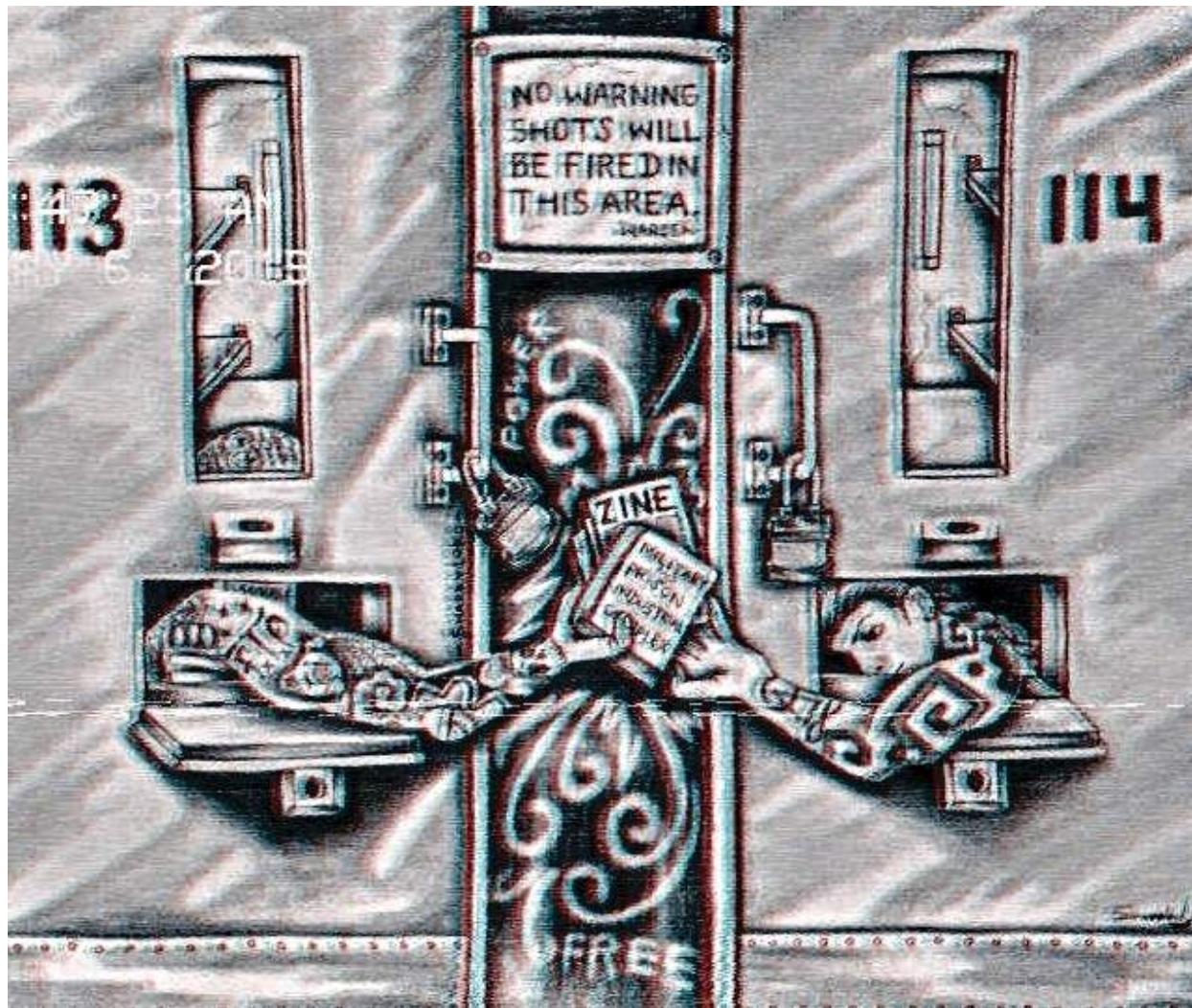




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DISPOSABILITY, RISK, AND
SOLIDARITY IN CDCR



Jennah Thompson-Vasquez
Heriberto "Sharky" Garcia

602 AS RESISTANCE

Under the California Code of Regulations Title 15, Section 3084.1, members of the incarcerated population have the right to appeal any decision, condition, or action by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) or its staff by using a 602 form. I named this zine "602" for this reason-- this a grievance to CDCR concerning current work policies and practices with a focus on ideas of criminalization and disposability, and actions people have taken on the inside to protest the practice of incarceration and the treatment they experience. With the rise of mass incarceration and California's tough on crime policies, a ripple effect was created that communities are still experiencing today. In 2017, Black and Latinx people made up 28% and 44% of California's prison population, respectively speaking. Additionally, 17% of CDCR's population identified as an immigrant, a status that can put someone especially at risk once they are granted release. Scholar-activist Ruth Wilson Gilmore emphasizes how the law is flexible, changing based on who needs to be controlled in that moment to achieve a "stable" society. However, those individuals, families, and communities most impacted by crime and incarceration know that the removal of loved ones and community members do not better their quality of life or stabilize their neighborhoods. Instead, the only stability that comes out of incarceration is a consistent cheap work force that condemns those on the inside to being property of the state and limiting their available opportunities. For the reasons outlined in this zine, a 602 should be filed against the state for the material ways the welfare of racialized communities is ignored and their reliance on incarceration to maintain social control and role in creating a disposable class.



Photo: ACLU Nationwide

"I do this so people hear what I have to say, so people know I exist... that's why I get loud, because death is always upon me...tone it down for what? Am I free? Do I have peace? Can I live? So I won't stop."
-Heriberto Garcia

PERSPECTIVE

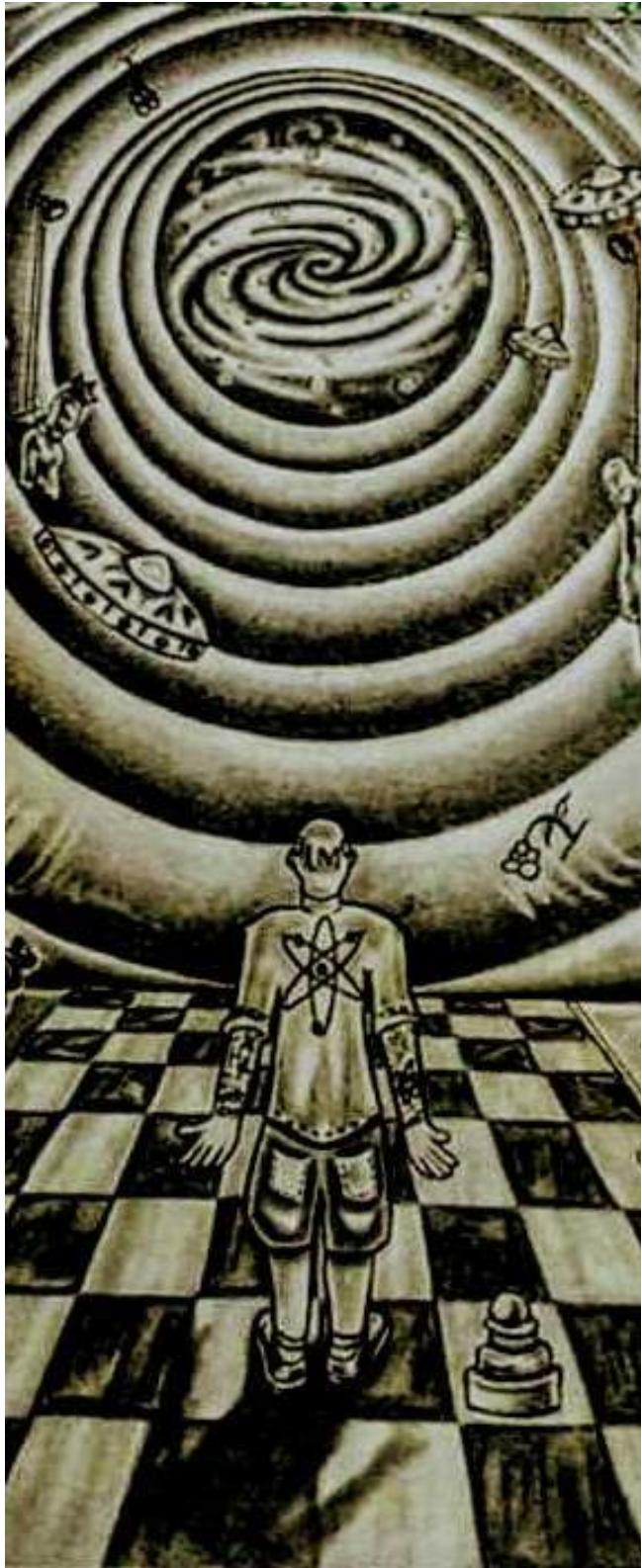
FROM THE DUNGEONS

Being that I've been incarcerated for over fifteen years, I have become familiar with the rules and regulations of CDCr, its forms, procedures, its culture of silence, labor, the hidden truth of its daily operations and with that, the 602 grievance form which is used to appeal any decision, condition, or action by the CDCr or its staff...In the entire length of my sentence under colonial rule, the 602 grievance has always been looked at as wrong, "morally wrong," by many for various reasons that stem from the politics and politricks of the incarcerated and employees. When I was sent to prison—the adult system—from a juvenile facility on my 18th birthday, the word was that 602'ing was considered "snitching." This was something that was mostly circulated by c/o's and actively spread around camp. I never once heard a prisoner say that, but I did hear prisoners talk about how 602ing was viewed as such. One can only understand how convenient it would be for CDCr to have an entire population thinking that way because it would further aid the repression of prisoners and solidarity. The culture of silence practiced in CDCr under the ruse of snitch culture. This is a small example of how CDCr exploits prisoners. It is my experience to be harassed, stripped down naked, physically and materially, cell searched, punished, and denied access to programming due to my advocacy of prisoner's rights, active 602 filing, organizing, and line of politic.

For most of the times I filed a 602 specifically on the program of the yard and employee misconduct I underwent some form of retaliation for doing so. Even though on paper (and paper only) it is supposed to be our right to appeal, prisoners receive backlash for doing so and this retaliation ends up being carried out in a fashion that it's being supported by the same rules and regulations being broken and/or violated by staff in the first place. For example— If a c/o asks "Did you 602 me? I'll search your cell because I'm supposed to do so anyway according to the law...You 602 me? I'll play with your visits and call it security measures." The list goes on...strip searches, no yard, phone calls, etc. So in CDCr the only way to address issues that are going unheard and unresolved is through 602's and even that is not a guarantee! Yet it's almost certain that some form of target gets placed on you, that's my experience with 602's. This does not discourage me whatsoever, I must say that for as many denials I've received, I've also had small claim wins and been granted appeals. For me, I use 602's in attempt to better living conditions and advocate for prisoner rights; I use it as a tool for organizing and to document and expose the injustices of the prison industrial complex.

LABOR PRACTICES IN CDCR

EXPLOITATION AND THREAT OF PUNISHMENT



According to California's Penal Code, every able-bodied incarcerated person in state prison is *required* to produce "productive" labor either through work, school, or other vocational programs. These positions can be paid or unpaid. In California prison, incarcerated people are paid anywhere from \$0.08 to \$0.37 an hour for working, depending on the job, skill, and experience needed. Despite the penal code saying that work is required, especially since COVID, it can be very difficult to get a job in part due to the racial segregation on the inside and the discretion/favoritism of the CO's. This is a double-edged sword, because if you *do* work, you are required to go, regardless, or risk getting a 115, a violation that goes on file and will negatively impact you when you see the parole board. On the other hand, if you *don't* work, when you see the parole board they will view it as not using your time productively and therefore have no evidence of your rehabilitation. Either way, your parole will probably get denied. The seemingly contradictory actions of CDCR serve a major purpose-- docility. Using Foucault's ideas of docile bodies and power, the bodies of incarcerated people are dehumanized, their value being related to how productive and obedient they are. This kind of association, coupled with these individuals being taken away from their families and communities, such low wages, medical neglect, overcrowding, and lack of bargaining power creates a precarious existence for incarcerated people. These factors create an environment of constant subjugation and discipline that requires complete obedience-- and without achieving that obedience, there is the threat that you will not be able to return home.

WORK SKILLS

SURVIVING SHU TERMS

My first inmate assignment, also known as my job, was to go to school and achieve a GED. After doing so, I was given a porter position/tier tender. For me, this was a way to get out of the cell in a place that was always locked down — High Desert State Prison. I ended up downstate in the SHU, solitary confinement, at Corcoran, where I was radicalized and became an active participant and organizer of the 2013 hunger and work strikes. When I was released from the SHU and went back to the yard, I was given a porter position again. Shortly after being assigned this position, c/o's began to see how I organized on the tiers, help people with their 602's, and advance the goals of the Agreement to End Hostilities (AEH), so suddenly the c/o's stopped letting me out for work without giving me a 115. While a 115 would have been procedure for not going to work, not giving me a rule violation was intentional so no documentation could be traced back to them. When I filed a 602 against those that would not let me go to my assignment, they threatened me with a 115. To my surprise, they decided they would rather pay me as a barber, when I

had never cut hair before, instead of having me on the tiers. I've been given RVR's and 115's before for not going to my assigned job or class, although it was never because I refused to go. Instead, it was the tower or c/o that never opened my cell. When I would get the 115 and had to appear at my hearing, my explanation as to what happened was dismissed by the officer saying, "a c/o wouldn't lie or do that," implying that it was my fault. To them, I deserved the punishment. When I spoke out against it I was told to "602 it." That phrase of 602'ing something is very common amongst c/o's to prisoners because they know that no matter what, there won't be any change, the percentage of a pig indictment through a 602 is close to none. With this, you can see how it is impossible to talk about labor in CDCR without also talking about 602's and rule violations. A 602 often feels like a process to figure out and pinpoint wrongdoing without any change, to give the illusion that something is being done about the injustices experienced by prisoners.

Also, what's amazing is how aside from the constant harassment due to my active 602'ing, my filing a 602 against a rule violation I received was used against me at my parole board hearing— claiming that I was not owning up to my actions, my "criminal mentality" was causing me to make excuses instead of taking accountability. This alone added another five years to my sentence as I was deemed "unsuitable" to re-enter society. This is exactly what we mean when we say "the seemingly contradictory actions of CDCR serve a major purpose— docility." If a 602 really amended injustices and solved issues of misconduct, prisoners wouldn't have to put their lives on the line through hunger strikes and other forms of resistance, causing them to sacrifice any chance at freedom due to the rule violations and the parole denials that follow, simply for demanding better conditions. Here in California, prior to California's 2013 mass hunger and work strikes, there was a gang validation system to place you in the SHU for a minimum of six years. However, there was no guarantee that someone's time in solitary would have an end date, leading some to be confined to the hole, with minimal contact, programming, or stimulation for decades. Not only was this practice wrong and inhumane, but due to the high number of Black, Indigenous,

and Raza individuals that get labeled as gang, or "threat group," it also serves to further racialize and criminalize communities that are already overrepresented in the prison system. Many of my comrades got validated for hunger striking because it was viewed as "gang activity;" the unity and strength of the lumpen is always criminalized, but is the only force the system truly fears— lumpen mass mobilization and direct action. These actions tend to install a sense of autonomy, power, and love for your neighbor and those around you. It is a beautiful moment when the oppressed realizes who's the oppressor and who and what our collective energy needs to be directed towards. I truly believe that just as in here where people unite under the worst of conditions, people can unite and do the same under fucked up conditions out there. We shouldn't be afraid of the fire that's already in front of us and with us all seeking emancipation. We shouldn't be afraid of the sacrifice and the struggle to come because Just as in here, people will unite even if it is the worst of conditions, necessary to survive and work towards that common goal of a better future for us and the generations to come. However, for that to happen we must fuel the flame and let it all burn down to start anew from the ashes.



LABOR, PROTEST, AND SOLIDARITY



HUNGER STRIKES

A way incarcerated people have historically and presently fought against their poor treatment and inhumane living conditions has been through strikes. It's worth reminding the reader that such action comes at extreme risk for those organizing-- risk of solitary confinement, stripping of privileges, write-ups that can prevent them from going home, and so on. I want to be explicit about this because of the importance in respecting the courage and determination of those that do organize and protest on the inside. Their behavior, which is often characterized as criminal or being a "trouble-maker," actually stems from a place of such care and love that they are willing to risk their personal safety to better the conditions of everyone on the inside. Recently in 2018, one of the more public prison strikes took place, beginning on August 21 and ending on September 9--coinciding with the death of activist George Jackson and the Attica prison riot. I say public because not only did this strike happen across the United States, with people incarcerated in other countries standing in solidarity, but also because the general public was

able to bear witness. . Protest, strikes, and videos, these public displays are necessary to make change to the conditions of prisons, with the hope that one day they will be abolished altogether. As it is, there is very little information about what goes on inside prisons-- they are meant to make people disappear, to serve as an abstract threat to the public to maintain control. The importance of taking action sheds light on the dehumanization that occurs on the inside, it forces the private to become public. They force the general public to recognize that, according to Michel Foucault, "our disregard for an incarcerated person's humanity and the violence we condone to happen to them" is something we have control over. We, as people on the outside, have the power to resist this type of dehumanization that is considered "appropriate" punishment, and stand in solidarity with incarcerated people worldwide.

PERSPECTIVE

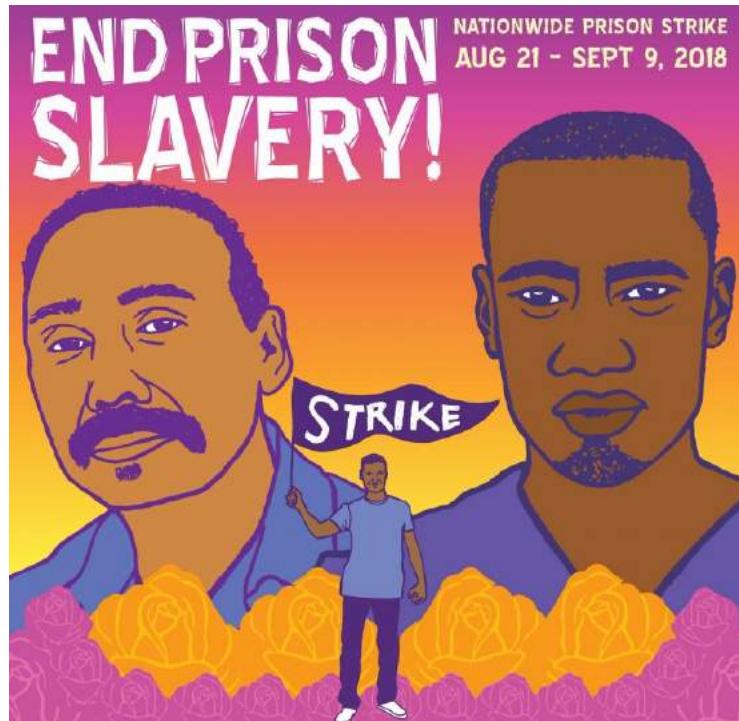
ALL OF US OR NONE



When it comes down to demanding one's human rights and bettering our living conditions whether it is in the form of a strike or 602, the demands tend to vary state to state. This doesn't mean our struggle ain't the same, it just means that some places are fucked up in different ways than others. Regardless, we should always chip away at the machine while working on abolishing it. Prisons shouldn't exist in our communities; our communities deserve better, our families deserve better, and we deserve better. I've participated in hunger and labor strikes throughout my time behind bars away from home and inside the belly of the beast. My first group hunger strike was the 2011-2013 California Prison Hunger Strikes. The mission of these actions was to shut down the SHU program and solitary confinement, calling for the release of all validated prisoners with indeterminate SHU sentences back into the general populations.

From that wave of power exercised by the lumpen organizing inside prisons grew the Agreement to End Hostilities that has implemented "peace" amongst barrios in California with influence in all of Southern, Centro, and Northern California. This was an attempt to unite not only Chican@ nations, but also Black, Brown, First Nations, and all oppressed peoples. For years now, the California Prisons have turned into the dungeons where the lumpen build community create structure across street, militant, hood life schools of thought. I participated in the 2018 National Prison Hunger Strike in solidarity with prisoners across states, documenting my action with a telephone. By doing this, by showing direct action and rejecting the dehumanization that we endure on a daily basis, the abstract threat of the prison becomes concrete. Those on the outside can no longer maintain their passive acceptance of the system, but have to choose. There is no neutrality in the oppression of others. When I did this, I was searched every day for one week straight in an attempt to find the phone and harass me during the strike. My call to comrades led to a phone zap that put pressure on the administration to stop their retaliation against me. It worked. I'm always challenging the administration—through the 602 grievance process, documenting c/o behavior and our (lack of) accessibility to program, disobeying direct orders, and taking blows at the machinery through fucking up state property (clogging pipes, toilets, fucking up computers, sticking staples in the locks and chains, etc.).

2018 NATIONAL PRISON STRIKE DEMANDS



1. Immediate improvements to the conditions of prisons and prison policies that recognize the humanity of imprisoned men and women.
2. An immediate end to prison slavery. All persons imprisoned in any place of detention under United States jurisdiction must be paid the prevailing wage in their state or territory for their labor.
3. The Prison Litigation Reform Act must be rescinded, allowing imprisoned humans a proper channel to address grievances and violations of their rights.
4. The Truth in Sentencing Act and the Sentencing Reform Act must be rescinded so that imprisoned humans have a possibility of rehabilitation and parole. No human shall be sentenced to Death by Incarceration or serve any sentence without the possibility of parole.
5. An immediate end to the racial overcharging, over-sentencing, and parole denials of Black and brown humans. Black humans shall no longer be denied parole because the victim of the crime was white, which is a particular problem in southern states.
6. An immediate end to racist gang enhancement laws targeting Black and brown humans.
7. No imprisoned human shall be denied access to rehabilitation programs at their place of detention because of their label as a violent offender.
8. State prisons must be funded specifically to offer more rehabilitation services.
9. Pell grants must be reinstated in all US states and territories.
10. The voting rights of all confined citizens serving prison sentences, pretrial detainees, and so-called "ex-felons" must be counted. Representation is demanded. All votes count.

INSIDE/OUTSIDE SOLIDARITY

POST-2018... WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?



Ruth Wilson Gilmore takes note in her book *The Golden Gulag* that since 1982, California has undertaken "the biggest...[prison building and filling plan] in the history of the world." The state continues to make this investment in caging its residents, and this investment in removing people from their communities is not just a threat for those engaging in "illegal" behavior. Everyone suffers. In her book, Gilmore concludes that "urban and rural households struggle from objectively similar but subjectively different positions across the prison landscape." Both groups suffer from disinvestment and uncertainty surrounding the future and opportunities available to them. And both groups end up in the prison system-- either by a lack of opportunities that caused them to end up incarcerated, or caused them to seek employment within the same system. This kind of maneuver at the hands of California is intentional, as it limits opportunity to build class solidarity between those coming from both rural and urban geographies. The power dynamic between those incarcerated and those employed by CDCR is paired with society's dominant beliefs that those who are criminalized are inhuman and deserve to suffer.

Organizations such as the union, Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee, and both inside and outside advocates can help intervene. By organizing actions and strikes, by making demands and using language like that above-- which emphasizes the humanity of those incarcerated-- is the first step in shifting beliefs that those in prison are not worthy of respect or even their own personhood. We must accept the risk-- especially those of us on the outside-- and become comfortable with being uncomfortable, as incarcerated people are uncomfortable every day of their sentence. Changing the way we think about the incarcerated and recognizing the only "us vs. them" is all of us versus the state is the only way we can move forward. It is California who created "tough on crime" policies that some have been away from their loved ones for decades. It is because of the way the United States and its racism operates that there is the belief that those who commit crimes are inferior and somehow less human, allowing them to disappear in the prison system. It is only through the recognition of each other's humanity and right to life that we can move forward.

PERSPECTIVE

BUILDING TOGETHER

Where do we go from here? As mentioned before, "both rural and urban groups suffer from disinvestment and uncertainty surrounding the future and opportunities available to them," this is by design. It is by design that people are going to be pushed to do "illegal" things in order to survive and make ends meet. These actions will most likely cause them to end up in the revolving door of prison and it is the same need to survive that pushes people to become employees of these gulag dungeons. By doing this, both groups end up physically and mentally imprisoned. It is amazing to see how not only does the carceral state dehumanize and institutionalize the captive, but the employee/overseer becomes desensitized, dehumanized, and institutionalized in the process of "work" to the point it affects their relationships with others by further creating a gap between classes of peoples and becoming the oppressor. Even if the employee class realized that we need to dismantle the prison system because it doesn't work and harms our communities, it is the prisoners from both sides of the walls that will bring emancipation and fight, build, and organize from the perspective of the oppressed. Not even an awoken pig can change the establishment, but it can sure aid it if it's willing to go against all it was ever molded to believe. As we prisoners work to better our living conditions, hold on to our flame as we push against the prison industrial complex, and build within these gulags it is important to understand and practice building bridges and connections across prison walls with outside organizers and supporters.

So as a prisoner, I understand the value and impact a radical kite, books, dialogue, pictures, support, and love can have on anyone inside. Those connections are powerful and necessary in order to move forward. Prisoners are isolated from the outside world, so it can be easy for us to give up on campaigns because of harassment, retaliation, or feeling like their efforts to create change are in vain. This often happens because the prisoner doesn't see the effects of their efforts. Instead the impact they take notice of is more repression and isolation, handed to them in the form of solitary, strip searches, and other dehumanizing activities meant to wear them down and stop their organizing. To combat this, we must remind prisoners of the immense support they have and the many organizations behind the movement, help them understand their connection to the movement, and the role they can play from within through filing 602's, supporting campaigns, strikes, efforts to build community, etc. We are working to end the prison industrial complex. This movement cannot be limited to leftists and radical intellectuals, it needs to be open to everybody. Everybody needs to understand the harm prisons cause families and communities, everybody needs to understand that we can end prisons in our lifetime and create meaningful change. It is time to change the way we view prisons, prisoners, and our interactions with them. We need to be willing to build and sacrifice to make advances towards abolition and support one another as we become equal in our struggles.

FURTHER READING

True Leap Press:
Publishing and Distribution
P.O. Box 6045
Concord, CA 94524



- The Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California, by Ruth Wilson Gilmore
- The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class, by Guy Standing
- Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, by Michel Foucault
- Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition, by Cedric Robinson
- Blood in my Eye, by George Jackson
- Assata: An Autobiography, by Assata Shakur
- Discourse on Colonialism, by Aimé Césaire
- Scenes of Subjection, by Saidiya Hartman
- Black Skin, White Masks, by Franz Fanon
- We Do This 'Til We Free Us, by Mariame Kaba
- Pedagogy of the Oppressed, by Paulo Freire
- Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement, by Angela Davis
- Are Prisons Obsolete? By Angela Davis
- all about love, by bell hooks
- Resisting State Violence, by Joy James
- How We Get Free, by Keeanga-Yamahta Taylor
- Homegoing, by Yaa Gyasi