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Updates for July 23rd

8 Jul - Fuck the Parole Board, Fuck Hate Crime Policy, & As Always Fuck the Police

Below is a series of articles mostly relating to imprisoned anarchist Cedar Hopperton. The good news is that since the release of the first article, Cedar has been provisionally freed!

MORE:

After waiting close to five days, we finally got news on the outcome of Cedar's parole hearing. At about 4:56pm today, after days of deliberation, we got the news that the revocation their parole stands. After submitting over a dozen affidavits to the parole board; after hundreds of community members spoke out and took action against the criminalization of pride defenders; after a day of solidarity that resulted in over fifty actions taking place across several continents in support of queers fighting back, the parole board nonetheless decided to keep Cedar in prison for the rest of the summer.

The parole board's findings, though heartbreaking, are not surprising to those of us who are experienced in dealing with the legal system. It may not be surprising, but it is something to pay attention to and learn from. Given the outcome, it is crucial to understand the general circumstances, as well as the particular forces that created this situation. Knowing the rationale behind Cedar's arrest and their subsequent incarceration tells us much about our current moment and provides many warnings to consider as we continue on in Hamilton.

One of the key questions that the parole board considered was whether or not a speech given by Cedar could be considered incitement and thus a breach of their parole. Contrary to the many statements made by the Hamilton Police that Cedar was arrested due to their alleged presence at Pride, the police's own internal documents indicate that they were arrested in large part for a different incident. Police lie. They regularly abuse their power, and cannot be trusted in any way, shape, or form to address the wave of hate that has been sweeping through the city. On the Monday following Pride, an open meeting was called at City Hall to bring together Hamilton's queer, trans, and non-binary community. The meeting was supposed to be a safe space – a place for queers to have an opportunity to voice their thoughts, feelings, and concerns following the weekend's attack. Unfortunately, this meeting ended up being extremely unsafe. During the event, Cedar gave a fiery speech criticizing the police and calling on queers to defend themselves. The speech also directly referenced and called out the uniformed police officers who were present. All of this is pretty well known. However, there is more to the story and this more is incredibly relevant to any discussion of the city's proposed "hate incident policy and procedure".

The cops who were visible in uniform at the meeting, were NOT the only cops present in the room. There was at least one other officer in attendance, but he was undercover in plain clothes. As if this isn't enough of a violation, the officer in question belongs to a very notable division of HPS – the Hate Crime and Extremism Unit. This means that said division isn't exclusively (and arguably isn't prioritizing) investigating the violent far-right. Rather, they are coming for us. Only days after Pride participants were attacked by hate groups, a member of the police unit specifically responsible for dealing with hate-based activities came to a meeting for the queer community to investigate the queer community. Let that sink in. This officer creepily surveilled the meeting and all of those present – he observed and took detailed notes that documented names of people who were there, specific things that they said, and who knows what else. These notes were then used as a weapon and became the basis upon which HPS built a case against Cedar. Having police at the meeting did not lead to more safety for queers, rather it led to more violence. To be clear, their presence put a trans person in jail; it led to a member of our community being put in a cage and segregated.

Against this backdrop, the recent proposal coming from City Hall for addressing “hate-related activities” is nothing less than horrifying. Just when you think that the city’s response to the fallout from Pride couldn’t possibly get any worse, it does in fact get worse. In case you missed it, last Friday it was announced that city councillors will soon vote on a new “Hate Incident Prevention Policy” aimed at addressing the issue of hate-based individuals, groups, and incidents in Hamilton. The draft policy entails provisions such as installing more CCTV cameras at City Hall and in other public places; increasing the “general surveillance capacity” of the city more broadly; procuring more tools for police to deal with protesters and demonstrations; and the hiring of a special security investigator “tasked with investigating and documenting hate related activities on city owned property”. In sum, the city wants more surveillance, more police involvement, and more files documenting people’s activities and personal information. All of this is incredibly concerning and we should be worried.

For starters, the most obvious issue is that this policy will not be used exclusively to target the far-right. It is almost guaranteed to target (and perhaps even focus on) queers, anti-fascists, people of colour, and other left activists. There is a long history of such policies being used against those deemed to be political radicals, and it has already been demonstrated that Hamilton Police Services can and will use the guise of “fighting hate” to criminalize our communities. We will be subjected to more surveillance, we will face more police harassment and violence, and we will have more of our lives intrusively documented. This is enraging. To use hate-related laws and policies to police movements for equality and liberation for all is offensive, and to equate anti-fascism with fascism (just two extreme ideologies) is categorically wrong. While the “both sides” argument has been popular these past weeks, it is important to loudly and publicly remind the city that these two sides are wildly different.

Next, there is the issue of how hate/hate symbols/hate activity is defined. The definitions used by city council in the past have been questionable, but also illustrative of underlying political sympathies. Throughout the course of last year, swastikas and other white supremacist symbols appeared with increasing frequency in public spaces. However, these hate symbols were paid little attention and the city’s politicians have instead focused their energy elsewhere – notably debating the circle A and arguing for the anarchist symbol to be classified a hate symbol. This gives a pretty good indication about where City Hall’s priorities lie.

There’s also the issue of how specific groups come to be recognized as victims and/or potential victims of hate. In other words, which groups of people or what kinds of groups of people are understood to be at risk for hate-based targeting. For example, could a feminist event on city property be accused of perpetuating hatred against men? Many in the men’s rights movement classify feminism as an ideology of hate and consider men, as a group, to be a target of hate. Moving to a more concrete example, let’s look at the police. Hamilton Police Services have routinely claimed that police themselves are a major at-risk group for hate-targeting and are frequently the victims of hate crimes. So, if a group organizes an anti-police demonstration, could they be accused of engaging in hate activity? Would queer demonstrations like those that have been organized in the aftermath of pride, be classified as inciting hate if they were to happen again?

And finally, there is the issue of information security and associated risk. Creating databases and other records at City Hall that include detailed information on people’s activities, alongside their personal information presents a very real threat to those people. What if those records were to fall into the hands of fascists or fascist sympathizers? One of the most famous white supremacists in Canada, Paul Fromm, ran for mayor of Hamilton during the last election. The City of Hamilton currently employs known neo-nazi, Marc Lemire, and in the IT department of all places! There are a million ways that this could go wrong, and if information such as people’s home addresses and places of work are acquired by members of the far-right, people will be placed in danger – they will likely face harassment and potentially violence.

All those who have joined the chorus of outrage in the wake of the attack on this year’s Pride and the subsequent mishandling of the situation by City Hall and the Hamilton Police Services should refuse to be pacified. Promises of more surveillance and repression from the very same people who have long refused to

keep queers, trans and non-binary folks safe, and criminalized those who stepped up to do so is absolutely against our collective interests. And all those who have rightly spoken up against Cedar's politically motivated arrest should take a moment to heed the actual words that got them thrown back in jail:

"If people say well we need cops there so they can de-escalate... it's like how about we build de-escalation skills collectively? [...] If we want the police there to use measured force in order to deal with situations, let's figure out how to use measured force ourselves and decide when and how it's appropriate to do so. I think building up strength to act, the strength needed to be violent if necessary is a necessary precondition for your choice to be peaceful to be meaningful, otherwise you're just powerless."

To those who know us, it will not be surprising when we continue to organize and mobilize for those who are facing charges from Pride, and for those amplifying trans, non-binary and queer voices throughout this city. We are under attack. We will defend ourselves. We will not let anyone criminalize our community for it. We will be relentless and we will keep fighting back. Until our friend is free. Until our voices are heard. Until we are safe.

July 17th - Anarchist Prisoners Luis Fernando Sotelo and Cedar Released from Prison

Abolition Media Worldwide reports on the release of two anarchist comrades, Cedar in so-called Canada, and Luis Fernando Sotelo in Mexico, who were both recently released from prison.

In Mexico:

Anarchist political prisoner Luis Fernando Sotelo was released from prison on July 12 after more than 4 years and 8 months. Sotelo was arbitrarily detained while protesting for the missing 43 Ayotzinapa students. The comrade burned his prison uniform after being released.

His detention was irregular; the judicial process never managed to prove his participation in the action that was prosecuted judicially. Despite this, the prosecutor for capital injustice kept him in custody. With an initial sentence of 33 years and despite all the inconsistencies of the process, they dismantled the lies of the government and thereby lowered the sentence.

It was thanks to his resistance, courage and knowledge of his innocence that he remained firm in his struggle. Many compañeras and compañeros joined his fight for freedom, among them the compañeras that made up the Luis Fernando Free Committee! who came every week to visit him in the Southern Prison.

Organizations such as the Popular Organization Francisco Villa de Izquierda Independiente, Weaving Revolutionary Organization, the comrades of the Vendaval cooperative, Street Brigade, organizations and collectives that fight together with the Indigenous Council of Government and support the EZLN, comrades who fight in the anti-prison movement, the CGT of the Spanish State, Zapata Vive coffee, among many others, participated in the meetings held in the courts, in the SCJN and in the marches called to demand his release.

Finally, this July 12, the comrade Luis Fernando left the Southern Prison in the company of his family and comrades who sang, hurled slogans and embraced him to welcome him.

After hugging his family, the comrade burned the uniform he had to wear in these years and gave a message of thanks to the organizations and compañerxs present and recalled that there are still many political prisoners in the country, inviting them to keep fighting for their release.

In Canada:

Anarchist comrade Cedar Hopperton has been released after spending nearly a month in jail for allegedly violating their parole conditions after giving a speech arguing that police should not be part of the queer community and applauding those at Pride who stood up to the police and fascists.

Despite the fact that they weren't at Pride, Cedar spent weeks in jail in a clear case of retaliation by the Hamilton police against Cedar for expressing their anarchist convictions. Cedar went on hunger strike after their arrest, and the queer and anarchist communities of Hamilton mobilized in their support.

The Tower, an anarchist social space in Hamilton, posted on Facebook Tuesday that Cedar was free, along with a photo of Cedar holding a "Free Cedar" poster.

"The rumours are true, and this time it's a good thing — Cedar is free!" The Tower said. "A statement with more details is forthcoming."

Asaf Rashid, Cedar's lawyer in the parole board challenge, confirmed that Cedar was released in relation to some credited time around their incarceration. Cedar was initially due to be released at the end of July.

The parole board dismissed the false claim by Hamilton police that Cedar was at Pride.

Cedar's release is a victory for the anarchist movement in Hamilton and beyond and a defeat for the oppressive Hamilton police force.

10 Jul - Love and Power: The Ballad of Oso Blanco Revisited

Official sources say that Oso Blanco, to whom the State refers by his birth name, Byron Shane Chubbuck, is responsible for about 20 bank robberies from 1998-1999, all undertaken for the express purpose of aiding the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional/Zapatista National Liberation Army) in Chiapas. Oso Blanco himself puts the number of "robberies" at closer to 50.

MORE:

by Clayton P (It's Going Down)

There's a satisfying symmetry—I won't call it poetic justice—in using money from banks to fund revolutionary struggle. Banks are in the business of burying people's hopes and of destroying their dreams. But the goals of freedom-fighters like the Zapatistas—and like Oso Blanco himself—are to keep hope alive, to nurture the revolutionary dream of a world free from oppression and exploitation. There's also a crucial difference between pilfering money for selfish interests—be it lining your own pockets or placating shareholders—and expropriating funds necessary to aid in revolutionary societal transformation. The bankers did the former. Oso Blanco did the latter. The bankers got bailed out. Oso Blanco went to prison.

To the Feds, and to local law enforcement, Oso Blanco was never anything more than another greedy, power-hungry thug with a chip on his shoulder and an axe to grind. Grudgingly bestowing upon him, doubtless with no small amount of derisive irony, the moniker "Robin the Hood," official accounts of Oso Blanco's actions are designed to make the public question if the funds he expropriated ever made their way to Chiapas.

With the mainstream media's eagerly proffered support of their lies, the Feds and their pals have painted Oso Blanco as a vain, charismatic, and dangerously manipulative hustler. To hear them tell it, he's an odd combination of Jim Jones and Scar Face with a dash of Che Guevara for flavor. Even the more sympathetic media accounts paint him as little more than a short-sighted victim of his own inability to lead an honest life and obscure his political motives behind the foggy rhetoric of personal responsibility. While such accounts do provide a brief glimpse into Oso Blanco's humanity, citing things like his short-lived recording career or his love and talent for art and poetry (he published a book of verse in 2011), they're predictably heavy on the pathos and light on the politics.

Oso Blanco, above all else, defines himself as a warrior and as a spiritual man who puts all faith in the Creator and for whom indigenous spirituality is paramount. He is a proud sovereign citizen of the Cherokee Nation who is a direct descendant of high-ranking Cherokee War Woman Nanyehi Ward. Among his relatives may be found the leader Dragging Canoe, remembered for leading successful armed opposition to

settler-colonialist expansion that European historians would call The Battle of Lookout Mountain. A burning sense of justice and a legacy of militant anti-colonial resistance runs through Oso Blanco's veins.

This could be partially why, after his initial arrest, he freed himself from State custody and, following a short meal in a motel, went right back to expropriating funds for his comrades in Chiapas in their fight against a tyrannical government. He also made a point of calling a local radio station to challenge the prevailing narrative about his actions and to report on the foul and abusive conditions he experienced and saw there. Even after he was arrested again and sentenced to an additional 40 years of hard time, bringing his total sentence to 80 years, he remained resolute. "I will not be broken in my determination and willpower," he vowed after he was recaptured, promising that he would continue to support EZLN rebels while "smacking the federal government across their face of hypocrisy."

This disdain for hypocrisy and dishonesty, though perhaps counter-intuitive to those who are content to dismiss him as another "run-of-the-mill criminal" (whatever that means), is one source of the sincerity that Oso Blanco carries into every personal interaction. A large part of what draws people to him is a combination of honesty with a strong depth of conviction. The past that the mainstream media and the State have flaunted (in their predictable attempts to vilify another revolutionary) is one that Oso Blanco has never denied having. What prevailing accounts also ignore is Oso Blanco's persistent urge to do genuine good, like supporting Project Share, a local houseless shelter, after he caught his first federal case at the age of 31.

His time there was a condition of his parole, but others involved with the project say he went above and beyond in his work there. Cathy Blanco (no relation), then the direct of the project, is a person who, to this day, Oso Blanco credits with always pushing him to do what he knew was right, and to never stop helping people. He talks openly about that first case and about his time in prison, and about his gang activity before and after. He also talks openly about his own drug use, and his involvement in drug manufacturing and trafficking. He describes this period in his life as his leaving "the good path of helping others" to walk instead a "Path of Death." It was from this Path of Death, insists Oso Blanco, that the Zapatistas saved him shortly after he first became aware of their activities.

That was in Albuquerque, back in 1997. He was watching a protest against human rights violations in Chiapas. A woman who he calls "Gloria" noticed his eagle feather tattoo, and the conversation quickly turned from indigenous struggle in the US to the Zapatistas' work in rural Mexico. She gave him her card and they parted ways. A year later, Oso Blanco was in Guatemala City looking to score two drums of ephedrine to manufacture methamphetamine. Gloria was there, too, looking to purchase supplies to take to the Zapatistas. Oso Blanco gave her the cash she needed, rented a truck to carry the supplies, and helped to deliver them. He left with only a single drum of ephedrine, and with having seen firsthand the work that the Zapatistas were doing for the people. "When I completely realized those EZLN warriors were not playing games," he says, "I went ALL IN!" And there's no denying that's exactly what Oso Blanco did.

Back in New Mexico, things really began to change. Oso Blanco, then the jefe of a local gang, began instructing his members to give back to their hood, and encouraged them to support, protect, and defend it and the people living there. "Siempre con honor"—always with honor—became the primary driving principle for most of the crew's members. It was also around that time that Oso Blanco began knocking over banks, expropriating the cash and using the bulk of it to buy necessary supplies to send to Chiapas, setting some aside to support his growing family and to invest in local neighborhood support projects. He would also routinely send plates, napkins, and food to Project Share when the shelter was struggling to keep houseless people fed. And according to the tellers, and to Oso Blanco, each bank job took place in the same way. He never used a gun, and was always polite when asking for the cash, which he also told bank employees would be going to support poor and starving children—referring, of course, to the Zapatistas' numerous local projects (from thence came Oso Blanco's sobriquet of "Robin the Hood").

Among the goods sent to Chiapas were batteries, cell phones, books, military surplus and equestrian gear, fabric dye, vitamins, and antibiotics. Some friends of his who owned a trucking company agreed to help

transport the goods. It's impossible to estimate the total cash value of the supplies, or the amount of the supplies, sent. But the one thing that is for certain is that Oso Blanco would do it all again without hesitation.

Oso Blanco's personal and political commitments have not wavered, even though the State has done everything it can to break his spirit and silence his voice. As if trying to bury him under an 80-year sentence wasn't enough, in the initial 17 months he was incarcerated, jail staff gassed, beat, and otherwise abused him on an almost routine basis. It was this routine abuse that Oso Blanco says drove him to escape. While incarcerated at USP Leavenworth, Oso Blanco was denied his right to attend sweat ceremonies with other First Nations inmates until persistent pressure on the prison bosses, coming from inside and outside the walls, derailed the State's attempt at targeted ethnocide.

In a recent letter from 2019, Oso Blanco briefly discusses being attacked, at times, by as many as 8 guards at once in the SMU (Special Management Unit), and being left in tightly fastened restraints for an excess of 80 hours at a time, which has resulted in permanent neurological damage. In other correspondence he has discussed routine denial of medical care and efforts to frustrate his correspondence with friends, family, and loved ones on the outside as punishment for his refusal to relinquish his identity and submit to State control.

But Oso Blanco does not want pity, nor does he want to be idolized or revered. An anarchist since 1982, he has no interest in being the object of hero worship. "We are [all] heroes," he insists, "who can help many, many people." All we need to do is awaken to our own abilities. "We need only to use our energies in positive ways. And focus clearly, for our potential is endless, amazing." And this, says Oso Blanco elsewhere, "is the true source of revolution: to [achieve] higher consciousness and to keep it." He wants his story told, not to build his fan-base, but to build revolutionary struggle. For him, his life's story is proof that it is possible for people to rise above the baser aspects of their nature that capitalism nurtures. He's been the subject of songs, news articles, and of National Lawyers Guild resolutions in support of political prisoners.

He'll spend the rest of his life with half a 9MM round lodged in his cheekbone, and he's got scars on his torso that mark where Feds shot him in the back. It's easy to read Oso Blanco as an enigma. And, in some ways, he is. This is, in part, because his attitudes and actions cannot be made sense of using the narrow, binary illogic of the capitalist system. Understanding revolutionary action requires breaking with that logic. What's important to Oso Blanco is that people see that undertaking revolutionary action requires the same thing.

Really, Oso Blanco is no different than we are: he is a person who, recognizing the harmful and problematic behaviors and beliefs that the system encouraged in him, has always strived to transcend those limitations. His story reminds us that we cannot transform society without transforming ourselves. To see Oso Blanco as a singularity is to ignore that we all have a tremendous capacity to achieve radical personal, and societal, transformation—which is exactly what the ruling class wants us to ignore. They want us feeling afraid and isolated, insecure and unaware. Oso Blanco was imprisoned because, when he fought for the Zapatistas, he was also fighting for all of us, and we could very easily find ourselves in his place. There may come a time when the State decides to make any one of us into an example. So, save the ballads and songs, the laurels and the accolades. Like his words and actions suggest, let's show support for Oso Blanco by working collectively to make our daily lives the stuff that revolutionary remembrances are made of. Let's build struggle however we can, wherever we are—and don't forget our comrades behind the walls. After all, all we really have is each other.

To find out more about Oso Blanco, his case, his art and work, and how to write to him, check out his support website: freeosoblanco.blogspot.com

12 Jul - The critical, overlooked history of WA's prison abolition movement

In Washington state, abolitionists have succeeded in shrinking the scope of state punishment and making prisons more humane. But their work is far from done.

MORE:

by Dan Berger (*Crosscut*.)

In 1914, union leader Nicholas Klein offered a four-part theory of social change: “First they ignore you. Then they ridicule you. And then they attack you and want to burn you. And then they build monuments to you.” Judged by this standard, the prison abolition movement is somewhere between steps two and three, ridiculed and attacked but also investigated and, at times, misunderstood. In recent months, the *New York Times* profiled leading abolitionist scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore, the Marshall Project editor wrote a piece entitled “What do prison abolitionists really want,” which neglected to speak to any actual abolitionists (two of whom responded), and *Playboy* offered a look at “The New Abolitionists.” Not surprisingly, *Teen Vogue* has already been on the case.

These and other articles about prison abolition tend to focus on California and New York, states often seen as bellwethers of a national mood on incarceration — and, not coincidentally, centers of national media. Yet Washington state has a critical and often overlooked part in the development of prison abolition and in its possible futures.

Often seen as pie-in-the-sky impracticality, prison abolition has become more visible in recent years. That growing attention owes in part to decades of often behind-the-scenes work by abolitionists working to shrink the scale, size and scope of state punishment. Although often misread as a one-time event that closes every prison, prison abolition is a process. Its grand vision — what abolitionists Gilmore and James Kilgore describe as “a society that centers freedom and justice instead of profit and punishment” — is implemented in a myriad of efforts to transform how the government treats people and how people treat each other. Abolition is both a goal and a strategy. Rather than ignore reforms, abolitionists pursue the kind of small-scale changes and alternatives that can add up to larger transformations.

That Washington would play such a pivotal role is not surprising, given that the state has often played a vanguard role in criminal justice policy — often for the worse. Washington was the first state to enact three-strikes sentencing policy in 1993 and blocked state funding from going to educate incarcerated people before the federal government cut Pell Grants to prisoners. Washington has been out front on everything from the eradication of parole to juvenile life without the possibility of parole (tried as an adult at 14 years old, Tacoma’s Barry Massey was the youngest person sentenced to life without parole in 1987; he was released in 2016, after the Supreme Court ruled mandatory life sentences for juveniles unconstitutional). For decades, the state has implemented civil commitment and expanded punishments for people convicted of sexual offenses, which have grown while prosecution for drug offenses has fallen. Built in the early 1980s, the state’s “Intensive Management Units” have become a national model for “administrative segregation” — a technocratic term for long-term solitary confinement.

Any discussion of the state’s checkered history of imprisonment must pass through the Washington State Penitentiary, better known as Walla Walla. When it opened in 1887, Washington was still a territory and not yet a state. The prison’s opening was itself an act of prison reform: it replaced the brutal convict leasing camps, where early industrialists paid local sheriffs to then rent prisoners to work for free in slavlike conditions. As with the more notorious convict leasing system in the South, the forced labor of prisoners in Washington was steeped in abuse and violence. The outcry led the territorial government to respond by taking over the practice of punishment; the response was Walla Walla prison.

Chronically overcrowded and underresourced, Walla Walla has always been the crown dungeon of the Washington penal system: the end of the line, a medieval homage to harsh punishment that, as journalist John McCoy recently observed, “serve[s] no one.”

Prisoners have responded to the terrible conditions there with a creative urgency. In the early 1970s, Walla Walla debuted an innovative experiment in prisoner self-governance that also won some small liberties —

less censorship restrictions, extended telephone and visiting privileges, the opportunity to wear civilian clothes. While some of the liberties remain, none of the governance does. As Washington, like other states, embraced a punitive backlash, it lengthened sentences, built more prisons and further disempowered incarcerated people.

Isolated and embattled, abolitionists nonetheless carried on. Throughout the closing decades of the 20th century, abolitionists and their allies remained focused on protecting human rights for incarcerated people, particularly those already marginalized by gender or tribal affiliation. Two examples of what abolitionist organizer Mariame Kaba has described as ‘participatory defense campaigns’ stand out here: feminists, Native Americans and other activists rallied on behalf of Yvonne Wanrow (now Yvonne Swan), a citizen of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, after she killed a man who tried to attack her and molest her and her neighbor’s children. Over nearly a decade of trials and appeals in the 1970s, the Wanrow case expanded women’s legal right to self-defense against gender violence. Between 1979 and 1981, similar coalitions rallied in defense of Jimi Simmons, a Muckleshoot-Rogue River man accused of killing a guard following a series of riots and reprisals at Walla Walla. Simmons was acquitted and eventually freed from prison. (His brother, also incarcerated at Walla Walla, was convicted of the murder.)

In the 1980s and 1990s, incarcerated people and their supporters networked through prisoner publications. In 1987, a group of radical prisoners at the Washington State Reformatory in Monroe began publishing *The Abolitionist*, a monthly newspaper documenting prison policy and prisoner activism. One of the editors, Ed Mead, was incarcerated for his role in the revolutionary George Jackson Brigade and had edited a series of radical newsletters in prison. After two years, *The Abolitionist* became *Prison Legal News*, which remains a vital resource on contemporary prison issues. These publications were some of the only consistently critical looks at the Washington criminal justice system, always attentive to the ways people could work to better conditions.

More recently, abolitionists have been involved in a variety of campaigns to shrink the scale and scope of Washington’s prison system. Perhaps most successfully, advocates succeeded in abolishing the state death penalty. The road to its abolition — years of grassroots organizing that resulted first in a gubernatorial moratorium, followed by a lawsuit that led the state Supreme Court to rule it unconstitutional for its “arbitrary and racially biased” application and finally a legislative ban — suggests something of the patience, dedication and tactics of abolitionists.

They are also busy. Prison is an amorphous concept, including city and county jails, state prisons and federal detention centers. For Washington, that entails everything from juvenile incarceration to immigrant detention. Abolitionist campaigns have targeted structures that maintain or extend the scale of punishment locally, regionally and nationally.

At the local level, abolitionists have been working to stop construction of a controversial \$210 million new youth jail in Seattle’s Central District. While supporters of the jail say a new building will provide needed services to incarcerated youth, opponents challenge the practice of putting young people in cages. Following years of petitions, protests and civil disobedience, groups involved in the No New Youth Jail Coalition have advocated a moratorium on construction and demanded that King County “repurpose the site for meeting the needs of youth and families.”

Statewide, abolitionists have worked to end life without parole, implement meaningful programs that provide for people’s education and reintegration in society, and implement transformative and restorative justice practices that provide accountability for interpersonal harm. Many of these efforts have involved incarcerated people partnering with their free-world allies on everything from providing higher education to incarcerated people and working to reintroduce parole (and as a community-led rather than law-enforcement-led process) to peer mentorship programs. The efforts of community groups like API Chaya and the Formerly Incarcerated Group Healing Together join those of prisoner organizations like the Black Prisoners Caucus and the Women’s Village.

Nationally, Washington is home to the region's largest immigrant detention center. Though the state has publicly rebuked a number of Trump administration policies, the state nonetheless is heavily involved in a punitive response to immigration. Abolitionists have worked to shut down the Northwest Detention Center, block deportations (using both civil disobedience and legal aid), support people on hunger strike there and free people held there or at the Federal Detention Center in SeaTac (including a number of women who the Trump administration had separated from their children at the border). Washington activists have been central to the national movement to abolish ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) and succeeded in stopping ICE from using Boeing Field for its deportation flights.

Left to its own devices, prison reform tries to fix prison with more prison: from the construction of Walla Walla to replace convict leasing to the use of life without parole sentences as an alternative to the death penalty. And so perhaps the greatest interventions abolitionists make is to challenge the narrow horizons of existing reform: documenting, for instance, that life without parole is not an alternative to the death penalty, but an extension of it (and one with similarly racist disparities), or that the state's alternatives to Donald Trump's xenophobia still allow the Department of Corrections to cooperate with immigration enforcement. In debates about agency budgets, governmental infrastructure and social priorities, abolitionists can be found working with verve, clarity and all-due urgency.

15 Jul - Prosecutor Don Kleine refuses to reopen 1970 Omaha Two case

The author of a recently released book on the booby-trap bomb murder of an Omaha police officer in 1970 says the real killer or killers have escaped justice.

MORE:

by Paul Hammel (*Omaha World-Herald*)

Michael Richardson, who spent more than a decade digging through FBI and police records for his book, recently asked Douglas County Attorney Don Kleine and Gov. Pete Ricketts to reopen an investigation into the slaying of Police Officer Larry Minard.

Richardson, an Omaha native who covered part of the 1971 trial that convicted David Rice and Ed Poindexter of the murder, said he's convinced by his review of the case and records not previously released that the pair was framed because they were black militants at a time when racial tensions were ripping apart the nation, as well as Omaha.

Richardson said: "They were guilty of rhetoric, they were guilty of being Black Panthers, they were guilty of hating the police. But they were not guilty of Larry Minard's murder."

Rice and Poindexter were convicted and sentenced to serve life in prison for what was one of the most sensational murders in Omaha history. Rice, who later adopted the African name Mondo we Langa, died in prison in 2016. Poindexter, now 74, remains behind bars at the Nebraska State Penitentiary.

Richardson, who delivered letters to Kleine and Ricketts in May, isn't the first person to call for a review of the case. National figures like black activist Angela Davis and former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark, as well as Amnesty International, have said the two men amount to political prisoners who should go free.

But others, including the family of Officer Minard, have long maintained that the two were justly convicted.

Richardson said his plea for reopening the case is critical now because justice could still be delivered to Poindexter, who required heart surgery two years ago.

"This case is in the past, but it is in the present for Ed Poindexter. He's still locked up," he said, "and you never get used to it."

Kleine, when reached for comment, said that he is always willing to take a second look at a case when new evidence arises, but that the conviction of Rice and Poindexter has been upheld in the face of “intense scrutiny” over the years by the Nebraska Supreme Court, federal courts and other attorneys.

“There’s a lot of people who have looked at this (case),” Kleine said. “But I’m not aware of anything that leads me to believe these people are completely innocent.”

Members of Minard’s family have said that it’s “totally and completely ridiculous” to believe that the two men were framed. In 1994, then-Omaha Police Chief James Skinner testified against Poindexter being considered for parole, saying the evidence showed they participated in a conspiracy to kill police officers, and that warrants life in prison.

Ricketts, according to Richardson, sent a one-sentence letter acknowledging receipt of his recent book, but did not respond to the call to reopen an investigation. The Governor’s Office did not respond to a request for comment.

Richardson, who is now based in Belize, said that there were many things unsettling about the investigation and conviction of the “Omaha Two” that should have raised red flags, “but due to the politics of the day, it didn’t.”

Among the assertions made by Richardson in his book, “Framed: J. Edgar Hoover, COINTELPRO & the Omaha Two Story,” are:

- The phone call that lured Minard and other police to the bomb that was planted in a vacant north Omaha home could not have been made by Duane Peak, the prosecution’s star witness, who testified at the trial that he made the call.
- In 2007, a voice-recognition expert testified that it was “highly probable” that the low-pitched voice on a recording of the call was not Peak, who was 15 at the time and had a high-pitched voice. But the Nebraska Supreme Court rejected a new trial for Poindexter in 2009, ruling that he had failed to prove that playing the tape at the trial would have changed its outcome.
- The FBI canceled a lab report on the phone call, a highly unusual move in such a case, according to the author. At the time, the FBI was conducting a covert, counterintelligence effort called COINTELPRO to discredit and disrupt Rice and Poindexter, as well as leaders of other Black Panther affiliates. The book suggests that not testing the tape helped manipulate the result of the trial.
- Dynamite residue found in Rice’s pockets was planted. It was implausible, one expert testified, that it would be found in anyone’s pockets. And Richardson said that Rice’s hands tested clean for dynamite just after The World-Herald published a photo of him turning himself in with his hands in his pockets. That, the author said, points to the planting of dynamite particles.
- Rice had an alibi witness who refuted Peak’s story about when Peak had picked up the suitcase from Rice. But Richardson said that the defense attorneys didn’t pick up on the conflicting testimony.

Peak, who initially said that Rice and Poindexter had no connection to the bombing but later testified that they directed him to plant the bomb, was granted immunity and moved to the Pacific Northwest in exchange for his testimony. Richardson said it was suspicious that the person identified as supplying the dynamite and suitcase for the bomb that killed Minard was not prosecuted, along with Peak and one other person linked to the dynamite.

Lincoln attorney Bob Bartle, who represented Poindexter in his most recent appeals a decade ago, said he remains suspicious of the “dirty tricks” played by federal authorities during the investigation and trial, but says the case lacks the irrefutable evidence, such as DNA evidence, that not only exonerates Rice and Poindexter but fingers who actually killed Minard.

“The traditional avenues of appeal for Ed Poindexter are closed, absent an extraordinary measure taken by a prosecutor or the (State) Board of Pardons,” Bartle said. “I would welcome (a reopening of the case), but would be pleasantly surprised if it came.”

Richardson said that his “guilty knowledge” of the case prompted him to dig deeper and write the book, which he maintains is the first time all threads of the case have been presented in one package.

“It’s too late to test for dynamite, but it’s not too late to see who (really) made that call,” he said.

16 Jul - A gay teen who was brutally bullied for years stabbed one of his attackers. He’s going to prison.

Abel Cedenó defended himself with a knife during a violent attack after the school did not stop the bullying.

MORE:

by Alex Bollinger

A gay teen who stabbed a classmate to death and critically wounded another after they allegedly bullied him for years was found guilty of manslaughter.

In 2017, New York City high school student Abel Cedenó, who was then 17, stabbed Matthew McCree, 15, and Arane Leboy, 16, in history class.

Cedenó stabbed McCree in the chest, and he died in a hospital from the wounds.

Cedenó was charged with first-degree manslaughter, first-degree assault, and criminal possession of a weapon for the switchblade he brought to school. He waived his right to a jury trial, leaving the judge to rule on the facts in the case.

During the trial, he said that he was bullied since sixth grade, often for his sexuality. He was beaten and they called him anti-gay slurs.

He said that he and his mother tried to get the school district to transfer him to a safer school, but they refused. He also said that school officials did nothing to stop the bullying.

By the time he got to 12th grade, the bullying was out of control. He had to repeat that year of school since he missed so much class due to bullying.

On the day of the killing, McCree, Leboy, and other students were throwing pens at him in class.

“The class was very rowdy and loudness and everything,” he said. “I just snapped.”

He said that McCree came up to him as he was leaving the classroom, pinned him against the wall, and punched him several times.

“I was alone and no one was going to help me,” he said. “So I took out the knife.”

There was video evidence of Cedenó getting beaten, which the prosecution didn’t give to the defense until months after Cedenó’s arrest. Teachers also told investigators that McCree came from the back of the classroom to attack Cedenó.

“Matthew pushed me aside, hell-bent on getting at Abel,” one of the teachers said.

Another student had told investigators that Cedenó didn’t pull out the knife until he was pinned against the wall.

But most of the evidence of bullying – including the video – wasn’t admitted into court because the judge rejected self-defense as a strategy.

The defense also had trouble finding students to corroborate Cedeno’s story. The city’s Education Department opposed any effort to locate them. The prosecutors also didn’t say who their witnesses were until the day before they were on the stand, giving the defense almost no time to prepare.

The judge found him guilty of all charges.

“I got justice for my son,” McCree’s mother told reporters after the verdict was announced.

“It is so sad,” said Mustafa Sullivan of the LGBTQ youth organization FIERCE!

“There were three adults in that class. Abel is paying the price for the lack of a plan in that school to stop bullying and school violence. Both families are suffering now. Witnesses confirmed what Abel said — that he was terrorized in that classroom. The judge is saying to students being bullied that they can’t fight back — that they have to have their hands tied. Abel was trying to defend himself, but the DA wanted to make an example of him.”

Cedeno could face 5-25 years in prison on the first two charges, which he may have to serve consecutively.

His lawyer, though, is trying to get him youthful offender status, which could cut his time in prison.

“I’m concerned about his safety,” attorney Christopher Lynn told Gay City News. “It is important that the court grant him youthful offender status. It makes him eligible for alternatives to incarceration. He is in danger from gangs. If something happens to him in prison, a lot of people will share responsibility for it.”

Cedeno, out on bail during the trial, has been sent to the LGBTQ Unit at Rikers Island Prison Complex.

He has filed suit against the city’s Education Department, accusing the school of enabling the bullying.

Cedeno was identified as bisexual in stories about the stabbing two years ago & has since come out as gay.

16 Jul - Chelsea Manning’s Daily Fines For Grand Jury Resistance Increase To \$1000

Daily fines against Chelsea Manning for resisting a grand jury increased to \$1000 on July 16.

MORE:

by Kevin Gosztola (*Shadowproof*)

On May 16, Judge Anthony Trenga held Manning in civil contempt and ordered her to be sent back to the William G. Truesdale Adult Detention Center in Alexandria. The court also imposed a fine of \$500 per day after 30 days, and then a fine of \$1000 per day after 60 days.

From June 16 to July 15, the court fined her \$500/day. Those fines total \$15,000.

If Manning “persists in her refusal” for the next 15 months or until the grand jury’s term ends, her legal team says she will face a total amount of fines that is over \$440,000. This excessive amount may violate her Eighth Amendment rights under the Constitution.

In May, Manning’s attorneys filed a motion challenging the harshness of the fines. The federal court has yet to rule on the motion or hold a hearing.

The motion asserted there is no “appropriate coercive sanction” because Manning will never testify. She should be released from jail and relieved of all fines.

“Ms. Manning has publicly articulated the moral basis for her refusal to comply with the grand jury subpoena, in statements to the press, in open court, and most recently, in a letter addressed to this court,” her attorneys stated. “She is suffering physically and psychologically, and is at the time of this writing in the process of losing her home as a result of her present confinement.”

“The government, and maybe the general public, think that I have access to resources just because I am a public figure but that’s not true,” Manning declared prior. “Making money has never been my priority.”

She continued, “I do the work I do for the same reason I do everything—because I want to make a difference. Now, my work has been totally interrupted by my incarceration. I definitely feel the costs of these sanctions, but I never expected to have a comfortable life, and I would rather be in debt forever than betray my principles.”

According to a June press statement from her legal team, the government alleged Manning had the resources to pay tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines since she does public speaking events.

But her legal team countered, “She has no personal savings, an uncertain speaking career that has been abruptly halted by her incarceration, and is moving her few belongings into storage, as she can no longer afford to pay her rent.”

Manning has attempted to share her financial records with the federal court in an effort to show that she has debt and “compromised earning capacity,” which has “left her balance sheets near zero.” But the court has apparently never completed a financial assessment of her ability to pay fines.

Manning’s attorneys do not question whether the court has the authority within its “traditional contempt powers” to impose fines, however, they maintain such fines are “generally reserved for corporations, which cannot be confined, and which have the capacity to absorb a fine without suffering, for example, homelessness.”

“Rarely, individuals are fined, but counsel can find no case in which fines were assessed as to an individual other than where the individual was a sophisticated financial actor and the underlying contempt involved disobedience of a court order directing the management of a large amount of money.”

Often a court will order someone to prison or fine them to coerce testimony. The judge took the extraordinary step of imposing both penalties.

The United States government already submitted its extradition request against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, and additional charges are highly unlikely. Despite this fact, Manning remains in jail, where she endures daily psychological and physical trauma compounded by her previous confinement and her needs as a transgender woman.

18 Jul - Indigenous Political Prisoner Little Feather released from prison

The time has finally come for one of our Indigenous NoDAPL Water Protectors to be released from prison.

MORE:

Little Feather has served 36 months in maximum security prison for protecting the water. His charges stemmed from October 27, 2106 when Treaty Camp was set up to honor the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851.

His family and friends could not be more thrilled. It takes a significant amount of strength and faith to not only survive in the federal prison system but to thrive! He used his time helping others when needed. It is time for us to help in any way we can to support him on his journey moving forward and healing from the time he spent away from his family and cultural practices.

We are asking our community and allies to help us welcome him back, and to help us support him through his journey of reintegration back into his community. It will be a journey of healing and we want him to have everything he needs on his journey.

Little Feather still has to endure four months in a North Dakota halfway house and three years of probation. We are attempting to get his probation transferred to New Mexico where his family resides.

Little Feather and his family would like to offer their appreciation and prayers for those of you who had stood by and with us. We are very blessed to have you all as our community, and you each have shown incredible acts of love, compassion, support and understanding to Little Feather.

Please donate now at paypal.me/LCowboy or venmo leoyla-cowboy-1

18 Jul - "Oh Prison" a poem by Eric King

We are always excited to see new poetry from Erik King!

MORE:

Oh prison
You must think so poorly of me
Think I'm weak enough to fold
tisk tisk
I'm not a fucking inmate, I'm a captive
even if I spend 50 years here, my humanity stays
I won't hate those that you sucked into your trap
keep your 'cars' chap, I can't be bothered
you're a petulant waste of time
Not converting for me, no head shaves or Qurans
God aint real, neither is white power
my happiness is mine and you can't lay a finger
Didn't you know you're dealing with a fighter?
Block the phone & the mail, you've accomplished nothing
snake scum, maggot
the beauty I see in the world wont be diminished
by your hatred
The love I share in my soul won't be doubted
by your procedures
walls were built to stand, and this one doesn't shake
Oh prison
didn't you know we stand by each other?
we're not jesters, we're unbreakable
when will you learn
Somethings were built to last
You can't win this fight because we refuse to loose.

20 Jul - Connor Stevens Has Been Released

Political prisoner Connor Stevens (Cleveland 4) has been released from federal prison.

MORE:

Entrapped by FBI, he did hard time at many USPs and is now on lifetime probation. Getting out of prison is no joke. He is going to need a lot of help—please donate what you can at fundrazr.com/d1PY2c

28 Jul - Anarchists Care About Books (ACAB): People in Trouble

WHAT: Book club

WHEN: 4:00pm, Sunday, July 28th

WHERE: Bluestockings—172 Allen Street, New York 10002

COST: FREE

MORE:

Join us to discuss People In Trouble by Sarah Shulman.

Metropolitan Anarchist Coordinating Council (MACC) events are open to all anarchists, antifascists, anti-authoritarians and those interested in anarchist ideas and organizing.

Bluestockings is wheelchair accessible, with no steps or platforms, and wide aisles between shelves. The bathroom is not wheelchair accessible. There is a Starbucks two short blocks down the street with an accessible bathroom (at Allen and Delancey). Metered street parking is available in the blocks surrounding Bluestockings. Bluestockings is not a scent-free space, but we encourage visitors to please refrain from wearing perfumes, colognes or other scented products (including essential oils) and smoke far away from the entrance to the space.

4 Aug - Brunch Party With A Purpose

WHAT: Fund raiser

WHEN: 1:00pm, Sunday, August 4th

WHERE: Five Spot Soul Food—459 Myrtle Avenue, Brooklyn 11205

COST: FREE, but this is a fund raiser so bring your wallet

MORE:

There will be cultural performances and the sale of unique, one of a kind notecards by artist Sophia Dawson to raise funds for political prisoners.