there the more it wears on you, the more it does its best to grind you down. We need to be especially supporting long-term prisoners.

J11: Can you tell us more about Jeremy, his case, and what he's up to now?

G: Sure. Jeremy is a lifelong activist. He's being doing activism pretty much his entire life. He was part of a hacking group. They were known as LulzSec, later known as AntiSec. AntiSec was sort of an offshoot of LulzSec. In the beginning, it was hacking just for a little bit of mayhem. Later, especially with Jeremy's hacks, it became more political. Jeremy tied in his politics as an anarchist with his hacking. He hacked Stratfor. He hacked several police and law enforcement related groups and organizations. Unbeknownst to him, unfortunately, one of the other members of the group, Hector Monsegur, had been arrested several months prior on identity-theft-related charges and agreed to turn state's witness. So, all this time he was being watched by the FBI. Hector Monsegur helped the FBI connect the dots and lead them to Jeremy. Jeremy was then arrested in March of 2012.

J11: Can you speak to how the strengths or failings of prisoner support have personally affected Jeremy?

G: I know absolutely 100% that the support that he received from the outside and from various groups, such as yourself and from other individuals have absolutely helped him maintain his spirit. He remains strong, vocal, and defiant. I know a large part of the support from the people outside is writing him, sending him books, really just keeping his spirits up and reminding him that he's not alone and that no matter how much prison and the system tries to strip him of who he is, he's still there and there's still people that care about him and see him. I think that importance of being seen just really has kept his spirits up.

J11: Years into his sentence, Jeremy has remained vocal and defiant. I know he releases a lot of statements, there's some sort of Twitter feed. Has he faced any repercussions for his outspoken attitude?

G: Absolutely. For those who may be [reading] who do not know, he was sent to the segregated housing unit, also know as solitary confinement. I believe it was last summer right after the shooting in Dallas where several police officers were killed, he released a tweet that basically said that everybody on the inside was excited to see the police get some get back and he ended it with "Support the Dallas shooter." He didn't say, "you yourself should go out and kill cops" or anything like that, he just said "Support the Dallas shooter." For that statement, he was placed in SHU. At first, he didn't know why. They wouldn't tell him why he was placed in SHU. And unfortunately, the process in SHU is that they can put you in SHU for 90 days without charge. At the end of 90 days they either have to charge you or let you go. Unfortunately, if they charge you and you are found guilty of whatever infraction it is, the 90 days that you've already spent in SHU doesn't count towards whatever sentence you're handed out. So, you can spend 90 days in SHU and if it's a severe shot you can get however much longer. SHU and solitary are torture. They are absolutely inhumane.

At first when he was sent down to SHU they wouldn't tell him why he was there. They wouldn't tell him what was going on. And then the warden personally visited and basically said to Jeremy, "Look you're not our problem anymore. We're sending you to a CMU", which again, for those who may be reading who don't know what a CMU is, it stands for Communication Management Unit. There are only two in the entire country. It's sort of like a prison within a prison where your communications are very highly restricted, there are no in-person visits, you get one 15 minute phone call per week that must be between certain hours of the day. It's extremely restrictive. They're hell. Several anarchist prisoners have spent time in them. Daniel McGowan. Walter Bond, also I believe may still be in a CMU or may have just got out. People that are in CMU are people that have been convicted of terrorism-related charges. I think something like 80% of people in CMUs are Muslim. They came down and they said, "Look you're not our problem anymore." Those were their exact words: that he was not their problem and they were sending him away. We all worried for weeks and weeks and weeks. We didn't know what was happening. He didn't know what was happening. He didn't know if he was going to get transferred, so we were all sick. Everybody that knows him and supports him was sick for weeks wondering what was going to happen, where he was going to go, how they were going to punish him.

In the end, he had another talk with people at the prison that basically outlined exactly what he could say and what he couldn't and they sent him back to general population. So, he was sent to solitary, threatened with being transferred to this other prison environment that is even more highly restrictive than the one he's in, and then nothing. He was given a low level shot and then sent back. He's had email and phone taken. He had email taken for writing a letter of support for Barrett Brown because he sent it to someone else to be given to Barrett Brown's judge. He has over and over again been penalized for speech and been penalized for being just who he is.

J11: That reminds me – I recently saw a picture of Jeremy with one of the Cleveland 4. I think it was Connor or Brandon?

G: Connor Stevens, yeah. They hang out pretty regularly. Jeremy has tried to befriend Connor considering they're both sort of the same kind of person on the inside. He has tried to be someone that he can talk to if he needs it. Of the Cleveland 4, he's a little bit of the reclusive one. Connor's been going through some stuff recently that I don't know if I'm at liberty to talk about so I'll just leave it at that. And Jeremy has tried to befriend him and guide him through what he's going though.

J11: So, with Chelsea Manning recently released from prison and the government still seeking to capture Edward Snowden and Lauri Love, what do you think the future looks like for repression against hackers and information leakers?

G: Well, with this administration I honestly don't have much hope. I feel like especially with Trump saying over and over again he's the law and order candidate and Sessions taking such a hard line against things like prison reform, hackers, activists, and people with a political motive are going to be treated a little bit more harshly because they're going up against such a fascist regime. It hurts me to say that, but I'm not hopeful and I feel like these next four years are going to involve a lot of really hard work to support a lot of really good people. I don't want that fear to hold people back. I do want people to be very careful. I do want people to follow their conscience and do what they feel is right and what they feel is necessary, but honestly it really scares me. It really scares me, which is why I feel like prisoner support – we're going to need more people, we're going to need people who are committed, we're going to need people who are in it for the long run because again, I'm not hopeful with the administration with the way it is.

J11: On that note, generally we see a pretty small number of people doing a lot of the support work for anarchist prisoners. Do you see any potential for expanding those roles and building on connections between other movements and communities and prisoner support efforts?

G: Absolutely. I've spoken about this before. The internet has become such an integral part of how we communicate with each other and how we spread information that I feel like the hacker community is really

good at supporting its own. It's pretty good at that. But unfortunately, the hacker community tends to be overwhelmingly white and male and they sort of forget about all these other really awesome people that also need support. The potential is there. It's there. The hacker community just needs to open itself up a little bit. We also tend to be very insular. The hacker community just needs to open itself up a little bit more and recognize that they have such a huge potential to help so many people and to spread information and to get activists mobilized and to just do things. They need to recognize that it's not just them that's suffering. Many other communities are suffering. Many other people are suffering. We need to, as a community, offer our skills to not only lift up their voices, but to expand the scope of who we reach and how we reach them. I just think it's so important for hacktivists and the hacker community to get in line with.

J11: It's really good to hear that you're hopeful about those connections being strengthened.

G: I really hope that they can be because there's just so much potential there. I know I keep saying that, but there is. There's so much potential. Look at how protests can be mobilized in a day just getting the word out, especially on social media, Twitter, Facebook. You don't even have to be technically a hacker. I mean right now we're looking at the prospect of the government going after WikiLeaks. What's going to happen to people like Jeremy? I talked to some friends who are hackers and computer people and I said, "Look, I might need some help if this happens" and immediately I had 8-10 people go, "You know what? We got you if this happens. We can put websites back up. The down time will be a day at most. We got this." I would really like to see that solidarity expanded further beyond supporting fellow hacktivists.

I did a talk in Berlin where I tied in other whistle blowers from other movements. People know who Chelsea Manning is. They know who Jeremy Hammond is, but do they know who Jeffrey Sterling is? He's a black former CIA agent that blew the whistle on the CIA. People know who Eric Garner is. Do they know who Ramsey Orta is? Ramsey Orta filmed Eric Garner's death and, to me, that's being a whistle blower. That is taking action in the face of the overwhelming repression that Ramsey Orta has faced. I mean, he's in jail on trumped up weapons charges. Do they know who people like Ramsey Orta are? Not just do they know who he is, but do they support him? Do they support the NODAPL protesters, who again in the face of overwhelming government repression brought light to the brutality of capitalism and the police state by being there, by putting their bodies on their line to protect sacred land and water? Do they support activists in countries that are facing overwhelming repression by the government just being out on the streets? It's not just hackers who can be whistle blowers and that's something that I really think the hacktivist community needs to get in their heads. You don't have to hack to be a whistle blower. If you support whistle blowers, you need to support all whisper blowers, including people like Jeffrey Sterling, people like Ramsey Orta, people like those out there protesting DAPL. We need to support them all, not just the ones that fall within our narrow, overwhelming white and male community.

J11: That's a really good point that you bring up. There are just so many people in prison who need and deserve our support. Can you speak to other challenges of prisoner solidarity and what you think we could collectively be doing better?

G: I think one of the major challenges to supporting prisoners is that after a while it's not flashy anymore. When there's the trial, we got all this great momentum. We got to support them, we got to make sure they got letters, we got to do this, this, this, and this. And when there's a sentence and when the hype dies down a little bit, it doesn't become so urgent. It becomes doing things like making sure he has books, making sure we collect money so he can have a little bit extra for commissary. It becomes these not flashy tasks and people tend to fall away because it's not such an urgent need. It's not right now. It's just these little things you have to do every month, every week, just these little tasks that take time and energy, but they're not the big or flashy things.

I think that we need to get to a place where we carry that momentum through the entire sentence, not just when there's a big urgent need. When there's a big urgent need people show up, even after the sentence is over. When Jeremy gets thrown in SHU, it's outrage. It's, "Should we write letters, should we make calls, should we do this or this or this?" That's great. I really love seeing people support him in any way that they

can, but then what about right now? When he's doing okay? And when I say okay I mean as okay as you can possibly can be in such a horribly, brutally dehumanizing and repressive environment. When I ask him how he is and I try to feel out how he's doing, he always tells me, "I'm fine" so when I say okay that's sort of what I mean. What about now? When things are relatively quiet? When there's not that big urgent need? Are people still writing? Are people still sending him books? It doesn't even have to be a whole letter. He loves getting memes because he's like, "I miss the internet." So, if you see a meme and you're like "Oh man, that's funny" do you print it out? Do you send it to him? Or do you just click over to the next meme? Like I said, now there's not a huge need to raise for a lawyer, but we still need money for his commissary so he can be as comfortable as possible. Do you send him $5 a month so he can buy stamps, so he can make phone calls? Are you writing to other prisoners that maybe aren't as famous as him and making sure they have what they need? Building that initial momentum, but time and time again I've seen that momentum just die out. That's frustrating as someone who's in it for the long term, but especially for the prisoners. That is really frustrating for them because they're like, "Well I'm really good at being recognized when there's an urgent need, but what about right now when I just wish I had a letter to read?"

J11: Yeah. That's something that we're hearing from a number of people that we've been talking to.

G: That makes me really frustrated. It just hurts my heart because I know how important support is for people on the inside. That you're hearing it from multiple people just really hurts my hurt.

J11: In what way can you see June 11th addressing some of these challenges? And what are your hopes for June 11th this year?

G: I really love you guys because you are that momentous push, that little reminder that these prisoners are still here and they still need your support, even though we're not in that time of crisis. I love days like June 11th because again it just reminds people that prisoners are still there and that even though they may not be hearing much from them or that they may be quiet or that they may have already taken a plea or are serving a sentence, that they're still there and they still need support. I love you guys. I love other groups that do days like this, like the day for trans prisoners. I really love them just because again it reminds people that they're still there. My hope this year is the same as every year: that people don't forget, that they remember, that they use that remembering to not just remember but to also go out and educate others, get other people who may not be involved or might not know about these people to get involved.

J11: What are your broader hopes and visions both for June 11th, but also prisoner solidarity in general for the years to come?

G: My hope is that prisoner support, instead of being a side project of the anarchist movement, becomes central to the anarchist movement. Because from what I'm seeing a lot of prison support is a side project. It's like a niche market. "Oh, these people do prison support." No – everyone should do prison support. Everyone should be writing to prisoners. There are groups out there – Black & Pink, all Anarchist Black Crosses – that keep lists, not just of anarchist prisoners, black liberation prisoners, eco prisoners. There are so many people from such a wide swath of life experiences that even if you're not an anarchist, you can write to people. You can write to people that have zero political views, if you want. Just please write to them, send them pictures, memes, if you can financially support them, please do. It's not just anarchist prisoners that need support. It's all prisoners. No matter what they've done. No matter what they're in for. They need support.

J11: Are there any struggles or moments in the recent past that have been inspiring to you?

G: I am just so floored to see that the antifascist movement is getting more mainstream, getting more press, and getting way more visible. I've been antifascist and involved in antifascist work for over a decade at this point, so it really just thrills me that that's getting more mainstream, that people are getting out there and getting in the streets. I've been absolutely inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement, by the Indigenous Water Protectors that again, in the face of brutal police repression mixed with the brutality of capitalism

have been out there putting their lives and bodies on the line to bring these injustices to light. It's super inspiring. I feel like especially under Obama people got – well, some people, not all people – got a little complacent because we had this great liberal president. Meanwhile, deportation skyrocketed, use of drones skyrocketed. "It's okay because he's liberal. It's a liberal dropping the bombs on wedding parties, not some evil Republican doing it." Again, it worries me that we're really good at starting movements, but we need to keep that momentum going and carry that through. I want to see that done and the fact that it is being done warms my heart.

J11: Are there any other projects you're involved with or have interest in that you'd like to talk about?

G: Prisoner support is my main thing. Besides Jeremy, the case of Lauri Love is still going. People need to keep eyes on that. Even though Lauri's not in jail and he's currently free, the case and the ongoing worry about it has taken a huge toll on him physically and mentally. I would really like to see people support him because he's such a great guy. He doesn't deserve to be kidnapped to the United States to face our horrible, draconian legal system. Every legal system is horrible and draconian, but ours seems to be especially bad. I'd really like to see people support and not forget about him because he's not in jail currently, but the case is still taking a huge toll.

J11: I'm actually not familiar with Lauri's case. Could you talk about that a little bit?

G: Absolutely. I love talking about people. This is all alleged. Nothing has been proven in court. He was allegedly part of Op Last Resort, which was in response to the death of Aaron Swartz. Aaron Swartz, if people don't know, was a hacktivist who was being tried for downloading academic papers and releasing them for free on the internet. Aaron was facing millions of dollars in fines, decades in prison, and instead of risking that, he instead chose to take his own life. Op Last Resort was in reaction to him taking his own life in the face of this brutal persecution. They did things like deface the US Sentencing Commissions homepage. Lauri is alleged to have hacked everything from the EPA to the Missile Defense System of the United States to the DoD. There's a whole list of things he's alleged to have hacked. Right now, what we're fighting for is for him to be tried in the UK. They want to bring him here. He's facing possibly over 90 years in prison, millions of dollars in fines. He has indictments in three separate jurisdictions: one is the southern district of New York, which is the district that Jeremy was tried in, one is the district of New Jersey (New Jersey's all one district), and one is the eastern district of Virginia, which some other hacktivists have also been tried in. None of these districts are very friendly to hacktivists, so right now what we're fighting for since he is a UK citizen and since the alleged crimes occurred while in he was on UK soil, we're fighting for him to be tried in the UK. I've already highlighted the brutal repression of the American Justice System, but in addition to that there's also huge sentencing disparities. For example, Jeremy's co-defendants. The longest any one of them served is 20-30 months. I'm not sure the exact number, but Jeremy spent almost as much of that time just in pre-trial detention before he was sentenced. We're talking huge sentencing disparities.

Lauri would have no family support, he would have no support system in the United States. Lauri has Aspergers. He suffers from depression. Bringing him here to try him would be a death sentence. Lauri has said very clearly numerous times that he will kill himself before he will allow himself to be taken here. He is autistic. He suffers from depression. He has physical medical problems as well. That's all being exacerbated by the stress from the whole situation. From what I've seen from the American Justice System, I don't blame him for saying that he'd rather kill himself than come here. One of the things that we're trying to highlight in the case is the sentencing disparity from the UK and the US. In the US, Lauri's facing decades and decades and decades in prison, millions of dollars in fines. In the UK, he'd be facing exponentially less than that. Lauri has no support system here. He has all of his family, his friends, all of this in the UK. Bringing him here, especially with the horrible way that mental health is dealt with in American prisons – in that, it's not dealt with at all, it's ignored, and people are left to suffer – that would be a death sentence.

J11: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

G: I think I want to speak specifically for a moment to the importance of supporting anarchists in prison. We touched on this earlier, but the one thing I want to get across to people about why prison support is so important is that prison is so brutal and so dehumanizing in a way that people who haven't experienced it can't understand. It does everything in its power to strip you of your autonomy, who you are, what you believe, just of everything. It grinds you down day after day to the point where you just lose who you are. For someone, especially like anarchists whose entire life has been decided to dismantling the state and the systems of oppression, to then be completely subject to the very system that you've been working your entire like to dismantle, is extra hard and brutal and dehumanizing. The support from the outside is what keeps people going. It's what gives them hope that this is not forever, that one day they're going to be free. I cannot stress how important that is for every prisoner, not just for anarchist prisoners, but I think especially for anarchist prisoners, that the letters and the books and the memes, it keeps them going and it reminds them that they're loved and that they're not forgotten. While it may just be 15 minutes on our end of writing a letter, sending a meme, donating, it's the world to people that are in prison. I can't overstate how important it is to the prisoners. If you don't know what to say, if you don't know how to go about it, ask. There are so many people out there that are willing to help, that are willing to guide you, that are willing to show you the ropes. I had someone DM the other day and say, "Hey, I want to start a letter writing night for prisoners in my town. How do I do that?" And I'm like "Great! Awesome! Here's how you do this. It's really simple." It's so simple. It's such a simple thing that means so much to people. If you need help, if you don't know what to do, if you don't know how to do it, there are so many great organizations. The Anarchist Black Crosses – they're always there to help people. The June 11th committee, you guys are there. People who run the Head Up defense campaign for prisoners. Ask them. Go to them. They're always so willing to help. Please just do it. I can't say it any more plainly. Just please do it because it means so much and is such a lifeline to so many people.

Interview with Daniel McGowan

JUNE 11TH: Can you start by telling us about yourself and your experiences with prison and prisoner support?

DANIEL MCGOWAN: Sure, my name is Daniel McGowan, and I'm a former political prisoner. I've done seven years in prison for actions I took with the Earth Liberation Front, or the ELF, in the late '90s and early 2000s. My experience with prisoner support, for most of my activist life I've been involved in prisoner support, and then I found myself being on the receiving end of tremendous amount of support and solidarity from friends and comrades on the outside.

J11: Can you speak to the importance of prisoner support as part of the anarchist project and other liberatory struggles? And specifically to the necessity of supporting long-term prisoners?

D: Well I think prisoner support is really something that's needed for anyone that goes to prison. Unfortunately the networks that exist are largely built around our comrades or people that we know in prison. I think long-term is a thing that means different things to different people. I tend to think that a person who has a two year sentence feels like it's long-term, so it's sort of relative. But I would say that obviously the longer the sentence, the more solidarity and support is needed. I think any movement that takes itself seriously, anarchist or otherwise, needs to provide for the consequences of state repression or interactions between our movements and the right-wing, in terms of incidents between antifa and right-wing fascists. I think that without having that safety net, not only are people less inclined to take actions they feel like are part of a movement, they realize that it almost feels like a martyr situation where people are willing to confront state power or fascists and then there's literally no one to help them or work with them when they're in prison.

I think as a person is in prison longer, the needs often change. Prison degrades and haunts individuals, so I think the longer you're in, the more it's necessary. And understanding that statistically most people that go to prison come out, but we also obviously have situations where we have people with intense cases, political cases, where they potentially have life sentences, or they technically have access to parole but it's

meaningless because they get rejected all the time. I think the needs of long-term prisoners are slightly different than short-term. A short-term prisoner might have their eye on their out date, and so they don't want to basically catch a new case, or catch new time. I think we see situations like Jared Chase where his release date has been pushed back, so he is already supposed to be out of prison, but due to interactions with the cops inside, his sentence has been extended to I believe 2019, which is obviously problematic in a lot of ways.

J11: What forms of solidarity were most important to you while you were in prison, and what could have been done better or different?

D: I think having access to people I could call and e-mail (when they finally instituted that) was really important. The fact that I knew I had a crew of people that I could rely on, that when I was bundled up and put in transit I knew that people were looking where I was, that they would reflect on the fact that they didn't hear from me, and would be looking out for me. I liked feeling that there were these people, my family, my friends, even people I didn't know around the country and the world, that were willing to make a phone call, to e-mail the BOP or bother them to have lawyers that were willing to come and visit me while I was in transit. I remember there's this one time I was at Oklahoma City and my partner at the time, I found out later, paid a lawyer to come in and visit me just to get me out of the segregation unit, and for me to let the lawyer know what was going on, and that lawyer was able to relay it to my long-term lawyers and let them know. So knowing that people gave a crap about me, that I had an outlet, that I had friends that I could ask for things that made my time a little easier, that people were willing to basically pressure those in power on my behalf, that was really affirming and supportive.

As far as how things could've been done different, I think we learned the hard way. Because my communications were monitored, it was really hard for me to make specific requests and so of course people want to do right by you so they don't want to do something that puts you in harm's way. I remember for instance when I first got to the CMU, I remember thinking how awesome it'd be for people to have a support demo outside, and how that would've probably flustered the Bureau of Prisons, like "this dude's from New York and he's somehow able to mobilize people to be in the parking lot banging on pots and pans and making noise." It's not something the prison gets a lot of, in the Midwest and often in rural areas. But I always thought that would be something I would love, but it was pretty much impossible for me to ask, since my phone calls, even my legal visits were all monitored on some level. They're obviously not supposed to monitor legal visits but I think it's imperative that people with cases that are scary to the prisons understand that more than likely their phone calls and legal visits are potentially going to be recorded. So we just realized along the way that there's basically just going to be a whole bunch of things they can't communicate to me, and I can't communicate to them.

J11: Can you speak more about your time in the CMUs and other tactics that the state used to try to silence and isolate you?

D: I was in the Communication Management Unit at both prisons, both CMUs. I was at the Marion one for twenty-six months, I got moved into general population at Marion and then the government concocted some fake reason to throw me back in the CMU, and I spent the remaining twenty-one months of my sentence at Terre Haute, Indiana. I think a lot of what it had to do with is that I was put there because I was in a sort of vulnerable position. I had a terrorism case, I had a violence case, since they consider arson violence, and it came with what they call a public safety factor for what they consider a greatest severity offense. So it's the kind of case that has a lot of highlighting and asterisks on my file. I'm not a Muslim and I have a terrorism case, so when they opened up the second CMU at Marion, they put a few people in there that could basically make some point to just say, "oh no, it's not a Muslim unit."

They put myself and Andrew Stepanian from the Stop Huntington Animal Cruelty case, they had sovereign citizens which are from all different races and nationalities, they put an old neo-nazi from "The Order," a group that engaged in targeting people and armored car robberies. So they put a few of us in there as their "proof" that these CMUs were not just Muslim terrorist units. I was doing academic work with a university

in the Midwest, Antioch University, I was doing a Sociology Degree so I was writing a lot about my case, and I think they found those documents and saw the amount of mail I was getting, and essentially when the place I was at was asked for nominations, it was pretty easy for them to send me there because I was vulnerable because of my case. I was at a low-security prison, but it was very easy for them to put me there.

I think part of it was I wasn't breaking any of their so-called rules, but I was writing a lot of political stuff, I was writing about the drug war, about fellow people in prison that I had met, as well as how basically fraudulent and bogus prison is and what prison does to people. I had met a ton of people when I was at FCI Sandstone that were there basically for crossing the border and who had five to seven year sentences. I met a bunch of people who were being put away for crazy thirty and forty year sentences for meth. It just opened up my eyes to a whole other element of the prison world. So I wrote a lot and I put it online through my friends and family. They were unable to give me incident reports, they were unable to stick me with that. So they just put me in a place where I think they thought I would just roll over and do quiet time.

It didn't really work that way, I felt like I was doing quiet time and I got sent to the CMU, and that really lit a fire in me again, and I decided I was gonna go to war with them over the next five years, which is pretty much what I did. The other thing they did in terms of isolating me and silencing me was – there are particular aspects about the CMU that were pretty onerous in terms of communication, so they did things like limit the communication in CMUs to (when I first got there) one phone call a week, which you had to sign in a week in advance and you could only call one person. They made the visitation so bad it was like four hours a month. It was really kinda hard for me to ask people to come 2,000 miles to essentially come for this horrible, non-contact visit.

They monitored all the communications, I think they had people in the units that were rats, who were willing to help the government out, and they did an immense amount of rejections of my mail. So my mail going out was monitored obviously and recorded and all that, but really my mail coming in, if it was political. They were very broad in their use of rejections. I had something like 100 magazines and newspapers rejected over the time I was in prison. I pretty much gave grievances for all of them, which was my way of being a bit of an asshole and a stubborn bastard. I basically grieved every single time they rejected anything from the prison level up to DC, which is crazy. It takes like nine months, and at that point you're allowed to sue. Obviously I didn't sue on any of my magazine rejections, but I basically pissed them off. I wasn't able to get Earth First! Journal or Rolling Thunder or a lot of the magazines that to this day really don't publish anymore.

J11: A topic that has come up for us a number of times is continuing support for people as they're released from prison. How was your transition, and what was helpful for you? What would you want other people to know about post-release support?

D: It's interesting, I think the release thing is getting a lot more attention these days from our community because I think we're getting better. We have a lot more people going to prison, a lot more people come out back into the movement, and we're sort of learning the hard way how rough re-entry is. Most of the programs that exist for re-entry don't work so well for politicized individuals for a lot of different reasons. For instance, maybe people come out and they already have good housing, maybe they have a college degree or something like that, maybe they even have job prospects, but usually people are coming out of prison with some struggles? And sometimes it's everything: it's housing, it's legal difficulties, it's 'stay-away' orders from felons or co-defendants.

My situation was such that I was married, I had a place I could go to live, and I got six months in the half-way house. I also had a crew of people that were really amazing in their dedication and fundraising. So when I got out I had a couple thousand dollars, actually more than a couple thousand, to buy some clothes, to buy a computer, to buy shoes. It had been six years, so I needed to replace some things. I was really good at that level. I had my material needs met, I was at the half-way house and came home on the weekends, we'd order takeout food because I wasn't really allowed to leave. I also did very well, like I was remanded

back into custody for writing an article basically about the CMU, and I had lawyers so they were able to get me out of prison the next day, which is really amazing.

But I struggled psychologically, they say you leave prison but prison doesn't leave you. When I first came home I just had a lot going on and I had a hard time. I was at the half-way house, and it was kinda hard for me, they wouldn't let me see a shrink or a social worker. I had some contacts from the movement that were willing to get me some access to mental health care. The half-way house, which is essentially a contractor of the government, would not accommodate that. Essentially what happened was I had a lot of two-steps forward, one-step back. And then I had a bit of crisis based on some stuff that went down in my personal life, and at that point it was kinda essential that I see someone. A friend of a friend who was a social worker offered. Because I wasn't actually even able to go to her office, she came down and met me every week in a coffee shop near my job on my lunch hour. That's the kind of thing not everyone has access to, and I felt really supported and spoiled by the whole thing.

And then when I was able to get out of the half-way house I saw this person in a professional capacity for three or four years. My problem was more feeling lots of anxiety, having a real hard time with crowds, and that's the sort of stuff that everyone's struggle when they leave prison is going to be different. I used to tell myself, "oh you only did six years," and I was living with men that did thirty, forty years, or life. I thought I was going to get out and everything was going to be peachy keen and fine, but when I got out it was really tough, I got out and I felt like I was still in. I was really sensitive to any kind of offense, everything hurt my feelings and I wanted to fight all the time. I sort of stayed out of trouble, but inside my head it was just rolling emotions.

So I think when people come out we need to reach them where they're at. Some people are going to get out and they're going to have amazingly hard times with every aspect. They've been in a long time, they might be like, "I've never seen a smartphone, I've never seen a computer." I taught computers in CMU and I dealt with men that had pretty much never even seen a computer or used the internet, so it can be really challenging. My situation, I was in for six years, and I had never seen an iPhone, but I certainly understood what a phone was and how to use it. So my ability to get back into things was good on that level. But everyone is going to have different situations. In New York in the last year there was a political prisoner that was in for thirty-seven years. His name is Maliki Shakur, and he came home and he took like a fish to water with phones, I mean he's good on the smartphone, he texts, he sends photos, he knows how to use it. His housing situation was aided. But I can't imagine he has a lot of great job prospects, hasn't been out in the job market for thirty-seven years.

Then you have people like Zolo Azania who gets out and has a crew in the Midwest that have been helping him. Everyone's going to have a different time, a different struggle. I don't know if we need to have an organization, but I try to help people when they get out, and I try to help their support crews in getting through some of these issues around housing, legal support, health care especially for older folks, mental health care, all that kind of stuff. I think it's something that we're just starting to deal with, I know there was a wave of people that had shorter sentences like the Tinley Park Five, Jason Hammond, and the other people in the NATO Three case, they all got out.

My co-defendants and myself, a ton of us got out after serving anywhere between two and seven years. And we're all out there in the world as felons trying to get some work, trying to deal with the issues that work presents when you're a felon. So I think we just have to reach people where they're at, to start sharing more information. People that are out, who are on probation and are felons, need to talk to each other more, and kinda prepare for when we know people are getting out to help them: materially, but also just as a sounding board. I talk to people when they get out if they're able to talk to me, and just try to hear them out and see them through the tough times.

J11: How has serving years in prison changed your perspective and your practices around prisoner solidarity?

D: Well, like I said, I did a lot of prisoner support before I went to prison. Maybe something like eight years. I started doing prisoner support in the late Nineties. I did prisoner support for Rod Coronado and a number of other animal rights and eco-people. I did support for Jeff Luers. One thing, probably the main thing, is that I realized that charity-based prisoner support that is like a group doing stuff on behalf of people on the inside can be really problematic. I think regardless of whatever people on the outside think, people that are doing time know what prison is like, and are better able to decide how they need to do their time.

I know a lot of times you have political prisoners or people, political cases or politicized individuals that are very vocal, they decide to buck, so to speak. They do hard-time, they are bucking within the administration, and that's definitely one way to do time. It's sort of the way I did my time. I felt like what I was doing was really minor, but the way the government responded to it was so insane. But everyone needs to do their time the way they need to, and I think that when groups on the outside put expectations onto people, I think that's problematic. I have some good co-defendants, they reported to prison, they kept their heads down and they did their time. I think at the same time that we understand that people need to do their time they way they need to, we also need to recognize that part of the time they use things like the CMU or the special management unit or supermaxes is to scare people.

So I think we do need people that are willing to struggle in prison, and not just put their head down. I'm cool with my co-defendants doing their time, a lot of them kept their head down and had their eye on the clock, and were trying to perhaps lessen the impact on their families. But I also thought that in my situation I felt like I was faced with an intolerable situation, and I thought, "who better to fight back than myself?" I mean – I'm in prison, I'm someone that doesn't want to look askance when there's horrible stuff going on, so I thought I was in the right position. So I think the model of working with prisoners, not for them, getting rid of that charity mindset.

I think a lot of that is happening with work that people do on the prison labor front, understanding that it's a mutualistic relationship. A lot of old-time prisoners, long-term political prisoners or whatnot, have a lot to offer. I have some really interesting relationships with people in prison from both when I was in prison and when I got out. I definitely do support for prisoners, but they're certainly not limited to the anarchist movement. I feel like my rapport with older leftists is very good and it's not sectarian, and there's no belief that I support everything they think: I'm definitely not interested in the tenets of Marxism or state-building. But I engage people on things that we have in common.

So getting away from the charity mindset, working with prisoners and helping them get their voice out there when they can't do it themselves. But always understanding it in a context of mutual aid and solidarity and not in the context of thinking of them as just a poor person that needs help. I'm sure there are a lot of innocent people in prison – whatever innocence means – but we got to also recognize that our comrades have agency and they made choices, and we're supporting them through the consequences of that stuff and the repression. But we don't have to think of people as victims.

J11: So you mentioned that you were doing prisoner solidarity both before and after you went in. Do you want to tell us more about the prisoners that you're actively supporting?

D: I got politicized through this organization that was run out of the basement of a bar in New York City called Wetlands, and it used to have these monthly or weekly meetings. So a large part of the first meeting I went to was an animal rights thing. There was someone there speaking on behalf of Rod Coronado. I got very involved in writing him. I did support for people in the Santa Cruz Two case, and a bunch of different environmental saboteurs or animal rights prisoners. That was definitely my politics at the time, limited to that, and so I wasn't really interested in interactions with people.

I lived in Eugene, Oregon and I was friends with Jeff Leurs ("Free"), and was part of his support committee. When he got sentenced to twenty-two years and eight months, I had actually written a bunch of long-term political prisoners, almost out of desperation, and asked them for help. I realize now, and laugh

at myself for having the nerve to write all these prisoners and ask them for help when they're doing all this time, but I got a lot of really great answers from people like Marilyn Buck, and I think Leonard Peltier. There were a bunch of people that were willing to give me some advice on that. So being exposed to that out of a need, I sort of started to pay more attention to the political prisoner world.

I'd been involved for a while, doing stuff kinda related to Anarchist Black Cross political prisoner support. Since I've gotten out, I've mostly been focused on two different things: support for long-term New York State political prisoners, and then also mostly younger and newer cases from the anarchist movement. So I help out a little bit on the Cleveland 4 and NATO 3 case, I've made myself available to talk through legal issues that people are dealing with, helping people get lawyers for different situations. I also have been heavily involved in trying to get some of the long-term Black Panthers in New York out. It's like Herman Bell, Jalil Muntaqim, Robert Seth Hayes, and also (not a Black Panther but a long-term New York person) David Gilbert. So I write most of those individuals, and I work with them on basically trying to raise their profile and fight back attempts from the Policemen's Benevolence Association (basically the pig union) and the Fraternal Order of the Police, who are very actively campaigning against the Black Panthers that are going up.

So I try to do a little mix of both. My ideas about prisoner support are rooted in that we have to definitely support our comrades that we struggle with, that we fight with. I think it's disingenuous to be part of a movement that, if your movement is effective, you are definitely coming into contact with law enforcement, and so to not see through that situation where you have comrades that are getting popped for various things, I think it's kinda fraudulent. It's just cheerleading if we're not willing to support our comrades, so that's my mindset for why I do political prisoner support, or prisoner support for Cleveland 4, or NATO 3, or Eric King, people like that. And like I said, the rest of my time I mostly spend working on the long-term New York political prisoners, but I tend to be one of these people that finds myself drawn to different campaigns if friends are asking for help.

J11: So you've been doing this for a long time. What are your hopes and visions for prisoner solidarity in the years to come, and how can June 11th as a project fit in to that?

D: That's a good question. I think June 11th is a great thing. I'm not sure if people know, but I was involved in the beginnings of June 11th in 2004. June 11th is the day Jeff Luers was sentenced to twenty-two years, eight months in 2001. And he got that for burning three pickup trucks at Joe Romania Chevrolet. There was actually a very spirited rally and march, and cops got a little crazy in 2003, people in Eugene sorta pulled off this act. But in 2004 we decided we wanted to do a worldwide thing. So we did this International Day of Solidarity and Action for Jeff Luers and the FBI sort of aided our efforts by releasing what they called "an eco-terrorist bulletin," and so there were all different events around the world, there were 57 of them, and all the domestic ones were messed with by the FBI. There was a tremendous amount of law enforcement attention paid to it, to even a film screening in Worcester, Massachusetts.

I was actually in New York at the time, and we went around ticketing SUVs with these fake tickets, and in Eugene they had a bunch of very large events. And so we did it in 2004, we did it in 2005, and then I got indicted and the people that were part of Jeff's crew extended it to a day of action for eco-prisoners. I think it's a good thing, and I think that things change, and days of action morph. I understand going from the Eco-Prisoners, to Marius and Eric, and now Marius and Long-term Anarchist Prisoners. I think these sort of days are good in terms of rallying support, and reminding everyone that we have people inside. I hope that there's material gain that can be made for people in terms of raising funds and raising awareness.

From my own personal perspective, I think it's important for anarchists to not just do prisoner support for anarchists. I think that there's a broader world out there, and that when we limit ourselves just to people that share our ideology or our identity, we're really limiting ourselves in some ways from mutualistic work, as well as lessons we can learn from elders that are inside. I think also when we consider when we're doing work that's limited to anarchist prisoners, but then we're asking other people to care about anarchist

prisoners, it seems a little empty if we're not engaging in some sort of mutualistic prisoner solidarity with other movements.

I know it's probably not something that many people want to hear, but I do think that when we focus on just anarchist prisoners invariably, we end up focusing on a lot of white people, which when we're considering the racial identities or racial makeup of the prison system in the United States, it is largely a black and brown and red thing. And I just think we need to be addressing in our work the white supremacist culture that we are in. That said, I think June 11th is something to support, and I think it's a good opportunity to rally support for anarchist prisoners, and I think it should continue. In terms of my hopes for prisoner solidarity movements or whatnot, I think we have a situation in the next couple of years where we have an opportunity to get a lot of the old-timers out on parole. I think we have a limited time to do so.

Campaigns that are not specifically focused on political prisoners but sort of are focused on the prison system as a whole are important, I think not only on their own accord, but also that those kind of campaigns could end up helping the political prisoners, whether they're the old-timers or the new folks. I'm thinking about groups like RAPP (Release Aging People in Prison). That's a group that exists in New York and a few other places, and they're addressing the fact that people have been put in prison for insane sentences, these 25 to life sentences. And they're beating back this punishment idea that America has, where if someone does something wrong according to the system, they have to be punished, and it's just this lifelong thing. What groups like RAPP and others have done has done more to change the narratives around prison than sometimes the somewhat narrow focus of the political prisoner groups.

So I hope in the next five years we get a significant amount of the old-timers out, and I think we have a lot to do in terms of the current anarchist prisoners. From my understanding a lot of them do not have access to adequate funds, and in situations like Jared Chase where it's been very difficult to maneuver through the complexity of having someone that's suffering from a terminal illness that affects his cognition and his judgment, at the same that he's being kept in the SHU in segregation, that is rapidly contributing to that situation. So I think the anarchist movement can really gain a lot and get a lot better at supporting its prisoners. That said, I think June 11th can be part of that, and I think it should.

J11: Are there any other projects you're involved with or things you have interest in that you'd like to share with us?

D: Yeah sure. I'll just tell you about one project I work on: it's this calendar called Certain Days: Freedom for Political Prisoners. We are currently collecting submissions until June 7th, from people that are incarcerated. It is a calendar that is in its seventeenth year. It exists as an educational thing about prison and prisoners, but also exists as a fundraiser. So last year we raised a bunch of money, we gave it away to different groups, like that group I mentioned, RAPP, a group called Addameer which works with Palestinian prisoners, and a group called the Unist'ot'en Camp, which is an indigenous homestead in Canada made up of Unist'ot'en people that are basically resisting development in their territory.

We're right between calendars right now. We're working on the 2018 calendar, but if you check out certaindays.org online, you can find it on Facebook and Twitter too. You can see our call for submissions, as well as bookmark it for later because our calendars come out in August. We also usually get organizations to sponsor prisoner calendars. The prisoner calendars are a lot cheaper, so groups will give us like $100 and you can send us prisoners' names and we will send them virtually free of charge. That's pretty much what's got my attention right now. Like I said, I'm working on supporting a number of different anarchist prisoners. Trying to help them increase their capacity to raise money, get books, get birthday cards, stuff that makes their days a little more passable, and support them in whatever they're working on.

Interview with Cindy Crabb about Marius Mason

JUNE 11TH: Would you start be telling me about yourself and your experience with prisoner support?

CINDY CRABB: My name is Cindy Crabb. I wrote the zine Doris and I'm on Marius Mason's support team. I started doing really basic prison support in the early '90s, when I basically sent my zine through to prisoners and had a little bit of correspondence with prisoners that way. And then later on I did books to prisoners in Asheville, NC. And I do it in Ohio now a little bit. First I started writing Marius when a mutual friend of ours committed suicide and I knew Marius would have one less pen pal. So I started writing him, and after a couple of years he asked me if I wanted to join his support team. So that evolved into more active prisoner support, trying to find out what wasn't happening and what needed to happen, how to get things more organized than they were and facilitate him getting more support.

J11: Can you speak to the importance of prisoner support in anarchist practice and other liberatory struggles? Explicitly the necessity of supporting prisoners with long sentences?

C: Yeah. I think there's a few reasons why prisoner support is real essential, especially long-term prisoner support for the anarchist project. As anarchists we often advocate for direct action, and if people get arrested for direct action it's essential that we be there to support them. Otherwise direct action isn't really a viable strategy, it's more just a romanticized form of action. So in order for direct action to be sustainable, reasonable and an actual strategy we need to be able to provide for prisoners who get arrested, for their basic needs, and bigger support.

To help them have the best lives they can while they are in prison and to support their families that are outside of prison. Another reason I think that prisoner support is really essential for anarchists is as anarchists we need to prefigure a world that we want to live in, and part of that prefiguration is being able to provide for people in our community that aren't able to provide for themselves. So if we live in a geographical community that we are connected to, we can do that through various kinds of support work of people in our communities. A lot of anarchists don't have geographical communities that they live in or aren't connected to the community that they live in, and prisoner support can be a good practice in learning to set aside your own sort of agenda, and learn to provide actual support and care to people that are not able to provide for themselves.

J11: Could you tell us a little bit more about Marius?

C: Marius Mason was an activist that was involved in various kinds of environmental activism and community activism since the '80s. He was a musician and father and believed in collective organizing and direct action. In 2009 he was sentenced to 22 years in prison for an arson that he was charged with at a Michigan State University building. The building in Michigan that was burned down was doing genetic engineering, and this was in 1999 when G.E. wasn't really in the public conscience of Americans. The Animal Liberation, Earth Liberation, and environmental projects were more focused on logging and factory farming. In other countries G.E. was prevalent, more something that was being protested against. So say in India people were burning their GMO crops and in protest of Monsanto patenting various seeds.

The arson of the Michigan building that Marius was convicted of, it really brought a lot of media attention to genetic engineering. It really was successful in shifting the dialogue in America from G.E. being just something not really seen to Monsanto being researched, and I think even Frontline did a big expose on Monsanto after the arson. Marius was arrested in 2009 after his husband had turned state informant and gave the FBI a bunch of information about their actions. Unfortunately for Marius his case wasn't really picked up by activist lawyers or the ACLU, who had picked up a few other cases like this that were coming down at the time. The FBI had started a campaign which later become known as the Green Scare, which targeted environment activists that were doing direct action, and giving them extreme sentences to show to the activists that these type of actions would be prosecuted to the furthest extent. The Green Scare is seen similar to the Red Scare in which the FBI often sent agents in to stir things up and then arrest people who went along with the agents.

So Marius didn't have an ACLU or activist lawyer step forward to represent his case probably because they thought it was a losing case, because his husband had turned state's evidence. So he had just a defender that

he had hired actually. He took a plea deal, he pled guilty under the assumption that he would get a reduced sentence, but instead he got an excessive sentence. Which was I think was 20 years, with a 2 years terrorism enhancement. He was then placed in a prison in Minnesota, and about a month later was moved to the high security administrative unit in Texas – Carswell.

The administrative unit he was in for over 7 years, and it severely limited his ability to communicate with the outside world. The small unit he was housed in was mostly people with extreme behavioral problems or mental health problems. Since he's been in prison he's refused to cut off ties with his friends and community on the outside. And he's also started a couple of campaigns, one of which was the January 22nd International Day of Action and Solidarity with Trans Prisoners. He's also been writing poetry and teaching guitar inside the prison. And he took up painting: he's been doing painting of animals, mostly of ones at the threat of extinction. And he's also been doing a trans heroes series of paintings.

J11: Could you briefly talk about him transitioning publicly: when that happened and how that worked?

C: While he was in prison in 2013 Marius came out to his friends and family as transgender. He now identifies as a man and spent over two years fighting for the right to receive medically indicated care, and he finally got approved for hormone treatment. So he was the first federal prisoner to receive hormone treatment which will hopefully pave the way for prisoners to be able to receive hormones. He is current fighting for the right for surgical care for gender transition.

J11: So you mentioned that Marius was recently released to general population after years in the administrative unit. How did that come about and what does it mean for him?

C: We are still trying to figure out how that came about and what it means. We are still trying to figure exactly what unit he's in. He was moved out of the admin unit. The administrative unit – and it's stated on the website – is there for behavioral problems. And that there are people in there that receive a list of goals that if they meet they get moved out. And Marius of course has never gotten anything like that. His lawyer has been writing them a lot trying to get them to abide by their own standards and hasn't gotten any response. And then, I think because Marius gets mail and he's in the public eye a little bit – he's not forgotten – that there is a better chance for him to get moved out than some of the other prisoners who are in there who don't have communities of support. But it seems kind of random that he was moved out and we're not totally sure why. We're not totally sure quite honestly. He's not quite in general population, I think he's in a little bit of a smaller wing. Which might be actually better then general, or at least a better transition spot than general.

It's hard to tell what's going on, so I don't want to get it all confused. I don't want people to get confused by there being multiple reports of what's going on. But whatever it is, it's way better than him being in the admin unit. He's able to go outside. He wrote us that he finally was able to see the sky and the clouds after years and years of not being able to see them. That he can touch the trees in the yard and feel the wind. Those things he will never be able to take for granted again. That it just means so much that he can go outside. And in this new unit he has more contact with other prisoners, and more groups and activities. So he should be good. I mean, it would be better if he was free, but it's good that he's not in that unit anymore.

J11: You also mentioned that Marius has been advocating for himself as a trans prisoner and other trans prisoners. One of the ways he's done that is initiating January 22nd as the Day of Solidarity and Action with Trans Prisoners. Can you talk about that initiative a little bit?

C: Yeah, he started that. He was communicating with someone I believe in Australia about starting this day of action and solidarity with trans prisoners. He wanted to help expand the support he was getting to bring support to the larger population of trans prisoners, and connect the anarchist struggle with the trans prisoners struggle.

J11: When we discuss prisoner support, we think primarily of things like letter writing and fundraising and such. And often the reality is that people are taken from their children, their elderly parents, and companion animals. Marius in particular has a few cats that he left in the care of a comrade. What can we do to strengthen the support for the families and dependents of our prisoners?

C: I think there is so much that needs to be done to support prisoners across the board. Individual prisoners and prisoners in general. You know, before I joined Marius's support team I thought probably that he was getting all the support that he needed. I would see his name around and would hear people talk about him. So I was really shocked when I joined his support team, that his basic needs weren't being met. There wasn't enough fundraising and the amount of letters he was getting was getting less and less as the years went by. So I think there is always that need for the basic stuff that we think is being taken care of, it probably isn't being taken care of.

With that being said, there is a number of good organizations that are trying to help support in this larger way that you're talking about. Like what do we do, how do we help prisoners who have kids who are left behind? And aging parents. I don't anyone who works specifically with aging parents, but I know the Rosenberg Fund for Children has helped fly kids out to visit their parents in prisons, political prisoners. And there is the Jericho movement which does a lot of support for political prisoners and their families. project FANG is a new fund that just started up that helps fly people out to visit prisoners. I think in the larger picture when I'm just focused on meeting the basic needs, I'm trying to figure out why there isn't more support, it's harder to think about the bigger picture. But I think what would help is if people realize that the basic needs of prisoners, of long-term anarchist prisoners weren't being met. If they figured out how much time they could put into it, whether it be an hour a week, or two hours a month, or whatever kind of timeframe.

If people really sat down and thought, I need to figure out how to make something happen in a realistic way, and this is a realistic amount of time I can put forward into it, and look at their strengths and look at what they are able to offer. Are they artists? Are they web designers? Can they organize fundraisers? Do they have some in with veterinarians? Can they do childcare? What are their strengths, what do they have to offer? And then think about, is there something in their region, is there a group in their region that's already doing prisoner support? They can offer their services there. I am an anarchist and I think that anarchist prisoners need our support, but there are also a lot of prisoners that need our support. So you know, if there is a local organization that's working against ICE and immigration detention – or there was this cool thing on Mother's Day where people were raising money to get mothers out who just needed bail. You know, like what's going on locally, or if they don't have a local area where anything is happening, what can they contribute virtually? I know with Marius we always have a need for fundraising, and art, and just getting the word out. Everything, you know?

J11: That transitions to the next question, which is what are some of the challenges that we have in supporting prisoners? And what could we collectively be doing better?

C: I think the challenges are that it gets tiring, it gets tiring to ask people for money, and writing prisoners can be depressing. And these are two things that we need to constantly be doing. I don't have a ton of experience beyond Marius's case, and it could be different with other cases, but I've seen this sort of gendered delegation of tasks that I've seen in other anarchist movements happening in prisoner support – where more women are doing the daily tasks of care that don't have as much glory to it, and more men are taking the more glorious media-type roles, which is depressing.

I think there is something really humbling about writing prisoners, and being connected in that way, trying to find, especially, anarchist prisoners where you can't necessarily write about what you're doing politically because it probably won't get through. And where you actually have to think about what else in your life matters, and what else they might need to hear. Most prisoners live in real sensory-deprivation environments. That getting letters, or art, or contacts should involve the senses is really important, and more important than hearing about the political thing that you're thinking about, you know? And I think for

a lot of anarchists, staying in the theoretical, this is what I think politically realm, is their favored place to be rather than going to a place of, what else do I have to offer someone, you know?

So anyway, I think that more people need to be willing to do the daily tasks of care and let go of their egos a little bit, and be like, yeah I might not have anything that will impress Marius to say in a letter, so I'm just going to write about what I did on the walk I went on with my dog. Honestly, he loves the letters of this is the walk I went on with my dog, and most prisoners I've written love those letters. They start to forget what it's like to be in the world, and remembering what it's like to just exist in the world is really helpful. So, letting go of the ego, and just being willing to do the daily stuff is really important.

J11: Can you speak to the way that the strengths and failings of prisoner support have affected Marius personally?

C: There's some things that he needs that don't happen which affect him. It's surprising to me that, you know, he's vegan and those meals in federal prison are not very vegan-friendly, and as a vegan he has some serious health problems because the food was not sufficient to meet his nutritional needs. So we've sent out some calls for people to see if anyone's willing to spearhead advocacy projects for federal prisons to have better vegan options, and there's been no response. And I know we don't have very good outreach, but it's like, come on people! This is something very real, and I know there's a ton of really active vegans out there and this would be a good project, and this is really affecting Marius' health in a severe way.

So there's that, and then the less and less mail that he's been receiving in the last few years has been pretty disheartening to him, and creates more disconnection with the world. He's so understanding that people just don't write letters anymore, that that's just not the way people communicate anymore. He understands that and everything. But the letters are a super lifeline, and a way to connect him with what it's like to be in the world, and honestly to keep sane. So I think people doing that more, that's been a big one. And then, fundraising.

J11: Can you see any ways that June 11th can contribute to addressing some of these shortcomings? And what are your hopes for June 11th this year?

C: I'm grateful for June 11th, I think without June 11th, Marius' case would have lost its visibility. And June 11th is so essential for keeping his case and other long-term anarchist prisoners' cases visible. I think the vision of what it is now, a lot of different local groups doing events that speak to what's happening in their communities, and that also draw attention to long-term anarchist prisoners – I think a larger vision could include a little more of a toolbox to help new activists to figure out ways to really get more involved in the anarchist movement and supporting anarchist prisoners. And could make more connections to other prisoner movements, just to bridge some of those gaps or at least show solidarity. I think it's doing a good job.

Sometimes I think it's kinda funny, but as anarchists we're not immune to the capitalist grow-or-die mentality. And sometimes I think that with our projects we think, what can we do next? Like, how can we up the ante? Sometimes, just keeping a project alive is sufficient. Of course I want to see everything grow just as much as anybody else does, but I also think that maintaining things takes a ton of work, and that making things be a constant in for people to get politicized around is a really huge aspect.

J11: Are there any struggles or moments in the recent past that have inspired you?

C: Yeah, Black Lives Matter of course. And some really cool work that, I can't remember if they were DREAMers or young people who had some kind of legal status in the United States, but did this thing where they got arrested on purpose into ICE holding centers and did some underground reporting and organized things on the inside. Which was really brave and really amazing. There's a ton of immigrants' rights stuff that's really powerful right now, really blowing my mind. And the prison strike of course was, and continues to be, really inspiring and exciting.

J11: Are there any other projects you're involved with or have interest in that you'd like to talk about?

C: I'm involved in the January 22nd Day of Action in Solidarity for Trans Prisoners, which I think is really exciting. I don't think it's really fulfilled its potential yet, in terms of its organizational structure. But I think just getting off the ground that there's a ton of interest in it, and it's a really beautiful way to broaden the picture of what we're doing, and what we're able to do as anarchists and as queers. We definitely need more help organizing it, but it's also taken off in local autonomous groups, and sometimes that's just as good as or better than a more organized form. I think the Trans Prisoner Day of Action and Solidarity has really taken off internationally, which is cool. And I know I've seen this critique before, and I think it's a good critique, that as people in the United States we need to do more work being tuned in and supportive of anarchist and trans prisoners in other countries. So I personally am going to work on that a little bit more over the next couple of years.

June 11th: Statement from Eric King

Being locked up is being placed in a constant battle. You're fighting for your physical well being, your dignity, your desire to be treated like a fucking living thing. It isn't a game, it isn't romantic. People lose this fight, people lose themselves often. One of the most savage tools the state uses is muzzling its captives, stealing, prohibiting and limiting our voice and contact with the outside world. This is dangerous because when you can't see or hear the outside, you stop seeing yourself as a part of it, You forget that you belong out there. You can fall more into what they want, the prisoner mold, it's a real fucking trap.

This is why communication is so dangerous to this system, it can dismantle their entire ratshit agenda. What is more powerful than knowing your voice will be heard, than knowing that out in the world people exist who love you and will refuse to let you get lost within these walls? The last time I was transferred, my team found me within 24 hours, with no help from the BOP. Those bastards refused to let me make a call, refused to give me a pencil to write a letter, they were not going to help me be in contact, it goes against everything they want. There was no fear though because I knew no matter where I got sent or how badly I was being treated, my team would fucking be on it. Communicating the situation with the community, using every possible tool imaginable to keep our line of contact available, harassing the facility until they found me and found out what had happened to me. This trust was built overtime, because EVERY TIME I have faced adversity they have been there for me, guided and helped me in every way imaginable. I was placed in Transfer seg on Friday, I had my first letters from my partner by Tuesday, and my first phone call by Thursday. That communication kept my spirits alive, it ruined their plans. The system doesn't like this, an empowered, loved prisoner isn't a good prisoner.

The state goes through many means to block our communication. Charging crazy (3c's =)..) funds for calls and limiting them to 300god damn minutes A MONTH, scanning all in coming and out going letters, reviewing all emails before they're able to be sent out, shipping you far from your family, isolating you completely, or at least trying to. They've shown their hand, our strongest tool is their biggest fear; well informed, connected, empowered prisoners. Prisoners who know their strength, prisoners with ears and hearts outside these walls. I've seen first hand how different doing time with support is compared to without. I've also seen how different you can be treated when these fucks know they can't bury you. Communication can be our strongest weapon because it can remove the fear the state tries to instill, it can calm our nerves in a anxiety riddled environment, it can spread knowledge of what is happening to us to the outside world along with what is happening outside to us, it can promote hope, inspire victories, keep the fire and rebellious spirit burning within our hearts. I am stronger mentally because of the love and help I've received from those on the outside. If everyone had that same love and communication, there wouldn't be a prisoner population.

Thank you to everyone who has been there for any prisoner, to my partner<3, support team, and everyone who has been there for me in anyway. Through that support we are free.

Krow's June 11th Statement

When I think of solidarity in the context of the June 11th holiday, in conjunction with writing the obvious letter to our caged comrades, I believe in the prioritization of engaging in living resistance utilizing/creating structures therein that allow rad folk to circumnavigate being caged. The Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement's most recent communiqué offers some suggestions that may enrich hypothetical efforts (it's free online and worth your time).

More immediately, we can also activate general prisoner solidarity by once more utilizing/creating local legal/bail funds to free any and all who are incarcerated and eligible for bail on this day. Even in the move from specific (eco-prisoners) to general terms, prisoners, if we are to be 'solid' with one, we must be solid with the other, as they are oppressed by one of the same forces and entities- the state. As always, no prisons means no prisoners. This is not to dilute the focus of this very important day from eco-prisoners, just extend the scope and reach of our support.

Outreach to un-politicized prisoners is a common good that needs doing and also holds potential to radicalize more people, thus also potentially adding them to the cause and discussions of the proverbial "team". We must be prefigurative in all that we do, valuing the process of achieving and actively living (daily) revolutionary lifestyles just as much as the diverse outcomes of those processes (derived from recent inspirations of Marianne Maeckelbergh's "The Will of the Many")

Disproportionately, the poor and people of color (POC) sit in jail de to lack of access to resources or money to pay bond (and sometimes they are very low bond amounts). We must outreach to offer tools that enable more agency on the individual's part here.

Also on this day, we must acknowledge and undermine the fact that our so-called "government" continues to vilify comrades who defend the earth and all it's creatures and life forces, in order to distract from the evil-doings+ merciless killings of land, water and people/creatures that the "US Government" is endorsing and perpetuating on a daily basis. They continually take the focus off of their heinous and racist resource-colonial acts and continue to subjugate, imprison, or kill any and all who seem to threaten their relative power.

Lastly, fuck Derek Jensen, but, "Forget Shorter Showers," and don't forget other Earth Defenders and Water Protectors that need our attention and support today and all days, like:

Red Fawn Fallis@ HACTC, 110 Industrial Road Rugby, North Dakota 58368
Kathleen Bennet @ Morton County Jail, 205 1st Avenue NW, Mandan, North Dakota 58554

as the latter needs assistance getting bailed out of jail! There are so many others we can reach out to as well, including internationally.

While we are reaching out to our wild-caged creatures this day, in the realms of prisoner and legal support groups, be sure to "check" yourselves and others' privilege if comments like "take care of it" or "it's better to just deal with it now" are slipping out of people's mouths in regards to addressing looming and potentially lengthy terms of incarceration. You/they may never have before been in this situation, and you/they may not wish being as targeted or ill-resourced whist incarcerated! We should first seek to find them alternatives if at all possible. For prisoner post-release support, both prior preparational and logistical, to create adequate healing space for all involved is paramount. You're all human; no one is a romanticized epitome of a radical ideal.

Thank you deeply to all who have supported me or donated to my support fund! My heart and wild appreciation goes out to you and I cannot do it without you! Here's to having each other's backs! Please also remember to support the upcoming International Solidarity with Eric King Day on June 28th and extend support to prisoners on food strike for better conditions in Folsom prison.

In closing, "… we threaten our own interests and rights when we condone by our silence the use of the government surveillance, attack on the legitimacy of the political activists, and the use of the criminal law to suppress and punish political dissent." -Lennox S. Hines
Until All Are Free!

17 Jun - Update on No DAPL Water Protectors Facing Charges

The long, arduous battle has continued in Mandan and Bismarck courts for more than 600 water protectors facing charges for resisting the Dakota Access pipeline.

MORE:
The Freshet Collective has grown from a bail fund to a collective of legal organizers, committed to serving the needs of those who put their lives and liberty on the line to stand up for Indigenous sovereignty and protect the sacred. We support water protectors with open cases through outreach, legal education, attorney coordination, travel arrangements, hospitality, and court solidarity.

Morton County is slowly prosecuting hundreds of DAPL cases that have generally been scheduled chronologically according to arrest date. Arrestees with charges from the mass arrest on October 22, 2016 are only now seeing their cases go before the court and we expect trials from the mass arrest on October 27 to begin in mid-July. Those arrested in early 2017 will not have trials until 2018.

Water protectors face a profoundly biased and at times explicitly racist criminal legal system. A survey by the National Jury Project showed found that 77% of the juror-eligible population in Morton County and 85% of the juror-eligible population in Burleigh County had already decided the defendants were guilty. Despite this, we have seen Morton County continuously fail to prove many of their allegations. Prosecutor Brian Grosinger outwardly admitted to defense attorneys that he did not have evidence to prove the "criminal trespass" and "engaging in a riot" charges from Oct 22. But in an effort to coerce defendants into admitting guilt, he has begun reissuing new charges to water protectors caught up in that mass arrest. Local attorney Erica Shively has called that tactic "a waste of taxpayer money, a waste of time, harassment and again, financial warfare aimed at securing guilty pleas."

The historic resistance at Standing Rock faces a wave of repression as the state surveils and criminalizes dissent, and seeks to imprison water protectors at the federal level. This December, we learned in between snowstorms that a grand jury had been convened to investigate water protectors. Grand juries operate in secret, and we owe much gratitude to Steve Martinez for his bravery to publicize and fight his subpoena, which was withdrawn in late February. That same Grand Jury issued federal indictments for six water protectors present at the Treaty Camp Raid on October 27, 2016. It is likely the Grand Jury continues to meet, and they may continue targeting water protectors. Our sister Red Fawn, taken into custody the same day, remains a political prisoner with federal charges, despite strong efforts by her legal team to fight for her release. All of these federal cases include the rarely used charge "civil disorder." Historically, it is only used to suppress social movements, including the American Indian Movement after the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973. Now, as water protectors face serious prison sentences, we learn through the TigerSwan leaks just how closely all levels of law enforcement worked with corporate paramilitary groups hired by DAPL to suppress the prayerful and non-violent resistance at Standing Rock.

In the face of this repression, the fight for water and Indigenous sovereignty is still very much alive in Morton and Burleigh Counties, and in Bismarck Federal Court. Our legal team works hard to stay in touch with water protectors to keep them updated, as circumstances change at any moment without notice. Overall, we have seen the best outcomes when arrestees stay involved in their cases, and we encourage water protectors to be in touch with us. A total of 93 cases have been dismissed so far, and this past week we saw our first not-guilty verdicts at Prolific the rapper's bench trial and Chairman Dave Archambault, Alayna Eagleshield, and Dana Yellowfat's jury trial.

In over 500 years of colonization, settlers have used many tactics to suppress, undermine, divide, and eliminate Indigenous peoples. In this moment of historic uprising and unified resistance, we see the state deploying these tactics through the criminal justice system. We believe in continuing the efforts of Oceti and Sacred Stone to protect the water and we will not be intimidated. With proactive arrestees and a support team behind them, we continue to fight on a different frontline. When we show up to Morton County it sends a message to others protecting the sacred to stay in prayer and solidarity and do what is right. We expect these cases to continue well into 2018 and hope you will stay involved and continue to give what you can as we support those who have taken great risk for all of our future. We are very grateful for your support.

24 Jun - Mutual Aid: New Bonds, New Revolts

WHAT: Talk and Film
WHEN: 7:30pm, Saturday, June 24
WHERE: The Base – 1302 Myrtle Avenue Brooklyn, New York 11221
NOTE: The Base is on the ground floor, is wheelchair accessible, and has a gender neutral toilet.
COST: FREE

MORE:
Join us for an evening of mutual aid! As more and more people oppose Trump and his world, some of us are building worlds of our own.
TALK: From the border wall to ICE raids; from poisoned landscapes and shell-shocked nations to impending global climate disaster—our world is facing a myriad of crises. Our private struggles, financial or emotional, mirror global upheaval and disaster. We could spend the rest of our lives dousing these fires one by one, but they stem from the same source. No piecemeal solution will serve; we need to rethink everything according to a different logic.

This short multi-media presentation examines the concept and application of mutual aid through stories of revolt, sacrifice and cooperation. We look at historical examples of mutual aid in action, it's role and influence within social struggles in the Trump era, and discuss approaches that apply these methods in our own communities to solve problems directly—assessing the prospects of contemporary struggles for self-determination in an period of globalized capitalism and increasing state control.
FILM: Our culture's addiction to systematic violence and environmental exploitation are spiraling towards collapse; like a bullet train, Western civilization is speeding towards a wall. More and more people are losing faith in the institutions they've relied on for survival, and it seems that every day is a new kind of crisis. Can anything be done to halt these catastrophes?

PROJEKT A demonstrates that another world is possible. Whether in the anarchist district of Exarcheia in Athens, anti-nuclear power protests in Germany or the world's largest anarcho-syndicalist union in Spain, this film explores the visions of anarchist communities who not only dream of a society based on autonomy and mutual aid for all—but who are making it happen. Together, we can change everything.

26 Jun - International Day of Solidarity with Eric King

WHAT: Poetry and Music
WHEN: 7:00pm, Monday, June 26
WHERE: Topos Bookstore, 788 Woodward Avenue, Queens, New York 11385
COST: FREE

MORE:
June 28th of this year will mark one year since Eric King was sentenced to 10 years in prison, and one year since he stood up in court in Kansas City, Missouri. In response to the call for an international day of solidarity with Eric, come join local supporters, hear some of Eric's poems, get caught up on his case, and have some fun on a Monday night.