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Updates for January 25th

14 Jan - Assata Shakur's Co-Defendant Sundiata Acoli Fights For His Freedom After Nearly 50 Years In Prison

Assata Shakur's co-defendant Sundiata Acoli is celebrating another birthday behind bars.

MORE:

by Anoa Changa (*NewsOne*)

Acoli, who was first eligible for parole in 1993, has been incarcerated for nearly 50 years.

Despite previously taking responsibility for his role in the events that led to the death of a New Jersey State Trooper in 1973, the New Jersey Parole Board seems intent on continuing to punish Acoli. Organizers have been fighting to free Acoli for years, but a year and a half after the largest racial justice movement in history and the renewed interest in the Black Panthers has helped get more attention for Acoli's case.

Last year during Black August, the Movement for Black Lives led an awareness campaign around movement elders remaining behind bars. According to the Bring Sundiata Acoli Home Alliance, the movement elder is experiencing lingering effects from a prior COVID-19 infection in addition to several other impairments, including early-stage dementia, emphysema, and glaucoma.

Lumumba Bandele, a coordinator with the Bring Sundiata Acoli Home Alliance and organizer with the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, told *NewsOne* that parole is being denied without rhyme or reason in many instances.

"What we found nationally is there is a huge problem around parole, and people utilizing parole as a punitive measure," Bandele said.

Acoli was almost granted parole once before. A 2014 court decision found the parole board acted arbitrarily in denying his request. That order was overturned in 2016, with a judge directing the entire parole board to hear Acoli's request. His request for parole has gone through various appeals and challenges, with the parole board claiming the now 85-year-old Acoli was likely to re-offend but couldn't produce any evidence to support that assertion.

Among those supporting Acoli's bid for release include four Black law enforcement groups. The groups have filed a brief citing Acoli's age and the very low recidivism rate for older adults as factors that should support his release.

The National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice, the Black Police Experience, Blacks in Law Enforcement of America, and Grand Council of Guardians, Inc. all challenge the unfair withholding of parole from Acoli. The four organizations argue the parole board is uncomfortable with Acoli's political beliefs and affiliations, echoing concerns raised by Bandele and other supporters.

By any fair read of the substantial evidence of the record, Mr. Acoli lacks any criminal proclivities. Holistic review of the parole hearing transcript from the full June 2016 hearing suggests the Parole Board does not fear Mr. Acoli has a substantial likelihood of future criminal activity; rather, the questioning by Parole Board members reveals a deep-seated discomfort with Mr. Acoli's political affiliations and beliefs, anger and frustration at his unwillingness to accede to the facts of the crime as found by the jury which he has always maintained he does not remember, and concern that he has not been sufficiently punished even after

all these years. Dissatisfaction with an old man's contrition and memory does not equate to credible evidence of a substantial likelihood that he will commit a crime if released.

Bandeale says there isn't a valid public purpose in continuing to deny Acoli parole, keeping him locked away from his family and community. The continued effort to keep Acoli behind bars seems directly tied to the highly political nature of Shakur's case and remaining outside of the reach of U.S. authorities.

Both Shakur and Acoli were charged with the murder of New Jersey State Trooper Werner Foerster. For his part, Acoli maintains that he was rendered unconscious after being shot and cannot recall how Foerster died. But he has expressed remorse for the incident and accepted responsibility for his role in the events leading up to the shooting.

He was also among the Panther 21, a group of 21 Black Panthers acquitted of allegedly planning attacks against two police departments in 1971. Among his co-defendants was a pregnant Afeni Shakur, the late mother of Tupac Shakur.

As a teacher and mentor, Acoli has had an exemplary record during his incarceration and continued his role as a community leader while on the inside.

"One of his jobs in prison is actually to prepare people for release," Bandele said. "The irony here is that he's entrusted with the process helping to prepare people for release, but he himself is unable to access that release."

Bandeale said that for many elders being denied parole like Acoli, a life sentence with eligibility for parole becomes more like death by incarceration when parole boards refuse to consider their release on the merits.

"Our carceral system is more committed to punitive measures than any kind of corrective action," Bandele said. "And so, the result is we have all of these elderly people who are dying in prison."

An April 2019 article by Prison Legal News reported that the recidivism rate for 65 or older is less than one percent. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exposed the enduring hardships experienced by elderly incarcerated people, including their healthcare. The cost of keeping older adults incarcerated is two to three times the cost of a younger person, given the additional health needs with age.

"There are, unfortunately, dozens of other incarcerated movement elders who are in similar positions, almost all of them are battling health issues and not just health issues, but life-threatening health issues," Bandele said.

Other incarcerated elders include Tupac's stepfather Mutulu Shakur, Imam Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin formerly known as H. Rap Brown, Kamau Sadiki and Leonard Peltier.

Celebrities including Aunjanue Ellis, Chris Pine, Yahya Abdul-Mateen, Robert Wisdom and Lena Waithe have also supported Acoli's release, participating in a video tribute encouraging people to support his release.

The Bring Sundiata Acoli Home Alliance also asks supporters to sign up to send postcards to New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, encouraging him to grant Acoli clemency. While anyone can support, Bandele says it's particularly important for New Jersey residents to share their support with the governor. A petition campaign has close to 20,000 signatures.

"As Bryan Stevenson said, we are all more than the worst thing we've ever done," Bandele said. "It does not provide the space for transformation for the human involvement. And this carceral structure is guilty of really violating so many of these human rights."

14 Jan - I Know What It Means to Strike at Rikers

David Campbell is a writer and anti-fascist activist who helped organize a strike while incarcerated at Rikers Island in 2020.

MORE:

by David Campbell (*New York Focus*)

I helped organize a strike at Rikers during the first wave. Those striking now are not to be ignored.

Two days ago, I read that there was a massive strike underway at Rikers Island. It brought back a flood of memories—dingy, scuffed white walls, clanging metal doors, a near-total dearth of comfort or privacy, and, perhaps strangely, a sense of solidarity so strong it moves me still.

In March of 2020, I was a prisoner in the Robert N. Davoren Center on Rikers Island. All my clothes were forest green. My bedsheets were stamped “DOC” in block letters. My neighbor on one side was a Dominican-American crack dealer with an imposing stature and infectious laugh; on the other, a tall, gaunt heroin addict from the Caucasus who I gave English lessons to two or three times a week.

The men in my 48-bed dorm all had their petty beefs and claims to a place on the totem pole. Who controlled the TV, who could use what phone, who was first in line for chow—these things take on oversized importance in jail. But all that changed when the pandemic hit. The Department of Correction seemed like it was trying to win a prize for most-bungled Covid response: It refused to take any serious attempt at mitigating the spread of the disease, testing for its presence, or social distancing, even as it claimed publicly that everything was under control. The extent of the response was to slap up posters advising us to social distance—a physically impossible feat—in twelve different languages. We were offered the most nonsensical advice to ward off Covid, like “drink green tea.”

After a week of mounting frustration at the DOC’s hypocrisy, they cut off our phones for several hours one morning. The phones are a lifeline in jail. They’re the only direct method of communication with the outside world. The reason, we were told, was to encourage us to clean our dorm. In fact, we had organized ourselves into cleaning crews, schedules and all, to make up for the fact that the institution was not taking any measures to protect us. This was the spark that lit the fire, and we went on strike. Suddenly, the fact that we all wore forest green and had DOC-stamped bedsheets mattered more than our backgrounds, convictions, or gang affiliations.

With near-unanimity, we refused to leave the dorms for work or institutional meals. When the phones came back on briefly, I communicated a list of grievances and demands to an activist friend on the outside, who spread the word on social media. We wanted masks, Covid tests, and cleaning supplies, and the immediate release of as many prisoners as possible, measures the Board of Correction had called for only days earlier. Prisoners on Rikers often share food and other scarce resources with each other, but once we went on strike, this practice became something else altogether. Volunteers began soliciting donations from among us and cooking giant collective meals. Though disputes still arose, they seemed less frequent and less frivolous.

Now, prisoners in RNDC are striking again. Our strike numbered about 90 and lasted one day. Their numbers 200 and has now gone on for seven. Their claims of being denied access to medical and mental health care, outdoor exercise, law library services, and humane living conditions are all entirely believable—I witnessed all of them first hand during my time there.

This sort of refusal to comply is called a “stick-up” in Rikers lingo. A stick-up may not be an organized strike. A prisoner refusing to exchange his sneakers for the painfully thin DOC-issued shoes upon arrival, or refusing to allow himself to be transferred to another housing unit, for example, would be considered

sticking it up. Sticking it up also refers to a broad range of less-than-noble goals and tactics; splashing a guard with urine because you haven't been brought new video games in two weeks, for example.

But the sort of action underway at RNDC happens way more than you might think—it just tends to go unreported. One reason is simply because it's less splashy. Stories of violence tend to grab attention. Another is that many of those incarcerated have no way to get word to the outside about their actions. Many, sadly, have no one to call. They often give away their phone calls, or sell them to other prisoners for things like ramen noodles or potato chips.

Nor do most have a frame of reference for strategic activism. Even after we had established a broad consensus to go on strike, for example, many of my fellow prisoners asked me what the point was. Striking prisoners may never think of themselves as “on strike” or communicate their actions to the outside world, let alone with a clear list of demands and grievances.

But within the walls, sticking it up is a fairly common occurrence. On Christmas Eve when I was incarcerated, the guards tried to pass my dorm over for its regularly scheduled commissary trip (the DOC is incredibly disorganized, and prisoners' basic needs often go unfulfilled as a result). The gang members in my dorm led the charge and quickly placed themselves between the guard on his way out of the room and the gate, refusing to budge until we were all taken to commissary. It was the first stick-up I'd seen, and it worked.

I also heard several firsthand accounts from different sources during my time inside of a sit-down for racial justice in “the Five,” or the Anna M. Kross Center, another building on the island. One of the regularly scheduled officers at the housing unit in question was apparently widely disliked for constantly berating the inmates with racist remarks. The final straw came when she took a cheap shot at an inmate of Middle Eastern descent, cracking off a comment about terrorism. The Latin Kings, who ran the cellblock, convinced everyone to pack their belongings into trash bags, sit down on the floor, and refuse to move until the higher-ups were called. They were, and the offending officer was rotated to another post.

It's incredibly difficult to pass information in jail; the sit-down had happened during my sentence, but I only heard about it months later, when one of the participants was transferred into my dorm. A great deal of things are communicated by yelling out the windows, but this is an imperfect method, to say the least, especially when you can't see the other person. My dorm and the other dorm on our floor went on strike together because we could communicate through the air vents. The dorms upstairs, however, never got on board. I later learned from guys who had been housed there at the time that they would have gladly joined in, if only they had known.

When information does spread, though, it can be powerful. When we went on strike in March 2020, we were inspired in part by reports a fellow inmate's girlfriend had seen on Twitter that prisoners in the Hudson County Immigrant Detention Center were on hunger strike, which she then reported to him over the phone. A few days prior, another guy had spread the word that his partner had told him during a phone call that inmates were “wil'in' out in the Five” in protest of Covid conditions, a fact I believe also contributed to our later decision to strike.

Prisoners, according to the DOC's inmate handbook, do not have the right to organize protests of any kind. Beyond any official sanctions, the organizers—especially those brave enough to speak out to the media using their names—can be punished with time in solitary confinement or extensions of their sentence on Rikers, as well as unofficial forms of retribution.

When a number of prisoners flat-out refused to bury the unclaimed Covid dead on nearby Hart Island without personal protective equipment, they lost their “good time” (that is, time taken off of their sentence for good behavior) and were transferred en masse for their trouble. In August 2020, prisoners' wages were drastically slashed, and a number of those in my dorm were simultaneously assigned the difficult job of cleaning the holding pens in the bowels of the New York City courts, which entails waking up at 5am only

to be shackled and driven across town six days a week. Most stuck it up, and when I left the island in October of that year, they were still striking, racking up expensive infraction tickets and living under the threat of losing good time.

Other forms of retaliation are more subtle. Searches, for example, are used as a tool to repress prisoners' ability to organize: even if they aren't actually looking for anything, DOC staff can arrive at any moment, strip-search you, and trash your few belongings, often confiscating a seemingly random assortment of items in the process. A transfer to another housing unit, too, can be a vicious act of retribution. Imagine someone appearing in your bedroom and ordering you to throw everything you own into a trash bag within the next ten minutes; then spending somewhere between a few hours and a few weeks in a holding cell without a bed or possibly even running water or a flushing toilet, amid a constant flow of stressed-out new arrivals and forced transferees like yourself; and finally arriving in a housing unit where you may not know anyone, and where you'll likely be forced to take the most uncomfortable bed, or, in some cases, jumped in.

Those of us who went on strike in March 2020 were comparatively fortunate in this regard. The DOC hierarchy had planned to transfer us all to different housing units as a way to punish us and break our momentum, but that never materialized. Many of the strikers were actually released by the DOC in the two days that followed the strike, and in the turmoil of the first wave, those of us left behind were not targeted for retaliation by the institution.

The most frustrating thing for me is that most of the men currently on Rikers could be immediately released too, and it would pose no problem to anyone. Three-quarters of the men I was locked up with were released overnight in the wake of our strike, part of an ultimate total of 1,477 people released during the first wave of the pandemic. Four months later, only 13% of those men had been rearrested. I think of those brave strikers in the building I was forced to call home not long ago, and I can only hope they are as successful.

14 Jan - Road to Jan. 6: How Portland police grew to love the Proud Boys and paved the way for Trump's insurrection

There were many points at which if the government had acted the Jan. 6 insurrection might never have happened.

MORE:

by Arun Gupta (*Raw Story*)

Leading up to the failed coup every alarm was ringing. Capitol Police knew a violent invasion was in the works, the Department of Homeland Security knew, the FBI knew, warning of "war at the Capitol." Hundreds of security officials at 80 Fusion Centers set up after 9/11 to combat domestic terrorism knew. They shared "an avalanche" of warnings about violence beginning at "1 p.m., U.S. Capitol, Jan 6." Nonetheless, the police allowed the invasion to happen.

If armed right-wing mobs who invaded state capitols in Idaho, Michigan, and Oregon before Jan. 6 were held accountable, support for the coup might have been squelched. Instead, ProPublica reported, Trump supporters learned "it was possible — even easy — to breach the seats of government to intimidate lawmakers," they would find sympathizers on the inside, and police would treat them with kid gloves compared to Black Lives Matter protesters.

Years earlier, if the government acted against the Bundy family, who allied with far-right militias and white supremacists to use violence for political ends, Jan. 6 might have been averted.

There is a fourth instance where the chain of events leading to Jan. 6 could have been interrupted if far-right gangs had been stopped. That case is Portland.

Since 2017, police have allowed the Pacific Northwest city to serve as a proving ground for fascists like the Proud Boys. They received legal impunity and even police support with few attempts to stop it. The far-

right used political violence to network with white nationalists, militias, and other extremists, raise their image nationally, gain recruits, and build capacity.

Law enforcement support for the far-right was matched by antipathy toward anarchists and anti-fascists in the left-leaning city. This is nothing unusual. Police are inherently friendly to the right and hostile to the left given their origins in slave patrols, enforcing Jim Crow, immigrant round-ups, and squashing labor organizing. This was evident in 2016 when police indifference to or support for far-right violence spread around the country in tandem with Trump's campaign.

Following the murder of George Floyd, cops responded to protests against police brutality with more brutality. Even in this storm of repression, Portland was an extreme outlier. Bellingcat, the investigative data site, tracked police violence during the last half of 2020 and recorded 142 cases in Portland. This was twice as many documented cases of police brutality as in New York City, which has 13 times the population of Portland.

A sampling of incidents shows how far Portland police will go to abet far-right violence. One important fact is that few right-wing extremists live in the city. The vast majority travel there, often on buses, solely to engage in mob violence against city residents. The police, more than 80 percent of whom live outside Portland and whose union president once called the city a "cesspool," are in effect attacking the city they are paid to protect. Only in Portland did fascist gangs succeed in turning the city into their fight club; everywhere else they were shut down.

Portland Police Protect Proud Boys

In June 2018, scores of Proud Boys invaded Portland. They joined with Patriot Prayer, a hate group based in Vancouver, Washington, that acts as an umbrella for extremists. Reporters say police marched a hundred-strong Proud Boys gang into anti-fascists. It quickly devolved into a massive brawl with groups of fascists stomping lone counter protesters. One reporter wrote that police appeared "primarily to protect the Patriot Prayer followers." Another reporter overheard a cop suggest "police should restrict the protesters to one area and 'just let them fight,'" adding, "That is essentially what happened." Researchers identified dozens of fascists, many by name, engaging in violence. But no one was ever charged with a crime related to that day, not even Proud Boys president Enrique Tarrio who visibly joined in the assaults.

In August 2018, close to 500 Proud Boys, white nationalists, neo-Confederates, and neo-Nazis gathered in a waterfront park near downtown. Police announced checkpoints to enforce a weapons ban, but dismantled the security measures at the last minute. Fascists carried illegal hunting knives, bear mace, thick wooden poles, and ax handles with no police intervention. Nearly all wore outlawed "sap gloves" weighted, often with metal, for hand-to-hand combat.

Police acted as a force multiplier for fascists. They fired rubber bullets, chemical weapons, and "flash-bang" grenades at counter-protestors, nearly killing two people with direct hits. Police claimed objects were thrown at them, but countless videos showed an unprovoked attack on a peaceful crowd. Police then charged anti-fascists, freeing fascists to roam throughout downtown and attack people.

In October 2018, right-wing troll Andy Ngo claimed a "Leftist Mob" attacked a motorist when the video clearly showed the motorist first tried to run over Black Lives Matter protesters who were in a crosswalk with the walk sign. That prompted Patriot Prayer to invade the city for a Saturday night slugfest with clubs and bear mace amid streets packed with bargoers. Once more Proud Boys, including notorious brawler Tusitala "Tiny" Toese, were filmed stomping and punching opponents with little police intervention and no legal repercussions.

On May 1, 2019, twenty Patriot Prayer members led by Joey Gibson and accompanied by Ngo attacked antifascists at a cidery, fracturing the vertebrae of one person. (Ngo released their name, leading to threats of violence, according to friends). The bar owner claimed the police took an hour to respond. Police

released a statement admitting they knew an attack was occurring but tried to justify why they didn't respond until after the fight had ended.

In June 2019, Andy Ngo was assaulted and splattered with coconut milkshakes while filming a Patriot Prayer rally outnumbered by antifa. Police spread a false rumor on Twitter that the milkshake was made of concrete. Amplified by Pizzagate conspiracist Jack Prosobiec, the disinformation was treated as fact by right-wing media, further inciting extremists. Antifascists were deluged with death threats and City Hall was evacuated after a bomb threat. An inside source said the mayor's office received "insane vitriol" and every office in City Hall received threats, including harassing calls that tied up emergency service dispatchers.

This was breathtaking. Portland police went from aiding far-right violence to weaponizing social media to terrorize locals and elected officials. It's an example of psychological warfare that police regularly employ. For example, Seattle police recently admitted to faking radio chatter in June 2020 that armed Proud Boys were headed to an area occupied by Black Lives Matter protesters. The reports led protesters to arm themselves, and a city investigation concluded the police "improperly added fuel to the fire and could have had dire results."

In August 2019 the far right planned another invasion of Portland after the milkshake incident. Proud Boys such as Joe Biggs flooded social media with graphic threats, displaying spiked bats, vowing "Death to Antifa," advising followers to bring guns, and indicating specific activists they hoped to kill. A bloodbath in Portland was only averted because of a bloodbath in El Paso. After a Trump-inspired shooter killed 23 people at an El Paso Walmart, the FBI warned Biggs and the Proud Boys of violence but no charges were filed despite specific, felonious threats.

That day was relatively calm, but it was a step forward in far-right organizing. Enrique Tarrio hugged members of the hard-core white supremacist American Guard. Despite claims to the contrary, Proud Boys can't get enough of neo-Nazis. In New York they fought alongside 211 Bootboys, far-right skinheads, in Charlottesville with Holocaust denier Augustus Invictus and others, neo-Nazi Keystone United in Philadelphia, extremist "Resist Marxism" in Providence, and white-nationalist Identity Evropa in Berkeley.

How It Began

There are dozens more examples of bias. Police documents reveal they see the far right as "much more mainstream" than the left. "Friendly" text messages between police and Joey Gibson show they fed him real-time information about the movements of antifa during street skirmishes, and advised him twice on how Toese could avoid being arrested. Police once discovered a Patriot Prayer team with a "cache of ... long guns" on a roof overlooking hundreds of anti-fascists. Police didn't arrest the team and didn't inform Mayor Ted Wheeler for two months they had uncovered what appeared to be an assassination squad despite the fact the mayor is head of the police.

The story of how Portland became a far-right magnet begins with Trump's 2016 campaign and the founding of extremist organizations such as the Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer. They gave life to Trump's unabashedly racist and violent rhetoric. Following his victory, right-wing extremists began invading Portland, Berkeley and Seattle to fight the left under the guise of free speech. Many anti-fascists argued allowing the far right to rally would lead to deadly violence. That is precisely what happened in Portland.

On May 26, 2017, Jeremy Christian murdered two men who came to the defense of a Muslim woman he was violently threatening on a train in Portland. Weeks earlier Christian had attended a small Patriot Prayer rally where he threw a Nazi salute and yelled "Die Muslims." Before the rally, Christian vowed on Facebook to shoot police, and they reportedly knew about it without taking action. The day before Christian killed the two men, he physically assaulted a Black woman on the same train system while yelling about free speech. The victim called the police who declined to arrest Christian at the scene despite multiple witnesses.

Sticking a finger into the city's raw wound, Patriot Prayer held a tense rally in Portland on June 4, barely a week after the murders. Police separated a small far-right crowd from some 1,500 counter protesters. Both local and DHS police were mobilized to guard federal property in the area. They gave the far-right wide reign to attack leftists and participate in an arrest. After police escorted Patriot Prayer from the area they turned their weapons on anti-fascists.

According to the ACLU, "police deployed flashbang grenades, chemical irritants, and less-lethal bullets at the antifascist gathering—to the cheers of the alt-right group." The ACLU slammed the police, saying it knows no other force that uses such "dangerous and indiscriminate" weapons "with the regularity of the Portland Police Bureau." Cops then "kettled" nearly 400 protesters, journalists, legal observers, and bystanders. Violating constitutional rights, police surrounded, detained, and recorded everyone's personal information before allowing them to leave.

The Big Bang of Terrorism

These events, from the April Patriot Prayer rally to Christian's murders to the police violence at the June rally, are the big bang of far-right political violence. It started a vicious cycle of fascists invading Portland, carrying out violence with impunity, and using viral images of past violence to recruit extremists with the promise of future violence. Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys adopted the Bundy model of inciting right-wing terrorism in rural areas to cities. This model was a precursor to the deadly Charlottesville "Unite the Right" rally in 2017, the invasion of state capitols, Trump's Jan. 6 insurrection and helped mainstream violence in the Republican Party.

The link between Patriot Prayer and Christian is significant. While they kicked him out of the first rally, researchers who study the far right say it was because Christian was too explicit. "He gave away the game" by throwing a Nazi salute one said. Patriot Prayer claims it's for free speech and tolerance, but it attracts neo-Nazis, white nationalists, neo-Confederates, anti-gay preachers, Islamophobes, and anti-feminists. Along with its many ties to the Proud Boys, Patriot Prayer has also rallied with the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters — all three of which are heavily implicated in the Jan. 6 insurrection.

Patriot Prayer created a broad tent for extremists, painted Portland as a threat to freedom, and threatened "the stench-covered and liberal-occupied streets of Portland will be CLEANSED." It hit the jackpot in figuring out how to stoke violence and provide cover for "lone wolf" attacks.

This is known as "stochastic terrorism," meaning inciting "random actors to carry out violent or terrorist acts that are statistically predictable but individually unpredictable." Trump is the master of stochastic terrorism, having inspired the anti-immigrant shooter who killed 11 Jews at the Tree of Life Synagogue, the El Paso Walmart shooter who used anti-Mexican language that echoed Trump, and the Canadian who murdered six Muslims near Quebec City days after Trump's Muslim ban.

Patriot Prayer served the same function for Jeremy Christian. Their rally gave him space to express his desire to kill Muslims, he used their language of free speech to assault a Black woman and then killed two men as he engaged in an Islamophobic attack. Stochastic terrorism allows Patriot Prayer to deny it had anything to do with the murders despite creating the conditions for Christian's murders and activating him.

Of course, if police had arrested Christian when he committed the first assault, he would have been unable to commit the murders the next day. That police failed to act when he threatened to shoot them is even more disturbing. It has become common to be arrested and prosecuted for expressing violent intent against police on Facebook. Unlike Christian, those who are prosecuted tend to be Black or leftists.

Christian received two forms of police impunity: impunity for men who assault women and whites who commit racist attacks. On top of that is a history of impunity for the Klan, neo-Nazis, and other extremists. One historian says "murderous violence" from the far-right has "had a shocking amount of support from

sectors of the U.S. government committed to ‘law and order.’” Leniency for the right is the flip side of police hammering the left. During the sixties, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover assigned a small army, 2,000 agents, to “discredit, disrupt, and destroy” the Black Panther Party, anti-Vietnam War activists, and student radicals.

Why Portland

In Portland, police impunity for the far-right and hostility toward the left was supercharged by Oregon’s history as a white supremacist state. With Black people barred from living in the state until 1926, Portland became the whitest big city in America, with a Black population of less than 6 percent, and a recruiting ground for extremists such as the White Aryan Resistance. That, in turn, spawned a culture of militant anti-fascists and anarchists willing to confront far-right extremists.

Portland police biases stem from the history of white supremacy, their affinity for the right, and hostility toward the left. In 2017, when asked why Tuzi Toese was not arrested for public assaults, a police spokesman claimed they knew nothing of him and pivoted to describing anti-fascists as their real concern.

Forceful action by elected officials could have halted this dynamic, but political leadership is weak. A source in Mayor Ted Wheeler’s office said in 2017 that they were “scared of the police” and feared “if they pushed on the police, there would be a police slowdown or strike.” The source added that the police have “institutional biases toward Patriot Prayer and white supremacy.”

Other officials are also lenient. For years, the local prosecutor was as lax in holding the far right accountable as police were arresting them. As for the governor and state legislature, one political scientist says, “It’s a white political culture that has a high tolerance for far-right and white nationalist organizing, and seems reluctant to address it for fear of alienating conservative voters.”

If officials do try to hold Portland police accountable, they break the law in retaliation. Weeks after a new district attorney advocating for police reform took office in July 2020, he was doxxed by the police, leading to death threats and forcing his family to leave their home after fascists showed up there. Police twice illegally released information about City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty, who won office in 2018 on a platform of police accountability, including feeding false information to the media that she was responsible for a hit-and-run accident. Police are so out of control, one court issued an order to try to stop them from tear-gassing, pepper-spraying, beating, and arresting journalists. Another court found the bureau was engaged in large-scale doxxing by live streaming participants in protests in violation of state law.

In this atmosphere of police criminality, their support for far-right violence only became more extreme.

Wild West

On August 22, 2020, a hundred fascists rallied in Portland. Kitted for combat, they stood in front of the Multnomah County Justice Center that houses the sheriff’s department, and, in back, the police headquarters. The agencies have nearly 1,400 sworn law-enforcement officers between them. Facing off against the far-right extremists were twice as many anti-fascists, Black Lives Matter activists, union organizers, and other leftists.

For two hours the opposing sides battled with mace, fireworks, blunt weapons, and fists. The fascists fired paintball guns and attacked with shields and metal and wood poles as well. There were broken bones, abdominal wounds, and chemical weapon burns. People were pummeled and stomped. Even by Portland standards, the violence was extreme.

It could have been worse. Alan Swinney, an eagerly violent Proud Boy and hulking Desert Storm veteran, aimed a revolver with his finger on the trigger at antifascists, though he didn’t fire. Many asked why Swinney was on the streets to begin with. A week earlier he shot a videographer in the face with a paintball

gun and threatened to shoot him “with a real gun.” Eventually, the antifascists forced the fascists out of the area.

Here’s where things go down the rabbit hole. Despite a fascist gang on their doorstep for hours, the police were nowhere to be seen. Once the right-wingers were run out of Dodge, however phalanxes of Robocops appeared and forced anti-fascists out of downtown.

Police issued a rambling press release to justify the abdication of public safety. It whined policing is “complex,” bizarrely said they told everyone to “self-monitor for criminal activity,” and complained they were worn out by months of “violent actions directed at the police,” otherwise known as racial justice protests. Yet they weren’t too worn out to dispatch scores of riot cops hours later “to arrest and beat marching demonstrators” at a BLM protest.

A clue to police intentions came when they said they didn’t declare a riot because the two sides were “willingly engaging in physical confrontations.” You see, for a few years Portland police had been telling the far right they could engage in “mutual combat” with antifascists. But not only is mutual combat explicitly banned, but it also would never be legal because it would quickly lead to blood sport, deadly duels, and Squid Games.

That day was indicative of police’s utter indifference to fascist violence and their victims. This is the same dynamic that went on in Trump’s insurrection.

Police allowed Alan Swinney to roam the streets for weeks until a growing public outcry led to his arrest and eventually a 10-year prison sentence. He joins Tarrio who is serving a sentence in prison, Joe Biggs who is jailed awaiting trial in conjunction with Jan. 6, and Toese who was recently arrested on numerous charges.

But this is closing the pen after the horses have bolted. By the fall of 2020, the Proud Boys took their cavalcade of violence on the road to D.C. with multiple riots in the city. Then two weeks before Jan. 6, fascists stormed the Oregon state capitol in Salem, let in by a GOP legislator who was subsequently expelled from the legislature and currently faces criminal charges. The fascists were ready for the big time: Trump’s insurrection.

The dangers have only grown since the coup in a political system incapable of even mounting minimal defenses against a fascist takeover such as by strengthening voting rights and election security being shredded by an extremist GOP.

Portland officials degenerated into self-caricature by August 2021. When fascists planned another riot, police announced they would let the two sides duke it out, Mayor Wheeler took to video to proclaim “choose love,” and in the real world fascists and anti-fascists traded gunfire in Downtown Portland.

Not long after, it was revealed that “more than two dozen current and former police officers, sheriff’s deputies, corrections officers, and members of the military in Oregon” had apparently joined the Oath Keepers.

The same Oath Keepers who were just charged with seditious conspiracy in the Jan. 6 coup.

15 Jan - Fundraiser for 2020 Uprising Prisoner Shawn Sutton’s Release

Call for post-release support for Shawn in Greenville, North Carolina.

MORE:

To support: fundly.com/support-shawn-after-their-release

Shawn was arrested in Greenville, NC on charges stemming from protests that were part of the George Floyd Uprising of 2020. As part of supporting prisoners of the uprising, several folks reached out to them and have been organizing funds to help with their release, in mid-January 2022.

In particular, Shawn is looking for help with housing costs, getting their Commercial Driver's License, and tuition costs for attending barber's school. Shawn particularly wanted to center the murder of Tony McDade, a former federal prisoner and friend of Shawn's who was murdered by police in Florida, and has this to say to their supporters:

For real all this is in memory of him. Yes George Floyd was what it was about to the world but to me and my federal family and my LGBTQ community it was for him. And I don't regret shit. I'd do it all again if that's what it takes. He's not here to speak so I'll make noise for him whenever and however I need to. I hear people say "oh we didn't have to do this or we shouldn't ve did that..." No fuck that! They shouldn't be out here just killing us for the world to see, with no remorse, for no reason at all. And even worse with no repercussions...They want to take our freedom. They don't want us to have no power, no say so. They want us to fear, they want us afraid. And in so many ways they have succeeded.

But I'll never bow out gracefully. They'll never take my voice or my integrity. So to close, what did the uprising mean to me? It meant 'no justice, no peace.' It meant 'Justice for Tony McDade.' It meant we fear no man but God. It meant we're going to fight back for all those who can't fight for themselves. It meant 'Your business will never be worth more than our lives because all that material shit can be replaced. It meant end racism and inequality and injustice. It meant Fuck 12!

Shawn's also an amazing musician, and you can check out some of their tracks at reverbNation.com/artist/3683415

19 Jan - Iowa Judge Upholds Ag-Gag Charge Brought Against Animal Rights Activist Hours Before Dismissing The Case

An Iowa judge upheld one of the state's "ag-gag" laws in a case brought against an animal rights activist, hours before dismissing all charges.

MORE:

by Kevin Gosztola (*Shadowproof*)

In Iowa, a person may be criminalized for "food operation trespass" if they enter or remain on the property of a factory farm "without the consent of a person who has real or apparent authority to allow the person to enter or remain on the property."

Matt Johnson, an investigator with the grassroots animal rights network Direct Action Everywhere (DxE), was charged with violating the ag-gag law after he exposed the extermination of pigs by Iowa Select Farms. He argued the law is "actually intended to punish individuals for expressing viewpoints disfavored by the Iowa legislature" and reminded the court that a similar Iowa ag-gag law was previously ruled unconstitutional by a federal court.

State prosecutors abandoned their case two days before trial and moved to dismiss charges, but the court defended the ag-gag charge, which was challenged by Matt Johnson as unconstitutional.

District Court Judge Derek Johnson ruled that the law "does not discriminate on the basis of the viewpoint of the offender. A person who trespasses on a food operation to abuse an animal is treated the same as a person who trespasses on a food operation to rescue one."

"That is logically true. It's factually preposterous, and it's very clear from the legislative history that the intent of this law was to target animal rights activists, people with a particular viewpoint," replied Wayne Hsiung, an attorney for Matt Johnson and co-founder of DxE.

“You can critique an animal rights activist’s views. You can say that what they’re saying is factually false. What you cannot do under the First Amendment is criminalize their speech, and that is the purpose of this law even if facially it doesn’t say that,” Hsiung added.

Iowa already had a law criminalizing trespassing prior to the passage of the “food operation trespass” law. Trespassing is generally a fine between \$65 and \$625 with the possibility of up to 30 days in prison. But under Iowa’s ag-gag law, trespassing is an aggravated misdemeanor that carries the possibility of up to two years in prison. A repeat offense may result in a felony charge.

Matt Johnson was charged on July 14, 2020, with “burglary in the third degree” and “electronic or mechanical eavesdropping.” He was later charged under the ag-gag law on April 8, 2021.

The charges came after Matt Johnson captured “video and audio recordings of pigs screaming in agony for several hours as they died. Thousands of pigs were exterminated at Iowa Select Farms using ventilation shutdown after COVID-19 outbreaks caused the closure of many slaughterhouses,” according to a press statement from DxE.

A whistleblower informed the activists of conditions at the factory farm. They rescued a “sickly piglet,” which they later named Gilly. Without saving the piglet, it would have gone to a landfill.

During an afternoon hearing on January 19, prosecutors argued for the dismissal of charges while Matt Johnson contended the charges should be dismissed with prejudice and the prosecutors should be required to outline why they were no longer pursuing the case.

The judge conceded in his order upholding the ag-gag charge that animal rights activists are disparately impacted because “some animal rights advocates have an ideological motive to gain physical access to the food animal operations.” However, he justified the targeting of animal rights activists by contending the law is “facially neutral” and does not “constitute viewpoint discrimination simply because it may disproportionately affect some speakers or messages more than others.”

On that point, Hsiung said the judge is allowing the Iowa legislature to “play games with our constitutional rights.”

Iowa has passed four ag-gag laws. The first two ag-gag laws were struck down in part or in their entirety as unconstitutional because they infringe upon First Amendment rights. According to Hsiung, the state legislature went forward with two laws that were constructed to “cover the same conduct” but avoid “constitutional scrutiny” by targeting anyone with severe penalties instead of only animal rights activists,

Hsiung also stated, “The notion that someone is going to trespass on property to abuse an animal first of all is just pretty factually unlikely. The only abuse of animals that is happening is by people who own the facility and operate the facility.”

Each expansion of ag-gag laws throughout the United States is aimed at suppressing journalism, whistleblowing, and speech around animal abuses. They are designed to protect the interests of agribusinesses and their lobbyists, who are threatened by transparency and accountability.

As of August 2021, such laws in Idaho, Kansas, North Carolina, Wyoming, and Utah, as well as in Iowa, were declared to be unconstitutional in whole or in part.

Matt Johnson told The Dissenter in 2019 he led an investigation into a factory farm owned by Iowa Republican state senator Ken Rozenboom. It was a response to his support for ag-gag laws.

The investigation was released in spring 2020. “Inside the barns, we documented severe rectal prolapses, intense overcrowding with noxious ammonia in the air, and excrement coating the floors. One piglet was

unable to stand, gasping for air while thrashing wildly for several minutes before dying before our eyes,” DxE reported.

“It was actually that investigation that led the Iowa Select Farms truck driver to contact us because of the abuse at Iowa Select Farms, which led to the ventilation shutdown exposé,” Johnson shared.

After the ventilation shutdown was exposed at the end of May, Rozenboom backed another Iowa ag-gag law, which passed less than two weeks later. He said the law addressed the “gravest threats to animal agriculture in Iowa.”

Rozenboom discussed how DxE investigated his farm and described the organization as an “extreme animal rights group.” He cheered the law for imposing a felony against animal rights activists who commit a second offense.

The ag-gag law was passed specifically as a response to the investigations and activism of DxE. As Matt Johnson said, it subsequently was used to charge him. He was the “inspiration for the law,” and he became the first person to be charged under the law.

Iowa lawmakers escalated their attacks on journalism and whistleblowing around animal abuse in the food industry in 2021, passing a recording ban that explicitly designates audio or video recording as “trespassing” crimes.

The Animal Legal Defense Fund sued the state of Iowa and argued “the law threatens increased penalties for recording even in public places and locations advocates have long used for public advocacy, such as in open areas of legislators’ offices and parts of businesses in which other members of the public regularly come and go.”

20 Jan - Eric King’s Mail Ban Lifted

Eric’s mail ban is over (for now) so please write him if you can.

MORE:

He would love to hear from people.

It has been quite some time since he was able to receive letters from people outside his immediate family. (We have no idea whether there will be another mail ban).

Please do not talk about his case and be mindful, that all letters are read by prison officials and potentially scanned/saved.

22 Jan - International Campaign for Revolutionary Anarchism and Solidarity with Revolutionary Prisoners

With the capitalist destruction of earth and life continuing unhindered and the nearing prospects of an ecological collapse, there is, perhaps more than ever, a serious and immediate need for global revolutionary movements.

MORE:

Where do our movements here in Europe stand faced with the immense challenges and demands of our epoch? Can we retrace our revolutionary roots? Can we become the creative force that can effectively abolish the cannibalistic authority of the rich few over the many?

Outside of Europe, the revolutionary spirit has reaffirmed its historical strength with armed and organized insurrections in Chiapas and the Middle East paving the way for the liberation of life through the self-organization of the people on the bottom, on terms of equality and communitarianism. But also, all around

the world in recent decades we see that combative resistance and insurrections are breaking out as a result of the increasing violence and totalitarianism of capitalism.

Let's draw our inspiration from the Black resistance movement in the U.S. and the uprising in Chile. These were popular people-led movements using militant and insurrectionist strategies to directly confront the oppressors and their armed thugs (the police). Daily images of barricades, burning banks and attacks against cops flooding global news are the reminder that the world of those in power is easily set ablaze when the rage of the oppressed finds a collective expression.

And yet, revolutionary practices and ideas have been systematically abandoned in our movements. Our struggles are all too often assimilated into the liberal democratic cemetery of politics, where consensus with law and order prevails, thus reducing our movements into harmless opposition/protest movements. Inevitably this works against our need for actual self-organization of people as a combative revolutionary force.

Starting from the belief in the necessity of developing revolutionary perspectives on an international level, we call for an international campaign of solidarity events to create a dialogue within the wider international anti-state, anti-capitalist movement, about the role of militant, revolutionary perspectives in our common struggle for the liberation of all our lives through the social revolution.

Because discussions around revolutionary perspectives and ideas cannot but place the revolutionary prisoners who put these ideas into practices in their center, our contribution to this campaign and discussions will be a focus on the case of Revolutionary Self-Defense and of the incarcerated revolutionary anarchist Dimitris Chatzivasileiadis, but also primarily on the written proposals towards the movement that the comrade has posed through his published communiques. Dimitris has taken the political responsibility for continuing the armed struggle based on the legacy of the urban guerrilla group Revolutionary Self-Defense and is currently serving a 16-year prison sentence in Greece for his revolutionary struggle in Greece.

A short historical background of the case:

Revolutionary Self-Defense was a revolutionary anarchist organization active from 2014-2017. During its years, the organization took responsibility for five armed attacks: against the headquarters of the greek political party PASOK, the Mexican Embassy in Athens, the French Embassy in Athens and two attacks against the greek riot police (MAT) in front of PASOK offices in the neighborhood of Exarchia. The communiques of the organization have been translated into English and can be read [here](#) and [here](#).

Dimitris Chatzivasileiadis went into hiding in October 2019 following an injury during an expropriation of a state casino store in Athens, Greece. After living as a fugitive from the state for 18 months, he was arrested on Monday the 9th of August, 2021, in Thessaloniki, Greece, following the expropriation of a bank in Pefka. The first-degree trial for the case of the expropriation in October 2019 and the case of Revolutionary Self-Defense took place in March 2020. The state convicted Dimitris to 16 years for participation in the Organization, as well as comrade Vagelis Stathopoulos for expressing solidarity to Dimitris by aiding him after his injury. Anarchist Stathopoulos was convicted to 19 years, as revenge for his unwavering stance of solidarity, but also for his participation in the anarchist movement, and his past conviction for the guerrilla Organization Revolutionary Struggle. The trial against the two anarchists on second degree has been set for February 2022.

Since his arrest, Chatzivasileiadis, as all prisoners, is facing the bare punitive and vindictive violence of authority. With this campaign, we call upon comrades worldwide to stand in solidarity with this revolutionary fighter who gave everything to the struggle for our collective liberation from the meaningless rot of the bourgeois State and the domination of global Capitalism. During his time in clandestinity, but also since his arrest, the comrade has participated fully to the open political dialogue of the movement through the publication of his speech in the movement's media. With this written word, the comrade poses

crucial questions to the movement as to its historical responsibility faced with the increasing violence of capitalism, and calls for open dialogue and for the revolutionary organization of the social base on an international level. With this campaign we want to contribute to this dialogue by introducing the comrade's propositions, thereby strengthening our global connections, but also commitments to the struggle, and to share ideas about how to effectively organize today.

Let's stand side by side with the comrade by building an international movement of solidarity and self-defense of the principles and strategies of revolutionary anarchism. Let's learn from the experience of the case of Revolutionary Self-Defense and discuss the potentials of revolutionary tactics and strategies and their role in our struggles for social revolution and liberation of all life.

To anyone who is interested to participate in the campaign by organizing a solidarity events with discussions around the proposals of captive comrade Dimitris Chatzivasileiadis, in the context of the necessary discussion around international perspectives of revolutionary strategies and practices, send us an email at RevoltIntCampaign@riseup.net

1. Noted here are the links to the publications of the comrade which are most relevant to the discussion we wish to initiate, and those which have been translated into English. Starting with the published brochure *Antimilitarism and Revolutionary Anarchism* (athens.indymedia.org/post/1606583), where the comrade's active proposals are set out analytically. This text is currently only in Greek, but will be translated and printed by us in due time. Printed brochures of this text in Greek can be distributed by us, upon request. Other texts that are available in English and sketch out the comrade's positions are *Debriefing and Propositional Statement of comrade Dimitris Chatzivasileiadis to the comrades* (athens.indymedia.org/post/1606087) and *Response to the Week of Revenge for comrade Michael Forest Reinoehl, who was murdered by government order* (athens.indymedia.org/post/1609173)

22 Jan - US Attorney Drops Charges Against Water Protectors Who Occupied Bureau Of Indian Affairs

The United States Attorney's office has decided to not charge 33 Indigenous water protectors and their allies who were arrested while peacefully occupying the Bureau of Indian Affairs lobby in the US Department of Affairs building on October 14th, 2021.

MORE:

via Popular Resistance

This was the first time since the 1972's Trail of Broken Treaties that Indigenous leaders occupied the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Indigenous leaders were met with extreme violence from the police leaving one Indigenous woman with a broken hand, others were hit with batons, two people were tazed and an Indigenous media reporter was assaulted with an officer kneeling on his neck and had his equipment damaged by the police during the attack on peaceful water protectors.

Water protectors occupied the building demanding the abolition of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the US government honor the treaties including the restoration of 110 million acres (450,000 km²) of land taken away from Native Nations, Indigenous children buried at residential schools be returned to their tribal nations, no new leases for oil and gas or extractive industry on public lands, the US government establish a policy of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, restoration of terminated rights.

The occupation followed a week of historic Indigenous resistance in Washington D.C that started on Indigenous Peoples' Day, where "Expect Us" was written on the Andrew Jackson statue outside of the White House ahead of 130 Indigenous leaders and allies being arrested outside of the White House on Indigenous Peoples' Day. Despite a proclamation declaring October 11th Indigenous Peoples' Day, Indigenous leaders were met with police violence and LRAD was used on Indigenous matriarchs and youth being arrested on the White House fence. This was followed by two Water Protectors demanding Biden Stop Line 3 climbing the flagpole outside the Army Corp North Atlantic Division Office, replacing it with

a "Free Informed and Prior Consent" flag that read "Consultation is not Consent." The day after the occupation Native youth from various fights were arrested out of the U.S Capital blocking the street. Indigenous water protectors were in town participating in a larger People Vs. Fossil Fuels week of action in which over 600 people were arrested outside of the White House demanding Biden declare a climate emergency.

Under attack from these fossil fuel projects, Indigenous peoples are fighting back: and winning. A recent report by the Indigenous Environmental Network and Oil Change International showed how over the last decade Indigenous resistance has stopped or delayed greenhouse gas pollution equivalent to at least one-quarter of annual U.S. and Canadian emissions. By blocking at least 26 major fossil fuel projects, these Indigenous leaders and water protectors have stopped projects equivalent to 400 new coal-fired power plants, or roughly 345 million new passenger vehicles.

28 Jan - Bo Brown Memorial

WHAT: Memorial

WHEN: 6:00pm, Friday, January 28th

WHERE: bobbrownmemorial@gmail.com for registration

COST: FREE

MORE:

If you don't already, Bo Brown passed in late October and there is an upcoming virtual memorial on Friday, January 28th from 6pm to 8:30pm.

If you hadn't heard, apologies for this sad news. Bo passed on a Sunday morning while at home with Etang and was cremated. She died unexpectedly on October 24, 2021 of complications from dementia. Bo's passing was sudden and quick after years of progressive impairment and brutal deterioration to her full self. Etang has had the love of friends and family in this hard time.

If you would like to attend the online celebration of Bo's extraordinary life, please respond to bobbrownmemorial@gmail.com, to register. The private link for the gathering will be shared with folks the day of the event.

Wishing you very well, Etang with Annie Danger, a friend of Bo's who is helping out.