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Updates for January 7th

24 Dec - 43 years later, Mumia is still a political prisoner

December 9, 2024, marked the 43rd anniversary of the arrest and political imprisonment of world-renowned journalist, prolific author of over 12 books, as well as veteran of the Philadelphia branch of the Black Panther Party, Mumia Abu Jamal.

MORE:

by JR Valrey (*San Francisco Bay View*)

He is one of the longest held political prisoners in the United States and was a victim of the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (CoinTelPro), which was a program operated by the U.S. government, particularly the FBI, to thwart dissent against US policies domestically and internationally. The US government claimed it was stopped, but overwhelming evidence shows that assassinations, political imprisonment, entrapment and mass surveillance continues, which means that the program still exists under a lesser-known name.

Linn Washington Jr. is an award-winning investigative reporter who is a journalism professor at Temple University in Philadelphia. Washington first met Abu Jamal in 1973, when they both worked at the Philadelphia radio station WRTI-FM. At WRTI, Abu Jamal hosted a community affairs program and Washington was a jazz music DJ. Linn Washington has been working to free Mumia Abu Jamal since Dec. 9, 1981.

It is important for people to acknowledge the imprisonment and prolific work of political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal, just like others in his position, like Imam Jamil Al-Amin, Kamau Sadiki, Leonard Peltier, Aaron Patterson, and political exiles Assata Shakur and Pete O'Neal, because it reinforces that it is a war going on domestically in the U.S., where the poor and disenfranchised classes bear the brunt of the corporate exploitation in the workforce within the nation. Mumia Abu Jamal, as well as the others named, are our soldiers in the fight, whom it is the people's responsibility to free.

JR Valrey: Who is Mumia Abu Jamal? And why is his case an important case in American history?

Linn Washington: Mumia Abu-Jamal is a legendary revolutionary journalist falsely incarcerated for the murder of a Philadelphia policeman. Abu-Jamal has evolved into one of the most perceptive commentators and scholars in AmeriKKKa, whose analysis of the inequities and hypocrisies garners renown worldwide. The importance of the Abu-Jamal case is its glaring example of the double standards of justice historically pervasive across AmeriKKKa.

JR Valrey: Can you detail examples of the glaring legal inconsistencies, contradictions and forms of outright corruption that exist in this case? Can you make sure that you talk about the boxes in the DA's basement as one example?

Linn Washington: Abu-Jamal is a victim of the "Mumia Exception" – a term I devised decades ago to encapsulate the dynamic in his case of judges failing to grant him the relief for numerous violations of his rights that those same judges have granted to other persons wrongfully convicted. Simply put: The law means the law EXCEPT in the Abu-Jamal case.

One glaring example of the "Mumia Exception" involves Philadelphia's progressive District Attorney Larry Krasner. Krasner has successfully gained release of over 40 persons wrongfully convicted due to misconduct by police and prosecutors. However, Krasner has vigorously opposed release for Abu-Jamal

despite Krasner himself finding six boxes containing evidence of Abu-Jamal's innocence illegally withheld by Philadelphia prosecutors for 36 years. That is the definition of prosecutorial misconduct.

Pennsylvania law requires prosecutors to make "timely" disclosures to a defendant of evidence of innocence. Philly prosecutors illegally withholding this evidence that Krasner personally discovered secreted away in the DA's Office clearly violates that "timely" disclosure rule. On the Abu-Jamal case, Krasner is clearly a fraud – falling in line with the systemic efforts that have denied Abu-Jamal the justice he is legally entitled to receive since his arrest on Dec. 9, 1981.

JR Valrey: Where does Mumia Abu Jamal's case stand now after 43 years as a political prisoner?

Linn Washington: Abu-Jamal's case is currently on appeal – again – to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. This appeal seeks to overturn lower courts' denials of relief and release based on the massive evidence of legal rights violations centered on the evidence of innocence and official misconduct discovered by Philly DA Krasner. If the Pennsylvania Supreme Court was truly fair and just, it would rule against that gross misconduct by Philadelphia prosecutors and police. Given the pro-police/anti-Abu-Jamal bias of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania – as documented in the February 2000 report from Amnesty International – it is doubtful that court will rule favorably for Abu-Jamal – thus continuing the torture of his life-without-parole sentence.

JR Valrey: What is the Mumia Exception?

Linn Washington: "Mumia Exception" – Judicial decision-making in America is supposed to be based on precedent: This means that a principle or rule established in a legal case serves as a guide in deciding similar cases. There is a wretched record in rulings against Abu-Jamal where judges from trial courts to appellate courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, will change the law to deny relief or rights for Abu-Jamal and then change the law back to previous ruling(s) to give others relief on the same legal grounds denied Abu-Jamal.

That 2000 Amnesty International report noted a "contradictory series" of court rulings that ignored precedent in denying Abu-Jamal appeals. These perverted rulings, the AI report stated, "leave the disturbing impression that [courts invent new standards] of procedure to apply to one case only: that of Mumia Abu-Jamal."

JR Valrey: Who are some of the people in Pennsylvania that have had their careers progress because of their participation in the prosecution of Mumia?

Linn Washington: There are clearly two persons whose careers have advanced significantly based on their blocking legal rights relief for Abu-Jamal. Both of those persons were former district attorneys in Philadelphia: Edward Rendell and Ronald Castille. Rendell was the DA during Abu-Jamal's 1982 trial that was sabotaged by misconduct by police, prosecutors and the bigoted trial judge. Rendell went on to serve as the mayor of Philadelphia, the governor of Pennsylvania and the head of the Democratic National Committee.

Castille as DA also fought against relief Abu-Jamal was legally entitled to receive. Castille's campaign to join the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania used a "tough on crime" theme emphasizing "tough on cop killers" with finger pointed at Mumia. Castille became Chief Justice of that court. On that court he repeatedly voted to deny Mumia's appeals. Both Rendell and Castille – once out of various elected offices – have publicly castigated any claim of Mumia's innocence.

JR Valrey: What was Mumia like when you worked with him? What kinds of stories did he cover? Where did y'all work? What years?

Linn Washington: Mumia and I worked together as journalists from 1975 till his arrest in December 1981. He was a radio reporter, and I was a newspaper reporter. We both covered the Black community, reporting on inequities and racism from abusive policing to decrepit housing to problems in public schools to entertainment like reggae music concerts. There were occasions when we both covered the same news event. One unusual “story” that I covered was a protest by Mumia against a loud-mouthed host at a radio station where he worked. Yeah, Mumia was a one-man demonstration on the lawn of that radio station. He and that host eventually made peace.

JR Valrey: While Mumia has been held captive for the last 43 years, what is the biggest lesson that you have gained from his life and work?

Linn Washington: Watching Mumia’s growth as a journalist while incarcerated coupled with his evolution as a scholar has been impressive. Remember much of that growth and evolution occurred during his lock-down on Death Row where his voluminous writings were done longhand, without a typewriter, word processor or computer.

He’s learned French and German while incarcerated. He’s obtained a college degree, a master’s degree and is nearing completion of a PhD. His life struggle post-arrest, offsetting deprivations that have driven men raving mad, has inspired others inside “the walls” and around the world. A testament to his incredible stature is found in the fact that an Ivy League school – Brown University – featured a year-long exhibition of Mumia’s life and works!

24 Dec - Record number of protesters will be in UK prisons this Christmas

England: Forty people, aged 22 to 58, incarcerated for direct actions on climate and Gaza actions amid crackdown on dissent

MORE:

by Matthew Taylor (*The Guardian*)

A record number of people who have taken part in protests will be in prison in the UK this Christmas, raising concern about the ongoing crackdown on dissent.

Forty people, aged from 22 to 58, will be behind bars on Christmas Day for planning or taking part in a variety of protests relating to the climate crisis or the war in Gaza. Several of them are facing years in prison after courts handed down the most severe sentences on record for direct action protests.

Jodie Beck, a policy and campaigns officer at the civil rights group Liberty, said the number of protesters in prison and the severity of their sentences was “a damning reflection of the state of democracy” in the country.

“We should all be able to stand up for what we believe in without fear of lengthy prison sentences. Continuing to prosecute people for exercising their right to protest will only serve to exacerbate the crisis in our criminal justice system alongside stopping people from making their voices heard,” Beck said.

Nineteen people are in prison – 10 of them on remand – after taking part in climate protests with the campaign group Just Stop Oil. They range from five people who received multi-year sentences after being found guilty of conspiring to cause gridlock on the M25, to two young people jailed for more than 18 months for throwing tomato soup over Van Gogh’s *Sunflowers* painting in the National Gallery in London.

Cressida Gethin, 22, who is in prison for conspiring to cause gridlock on London’s orbital motorway, told the jury during her trial: “Earth’s life-support systems are breaking down due to human activities ... I stand by my actions as the most effective option available to me.”

The other 21 facing Christmas in jail – 19 of them on remand – are alleged to have taken part in pro-Palestinian direct action campaigns, including attempting to disrupt the supply of weapons to Israel from arms factories in Glasgow and Bristol. They include a group who allegedly broke into an Israeli-based defence firm's site and face charges including grievous bodily harm, criminal damage and aggravated burglary. Their trial is due to take place in November next year.

Since the war in Gaza, many climate justice groups in the UK have swung behind the Palestinian cause and both sets of activists have been at the sharp end of the crackdown on protest, receiving what many experts consider draconian treatment by the legal systems in the UK.

The scale of the incarceration and the length of the sentences has caused widespread concern among civil liberties organisations and legal experts.

Michel Forst, the UN rapporteur on environmental defenders, has described the situation in the UK as “terrifying”, saying protesters are being forced to navigate a draconian new legal environment that includes significant limits on the right to protest.

Earlier this month a report found that the UK is a world leader when it comes to jailing environmental protesters, with police arresting people at nearly three times the global average rate.

A leading barrister, Michael Mansford KC, said that as more people became aware of the “violent global threats to our very existence”, namely the climate crisis and war, “it is hardly surprising that the increasing numbers trapped by these forces are compelled to make their presence and their objections felt as loudly and urgently as possible”.

He added: “If the non-violent exercise of freedom of speech, expression and assembly are to retain a meaningful central role in our democracy, there has to be a paradigm shift in appreciation and understanding of these particular needs by government and the law.”

Over the past few years, a raft of new legislation has been introduced that severely curtails the right to protest.

Beck, of Liberty, said: “From votes for women to pride, our society is better for the protests that have come before us. We need a government that listens to, rather than punishes, protesters, and for the dangerous legislation of recent years to be immediately overturned.”

Direct action climate protests are not always popular with the British public. In October, a YouGov poll found that almost three-quarters of people thought the jail sentences given to the National Gallery protesters were either “about right” (37%) or “not harsh enough” (36%).

The policing minister, Diana Johnson, defended the approach to protest, saying that although the government supported people's right to take to the streets, no one was above the law.

“This government recognises the democratic right that people must be free to peacefully express their views, but they should do so within the bounds of the law,” Johnson said.

Anna Holland, 22, from Newcastle, was one of the two people imprisoned for throwing soup at the Sunflowers painting, and will spend Christmas in Send prison in Surrey. They said life behind bars was “hard” and “scary”, and that being away from their family at Christmas exacerbated those feelings.

However, they said the threat of prison must not silence people in the fight for justice.

“Prison is used as a deterrent, but we must not allow it to deter us,” Holland wrote. “We must not allow fear to win over hope. We must not lose the dream that we can create a better world together.”

25 Dec - New Florida Prison Policy on Trans Health Care ‘Like Conversion Therapy’

With new restrictions on gender-affirming care, prisons confiscate underwear from trans people and compel them to cut their hair.

MORE:

by Beth Schwartzapel (*The Marshall Project*)

Earlier this fall, Florida officials ordered transgender women in the state’s prisons to submit to breast exams. As part of a new policy for people with gender dysphoria, prison medical staff ranked the women’s breast size using a scale designed for adolescents. Those whose breasts were deemed big enough were allowed to keep their bras. Everyone else had to surrender theirs, along with anything else considered “female,” such as women’s underwear and toiletry items.

The examinations came after people who had been diagnosed with gender dysphoria by the prison system’s own providers were brought into meetings at the end of September and told of the prisons’ new policy, which would make it nearly impossible for them to get hormone therapy and other gender-affirming medical care, according to interviews and emails with more than a dozen transgender women who said they attended the meetings.

Josie Takach, who is incarcerated in a men’s facility south of Tallahassee, said a male doctor told her to lift up her shirt, then glanced at her breasts and wrote something down without saying a word. When she tried to ask a question, a nurse “told me not to ask questions and to shut up and do what I’m told,” she recalled.

“It felt like I was being treated less than human,” she said.

The state’s chapter of the ACLU sued Florida’s Department of Corrections, which operates the prisons, in late October, calling the policy draconian and arguing it amounts to an unconstitutional ban on gender-affirming care. The new policy is the latest maneuver in the culture war around transgender people’s civil rights in the Sunshine State. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis championed a raft of anti-trans legislation, including a law passed last year that prohibited children with gender dysphoria from accessing treatments like puberty blockers and hormone therapy. A similar law in Tennessee was the subject of arguments in a case before the U.S. Supreme Court last week.

In Tallahassee Monday, a federal judge held a preliminary hearing in the ACLU case. The state had asked the judge to dismiss the lawsuit altogether, and the ACLU asked him to stop the state from enforcing the new rules. The judge is expected to issue a ruling on these questions in the coming weeks.

The Florida Department of Corrections’ media office did not respond to multiple emails and phone calls with detailed questions, but in court papers responding to the ACLU’s lawsuit, the department’s lawyers argued that the new rules are “a carefully crafted policy that creates an individualized course of treatment for each inmate based on scientific evidence and clinical judgment.”

Under the new policy, the Department of Corrections stated that the prisons will only provide those with gender dysphoria with psychotherapy — and not cross-gender hormones — except “in rare instances ... if necessary to comply with the U.S. Constitution or a court decision.” The policy argues that “unaddressed psychiatric issues and unaddressed childhood trauma could lead to a misdiagnosis of gender dysphoria,” and that cross-gender hormones “may be requested by persons experiencing short-termed delusions or beliefs which may later be changed and reversed.”

Florida has the country’s third-largest state prison system, with more than 87,000 people incarcerated at the end of September. Of those, 181 have been identified by the department as transgender, and about 100 received hormone treatment, according to documents state officials filed with the courts in the ACLU case.

The new policy was announced in meetings in several prisons across the state at the end of September. Transgender women who attended the meetings said they were told by officials that everyone identifying as transgender would be “re-evaluated” to assess whether they can have continued access to the care and accommodations they had been receiving, such as permission to grow their hair long. Officials have not told the women whether and under what circumstances they will be allowed to stay on the hormones they have been receiving.

Since then, more than a dozen transgender people said corrections officers ordered them to cut their hair. Mariko Sundwall told *The Marshall Project* that she was given a disciplinary infraction and spent 10 days in solitary confinement for refusing to cut her hair before officers put her in handcuffs and led her to the prison barber where her hair was cropped short.

“[Before] my hair was long enough for a ponytail. Now I have a buzz cut,” said Jada Edwards, incarcerated in Dade Correctional Institution south of Miami. “I’m very sad and depressed. I feel like they’re taking away my identity.”

Scores of women also had their breasts examined, according to filings in the suit and interviews with some of the women. A medical provider for the state assigned each transgender woman a rating on the Tanner scale, a system used by pediatricians to assess the development of adolescents during puberty. Several of the women said they weren’t told what stage was required for permission to keep their bras, but that almost everyone they knew had theirs taken away.

Some report hiding bras or sewing makeshift underwear — although now women’s undergarments are considered contraband and could result in disciplinary charges — because they feel naked and exposed without them.

“I feel like I’m 12 years old again, sneaking around wearing a bra,” said Takach, after her female undergarments were confiscated.

The new policy, which requires psychotherapy to treat underlying issues rather than treating the dysphoria, “comes off like conversion therapy,” says Daniel Tilley, the lead attorney from the ACLU of Florida. “We’re trying to change your fundamental nature to get you to stop being who you are.”

Sarah Maatsch, who is incarcerated in a men’s prison south of Orlando, said she was told that the gender dysphoria diagnosis she received from corrections department doctors in 2019 would now be considered a serious psychiatric illness. If she wants to continue her treatment, she said she was told, she would have to move to a more restrictive prison with more psychiatric services, but fewer work opportunities.

“We are all devastated,” said Maatsch. “There are good days, bad days and the very bad days where a part of you hopes you have a heart attack.”

The new policy is the latest change in health care for transgender people in Florida after a 2023 law said any “governmental entity” in Florida “may not expend state funds ... for sex-reassignment prescriptions or procedures.” It did not name prisons specifically, but the Department of Corrections’ new policy says it “shall comply” with this law.

Shortly after DeSantis’ anti-trans bills were passed, transgender people in state prisons began reporting that medications were abruptly changed or delayed with little or no explanation.

Courts have held that prisons are required under the U.S. Constitution to provide gender-affirming hormones as needed. Dan Karasic is a psychiatrist at the University of California, San Francisco who helped develop international standards for treatment of transgender people and who has testified against bans on gender-affirming care in Florida and elsewhere. He read Florida’s new guidelines at *The Marshall Project*’s request and called them “a fig leaf on their efforts to ban gender-affirming care. They are really

trying to skirt the law, as determined by multiple courts, that gender-affirming medical and surgical care must be provided when medically necessary.”

The Florida prison system’s program to treat prisoners with gender dysphoria began in 2017, after Reilyn Keohane sued the state. The federal judge in the case said that the Department of Corrections’ refusal to provide Keohane with hormones and social accommodations, like women’s clothing and haircuts, caused her “to continue to suffer unnecessarily and poses a substantial risk of harm to her health.” During the course of the lawsuit, the state began providing gender-affirming hormone therapy, access to makeup, women’s clothing and other social accommodations within its prisons.

Behind the scenes, Danny Martinez, the state prison system’s medical director, began revising the state’s gender-affirming care program in 2020, he said in a court declaration in response to the ACLU’s recent lawsuit. As many as one-third of the people on hormones in Florida’s prisons were not attending group or personal therapy sessions, he said. “I observed no decrease, and in fact an increase in grievances to the medical and mental health staff from inmates receiving hormone therapy, indicating to me that the treatment solely based on hormone therapy without additional mental health treatment produced limited success,” he wrote. An email to Martinez seeking comment was not returned.

Martinez said he designed the new program based on a 2022 report by Florida’s Medicaid organization that found “insufficient evidence” that medical interventions for gender dysphoria are safe or effective. The report led to the state’s Medicaid program banning coverage of gender-affirming medical care. But a federal judge, in striking down the Medicaid ban last year, found that the report was “a biased effort to justify a predetermined outcome, not a fair analysis of the evidence,” and the report’s conclusion was “not supported by the evidence and was contrary to generally accepted medical standards.”

So far, none of the transgender women incarcerated in Florida have reported being taken off their hormones, but the looming threat has led to widespread anxiety.

“If they took away my hormone therapy treatment, I would be ready to end my life. I’m at that point,” said Sasha Mendoza, who is incarcerated in a men’s prison near Miami, in a declaration filed in the ACLU case. “It may sound drastic. But FDC just let me start my transition and I was doing so well, and now they are making me stop. I’m halfway there and halfway not there.”

27 Dec - Update on Gabriella Oropesa’s case

On December 18, 2024, a Tampa jury declared Gabriella Oropesa guilty of conspiracy against rights, with sentencing scheduled for March 19, 2025.

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Two FBI agents testified that they identified Oropesa in Winter Haven, where one of the defaced crisis pregnancy centers (anti-abortion centers which masquerade as legitimate abortion clinics) was located. A chief concern regarding this sworn statement is the lack of evidence supporting it; no evidence regarding this matter was referred to over the course of the trial. Furthermore, an inconsistency glossed over by the jury was a testimony by a CAST (Cellular Analysis Survey Team) FBI agent who stated that tracking evidence does not support the conclusion that Oropesa’s phone was present in Winter Haven. This conflicts with statements alleging that the defendant was present at the site of the anti-abortion center.

Given the sentences imposed by the Dishonorable Judge Virginia Covington for the other defendants in this case, it is apparent that these trials are being used to make examples of the activists and to strike fear in other Floridians protesting the state’s draconian abortion regulations.

We at the Anarchist Black Cross South Florida chapter have been involved in supporting the political prisoners in this case since its inception and will continue to aiding Oropesa moving forward. Here is how You can help assist our anti-repression work.

27 Dec - After Biden's Grants of Clemency, Calls to Commute Peltier Reignite

In late December, after President Biden made the historic act of commuting the sentences of 1,499 Americans in a single day, efforts to free Leonard Peltier have reignited.

MORE:

by Darren Thompson (*Unicorn Riot*)

On Thursday, Dec. 12 — the day after Biden announced clemency — dozens of U.S. senators and representatives wrote a letter to the President asking for clemency for Leonard Peltier.

Tribal leaders and organizers have praised the act by federal leaders: “We would like to thank Senator [Brian] Schatz and Representative [Raúl] Grijalva for their solidarity as well as the other senators and congresspeople who signed on to the letter,” said NDN Collective CEO Nick Tilsen to *Unicorn Riot*. “This is an indicator that momentum continues to grow for clemency for Leonard Peltier.”

The letter to President Biden was signed by all Democrats including seven senators, 26 House members, and a former Democratic senator who served in the Senate with Biden for years, Patrick Leahy of Vermont. “We write to you with renewed urgency regarding the case of Native American rights activist Leonard Peltier,” the letter to President Biden stated. “The power to exercise mercy in this case lies solely within your discretion, and we urge you to grant Mr. Peltier clemency, allowing him to return home and live out his remaining days among his own people.”

The American Indian Movement (AIM) has long led efforts to raise awareness of Peltier’s conviction, and has organized many campaigns that have focused on the federal government’s oppression against the dissenter organization in the 1970s.

Peltier’s conviction stems from a 1975 fatal shootout that took place two years after the 71-day Wounded Knee Occupation, where AIM members occupied the town of Wounded Knee to protest corruption in tribal leadership and to highlight the federal government’s failure to honor treaties. During the time of the fatal shootout, the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation had the highest murder rate per capita in the nation. Violence on the reservation was largely fueled by conflict between tribal citizens who supported the Oglala Sioux Tribe’s government and those who did not. In fact, the period leading up to the fatal shooting that left two FBI agents dead is widely known and referred to as “The Reign of Terror.”

In the summer of 1975, AIM members camped out on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation to support and protect elders in the community. On June 26, 1975, a shootout broke out between drivers in two unmarked cars and another vehicle driven by someone associated with the AIM encampment. Two FBI agents, Ronald Williams and Jack Coler — drivers of the unmarked cars — were killed.

Despite Peltier’s defense team claiming the evidence against him had been falsified, he was convicted of two counts of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison in 1977.

“The American Indian Movement is grateful for the many people and organizations who have supported Leonard Peltier over the last decades,” said American Indian Movement’s Grand Governing Council Chair Lisa Bellanger to *Unicorn Riot*. “The recent letter from federal leaders to Biden is appreciated and it’s time to let our elder return home to his people.”

Efforts to support Leonard Peltier’s release from federal prison have increased in the last couple of years through asking President Biden to grant Peltier a compassionate release due to his deteriorating health and age. The Democratic National Committee’s Resolutions Committee unanimously approved a resolution in 2022 asking President Biden to consider clemency for Leonard Peltier. Later that year, a walk that began in Minneapolis convened for a demonstration and rally at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. and included several meetings with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and the White House.

In Sept. 2023, NDN Collective organized a rally with Amnesty International USA at the White House, and 35 participants in the rally were arrested including former National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) President Fawn Sharp, Dallas Goldtooth, and NDN Collective CEO Nick Tilsen. Each arrest resulted in a \$50 citation and no one was taken to jail.

After the White House's Tribal Nations Summit — an annual meeting with at least one representative of a federally recognized tribe and White House officials — on December 9, Oglala Sioux Tribal (OST) President Frank Star Comes Out coordinated a meeting with the DOJ's Office of Tribal Justice officials including Oglala Sioux Tribal Member JoAnn Kintz and acting director Daron Carreiro, an enrolled Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma citizen, to show a united front of support and solidarity from Tribal Nations and Tribal organizations in asking for the release of Leonard Peltier. There were at least a dozen Indigenous leaders in the closed meeting.

"The Oglala Sioux Tribe formally requests, on a government-to-government basis, that you grant Mr. Peltier clemency so he can be released from prison on humanitarian grounds," wrote OST President Star Comes Out in a letter addressed to President Biden on December 3. "He has served 49 years in prison, is now in poor health, and should be given an opportunity to spend the remainder of his life with family."

In his letter to Biden, Star Comes Out mentioned a letter from James H. Reynolds, the appeals prosecutor for South Dakota from 1976-1982 whose office handled the prosecution and appeal of Peltier. In 2021, Reynolds wrote a letter to Biden saying that much of the evidence used to convict Peltier for the crime of first-degree murder would not be accepted in a court today and asked the president to grant Leonard Peltier clemency. Reynolds spoke at the "Walk for Justice" rally in Washington, D.C. in November 2022 and joined leaders in various meetings with the DOJ and Pardon Officials.

Last month, while aboard Air Force One to the Gila River Indian Community, NCAI President Mark Macarro spoke with President Biden about Leonard Peltier and asked him to consider granting clemency. Biden was traveling to Gila River to officially apologize for the United States' role in operating federal Indian Boarding Schools. Macarro reportedly told Biden that Peltier was a boarding school survivor and Indian Country has long advocated for his release.

"Our expectation is that the President will make a decision for, or against, clemency before he leaves office," said Tilsen. "This decision will have a direct relationship to President Biden's legacy and relationship to Indian people." However, no indication has come from the White House that the President was considering granting clemency for Leonard Peltier.

Interior Secretary Deb Haaland previously voiced her support for the release of Leonard Peltier, but that was when she was a New Mexico congresswoman. Since becoming the Secretary of Interior, Haaland has not issued a statement supporting Leonard Peltier's release from federal prison. Former President Barack Obama denied Peltier's application for clemency on his last day in office, on January 18, 2017.

"If we all told the truth about Leonard Peltier, we would have to talk about the 69-100 Oglala traditionals and/or AIM identified people who were murdered under the political cover, legal immunity, funds, arms, equipment and intelligence provided by the corrupt FBI and other agencies. If Biden chooses the same path as every other US President before him then Leonard Peltier's fate will be decided by President Trump who, like Leonard and AIM, has been politically targeted by the FBI."

Chase Iron Eyes, Executive Director, Sacred Defense Fund

Biden's last day in office is January 20, 2025.

January 4th - Update on Leonard

Leonard Peltier started experiencing intermittent blindness over a year ago. He was told his eyesight would be treated within four to six months. Leonard's eyesight has worsened severely, and they are still saying it

will be four to six months before he is treated. Leonard Peltier is going blind. On 12-31-2024, Leonard was taken to the hospital because a blood vessel in his eye ruptured.

The lockdowns have lessened in severity. Many of you have been pressuring the Senate Judiciary Committee, and they may be hearing us. Thank you for your efforts.

When Leonard had lockjaw, supporters found a senator willing to intercede and fly him to the Mayo Clinic for treatment. We must find someone in Congress willing to intercede to save Leonard's eyesight. The prison treats emergency symptoms when they arise, but the underlying conditions must be treated.

27 Dec - On the Abandonment of Political Prisoners in the Pro-Palestine Movement

Casey Goonan is the only US political prisoner from the 2024 pro-Palestine student encampments.

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They are an abolitionist and anarchist who has dedicated themselves to multiple forms of prisoner support work and directly engaging with incarcerated comrades. The impact they've made inside is prevalent, as indicated by statements from their comrades Stevie Wilson and Hybachi Lemar. They've always pushed to ensure an understanding of Black struggle and revolt as central to their abolitionist work, and through understanding the totality of anti-Blackness the importance of an anti-police and anti-prison perspective was brought into any and all of their efforts towards liberation.

In June of 2024, they were arrested by a task force comprised of the FBI and other law enforcement agencies in connection with an alleged direct action which took place in solidarity with the UC Berkeley encampments which had been brutalized by police and zionists earlier in the year. If convicted, they could face up to 20 years in prison with a minimum sentence of 5. The investigation and court proceedings are currently ongoing but a **non-cooperative** plea deal is pending in which Casey will plead guilty to one charge to allow additional charges to be dropped.

While Casey has received a great amount of support from decentralized community in New York, Chicago, California, and elsewhere, the pro-Palestine movement needs to be publicly and actively supporting them. Right now, their primary accomplices are those who personally know them, those who prioritize prisoner support, and fellow anarchists. Despite vague assertions of the interconnectedness of repression and struggles between the American policing and prison apparatuses to that of Israel, there has been little material manifestation from that understanding within the US pro-Palestine movement. Meanwhile, coordinated struggle between prisoners and outside militants has been a key point of success.

We must recognize the necessity of attacking the infrastructure of occupation domestically. Amidst calls for escalation, it is of vital importance to defend those experiencing repression from the legal system. To not do so is to allow one of the state's most well-funded and structured counterinsurgency tactics to take complete hold of movements. If people are abandoned to incarceration, the fear of repression will throw everyone towards inactivity. This need for defense is especially true for those facing charges beyond the more palatable ways of dissent, like marches and encampments.

State repression must be met with expanding our community resources to reach those inside. Bravery must be met with support.

It's not surprising that, despite the large presence of the Palestinian diaspora in the American pro-Palestine movement, tactics focus primarily on vocalizing dissent through marches and making demands of the state, which are a far cry from the struggle within Palestine itself. This is partially attributed to the class character of the diaspora — a petty bourgeois group would have no investment in attacking infrastructure they partially benefit from even if that same infrastructure perpetuates the genocide of indigenous groups including Black people and Palestinians both domestically and globally. Equally, the motivations and interests of the community organizations and student groups that are largely in control of the movement not

only harbor that class character but also rely on funding from the infrastructure they refuse to attack. Despite the student movement being referred to as an intifada, its activity is incomparable to what has occurred during the numerous intifadas leading up to the Al-Aqsa Flood.

Considering pro-Palestinian community groups and political organizations like USPCN, CJP/SJP, Dissenters, NAARPR, JVP and PSL are supplied with enough funds to bus people in for marches, plan conferences, and campaign for local policy, certainly donating money towards legal fees for those facing repression would be no issue.

Even with all the attention and credibility being given to the pro-Palestinian student movement and despite the numerous pro-Palestine student groups on university campuses, there have been no publicly circulated student-led support efforts for Casey. Outside of participants of the Columbia University encampment, there has been no mention of them from any other university space, most likely attributed to groups aligning themselves with certain tactics, a hesitancy towards anarchists, and the fear of repression.

Beyond the bare minimum of ensuring people are supported in obtaining adequate legal counsel, any revolutionary horizons with teeth require long term prisoner support. This practice is key to the current struggle that led to the Al-Aqsa Flood as exhibited by the rich history of organizing within prisons and the ongoing liberation of those being held hostage by Israel. In Khalida Jarrar's words, "[t]he ongoing conquest to liberate prisoners is in tandem with the Palestinians' constant and multifaceted struggle against colonialism. Hence, the slogan "emptying the prisons" is derived from and a core component in the Palestinian struggle through various stages in its history."

Those of us living under a plantation economy already have our own reasons to ensure incarceration is a central site of struggle. But if one does insist upon taking guidance from elsewhere and if one intends to "bring the Intifada home" or "escalate for Gaza", Palestinians have provided plenty of methods for how carcerality can be attacked.

Casey understood this prior to their incarceration and there's no doubt this knowledge influenced their own political horizons. If the pro-Palestine movement wants to also tote itself as an intifada they should take note of the militant organizing and support infrastructure within and between prison walls that occurs in Palestine. Abandonment of prisoners is where revolutionary ideals die.

27 Dec - Continued push for Imam Jamil al-Amin

Demand Imam Jamil Receive Medical Transfer & Treatment.

MORE:

Imam Jamil Al-Amin, 81 years old, formerly known as H. Rap Brown, had a recent growth on his face that is potentially life-threatening. This is on top of his multiple myeloma (cancer), strokes, other significant medical issues, and age. A civil and human rights leader, wrongfully imprisoned for the past 24 years, needs YOUR IMMEDIATE HELP to stop his "Death By Medical Neglect!"

CALL the DESIGNATION & SENTENCE COMPUTATION CENTER

972.352.4400, Press 1 for operator (ignore the menu)

Give Name & Inmate Number: Jamil Al-Amin, #99974-555

Demand they grant Imam Jamil an EMERGENCY MEDICAL TRANSFER from United States Penitentiary (USP) Tucson to Federal Medical Center (FMC) Butner for his Immediate Medical Treatment.

You may also call the following to have added impact:

Tucson Complex Warden Mark Gutierrez—**520.663.5010** | mggutierrez@bop.gov

BOP Southeast Regional Director Shannon Phelps—**678.686.1201** | sphelps@bop.gov

Director of BOP Colette Peters—**202.307.3198** | cspeters@bop.gov

31 Dec - Anarchists Organizing Demonstration Outside Brooklyn Federal Jail Holding Luigi Mangione, Sean Combs

On the noisiest night of the year, organizers with New York City's Anarchist Black Cross (NYC ABC) are asking folks to join them outside of the Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC) in Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

MORE:

They are inviting revelers to come, not in an appeal to authority, to speak truth to power, or any other contrivance, but rather to stand with others, and show direct solidarity to those on the other side of the wall.

While much has been made of the fact that two very high-profile folks are currently held at MDC—Luigi Mangione and Sean “Diddy” Combs, NYC ABC says they have held New Year’s Eve demonstrations there for years. “As a collective, we work to provide support to U.S. held political prisoners and prisoners of war, folks who come from communities like ours and deserve our support,” said Louise Berger. “There are currently dozens of political prisoners in the United States, coming from movements like those struggling for the liberation of historically oppressed people. Folks like Leonard Peltier or Imam Jamil Al-Amin who have been imprisoned for decades. There are also those more recently imprisoned, like Jesse Cannon, Caleb Freestone, Casey Goonan, and Annarella Rivera, coming from movements for Palestinian self-determination; the ongoing fight against violent white supremacists; and for women’s reproductive freedom.”

NYC ABC has been organizing New Year’s Eve “noise demonstrations” for over a decade, just as other groups have done outside of jails and prisons around the world. A noise demo is equal parts celebratory demonstration to let imprisoned folks know they are not alone and raucous protest to keep guards and administrators on notice that they are being watched. The latter has become crucial in recent years and the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn has come under scrutiny following the 2020 murder of incarcerated Jamel Floyd by aggressive guards who pepper-sprayed Floyd until he went into cardiac arrest. That murder came only one year after the same jail went for days without heat or electricity in the middle of a polar vortex, leaving 1,600 incarcerated folks without water for several days. Conditions have not improved in the following years.

Jem Kapinos is a member of MDC solidarity, a group based in Sunset Park, Brooklyn that organizes around the horrible conditions at the federal jail.

“The conditions at MDC Brooklyn are completely inhumane. Members of our group who have loved ones inside routinely hear reports of spoiled and maggot-infested food; lack of clean, hot water; and medical neglect and deprivation,” Kapinos told us. “The COs use any excuse to lock the prison down, forcing people to spend up to 23 hours a day in their cells without access to regular showers, phone calls, or physical activity. The BOP [Bureau of Prisons] has created a pressure cooker environment that takes a mental toll on everyone inside. It’s torture, and no one should have to endure it.”

When asked why NYC ABC are organizing a demonstration on the night that most folks are solely focused on socializing, Berger said, “Hand in glove, billionaires and the government systematically oppress folks to keep us divided and at each other’s throats. When we decide to fight back, they repress and subject us to draconian punishments, if not immediate death.” Berger added, “there is no better way to celebrate New Year’s Eve than by including those who are expected to feel at their lowest on this night.”

January 4th - In Brooklyn, NY, people rallied and gathered outside of the Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC) for a noise demonstration.

Annual New Year’s Eve noise demo at MDC Brooklyn saw a crowd of around 100 who braved a torrential downpour to remind those locked inside that they are not alone. The crowd was aided in noise-making by the contribution of thunder from Mother Nature and radical beats from [**@rudemechanicalorchestra**](#).

Despite heightened visibility due to both Luigi Mangione and Sean Combs being incarcerated pretrial at MDC, NYPD presence was about the same as it was in previous years. However, MDC cops took it upon themselves, on the presence of this journalist filming the facade of the prison, to carry pepper bullet guns as an absurd show of force against a crowd of punks banging pots and pans 100 feet away. The gimmick was a ridiculous reminder of the violence the state inflicts on people locked in cages away from the public eye — such as the recent lynching by 13 C.O.s of Robert Brooks at Marcy Correctional Facility in upstate New York — and immediate validation of the rallying cries to “Free them all” and “Burn the prisons.”

Flyers distributed by **@mdc_solidarity** listed demands also circulating on a petition from the group:

WE DEMAND THAT MDC BROOKLYN:

1. PROVIDE ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS, GOOD QUALITY FOOD AT ALL TIMES
2. PROVIDE APPROPRIATE HEALTHCARE, INCLUDING MENTAL AND PHYSICAL EVALUATION AND TREATMENT
3. END THE LOCKDOWNS
4. ALLOW REGULAR, ACCESSIBLE VISITATIONS WITHOUT ARBITRARY AND UNJUST RESTRICTIONS
5. MAINTAIN HABITABLE CONDITIONS INCLUDING APPROPRIATE TEMPERATURES AS WELL AS SANITARY, PROPERLY FUNCTIONING PLUMBING

1 Jan - Call For Court Support For Peppy & Krystal

Peppy and Krystal’s sentencing hearing is scheduled for January 6th.

MORE:

If you’re able to attend, here are the details:

WHEN: Monday, January 6th at 2pm

WHERE: Room 6C of the US Courthouse, 700 Grant Street, downtown Pittsburgh.

This is the last court appearance Peppy will make before being transferred to BOP custody to serve out the remainder of his sentence. So, if you’re in the area and are able to, please show up and show him and Krystal just how much support they have!

4 Jan - Your local jail may be a detention center

Just before the 2024 presidential election, Butler County Sheriff Richard Jones said that if former President Donald Trump won, he would get back into the "deportation business."

MORE:

by Shannon Heffernan (*The Marshall Project*)

Now, the suburban Ohio sheriff has set aside 250 to 300 beds for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainees — around a third of Butler County Jail’s capacity, according to the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, and a boon to the county’s revenue.

Overwhelming evidence shows immigrants are less likely to commit crime than people born in the U.S. Sheriff Jones himself concedes that immigrants are not more prone to crime. However, he has echoed Trump’s immigration rhetoric and vowed to do his part to enforce Trump’s plans to deport undocumented immigrants. “I believe in American citizens first. People that have blood and sweat into this country have fought for it, them first. These other countries aren’t first. We are,” Jones told *WLWT*.

The detention part of the “deportation business” could be a profitable one for Butler County. In 2024, the county made over \$6.7 million renting jail beds to other local and federal government agencies, including the U.S. Marshals and the Bureau of Prisons. Even before Trump’s re-election, Butler County budgeted for an increase in that revenue to an estimated \$8.5 million in 2025, according to the *Journal-News*.

A county commissioner offered support for the sheriff's plans to rent more beds to ICE: "Obviously, the more prisoners we have, the more revenue it produces," Commissioner Don Dixon said.

Butler County isn't the only entity that could see revenue rise with the deportation of immigrants.

Trump's plans will require building a massive nationwide infrastructure, including centers to detain people awaiting deportation, contracts to provide food and healthcare services during their incarceration, and planes to fly them out of the country.

The Biden administration has already laid the groundwork for deportations, by extending private detention contracts. Still, Trump will face significant financial, legal and logistical limitations in building or expanding any kind of deportation infrastructure. But even if he only partially delivers on his promises, the financial and human impacts could be significant.

Since the election, there has been a lot of attention on how many for-profit companies, especially private prisons, stand to rake in big profits from mass deportations. Some have already seen their stock prices skyrocket. But local governments may also assist Trump, for both political and financial reasons.

As *The New York Times* reported last month, it would be nearly impossible for Trump to execute his immigration plans without cooperation from local law enforcement.

Local law enforcement officers can check people's immigration statuses after an arrest and pass them along to federal officials. And *The New Yorker* recently described how the Trump administration might make it so even more people who are arrested locally may face deportation proceedings.

The job of detaining immigrants, though, is where local governments most clearly stand to profit. County jails may rent beds to ICE, expanding detention capacity. Local governments can also sign intergovernmental agreements to provide detention for ICE, and then subcontract to private companies to actually run the jails — essentially acting as middlemen between private jails and the federal government. That allows ICE to bypass rules about documentation and competitive contracting, according to a government report.

Local jails are the most common type of detention facility that ICE uses, according to a recent report from Vera, an advocacy organization working to end mass incarceration. These kinds of agreements already exist under the Biden administration, but could expand under Trump's deportation plans.

A 2022 report from the Brennan Center for Justice, a liberal public policy institute, found that local governments sometimes use jail space to generate income, by building "jails that are bigger than they need with the expectation of selling the extra space." In some cases, immigrant detention is filling voids left by declining prison and jail populations.

In Louisiana, more than a dozen facilities closed after the state passed laws reducing mandatory minimums and increasing chances for parole. But some buildings were quickly repurposed to house migrants. The complex interplay between state, federal and local governments and also between public and private entities often makes oversight and accountability difficult, according to Bloomberg News. The journalistic investigation looked specifically at Louisiana's Winn Correctional Center, which is run by the private company LaSalle Corrections.

"The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections owns the facility," reporters at Bloomberg wrote. "The Winn Parish Sheriff's Office leases the property from the state. The sheriff's office then signs a contract with the federal government to allow the facility to be used for ICE detainees. Finally, LaSalle Corrections is subcontracted to handle day-to-day operations."

When lawyers with an advocacy organization tried to get records to investigate troubling allegations of abuse, each agency insisted someone else was responsible for keeping them. While such arrangements may grow under Trump, there is already a long history of local jails playing a role in immigration detention. "The Migrant's Jail," a recently published book by Brianna Nofil, shows how these practices stretch back to the 1920's and '30's. "By the end of the 20th century, sheriffs are funding city emergency services, buying new police technologies, and eliminating personal property tax off of migrant incarceration revenue," Nofil told Princeton University Press.

The conditions of those jails were often inhumane. According to Nofil, in 1925, a grand jury found the situation at a Galveston, Texas jail so terrible, it declared it "a crime against humanity."

Problems with poor conditions continue today. In August, Massachusetts Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey wrote a letter to ICE and the Department of Homeland Security, raising concerns about deficient medical care and allegations of staff violence at Plymouth County Correctional Facility. But since then, the county has signed a new contract that more than doubles the jail's revenue, according to *The Boston Globe*, "paying the sheriff's office \$215 per detainee per day."

Some states have taken action to limit how much local governments can contract with ICE, but have met resistance for financial reasons. Illinois passed a law banning ICE detention in 2021, but two counties sued the state. In court records, Kankakee County Sheriff Michael Downey said the county's contract with ICE generated \$16 million over four years, which paid for many aspects of local government. Losing the contract would lead to a need to increase taxes, cut budgets and lay off staff, the sheriff testified. A federal judge ruled against the counties.

Stacy Suh, Program Director at Detention Watch Network, an advocacy group that opposes immigration detention, told me that these kinds of incentives are perverse. She also argued that prisons and jails don't always deliver the jobs or economic boons towns hope for. "We're very concerned that this detention expansion is happening — both through local governments that are struggling with shrinking budgets, or private prison corporations that are looking to profit," Suh said.

14-20 Jan - City Time Tour

WHAT: Book talk

WHEN: 6:30pm, Tuesday, January 14th; 4:00pm, Sunday, January 19th; 7:00pm, Monday, January 20th

WHERE: Center For Brooklyn History—28 Pierrepont Street, Brooklyn; Woodbine—585 Woodward Avenue, Ridgewood; Tiny Raccoon Books—277 Railroad Avenue, Sayville, New York

COST: FREE

MORE:

The book, entitled *City Time*, is a collaboration with Rikers scholar Jarrod Shanahan, author of *Captives*, who also served time there, and David Campbell, NYC ABC comrade and formerly incarcerated at Rikers Island. Publication is set for January 7. The authors are doing a quick tour, mostly on the East Coast, including a few events in NYC Long Island.

18 Jan - Saxapahaw Prison Books Packing Party

WHAT: Packing Party

WHEN: 4:00pm, Saturday, January 18th

WHERE: P.I.T. - 411 South 5th Street, Brooklyn

COST: FREE

MORE:

Saxapahaw Prison Books is hosting their regular book packing to send books to prisoners in Georgia.