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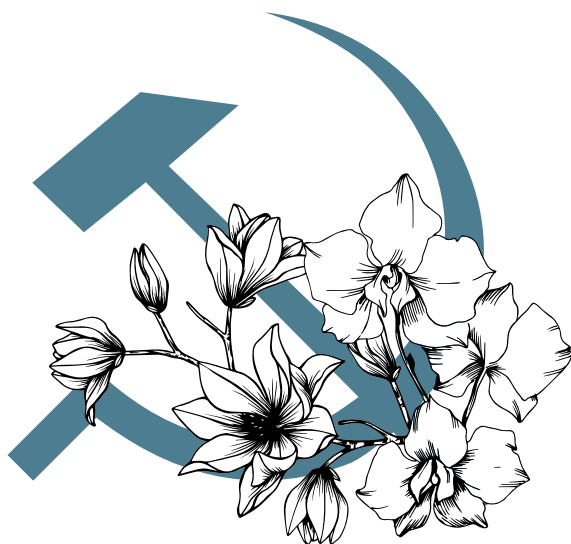
*A Marxist-Leninist-Maoist journal for
contending schools of revolutionary thought*

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Editor's Note

May 2026

When we first conceived of this issue's theme, we did not expect that, by the time we were in the final stage of editing, the US would kidnap Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores from Venezuela and then launch its war upon the people of Iran. These events were, of course, *foreseeable* since the current fascistic Trump regime began this term with a belligerence towards the hypocritical “rules-based” international order, a game that previous iterations of imperialism liked to play with the world it has dominated. The Trump-style “mask off” imperialism is such that all forms of violent intervention and unilateralism are foreseeable. But since all such forms are foreseeable, it is hard to know which ones to expect—who will be bombed next, who will be kidnapped, what populations will be rounded up—months before they manifest. Hence, just as we did not expect an open genocide to be launched on October 2023 by an equally belligerent settler-capitalist power when we were putting together our first issue of *Material*, events again got ahead of our planned content.

Even still, the theme of this issue—the political prisoner—is relevant to the current conjuncture and will remain relevant for as long as capitalism dominates the globe. A particular dialectic of political prisoners and the politics of imprisonment is essential to the reproduction of capitalism. To paraphrase Lenin: “One class in power and another in prison.” As long as there are political classes and struggle between classes there will be prisons, and the class in command will determine the rules of imprisonment.

Resistance to capitalism and imperialism will always generate political prisoners—too many to count still languish behind bars. Moreover, the particular nature of the capitalist state will dictate the nature of incarceration: what populations will be targeted with criminalization, the very laws that decide what counts as *crime* in the first place. Imprisonment is always political, as the violent expansion of ICE raids and arrests the Trump administration unleashed upon its own population have demonstrated—as does the kangaroo court proceedings within which Maduro is caught.

Moreover, when we look at the current actions of the US and Israel in Western Asia, it is tempting to condemn them as criminals guilty of war crimes. While this condemnation may be descriptively true based on vague notions of international law,¹ it is also true that this law has largely existed as a balancing between imperialist siblings, a veneer of liberal moralizing no less violent than Kipling's rapturous poetics about the "white man's burden" of British Empire.² Even when this supposed moral order was venerated, the imperialist powers always found ways to exempt themselves and their allies whenever their morality was called into question. They definitely did so when Israel launched its latest instance of open genocide in Gaza, often in the language of international law ("Israel has a right to exist!"). So who will charge and imprison those guilty of war crimes—of obliterating humans and their history, of genocide, of demanding that the entire world bend to an apocalyptic vision—when the guilty are those who determine what counts as a crime in the first place? That is, the desire to condemn the US or Israel as "criminal" for their actions in Western Asia is shattered by the reality that what is "criminal" is a matter of law, and what is law is a matter of politics. The point, here, is that we are on the side of a particular kind of criminality because our politics and the subject of our politics—the exploited, the oppressed—are criminalized. One class in power, another in prison.

¹ Moreover, in the past decade it has become increasingly obvious that even bourgeois structures like the UN and the Hague have become completely meaningless.

² Rudyard Kipling's infamous poem, *White Man's Burden* (1899), argues that the British Empire's "burden" is to bring civilization to the non-white peoples and nations through colonialism. The notion of Empire expressed in that poem was a reflection of how British imperialists had for a long time justified their empire.

This issue of *Material* begins with an interview with Georges Ibrahim Abdallah, “We have no choice but to navigate against all odds.” As many of our readers are aware, Abdallah is a former Lebanese political prisoner held in France from 1984 to 2025 for his revolutionary activity with the Lebanese Armed Revolutionary Faction (LARF). After many years of solidarity activism on his behalf, Abdallah was finally released from prison in July 2025 and immediately deported to Lebanon. We are honored that he agreed to be interviewed for this issue.

Next, we have the article “Ibon man may layang luminad: Political imprisonment and lawfare in the Philippines”³ by Karapatan, a collective interview with International Red Aid and Samidoun Île-de-France, and a contribution from the Secretariat of the International Red Aid. These pieces provide an important window on the international situation of political prisoners and the ways in which law is wielded to incarcerate and criminalize enemies of the state.

Following the above pieces, “Political Prisoners, Lawfare, and the Revolutionary Response in the US” by Comrade B, the General Secretary of Lal Morich, outlines the structure of carceral logic in the US—the deep institutional roots of racial and carceral capitalism—of which the current ICE raids are a recent symptom. The US possesses the largest prison population in the history of humanity; this is not a bug, but a feature of its status as the current leader of world capitalism.

N. Ravi’s “Conditions and Rights in Jails: My Experiences” is about India’s carceral system, particularly in Jharkhand, that exposes the political elements of imprisonment. Ravi is a revolutionary activist who has been in and out of this carceral system and thus possesses personal experience with the prison conditions.

In our “From the Archives” section, a space where we provide material from our revolutionary past, we have some selections from Rosa Luxemburg’s “Letters from Prison.” The incarceration of the anti-capitalist militant has been an intrinsic part of capitalism since its inception; many of the “great names” of the historical revolutionary movement have spent time imprisoned and writing from the space of incarceration. We had a lot of options to choose from but felt that it was important to give our respect to Luxemburg, who also wrote her famous *Junius Pamphlet* from

³ “Even birds have the freedom to fly.”

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prison, which argued for a rupture from social democracy and the practice of supporting national imperialist interests, relevant to today's conjuncture where some "leftists" are again suggesting that we support an imperialist intervention in Iran.

Finally, we have two texts concerning film criticism in the Philippines. The first, "Cinema Against Confinement: The Political Prisoner in Selected Filipino Film Productions (1984–1995)" is a review by the militant and acclaimed film scholar Epoy Deyto that examines the depiction and analysis of the figure of the political prisoner in regional cinema. The second text, "Regulated Filmmakers, Deregulated Film Industry: Some Problems in the Philippine Film Industry and their Solution" by A. Hunt examines the role of film and the film industry in the region, the notion of "independent" film, and the possibility of revolutionary film, using and expanding on work by Deyto.

Our art in this issue is by the Palestinian artist Rehab Nazzal from her *Dead Sea Series* (2012) and her *We the Wild Plants and Fruit Trees* (2022). Nazzal is a long-time political activist whose work deals with the settler-colonial violence on the bodies, landscape, and culture of her people. The work from the former series concerns the fact that the Dead Sea is invisible from the Palestinian side due to the colonial imprisonment of the people by the Zionist Entity. The work from the latter concerns the erasure of the Palestinian Indigenous relationship to the land.

Thanks again to our readers and supporters. Solidarity with all incarcerated militants who challenged capitalism in the hope of a better and more humane world; solidarity with all of the oppressed and exploited victimized by criminalization and incarceration.

D. Jin

J. Moufawad-Paul

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"We have no choice but to navigate against all odds"

Interview with Georges Ibrahim Abdallah

Editors' Note: This interview with Georges Ibrahim Abdallah was conducted in Lebanon in early January 2026 by the editors of *Material*. At that time, the country's political situation was still largely shaped by the aftermath of the 2024 Israeli invasion and the fall of Bashar al-Assad in Syria to the north. In March 2026, the resumption of hostilities between the Zionist entity and the Lebanese Resistance following the outbreak of a second Israeli invasion in South Lebanon and the unilateral attack by US-Israeli imperialism against Iran has created a very different reality—that of open armed conflict. Nevertheless, most of the issues raised by Georges Abdallah in this interview remain relevant and important. We therefore hope that despite the significant changes that have occurred, this document will enable our readers to gain a better understanding of the overall historical situation in Lebanon, Palestine, the Arab world, and the anti-imperialist Resistance in the region.

Material: Thank you for agreeing to this interview. We have a series of questions for you, both about your experience as a political prisoner and your views on the situation here in Lebanon as well as Palestine.

As the readership of our journal is mainly English-speaking and has not been very exposed to your case, we would like to ask you to start by briefly introducing yourself.

Georges Ibrahim Abdallah (GIA): I am a Lebanese Arab and Palestinian activist, born out of the Palestinian and Lebanese revolutionary experience. The Lebanese and Palestinian revolutionary movements share a long history. One could say that they began with the advent of the modern Palestinian resistance, which started after the defeat of 1967. In other words, from 1968–1969 to the present day.

So, like any communist activist who has accompanied this journey and is part of it, I have experienced various phases in the dynamic of the struggle, both in the Lebanese Civil War¹ and in two operations (more or less) unrelated to the local national struggle. Mine is a small contribution to the struggle, and prison is part of the dynamic of that struggle.

The category of the “political prisoner” is something that requires clarification because it suggests a certain pretentiousness that is inappropriate. Prison, in general, is a “bump in the road” on the journey of any activist. The real question arises when imprisonment becomes protracted, that is, when the organizations that are promoting relevant political projects and programs of struggle are incapable of securing the release of their comrade. Nevertheless, throughout the Palestinian revolution, the release of prisoners has always been a moment of great excitement, which has had and continues to have local, regional, and international repercussions.

Material: Obviously not every political prisoner is the same: there are militants who are locked up because they were/are part of an active movement that threatens the state in some way that necessitates their incarceration; there are those that are/were “lone wolf” activists; there are lumpen prisoners who become politicized in prison, etc. Some argue that because of the sheer numbers of “social” prisoners in US prisons, their incarceration is political, and they are in that sense, political prisoners. And then of course in Palestine, everyone in prison can be considered a political prisoner because they have been made so from birth, just by continuing to exist. What you said about the political prisoner being a militant/activist

¹ Often reduced to sectarian strife, the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) was rooted in structural class inequalities, a confessional state serving elite interests (mainly located among the Maronite Christian community), and Lebanon’s position as a semi-colony. Sectarian militias (such as the “Phalangists”) functioned as instruments of Israel and other imperialist interests to fight the local and Palestinian Left.

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in special circumstances helped us have a better understand that this is perhaps a more critical definition of what a political prisoner is. Can you talk more about your views on this?

GIA: When I refer to prison as a “bump in the road” for any activist, what I mean is that being arrested is part of everyday life for activists. It is not something exceptional. It is normal in the life of an activist to be arrested and sent to prison, then to spend a week, a month, a year, five years, ten years, there.

The dynamics of the struggle, the balance of power between the forces of the bourgeoisie and the protagonists of the revolutionary struggle, means confrontation. Prison is part of that confrontation. It is part of the arsenal of instruments of repression available to counter-revolutionaries and the bourgeoisie throughout this war.

That being said, prison is not just for people who are classified as “political activists.” The masses in their daily lives face prison; they face the judicial system, the law, judges, and they face the police. Hence, the issue is much broader than simply a question of political or non-political prisoners. When we examine the dimension of “political prisoners,” we identify the most organized fraction of the prison population. This is because the majority of prisons are filled with men and women who reflect society. Most of the time, it is the “dangerous classes” who experience prison; it is the workers, the unemployed, the sons of laborers, all those who are precarious who end up in prison.

Activists are among these masses. But unlike most, activists are organized and therefore better equipped to deal with the prison environment. This applies both to their level of political awareness and to their relationship with the changing reality of society. When we limit the theme of imprisonment to politically committed prisoners, it restricts us somewhat. But it also leads us to question how we resist in prison.

Do we resist as prisoners or as committed activists? If we resist as prisoners, we are human beings like all human beings. Whether it is you, an activist, who goes to prison, or someone who stole from his grandmother, or another who broke the laws of the bourgeoisie that runs this unjust society: they are all the same. As individuals, at that moment, the labels “political” and “non-political” have no meaning. They only make sense

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when you treat your position as that of an “activist fighting under particular conditions.” It is at that moment that there are qualitative differences.

It is very important to distinguish between the two. If you talk about repression, prison is in itself a means of repression; it is the place of repression, the pillar of the repressive architecture of the bourgeois state and of the state itself. Where there is exploitation, there is prison, judges and courts, and police. They form the trinity of government and the bourgeois state. Whether you are committed or not, you will have to face it. Those who are on the streets, who steal, who demonstrate, who hold meetings, or who call for perfectly ordinary demands: they will all face this array of violence.

The so-called “political” prisoner is a fellow activist who knows this environment and takes on a very special role, a much more committed role than that of ordinary citizens who are taken into custody. When the activist is in prison, he is treated differently. This treatment is not necessarily always much worse than that endured by other prisoners, but his role is different at that point—not because he is a prisoner, but because he is an “activist who is in prison.”

Material: In recent interviews, you’ve spoken a little about the particular position of political prisoners within the broader struggle, describing how their role is not simply providing abstract support to struggles taking place outside the prison walls. How does the position of the incarcerated activist allow one to maintain a foothold in the concrete, ongoing struggle while, at the same time, developing creative strategic insights as a result of this partial removal from the day-to-day activism?

GIA: In a way, the issue of the imprisonment of political activists is very straightforward: it concerns an organization whose member is in prison. The question is how [and to what extent] we accept imprisonment for a given period of time. It is up to the organization to decide. If the organization accepts that its comrades will spend years in prison, it will act accordingly. It is the choice of the entire organization, not that of the prisoner. How will it support him? In itself, this is not very important. But once you “accept” imprisonment for your comrades, you have effec-

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tively abdicated the overall struggle. Because prison is an institution that destroys individuals.

Quite naturally, like any revolutionary prisoner, I am an abolitionist, which means that I consider prison *in itself* to be counterproductive for society. Whether it claims to be “progressive” or not, it is an institution that has been put to the test for over a century and has proven to be counterproductive. In other words, it does not produce solutions to “societal offenses.” Whether it is someone who assaulted their neighbor, someone who shoplifted from a store, etc.: locking them up does not reform them. Every time an individual goes to prison, they come out ready to commit new crimes. When it comes to political comrades, that is, men and women who are working to change society, they are supposed to have a position on this institution. Either they consider that this institution should be destroyed and abolished—and the bourgeois police and the courts as well—or they believe that it is legitimate and should continue to exist. This position will be articulated according to the organization, its program, and its class content. If it is a proletarian organization, which stands for personal fulfillment of human beings and the abolition of exploitation and alienation, then we believe that it cannot avoid being abolitionist.

It cannot accept that there are cops who harass the population. It cannot accept that prosecutors decide who lives and who dies among the masses. It has an answer to all these questions. In short, what is important for us today is that if I am an activist and I belong to an organization that fights against all forms of injustice, and that organization decides that I, who have just been imprisoned, should not spend 30 years in prison, but that in the end, well, I do spend more than 30 years there, the question arises: How can I behave? I behave as an imprisoned revolutionary who will try to participate in the life of his organization inside the prison because I am not completely separated from the organization. Experience shows that comrades who are prisoners and who do not have the support of their organization, who are not in some way or another included in the arena of militant struggles, will suffocate. In order for them to be part of the dynamic and process of actual struggles, their supporters on the outside must also be part of this dynamic. You cannot show solidarity with a prisoner if you do not support that prisoner’s struggle. If I am an activist fighting for

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the liberation of the proletariat, the people who show their solidarity with me are part of the struggle of the real proletariat, not some imaginary one.

In our society, there are men and women who protest and fight, who hold meetings and do all sorts of other things. The solidarity they show me is part of the dynamic of these men and women, which is not the same as if they came to show me love and a little comfort. Whenever there is an opportunity for me to intervene in the dynamic of the struggle, I must intervene. And my comrades must support this intervention. In other words, they must also belong to those who suffer from the actions of the bourgeoisie that put me in prison. Because this bourgeoisie jailed me specifically for my political activity. This political activity, in principle—if I belong to a proletarian organization—is an activity of proletarian struggle. Every time there is a demonstration, the prisoner must be present in it. Every time there is an occupation of a particular place, the prisoner's supporters must be at the forefront. Ultimately, it is up to the entire organization to engage in this dynamic.

The imprisoned comrade participates both in the prisoners' resistance and in the radicalization or non-radicalization of his organization. In this predicament, solidarity is part of the struggle—not separate from it. From this perspective, we can consider that the liberation of comrades is also part of a power struggle between the mass movement and the political establishment.

As long as the political establishment finds that your detention costs less than your release, you will remain in prison. The judiciary plays a specific role; its role is to defend the established order. And as long as you, the prisoner, do not cost the ruling class much politically, it will continue to indicate a refusal to your request for parole.

But in the presence of a movement in favor of your release, which is part of the dynamics of the real struggle, the bourgeoisie will consider that as a prisoner you become a pretext for continuing to wage this proletarian struggle. The magistrates will then conclude that you cost less outside than inside prison. And at that point, they will give the order to release you.

That's what happened to me after quite a few years. Those years don't count—not when you're an activist. Because those years are years of struggle for those behind bars as well as for their comrades on the outside. Imagine you've served 30, 40, 50 years—it doesn't matter. Others have

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died—they’re six feet under—and they were part of the same struggle. You don’t behave as a “prisoner who struggles”; you behave as an “activist who is in prison”—an activist who “struggles under the particular conditions of imprisonment.” These conditions bring you into contact with the disenfranchised who are in prison. Thus, you end up getting involved in very specific dynamics, and so does your organization. The latter will develop these dynamics concerning imprisonment itself.

Material: Can you give us some concrete examples of how this link is forged between imprisoned activists and the struggle of organizations outside prison, particularly in the French context? For example, we know that you closely followed the Yellow Vests movement.² Likewise, there have been attempts within the prison to politicize inmates and guards.

GIA: The prison population belongs to the popular masses of this country. When there is a social movement, that is, when the relatives and friends of prisoners—people from the same social stratum—are taking action in society, then this movement is related to the prison. It feeds the prison through repression, of which the bourgeoisie is the main protagonist. Repression drives the masses towards prison, and they come with their demands, their consciousness. Nevertheless, there is a gap between the level of political awareness of the mass movement and that of those who find themselves in prison.

Social movements, in general, are suppressed, and their participants are sent to prison. There is a certain politicization at work here. This spontaneous politicization is tainted by the petty-bourgeois spirit, because when precarious workers seek to act through demands, they look for specific, personal solutions, just as when they may try to do so by robbing a bank. It is by doing these kinds of things that they feed the prison system. Naturally, the bourgeoisie—the guardians of private property—will repress them.

² The Yellow Vest movement (beginning in 2018) emerged in response to French state’s neoliberal agenda, regressive taxation, and the steady degradation of working-class living conditions. Despite early attempts by the far right to coopt its anger, and the institutional—and extra-parliamentary—Left’s inability to politically steer it, the movement increasingly articulated demands around redistribution, public services, and popular sovereignty, marking a gradual shift toward a more explicitly left-wing class politics, before it lost momentum in the face of the COVID epidemic in 2020.

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You, the political prisoner, are on the side of those who are repressed. And when the social movement demands improvements that belong to the demands of the same social stratum as the other prisoners—when it calls for an improvement in living standards or the abolition of electricity taxes—it is this social stratum, the so-called “dangerous” class, that is affected.

It is affected by repression, which is why it fills prisons with men and women whose leaders are a little more politicized. This is what happens in times of the “euphoria” that comes with social uprisings. But in the overall dynamics of repression, prison is not the most advanced place in the struggle. It becomes an advanced site when there is an explosive social crisis. The role of comrades is to take advantage of this space to spread political consciousness in line with the mobilization that is taking place outside and by participating in the mobilization that is happening there. The fact remains that repression in itself, in absolute terms, is reprehensible. Whether there is a social movement or not; whether there is a protest movement or not: isolation must be abolished. When repressive measures target the individuality of each person who has stolen, raped, shoplifted, you, the revolutionary activist, will always remain opposed to their destruction as individuals. So you will seek as much as possible to confront the conditions of detention themselves, not just for yourself as a prisoner with a political project, but for the entire prison population.

You will insist that someone who has spent many years in prison be granted leave. You will be the first to demand that there be socio-educational activities. You will encourage any sign of rebellion. Whenever there is a small revolt, you will try to push it to the extreme so that it becomes politicized, because you defend subjects who come from the most impoverished social strata of society. Because who ends up in prison? It's not the children of the bourgeoisie. It's the children of working-class neighborhoods. When these children from working-class neighborhoods end up in prison, it's not because they put up a political fight. They end up there because they are trying to survive in a class society.

They try to get by, but they go astray by seeking erroneous solutions. They think they can make it by dealing drugs here and there. And their politicization is not that easy; it is very complicated, because we should not forget that the majority of prisoners have not spent their lives working. When you find yourself in a prison with men and women who are 40 years

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old and have never worked, you find that they don't really understand the concept of exploitation. They have spent their lives stealing, robbing, drug dealing, etc. Their basic notions of class consciousness are spontaneous and are not structured or synthesized. It's up to you to work on this consciousness, but it's not easy.

It's very difficult to politicize someone who has never experienced exploitation directly, who has never attended the “school of the proletariat,” namely the unions, who has never been to a protest. This person is 40 or 50 years old and has spent 20 years in and out of prison and then they end up with you. He has never been to a demonstration; he has never made a leaflet; he is struggling to get by; he is trying to make ends meet to support his family, his children.

The concept of “class” only reaches them when there is a mass movement in society. When the Yellow Vests came along, there was such politicization. This prisoner who is here with me in prison, who is 30 or 40 years old, his sister or his wife or his cousin is in the Yellow Vest protests. At first, she just watched, wondering what all these people were doing, what they were talking about. Then they begin to sympathize with the social movement, for the simple reason that it is a fertile ground for raising awareness.

It is in this sense that the organization of the masses is supposed to take into account all the protagonists who are the targets of repression. This does not mean that everyone can be lumped together. It does not mean that someone who has been involved in drug dealing for twenty years should be treated the same way as a kid who is the son of an unemployed worker and who has robbed the local bank. It's not the same thing. Someone who has spent their life stealing and become the leader of a criminal gang is someone who may be sensitive to demonstrations calling for prisoner freedom. But they cannot be at the forefront of the struggle.

We have to look at what we're talking about. If we're talking about prisoners abstractly, it doesn't make sense. We're talking about specific places of detention: Where are the majority of prisoners in this country? What conditions do they live in? If we take the situation in France, there are about 86,000 prisoners. The majority do not live in decent conditions. There are different categories of prisons: there are jails, there are detention centers, there are central prisons. In central prisons, long sentences are served; everyone lives in their own clean cell, and the destruction of the

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prisoner is “managed” on a long-term basis. Humiliations are not everyday occurrences. For example, prisoners eat alone in their cells and are therefore less likely to be raped by their cellmates because they are alone.

Most prisoners are held in jails, where conditions are barely adequate for survival. When there are five people in a cell designed for three, two of them have to sleep on the floor. Two of them become, if not slaves, at least the minions of the most senior prisoner—in other words the least “conscious” prisoner, who is caught up in a cycle of social marginalization.

In this context, the responsibility of those who resist is to consider how we approach prison. There should be specific categories, as well as lawyers who take the “prisoners movement” into account. There are times when the prisoners movement, raising issues from within the prisons, can play a role in raising awareness in society. Look at the jails: we are in the belly of the beast—that is, in one of the so-called most advanced countries—and yet there are cockroaches on the floor. So, as a prisoner, you sleep on the floor with all the filth in the world, and society doesn’t see it. It’s up to our comrades to make this fact known to the outside world. Because jail is where the majority of prisoners are.

Naturally, in these places, there is very strong repression. You can gauge this by the proportion of suicides. The number of suicides in prisons is two or three times higher than outside. People commit suicide because they are in an unbearable situation. The parents of those who commit suicide are poor people. They don’t have the best lawyers, and they themselves don’t know how to “speak.” They don’t know what to do. Of course there are associations. Comrades should support these associations, without having any illusions about them.

Prison is not the factory. It is not where the industrial working class is. In prison, there are marginalized people. Now, marginality is not an insult. We need to understand what the working class is made up of today, and what kind of world it lives in. Internationally, precarious workers make up the majority of the workforce. And it is on this basis that we must understand the issue of prison, while also addressing the concepts of alienation and repression. This is the role of comrades like you and me; comrades here in organizations that claim to be communist organizations, that is, organizations that fight against commodity alienation as a whole.

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Material: So far, we have discussed the issue of political prisoners. We would like to ask you some other questions, particularly about the current situation in the Arab world. We were very moved by your arrival in Beirut in July, when one of your first statements was a passionate call to the Arab youth, exhorting them to rise up for Palestine. Why do you think Palestine is the “lever” on which the struggle for the liberation of the Arab people rests?

GIA: It is important to note that the Palestinian revolution plays a historic role in the Arab world. It is a cause that can mobilize the masses from Morocco to the Persian Gulf. Because, generally speaking, Palestine is seen as the open wound of the Arab-Muslim world in its confrontation with the West. An absolute injustice has been committed there, and everyone understands this. Naturally, the Arab bourgeoisie has been unable to heal this wound, and the masses have been unable to play their part for various reasons. But these reasons are not limited to cowardice or anything of that sort. It is the political struggle of Arab organizations that is at issue: the various factions, the various regimes and their repression, etc.

For me, the Palestinian revolution is one of the main levers of the Arab revolution. In other words, I believe that there is an Arab world and an Arab nation made up of several hundred million men and women. The masses of these nations number around 500 million people, whose political system cannot provide for the regeneration of the working class. That is why there are men and women who leave the country and throw themselves into the sea to find a place to survive. In other words, the capitalist system that creates this extremely difficult situation cannot ensure the regeneration of the working or peasant capacity of these countries. The crisis of capital as a whole is having a direct impact on the Arab world.

Palestine is the place where everything comes together. Because what is this entity called Israel? It is not a colony, it is not a military base for this or that imperial power. Israel is the organic extension of the imperialist West as a whole. This imperialist West was formed in a historical process of genocide, starting in North America and extending to Australia. It was not simply formed through the exploitation of the working class by capitalist forces. No, it was formed through a process of genocide. In North America, in order for it to become the United States and Canada, more than

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20 to 25 million Indigenous people had to be killed. In order for Central and South America to become “Latin” America—in other words, for the Latinization of this continent to take place—millions of men and women had to die. For Australia to become Australia as we know it, the Aboriginal population, which was one of the oldest peoples on this planet, had to be eliminated.

Quite naturally, the organic extension, Israel, bears all the scars of this process. Those who are—in terms of social stratum—capable of confronting it are those who are able to confront the capitalist process of genocidal domination as a whole. The genocidal process in Palestine has failed. It began at the end of the 19th century³ and continues to this day. In 1947–1948, when the Nakba⁴ took place, the Palestinian people numbered about 1 million. Today, if the Palestinian people had suffered the fate of the Australian Aboriginals, all that would remain of them would be scattered pockets living in mountain caves. If they had suffered the same fate as the Incas, we would find them mentioned in history books.

Today, the Palestinian people not only continue to exist, but have grown from less than 1 million in 1947 to a population of 14 million and more. In other words, the genocidal process has not succeeded, and this is the basis of the crisis of the Zionist project. This crisis is such that even within the limited space of historic Palestine, the Palestinian people now number about 7,300,000. The population of Israeli settlers is approximately 7,200,000. In other words, the Palestinian population within the Zionist entity, in its historical space, is still in the majority. This population, which was able to resist, did so for various reasons, in conditions that the Aborig-

³ The first phase of expropriation of the Palestinian people, beginning in the late 19th century with the first Aliyahs—waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine motivated by nationalist, religious, and political aims—reflected the penetration of capitalist interests into Ottoman Palestine. Zionist settlement, supported by European capital, facilitated the commodification of land and the displacement of peasant communities. With the British Mandate over Palestine (1920–1948), these processes were accelerated: imperial administration, legal reforms, and infrastructural projects systematically prioritized settler accumulation over indigenous livelihoods, embedding a structural inequality that framed the subsequent class and national struggle.

⁴ The Nakba (“catastrophe” in Arabic) refers to the forced displacement of approximately 700,000 Palestinians during the 1948 war, alongside dozens of massacres, widespread village destruction, and land confiscation by Zionist forces.

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inals, the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, or even African Americans did not have at their disposal.

The Palestinian people confronted this organic extension of imperialism as representatives of the Arab “Mashriq”⁵ as a whole. As a people, the Palestinians emerged from this struggle, which is why they represent the driving force behind the Arab revolution. They confronted the enemy on behalf of the entire Arab nation, while using this momentum to unite all Arabs. When we recall how the historic revolts of the Palestinian people took place, the revolutions of 1935 and 1939 come to mind. In 1935, it was Izz al-Din al-Qassam who led the movement. Where did he come from? Not from Palestine, but from Syria. It is the entire “Mashriq” surrounding Palestine that forms the Palestinian identity.

Of course, the issue needs to be analyzed in much greater depth. The genocidal Zionist project has failed—which does not mean that the killings have decreased—not at all. But they have reached a point where they cannot go any further. No solutions for Israel can come out of a direct genocidal process. The Palestinian people, despite all the destruction, are still in Palestine. And they are surrounded by a historical social fabric that is the Arab nation—which, it must be said, is currently not rising up to confront colonialism, and is under bourgeois leadership, incapable of confronting the enemy.

Quite naturally, we ask ourselves, “How will the Palestinian revolution develop?” It will develop in the direction of the Arab revolution, that is, through the transformation of those within the social bloc who have an interest in radical change and liberation, such that the bourgeoisie no longer forms the leadership of the movement. Because as long as the bourgeoisie occupies a leading position, the movement cannot confront the organic extension that is the Zionist entity, because the latter is an extension of capital in its purest form.

Unlike all the colonies that have existed throughout history, here, there is no metropolis. The metropolis of colonial Algeria was France; the metropolis of North America was England; the same was true for Australia. Israel has no metropolis. It is international capital that forms its home

⁵ The Mashriq refers to the eastern Arab world, including modern-day Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and parts of the Arabian Peninsula, historically distinguished from the western Arab world, or Maghreb.

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base. Wherever the headquarters of international capital are located, there lies the home base of this entity. Hence, the social stratum that will be able to confront the Zionist entity is the one that will be able to confront its metropolis, that is, capitalism as a whole. And this capitalism “as a whole”—which is currently in crisis—has become globalized. Today, there is no “national capitalism” that escapes the rationality of globalization. From this perspective, Palestine is more than *a* catalyst for the Arab revolution. It is *the* catalyst for the Arab revolution.

It is in that sense that we can expect the Arab masses, at one point or another, to end up pushing forward the process of liberation. A liberation not only from the Zionist entity, but also from the Arab bourgeoisie. Because today, with the acuity of the contradiction of global capital, the Arab bourgeoisie has been completely transformed. It has alienated itself to the side of Palestine’s enemy.

In the process we are witnessing in Gaza, what is being asked of the Arab bourgeoisie? The Israeli, American, European, German, and other military processes have been unable to disarm the Resistance. Today, the Arab bourgeoisie is called upon to enter into a direct process of disarming the Resistance. Naturally, this will fail because the Arab bourgeoisie is not very strong, and because there are Arab masses who, as part of this process, are called upon to overthrow this ruling class and constitute themselves into a social bloc with a clear awareness of its historical role and of history itself. It is this bloc that is destined to take power. This process is the process of the Arab revolution. It is in this sense that Palestine is *the* historical catalyst of the Arab revolution, much more than *one of many* catalysts.

Material: You have mentioned the Arab bourgeoisie several times, whose vast majority is currently on the side of the enemy. During our first meeting you spoke of the national bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie, who once led the Arab and Palestinian nationalist movement. Since then, certain dynamics have pushed this national and petty bourgeoisie to collaborate with the enemy. Can you tell us a little more about the history of these classes and their situation today?

GIA: Throughout the anti-colonial struggle, the Arab petty bourgeoisie was an upwards-striving class. They led the national liberation struggle,

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not only in the Arab countries, but throughout the world. The petty bourgeoisie—the one that led the national liberation struggle in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, and Yemen—achieved so much that it was supported by the USSR. It was at the forefront of the petty-bourgeois left internationally. The rising petty bourgeoisie of that era—in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s—reached its peak. Throughout its course, it accumulated resources that it plundered at the very moment it was carrying out its progressive reforms. At a certain point, it transformed itself into a “state bourgeoisie.” The question is not whether it betrayed or not. It changed in nature: from an upwardly mobile petty bourgeoisie in contradiction with international capital, it transformed itself into a state bourgeoisie seeking to normalize itself within the global capitalist system. This is what happened in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

It is not always easy to “normalize” because, at one point or another, imperialism and the ruthlessness of capital will seek to extort these formerly dissident regimes. Some have failed completely in their normalization. We see this very clearly with Syria and Iraq. And we can say that this global process of the Arab bourgeoisie has reached its peak today, where it is no longer anti-colonial, where it is no longer anti-capitalist, where it no longer carries the peasant aspirations for agrarian reform or the industrialization of their countries. The USSR is no longer, and the entire trajectory of this petty bourgeoisie has tainted the overall liberation process in the region.

But we should not let this history make us forget that this class is only a fraction of the Arab bourgeoisie. The bulk of the Arab bourgeoisie, namely the Gulf bourgeoisie, the Saudi Arabian bourgeoisie, the Moroccan bourgeoisie, and the Tunisian bourgeoisie, are not part of this dynamic. It is a fraction of the petty bourgeoisie that has been anti-colonial—therefore, it was not the “Arab bourgeoisie” as such. At no point were the bourgeoisies of the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, or Morocco anti-colonial. They were born in the cradle of colonialism.

The petty bourgeoisie that led the liberation movement reached its peak and sought to normalize itself. In other words, it wanted to become part of the global capitalist market; some were more or less successful in this endeavor. But today, on the whole, the masses are on one side and these regimes on the other. The fact remains that the masses are disoriented after these experiences. This is because the experience of this petty bourgeoisie

destroyed any possibility of organized protest. There were global alliances, notably with the USSR against imperialism, which led to a radicalization of the “reformist” current, to the point where it no longer tolerated any form of organized opposition. The bourgeoisie of the Ba’ath⁶ party in Iraq, the Nasserist⁷ bourgeoisie in Egypt, and even in Syria, did not accept the presence of communist parties that were truly oppositional. All of this was done with the support of the USSR.

The normalization of these reformist parties was endorsed by the USSR. The people paid a very high price for this, and we are still paying a very high price. It is in this sense that today, the petty bourgeoisie that [once] challenged the established order of the reactionary Arab bourgeoisie has now rallied behind the [ruling classes of the] Gulf states. When we talk about the petty bourgeoisie having completely turned to the enemy, it is the bourgeoisie of the Gulf states and Saudi Arabia that has allowed it to “normalize” itself with [global capital].

The state bourgeoisie in Egypt and in its neighboring countries is now completely on the side of the enemy. The ruling classes of the Gulf states have always been reactionary, because they were born in the cradle of colonialism, not in protest against colonialism. However, those who were born in protest against the laws of imperialism have reached a point where they have ceased to be dissidents.

When they finally became state bourgeoisies, with capital stolen from the people during the process of industrialization and agrarian reform—capital that had long been hidden abroad, in Swiss banks, etc.—they sought to turn this capital into profit by exploiting their own countries, becoming part of the overall dynamic of regional and international capital.

It is in this sense that the petty bourgeoisie, which has become the state bourgeoisie, is now “behind” us. This observation should lead us to ask who should then lead the social bloc that is capable of dealing with this

⁶ Ba’athism, developed by Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar in the 1940s, is an Arab nationalist and pan-Arabist ideology combining anti-imperialism, state-led economic development, and social reform. Different branches of the Ba’ath Party came to power in Syria (1963) and Iraq (1968).

⁷ Nasserism refers to the political ideology associated with Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, combining Arab nationalism, anti-imperialism, and state-led development. While not explicitly socialist, it promoted land reform, industrialization, and mass mobilization.

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situation. It is in this sense that we must understand the crisis of the Arab national project and the crisis of the Palestinian national project. If in the past the petty bourgeoisie was able to lead the anti-colonial struggle, but then reached its peak by becoming a state bourgeoisie, then who will take its place?

The class that should lead the social bloc—since it has an interest in social change and in anti-imperialist confrontation—can only be the proletariat, with its communist ideology. There is an ideological confrontation within this social bloc, which will last throughout the process of forming of this social bloc. The condition for victory in Palestine and elsewhere lies in the level of awareness this social bloc has of its historical interests. Once aware of those interests, it will be conscious of history itself, because it becomes the historical agent of progress. Only under this condition will there be victory, both over imperialism and over capital, organically represented by the Zionist entity. It is this condition that is not so easy to fulfill, and which will require a long-term struggle.

Quite naturally, the Arab masses will succeed, at one point or another, in forming this social bloc and endowing it with a consciousness of its historical tasks. This is what will enable it to put an end to the entire dynamic of capital in the region. At that point, there will be a global change, not only in the Arab region, but worldwide, because an event of such magnitude changes the balance of power at all levels.

Material: On a different topic, we recently visited to the Bourj el-Barajneh and Shatila⁸ Palestinian refugee camps. There were a few things that really struck us: On the one hand, there was the strong presence of Fatah (as well as other factions) in the Lebanese camps—a party that can be described as that of the bourgeoisie who sided with the enemy through collaboration and who, as you said just, now wants to make its small amount of accumulated capital pay off; on the other hand, there is the relative absence of opportunities for the masses to organize outside the apparatuses of the well-established parties, which now seem to take

⁸ The Bourj el-Barajneh and Shatila camps were established in Lebanon in the aftermath of the 1948 Nakba to house Palestinian refugees. The Shatila Massacre (September 1982) occurred when Lebanese Phalangist militias, allied with the Israeli occupation, massacred hundreds of Palestinian civilians in the Shatila camp.

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very little interest in “mass work”—in the streets and in the small public spaces of the camp.

Who will step in to take over from the established parties? At the same time, what gives rise to a revolutionary subject in such a context, where the camp population has been rendered passive through its dependence on aid provided by NGOs and international agencies such as UNRWA,⁹ against a backdrop of extreme lumpenization of the population.

GIA: The crisis of the Palestinian national project lies in the fact that the forces leading it do *not* form a state bourgeoisie. The Palestinian bourgeoisie is characterized by its marginalization within the Palestinian national structure—and this has nothing to do with the rising bourgeoisie of the 1950s and 1960s in Syria, Iraq, or Egypt. Here, an entire people has been rendered precarious. It is this existential precariousness that has shaped the Palestinian identity. This Palestinian identity, in its most intimate form as experienced by each Palestinian, is the camp.

When we talk about the camp, we are talking about moments of destruction that are constantly recurring. There is no camp in Palestine or outside Palestine that has not been destroyed at one time or another and subsequently rebuilt. In this dynamic, the role of the social bloc is to represent those who are “existentially precarious.” This is a mass of people who don’t even have a country headed by a bourgeois, colonial, or semi-colonial state. It is a very particular situation. Hence the importance of the Palestinian national liberation movement, with all the complexity of its internal dynamics.

When we talk about Fatah, when we talk about the Palestinian Authority,¹⁰ when we talk about the PLO,¹¹ when we talk about Palestinian

⁹ The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was created in 1949 to provide aid to Palestinian refugees.

¹⁰ Created in 1994 under the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority functions as a limited administrative body in parts of the occupied West Bank, operating under Israeli military dominance and heavy reliance on foreign aid. Its framework concretely functions to subordinate Palestinian self-determination to imperialist and Zionist interests.

¹¹ The Palestine Liberation Organization was founded in 1964 by the Arab League in Cairo as a national liberation movement representing the Palestinian people. The organization—uniting under its banner a multitude of different political parties and militias—combined armed struggle and diplomacy against Zionism and imperialist powers operating in the region. Over time, especially after the Oslo process, it has

organizations, it is not a theoretical and abstract question. We are discussing a movement of precarious masses who find themselves in a specific situation in the Arab world, who have several distinct social strata within their ranks, and who occupy a particular position in the Arab region. Thus, the leadership of the Palestinian national liberation struggle, which was embodied by Fatah¹²—and Fatah, let us not forget, is the mother of the revolution!—is not an organization that can simply be said to have “betrayed” the cause. It is the organization that represents the Palestinian revolution in all its complexity.

Today, this organization that gave us Oslo,¹³ which sacrificed the Palestinian national project and placed a limit on the existence of our people *as a people*—a “theoretical” limit, of course—is the same organization that is most represented in Zionist prisons, with more than half of the inmates being Fatah members. We must not forget this: this is also Fatah. When it comes to Palestinian prisoners, Fatah members make up more than half of the resistance fighters in Israeli prisons. And it is still this same Fatah that continues to supply Fedayeen¹⁴—whether in Gaza, the West Bank, or elsewhere.

The leadership at the head of Fatah is pluralistic. It can be said that Palestinian comprador capital has married the bureaucracy of the national liberation movement and given birth to what is known as the Palestinian Authority and all the concessions it has made before our eyes.

been criticized for shifting from a liberation framework toward accommodation and collaboration with Zionism.

¹² Once the leading force of Palestinian resistance under Yasser Arafat, Fatah (abbreviation for “Palestinian National Liberation Movement”) combined nationalist mobilization with armed struggle against Israeli occupation since the mid-1960s. Over the decades, particularly after the Oslo Agreements, which were negotiated and signed by Yasser Arafat himself, as leader of the PLO at the time, it became increasingly bureaucratic and counter-revolutionary at its top level, prioritizing political survival over genuine resistance.

¹³ The Oslo Accords were series of agreements made between Israel and the PLO in 1993 and 1995 that established limited Palestinian self-rule without ending occupation. They resulted in entrenching Israeli control, fragmenting Palestinian territory, and turning the PLO into Israel’s watchdog and enforcer.

¹⁴ The Palestinian Fedayeen emerged in the 1950s and 1960s as armed groups resisting Israeli occupation and defending refugee communities.

Of course, the problem is much more complicated than a simple story of deviations. It is not a matter of mere “deviation”: it is a result of the initial progress of the struggle, which led a fraction of the Palestinian bourgeoisie to seize control of the movement and marry itself to comprador capital, which, unsurprisingly, collaborates with the existing capitalist forces in the region. But its weight of Palestinian capital is extremely marginal in the overall dynamics of the struggle. In other words, Palestinian capital is not the same as that which exists in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, or Lebanon. It is insignificant in relation to the global movement. But it is very important as a fraction of the Palestinian political movement. Its importance lies in the fact that it is part of the movement that can be described as the “lever of the Arab revolution.” Its importance lies in its “Palestinianness” and not in its economic weight or its influence on the region’s capitalist system.

When we talk about the Arab bourgeoisie that has sided with the enemy, we are talking about capital that has real weight in the global economy, within the global dynamics of inter-imperialist contradictions. Whether it is on the side of China or Russia, whether it is with the Americans or not, it affects the balance of power at the international level. Palestinian capital, on the other hand, is utterly insignificant at this level. Politically, however, it is very important. Politically, the Palestinian movement is at the forefront of the anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist contradiction.

When we describe Israel as an “organic extension of international capital,” we must be able to distinguish between the Arab bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie that is invested in the Palestinian revolution. There is more than just a nuance: there is also a qualitative difference. When we talk about today’s Egyptian “state bourgeoisie,” it is a bourgeoisie, plain and simple. When we talk about the Iraqi bourgeoisie, it is a bourgeoisie, plain and simple. When we talk about the Syrian bourgeoisie, it is a bourgeoisie, plain and simple. On the other hand, the Palestinian bourgeoisie has not succeeded in its conversion at the international level. That is why Palestinian society has collapsed. The same is true of Iraq. This did not happen in Egypt, where there is a bourgeois state in a subjugated, peripheral country, and where order reigns, but from which we expect that at some point the social bloc will get rid of this bourgeoisie.

The Palestinian Authority is more complicated than that, because in the Palestinian situation, there is no single class that manages society. There are

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martyrs, there are prisoners, there is the armed struggle movement, there is the dispersion of its people across camps. The camp, in itself, is more than just one “aspect” among others. The Palestinian camp would be doomed to disappear if it were up to the imperialists, because its destruction is the end of the Palestinian cause itself. And in order to put an end to the Palestinian cause, we must put an end to the “Palestinianness” of all Palestinians. However, this “Palestinianness” is embedded in the dynamics of the alleys of these camps.

The camp is “unmanageable”; unmanageable in the sense that it is impossible to manage by and for capitalist interests. It is a place where a group of people who are “existentially precarious” live. When you destroy a camp, what are you doing concretely? Of course, you have destroyed it at its current location. But in reality all you have done is move it somewhere else; it will be rebuilt in another location. Unlike camps built after disasters, which are an economic phenomenon, these are “political” camps from the beginning to the present day. Every time we encounter a camp, we are confronted with Palestinian identity. Palestinian identity has been constructed through the camp, throughout a process that has been going on for more than a century. When we talk about Gaza, what exactly are we talking about? It is a collection of camps: 80% of Gaza’s inhabitants are refugees—not “economic” refugees, but refugees produced in the confrontation between the anti-colonial movement and colonial aggression. So as a people they embody precariousness on an “existential” level.

Today the camp is located at point A. Tomorrow it is destroyed, and the day after tomorrow it relocates to point B. When it moves from one place to another, what moves is the land, the mothers, the brothers, the sisters. The social functions performed by the various personalities in the camp will also change location and even change in nature. Existential precariousness is the order of the day at that moment. Managing this precariousness is the task of Palestinian revolutionaries. Where are we at on that level? We are still very far away.

In 1968–1969, there was a revolt in the camps that was able to force the withdrawal of bourgeois order. Henceforth, there was no more police, no more judiciary, no more representatives of the order of the “host” country, Lebanon. The status of the camps became that of extraterritoriality. This extraterritoriality benefited the revolutionary movement.

We remember that, historically, the years 1968–1969 were those of a worldwide liberation movement, in which students played an important role. This had an impact on the situation of those who were existentially precarious. If we try to understand the movement that began in 1968 based on the working class in the factories, it is difficult to grasp the Palestinian movement and the armed struggle that gave rise to the Palestinian identity and that of the camp. In 1968–1969, the Cairo Agreements¹⁵ on the situation of the camps in Lebanon were concluded between the Palestinians and the Lebanese state. These agreements defined not only the extraterritoriality of the camp, but also the Lebanese border with Israel. Thus, a region directly administered by the Fedayeen was established. This administration was the responsibility of the forces of armed struggle, namely a subjective agent acting in the field of class struggle. This was not the result of antagonism between the working class and the bourgeoisie, compounded by the crisis of capital. No. It was the result of a subjective initiative led by the forces of the armed struggle, which became more than just an economic agent.

However, this situation in the camps has atrophied along the way, becoming a kind of stateless state—hence, the failure of the Palestinian left. We were unable to transform the camps with extraterritorial status *vis-à-vis* the bourgeois order—a status that still exists today. We were unable to transform the camps into “liberated zones,” or at least “semi-liberated zones.” Liberated from what? Liberated from capital and its values. What process did we have instead? A process of deterioration. The camp has become a source of chaos, trafficking, prostitution, and all sorts of other things, to such an extent that the main forces in the camps themselves now say, “We can no longer manage the weapons now in the hands of criminal gangs; we must return them to the state. Let it come and take them away from us!”

This situation fits perfectly into the overall dynamic of “chaos” created by the bourgeoisie in this region. Quite naturally, the Palestinian left—the

¹⁵ The 1969 Cairo Agreements formalized the presence of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in southern Lebanon, granting armed and administrative autonomy in the refugee camps. While the treaty represented a real concession to Palestinian self-determination, it also tied the PLO to the Lebanese state and regional power structures.

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PFLP, the DFLP, the Palestinian Communist Party¹⁶—is called upon to assume its responsibilities. Will it succeed? Perhaps, we don't know. In the short term, it will fight, and it is on the basis of this struggle that the forces of the Arab revolution will emerge. The task is not so easy, and the explosiveness of the situation lies in the fact that the camp can never truly be destroyed. To destroy it, the Palestinians must be annihilated, and they cannot be annihilated. Attempts have been made to do so, in particular through measures that draw Palestinians abroad. This is not the same as Egyptians leaving to work in Europe. Here, the goal is political. A country like Canada, for example, tries as much as possible to attract all the managers, all the students, all the intellectuals, all those who have a little knowledge, a little scientific background, among the Palestinians, so that they go work there. They are given every facility possible and imaginable so the camps will empty and cease to exist, so that they are deprived of all their “identity-related capacities.”

Today, international institutions managed by capitalist interests—such as UNRWA, NGOs, and other agencies—impose conditions on the operation and funding of schools, such as, for example, prohibiting girls from wearing headscarves. The other day, a girl wearing a hijab arrived at school and was told that she was no longer welcome, because it was forbidden to come to school wearing a headscarf. In the same vein, teachers are no longer allowed to teach history, and so on.

Everything is being done to combat Palestinian identity. But identity is embedded in the alleys of the camp. As long as the camp exists, this identity will exist; you cannot separate identity from these alleys. Hence, the desire to destroy the camp. The army is now everywhere, and the camp is surrounded by blockades put up by the Lebanese authorities. But contrary to what one might think, this can only accentuate Palestinian identity.

The bourgeoisie, the capitalists, only ever work in the short term. They cannot operate in the long term because the long term means crisis. And

¹⁶ The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP, founded in 1967) and Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP, founded in 1969) pursued Marxist anti-imperialist struggle and armed resistance but were limited by internal divisions and the dominance of Fatah within the PLO. The Palestinian People's Party (PPP) was established in 1982 as the Palestinian Communist Party before it changed its name in 1991. Although the PPP initially supported the Oslo process, it has since criticized its catastrophic results.

all the solutions proposed for the problems of the bourgeoisie are short-term solutions. So, in reality, it is not really possible for them to extinguish the Palestinian identity movement. It is part of the overall Arab dynamic, so consequently, it will always represent a refuge for precarious Lebanese, Syrians,¹⁷ Iraqis, and others. When you are in the Shatila camp, what is the proportion of Palestinians? Less than 20%.¹⁸ Yet it is still a Palestinian camp. Who lives there? All Arabs who are as precarious as the Palestinians. They feel at home there—at home in the precariousness of the camp.

So, for this driving force of the revolution to play its role, the protagonists of the struggle must be capable of managing these resources. Until they have this capacity, the social bloc will continue to flounder. And this will cause further damage. However, the revolutionary forces will at some point succeed in forming a social bloc capable of confronting the process of annihilation to which it is being subjected.

The situation in Lebanon today is crucial. Lebanon is much more than the Palestinian struggle. It is a source of concern for the entire Arab bourgeoisie. The Arab bourgeoisie cannot live in harmony with the situation in Lebanon. There is a Resistance, there are people who say “no” and who do not accept normalization with the Zionist entity. Today, this small country, Lebanon—a country that is even *too* small, with an area of barely 10,000 square kilometers—is being asked to coexist with other Arab regimes.

But in Lebanon there has never been and never will be a dictatorship of one social stratum capable of militarizing social relations. Instead, we have a sectarian system in which the state acts as the guardian of the process of “degeneration,” that is, the process of preventing the formation of a [united] society, ensuring that it remains a collection of communities.¹⁹

The important things to understand is that this system does not give rise to a direct fascist dictatorship, but to fascist organizations at the grass-

¹⁷ Since the collapse of central state authority in Syria after the fall of Bashar al-Assad and the consolidation of power under al-Sharaa (better known as “al-Julani”), Lebanon has experienced an influx of refugees, including Alawites and other Syrian minorities, as well as Syrian Palestinians. Many have taken refuge in existing Palestinian camps, intensifying already precarious conditions.

¹⁸ Accounts of the total number vary between 20–40%.—*Material*

¹⁹ Lebanon’s sectarian state system, established in 1944, allocated political power among religious communities: Maronite Christians controlled the presidency and a disproportionate share of economic and political institutions, Sunni Muslims held

roots level. For example, there are those who participated in the Shatila massacre, and so on. There are many groups like this. But the state as such will always take the form of the inter-bourgeoisie agreement that constitutes Lebanon's particular established order: the agreement between the Sunni bourgeoisie, the Maronite bourgeoisie, etc. It's the sectarian characteristics that prevent the emergence of a social bloc with a collective identity capable of putting an end to the bourgeoisie altogether. Quite naturally, the revolutionary process is directed towards the construction of this social bloc. Such a construction cannot take place outside the struggle of the Palestinian people, because the relationship with Palestine is a historical one.

The armed struggle began in 1968–1969 in Palestine and elsewhere, and Lebanon has been part of this theater since those years. It is the main theater of the struggle. Lebanon therefore has an organic relationship with the Palestinian revolution. Naturally, the Arab bourgeoisie, supported by Israel and imperialists of all stripes—American, French, German—will throw its full weight behind breaking this dynamic, to eliminate the representatives of non-normalization with the Zionist entity. They will succeed in achieving certain gains at this level, because non-normalization is now managed by a whole jumble of different organizations. It is not the working class or the communists who are leading it. It is the entire population that is involved, and among them the Shiite bourgeoisie plays an essential role. When our communist comrades will realize the importance of getting directly involved in the Resistance, their mere presence will prevent the Shiite bourgeoisie from coming to terms with the Maronite bourgeoisie. If they do not get fully involved, it will be much less easy, and the bourgeoisie will more likely end up acting as a bourgeoisie that is without ties. It will then pursue its own interests and break the momentum of the Resistance.

The Resistance has its strengths. It has many martyrs, which means it has a very solid historical foundation. But the leaders of this resistance are now also all martyrs. It is therefore not easy to take their place, as it is still very recent. And the community that is the physical foundation of the Resistance is a Shiite community located on the southern border.

the prime minister position, Shia Muslims the speaker of parliament, and smaller Christian and Druze communities were apportioned seats to maintain a fragile balance. While intended to manage sectarian tensions, it reinforced class dominance held by some communities while marginalizing working-class and peasant populations in others.

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Israel cannot accept its presence because it is unable to purge it, that is, to remove the protagonists of the struggle. The contradictions are therefore of an organic nature.

The role of the communists is essential at this level. They need to be much more involved than they are at present. There are martyrs every day. Today, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, there will be martyrs falling in Lebanon. But their names sound like that of Hassan Nasrallah²⁰; they are from one particular community. Communists must also fall as martyrs, so that the foundation of national identity is the foundation of collective identity transcending sectarian divisions.

It is within the dynamics of this foundation that the social bloc is built and its class identity constructed. We hope to make it in time before they crush us all. The small country that is Lebanon has too few resources. But its resources are sufficient to ensure that the Resistance remains strong. The hope is that the momentum of this Resistance will lead to the formation of a mass movement—millions of proletarians, sub-proletarians, and precarious workers who will finally take action, particularly in Egypt and Jordan.

All the hope of the Resistance here in Lebanon lies in ultimately getting back on our feet and looking at the situation with clarity. In short, the role of the Communists is to ensure that we can hold out until a social explosion occurs in Egypt and Jordan.²¹ If it never happens, we will go down in history as those who “jumped to touch the sky.” But we will succeed in the end, because the potential for a mass movement is very strong, and the underlying social structures facilitate its emergence.

Of course, we don’t have a very clear picture of the battlefield. “Here are the good guys, there are the bad guys.” No. We are faced with situations where communities are intertwined. And at the same time, we have the bloc of traitors; people who are connected to imperialism, to Israel, etc.

²⁰ Hassan Nasrallah, longtime Secretary General of Hezbollah and a central figure in Lebanese resistance politics rooted in Shiite workingclass and antiimperialist currents, was killed in an Israeli airstrike in September 2024. His death was mourned by hundreds of thousands.

²¹ In previous, more informal discussions with Georges, Egypt was a frequent focus, reflecting on both the strong anti-Zionist sentiment among the population and significant support for the Palestinian cause within parts of the military, as well as the country’s demographic weight—nearly 120 million people—making it a central actor in regional politics and anti-imperialist strategy.

“We have no choice but to navigate against all odds”

Faced with these imperialists and the Zionist entity, we have people who are willing to blow themselves up. Imperialism is throwing all its weight behind eliminating the leaders of this movement. That’s why we have no choice but to try to navigate against all odds.

Material: To conclude, we would like to ask you how you see the unfolding relationship between the struggles in Lebanon and Palestine on the one hand, and the movements in Europe and North America on the other. How can we concretely and effectively support the Palestinian revolution from our context in imperialist countries?

GIA: The relationship between the movement here in Lebanon and Palestine and the movement in Europe and elsewhere, that is, between the centers and the peripheries, is built on the dynamics of struggle. Every step forward here is a step forward for you. Every step forward for you is a step forward here. But our reading of the situation will be incomplete if we limit ourselves to this observation.

In fact, what we are facing here is a force that is the organic extension of Western imperialism. It has run out of steam. It is therefore naturally the “fascist” expression of this capital. At the same time, the global dynamics of capital do not produce fascism only in the belly of the beast, in the centers of the system. That is why we see anti-fascist struggles emerging on both sides. These will take on an increasingly broader dimension. It is in this sense that we must understand the intensity of the current movement in Europe for Palestine. It does not express a passionate discovery of love by the Christian man who looks at the wounds of Palestine, the crying children, etc. There are crying children everywhere in the world. That is not what moves people. Today, people in Europe are taking action to say two things: (1) that in Israel there is fascism with Netanyahu; (2) that at home there is fascism with Meloni, with Marine Le Pen, with the AFD, etc. In the intertwined dynamics of these two forms of anti-fascism, a communist identity is being constructed.

The social bloc, both here and there, is being built in the dynamic of the battle against this ongoing rise of fascism. There is a process of fascism in Europe, it is unmistakable. You only have to look around to see it. It can be observed through the countless discreet laws that are being passed. We see

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it in prisons, we see it in demonstrations, we see it in the use of violence, we see it in the restrictions that the bourgeoisie is introducing. It's the same here; we see it in the overall dynamics of repression in the Arab world.

There have been intense protests in Europe, as well as small initiatives that have given rise to the story of the flotillas trying to reach Gaza, etc. Here, the impact of these initiatives is enormous. It is enormous in terms of the morale instilled in the protagonists of the struggle. It raises morale and opens up space for communists to better see the dynamics of capitalism.

When we are here in Gaza or there in Europe, and we are on the eve of a potential or probable world war, we are called upon to make small analyses. Their depth at the moment is irrelevant. But these analyses allow us to see more clearly the problems of capitalism. In this context, as protagonists in the revolutionary struggle, we are obliged to talk about certain areas such as the camps—areas that are semi-liberated. How do we manage a semi-liberated area? To understand this, we have to look at how liberated areas were built.

In France and elsewhere, there has been talk of ZADs—“zones à défendre” [“areas to be defended”].²² Without reducing these to mere anecdotes, here we are required to go a little further, or even much further: How can we build a social bloc in the face of the global dynamics of capitalism? How can we build a social bloc whose aspirations are not those of commodification? How can we get rid of commodification altogether? In other words, how can we build a proletarian identity based on the social bloc of those who are existentially precarious?

These are very important tasks, but they require a lot of effort, and of course it is not possible to achieve them all at once. But it is important to keep in mind the significance of maintaining relations with the other side of the Mediterranean. If there is no movement back and forth between here and there—if there is no link—there will be an incompatibility between the proposals to build liberated zones on the one hand and the fact that the bourgeoisie is at the head of the social bloc on the other. In order

²² The French ZAD are contested spaces where activists resist state or corporate projects threatening to destroy the environment, combining direct action, community organizing, and experimental self-governance. Notable examples include the ZAD of Notre-Dame-des-Landes, opposed to a planned airport near Nantes, and the ZAD de Sivens, resisting a dam project.

“We have no choice but to navigate against all odds”

for us to have the potential for progress, there must be this link—this link that is historical and every day. Whether it is your arrival here or the struggle of the people who are over there in Europe, all of this allows us to forge links of struggle.

For the moment, the struggle takes this form. It is not certain that this is the only form that is proposed and that can be proposed—namely demonstrations of support. Tomorrow, it may turn out that there are other tasks that our Swiss or other comrades can take on. Yesterday, it took the form of financial support. In the future, it will be something else. It depends on the capacity of the comrades operating in the belly of the beast and the capacity to structure the social bloc here. The fate of the revolution will depend on all of this. The fate of the revolution not only in Europe and the Arab world, but worldwide.

Here, we are not addressing the crisis of capital in terms of low-level propaganda. If we are convinced that we are producing serious analyses, we will see that globalization has ensured that the only way to solve the crisis of overproduction is through intensive global arms production—arms conceived as the driving force of the consumer market economy. It so happens that bombs and missiles cannot be eaten. They are consumed by destroying entire sections of the population. We are on the eve of such events, and the only antidote to this consumption of the “arms-commodity” is revolution in all countries.

Quite naturally, when the revolutionary movement advances in Switzerland or France or elsewhere, the consumption of these goods ceases to be within the reach of capitalism. In other words, the outbreak of war ceases to be the prospect of a world war. When the French proletariat occupies the terrain of daily struggle, the French army cannot go and fight another army in another country. It will have to deal with the French masses until they tip the scales and seize power.

This process is unfolding in parallel with the process here. On our side, it will not always be in the name of the prophet that we will confront the enemy. For the revolutionary process to gain momentum, all categories of heritage must be purged, meaning that some must be denounced and replaced by other perspectives: equality between men and women, the issue of children’s rights, the issue of the circulation of goods, etc.

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These issues must be addressed by the organizations that manage the current and future semi-liberated zones. We must be able to see what a liberated or semi-liberated zone is and how to manage it. It's not as clear-cut as it seems. We have examples before our eyes: the experiences of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie managing these zones, which have led to the situation we see today.

The hope is that the mass movement, with its long history and experience, will succeed in getting us out of this situation. Seeing young people mobilizing in your country gives us hope and the belief that we will be able to confront capitalism and its crisis; that this transition period is the death throes of capitalism. And the transition from agonizing capitalism to socialism is a process that is taking place on both shores of the Mediterranean.

Ibon man may layang lumipad:¹ Political Imprisonment and Lawfare in the Philippines

Cristina Palabay
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The use of political imprisonment and lawfare in the Philippines is intrinsically linked to the history of colonialism, neocolonialism, and political resistance of movements for national and social liberation.

During precolonial times, the informal prison system was community-based, whereby penalties were meted out by local chieftains in accordance to local laws and incarceration was within the communities.

The formal prison system in the Philippines started during the Spanish colonial rule, marked by the establishment of the Old Bilibid Prison in 1847,² within a period when early organized peasant movements and underground dissent were growing against the colonial regime's abuses and

¹ In English: "Even birds have the freedom to fly."—*Material*.

² Today's Manila City Jail, during the period of Spanish colonization it was called "Carcel y Presidio Correccional" ("Correctional Jail and Military Prison"). Old Bilibid Prison functioned as a central carceral apparatus used by the state to discipline the oppressed and neutralize political dissenters.—*Material*.

exploitation. The prison, the main penitentiary in Oroquieta Street in Manila and known as Carcel y Presidio Correccional, was built for common prisoners (“Carcel”) and for political convicts (“Presidio”).

Later, in 1869, the San Ramon Prison and Penal Farm was also established as a penal colony for Muslim rebels and political prisoners,³ as deportation or exile to remote areas became a common punishment for so-called political offenders to remove them from the centers of rebellion.

Much later, especially when the political reform and revolutionary movements against the Spanish occupation were established, the dungeons of Fort Santiago in Intramuros,⁴ Manila, were used to imprison political dissidents, who were subjected to physical torture and severe mistreatment.

The construction of prisons by the Spanish colonizers had been a deliberate tactic to suppress resistance to colonial rule and instill a social order in accordance to the interests of Spain. Pacification campaigns, including arrests, were carried out by the Spanish Army, Navy, and the Guardia Civil.⁵ Among the notable cases of those imprisoned due to their roles in political resistance include the leaders and participants in the Magalat Revolt of 1596⁶ against abusive Spanish tribute collectors and forced labor; the three Filipino priests collectively known as Gomburza (Mariano Gomez,

³ Founded in Zamboanga City, Mindanao, the San Ramon Prison and Penal Farm served as a colonial outpost for the confinement of the Moro—the indigenous Muslim populations of the southern Philippines—and political activists who resisted central state authority. By situating the facility in the Zamboanga peninsula, the ruling administration sought to pacify the Moro heartlands and utilize forced labor to integrate the southern frontier into the broader colonial economic structure. The prison functioned as a strategic tool to suppress movements for regional autonomy and to maintain the hegemony of the Manila-based legal and political order over the diverse ethnic groups of the Sulu Archipelago and Mindanao.—*Material*.

⁴ Founded in 1571 on the site of a palisaded Rajahnate fort, Fort Santiago was originally the premier military citadel of the Spanish colonial government in Manila. It served as a strategic defensive bastion to protect the interests of the ruling elite before being repurposed as a prison dungeon.—*Material*.

⁵ The “Guardia Civil” was a paramilitary police force tasked with maintaining internal security and protecting the property of the ruling elite against “bandits” and political subversives.—*Material*.

⁶ Andrés Bonifacio was the leader of the Katipunan, a revolutionary movement founded in 1892 that sought the total overthrow of colonial rule through armed struggle by the masses. Representing the interests of the radicalized laboring classes, he organized a clandestine government to dismantle the exploitative social order and replace it with a sovereign Philippine nation.—*Material*.

Jose Burgos, and Jacinto Zamora), who were detained following the 1872 Cavite mutiny⁷ and publicly executed via garrote; writer Jose Rizal,⁸ who was detained at Fort Santiago before his execution; and worker revolutionary Andres Bonifacio,⁹ who was tried, detained, and executed in Cavite.

As the American colonial rule came, the US used the legal architecture of legislation to suppress resistance and criminalize advocacy for independence, reclassifying anti-colonial fighters as common criminals. Five laws passed by the US colonial government had been crucial tools to suppress nationalist movements and quell armed resistance. The first of these laws authorized the organization of a national police force, the Philippine Constabulary, in July 1901. The other four laws were the Sedition Law (November 1901), the Brigandage Law (November 1902), the Reconcentration Law (June 1903), and the Flag Law (September 1907), which had been intended to suppress Filipino nationalism and ensure the colonial government's control over society. Upon the enactment of the National Defense Law in 1935, the Armed Forces of the Philippines was officially established, and in 1938, the Constabulary Division (precursor of the Philippine Constabulary) was reorganized into a national police force which undertook roles on “peace and order” in the islands and conducted the arrests.

The Philippine prison system was reorganized through the creation of the Bureau of Prisons (now the Bureau of Corrections) under the Reorganization Act of 1905. Prisons became tools of “benevolent assimilation” and surveillance to contain anti-colonial resistance.

⁷ This was an uprising of workers and soldiers at the San Felipe arsenal who protested the colonial state's revocation of long-standing labor privileges and tax exemptions. The ruling elite used the rebellion as a pretext to execute reformist priests and crack down on dissent.—*Material*.

⁸ José Rizal (1861–1896) was a prominent intellectual whose critiques of the colonial administration—such as his novels *Noli Me Tangere* (1887) and *El filibusterismo* (1891)—challenged the ideological foundations of the ruling social order. Following his conviction for sedition by a military court, the state executed him by firing squad in December 1896 at Bagumbayan (island of Mindanao) to stifle the growing revolutionary consciousness among the masses.—*Material*.

⁹ Andrés Bonifacio (1863–1897) was the founder and leader of the Katipunan (the revolutionary nationalist organization). His leadership ended when he was betrayed by the provincial elite faction of the revolution, subjected to a sham trial for treason, and executed in the mountains of Maragondon.—*Material*.

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The Old Bilibid Prison had been renamed as the Manila City Jail in 1940, when inmates were transferred to the New Bilibid Prison in Muntinlupa¹⁰ due to extreme overcrowding. The following facilities were also established mainly to imprison *ladrones*, *tulisanes*, and *bandoleros* (bandits, outlaws, or brigands), as the recent laws have regarded *revolucionarios* (revolutionaries) or *insurrectos* (insurgents): the Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm in 1904, the Davao Penal Colony in 1932, and the Correctional Institution for Women in 1929. Revolutionaries Crisanto Evangelista, Jacinto G. Manahan, and Dominador J. Ambrosio of the old Communist Party of the Philippines,¹¹ Luis Taruc of the Socialist Party of the Philippines,¹² Macario Sakay and brothers Quintin and Adoy Tabal were among those imprisoned in said facilities. During the Japanese colonial period, the same facilities, and more, were used in the torture and detention of leaders and members of the *Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon* (People's Army Against Japanese Colonization).¹³

As nominal independence was declared by the United States in 1946, laws of the neocolonial government defined laws on rebellion, insurrection, sedition, or disloyalty and used them against dissidents who opposed the continuing US dominance on Philippine politics and the puppet elite

¹⁰ Situated on the outskirts of the capital, Manila, this facility allowed the ruling elite to geographically isolate thousands of prisoners.—*Material*.

¹¹ These men were the founding leaders of the *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP) in 1930, representing the first organized political challenge to the ruling class from a proletarian standpoint. They worked to unify the peasantry and urban labor unions into a revolutionary front against both American imperialism and the local landed elite. Following their 1931 arrest and the state's subsequent banning of the party, they became the first major targets of modern anti-communist lawfare.—*Material*.

¹² Luis Taruc (1913–2005) was the leader of the Socialist Party of the Philippines. Representing the militant agrarian struggle in Central Luzon, he organized the peasantry to demand land reform and challenge the semi-feudal domination of the landed elite. After years of guerrilla warfare, he surrendered in 1954.—*Material*.

¹³ Founded in 1942, the “Hukbalahap” was a peasant-based guerrilla army in Central Luzon that resisted Japanese occupation while simultaneously challenging the local landed elite. Representing the militant aspirations of the agrarian masses, the “Huks” established an autonomous social order in the countryside, implementing land reforms and local self-governance that bypassed the collaborationist state. Following the war, the returning American colonial administration and the Philippine ruling class viewed the Huks’ demand for social justice as a threat to the capitalist status quo, leading to the movement’s criminalization and its eventual transition into an anti-government insurgency.—*Material*.

Political Imprisonment and Lawfare in the Philippines

rule. The AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines), trained by the US government, and the Philippine Constabulary undertook the arrests of political prisoners.

Most notable among the political prisoners at that time were poet, writer, and trade union organizer Amado V. Hernandez¹⁴ and more than 500 other trade unionists. Hernandez faced charges of rebellion with murder, arson, and robbery. Five years after his arrest, and imprisoned at the New Bilibid Prison, Hernandez filed a petition for bail with the court where his case was pending, but was denied on the basis of the nature of the offense (if the crime was complexed, the penalty for the most serious crime shall be imposed). Thus, he filed a petition at the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled that rebellion cannot be complexed with other crimes, such as murder and arson; granted Hernandez's bail, and eventually issued an acquittal in 1964. The landmark decision, known as the Hernandez doctrine, has since been cited in jurisprudence regarding criminalization of political offenses.

The regime of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. paved the way for the imposition of martial law and the use of US-driven counterinsurgency programs, which resulted in thousands of killings, torture, disappearances, and illegal or arbitrary arrests. At this time, the Communist Party of the Philippines had been reestablished in 1968,¹⁵ and a resurgence of the protest movements, mass organizing, and armed resistance was seen.

From 1972 to 1986, it is estimated that at least 70,000 individuals including revolutionaries, activists, peasants, workers, urban poor, students,

¹⁴ Amado V. Hernandez (1903-1970) headed the Congress of Labor Organizations (CLO), the most militant federation of the post-war era. Representing the intersection of culture and class struggle, he used his platform to advocate for the rights of the urban proletariat against both the local ruling elite and foreign capital. In 1951, the state arrested and imprisoned him for over five years on charges of "rebellion complexed with other crimes"—a legal fabrication designed to criminalize union organizing. While incarcerated in Muntinlupa, he wrote his most influential works (such as his novel *Mga Ibong Mandaragit*, "*Birds of Prey*," and his collection of poems *Isang Dipang Langit*, "*A Stretch of Heaven*"), transforming his imprisonment into an indictment of the carceral system and the systemic oppression of the Filipino worker.—*Material*.

¹⁵ The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) emerged as a Mao Zedong Thought-inspired vanguard that sought to rectify the perceived errors of the old party (the above-mentioned PKP) by launching a protracted people's war against the state. By organizing the New People's Army (NPA) to address the "three basic ills"

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journalists, academics, church workers, and members of the political opposition have been incarcerated. Most of the political prisoners were arrested without warrant and detained without charges, and suffered various forms of torture in various military camps and military safehouses and in at least 80 detention centers. In cases where there were charges, they faced charges of rebellion, subversion, inciting sedition, or illegal possession of firearms and explosives.

In response, the political prisoners organized themselves within prisons and detention centers to resist their maltreatment, advocate for their rights, and maintain solidarity. They conducted various forms of protest, including hunger strikes, to highlight their situation, demand better jail conditions, and press for immediate and just trials or release. In some instances, they organized prison escapes. They established links with organizations and individuals outside prison to amplify their demands. These forms of mass struggles inside prisons was considered part of the Filipino people's struggle against the Marcos dictatorship.¹⁶

Political prisoners also used art as their form of expression and resistance. Volunteers from groups brought art materials into prisons and helped market the finished products outside to provide some financial support to the prisoners and their families. These organizations also helped in providing legal aid, scholarship funds for children of political prisoners, and livelihood support for released political prisoners.

Organizations supporting political prisoners were established including an organization of their families in 1979, and an organization of former political prisoners called the *Samahan ng Ex-detainees Laban sa Detensyon at Para sa Amnestiya* (SELDA; Association of Former Detainees Against Detention and for Amnesty).

of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat capitalism, the party created a sustained military and ideological challenge to the ruling elite.—*Material*.

¹⁶ The Marcos dictatorship (1972-1986) was a period of centralized authoritarian rule that utilized martial law to consolidate wealth and power within a small circle of landlords and comprador bourgeoisie. By suspending civil liberties and employing systemic state violence, the regime sought to liquidate political opposition and suppress the growing revolutionary consciousness of the masses. This era of institutionalized plunder and human rights abuses deepened the nation's economic dependency while inadvertently fueling the very resistance movements it aimed to destroy.—*Material*.

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In February 1986, after years of the dictatorship and upon Marcos's ouster from office,¹⁷ the new President Corazon Aquino¹⁸ issued orders to release political prisoners, and by February 1987, issued Proclamation No. 80 on the full and unconditional amnesty for political prisoners. Victims of the Marcos dictatorship, including former political prisoners, filed a class suit in Hawaii to seek recognition and reparations.

However, the legal and political infrastructure that enabled illegal or arbitrary arrests, including warrantless arrests, and political imprisonment had been maintained, despite the ouster of the dictator Marcos and the 1987 Constitution which contains a Bill of Rights. The US government's low intensity conflict had been adapted as a counterinsurgency and military strategy by the Aquino government, and such arrests, detention, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearance continued. In 1991, the Supreme Court ruled in a case that warrantless arrests are permissible, emphasizing requirements of probable cause, good faith, and the circumstances of the arrests. In the same year, the Philippine National Police was created.

From 1986 to 1992, human rights groups documented 20,523 victims of illegal arrests and detention, 816 *desaparecidos*,¹⁹ 135 cases of massacres, 1,064 victims of extrajudicial killings, and 1.2 million civilian victims of forcible evacuations due to military operations. From 1988 onward, an average of 200 persons were arrested daily, with 94% of the arrests conducted illegally. From January 1989 to September 1990, 4,408 political detentions were reported, 535 of which showed signs of torture. 109 disap-

¹⁷ The 1986 "People Power Revolution" was a mass uprising led by a united front of nationalist and communist forces along with certain elements of the military. While the movement successfully ended the Marcos regime after fourteen years of dictatorship, it largely resulted in a transition of power between competing factions of the ruling elite rather than a fundamental restructuring of the social order.—*Material*.

¹⁸ Corazon Aquino (1933–2009) assumed the presidency in 1986 as the figurehead of the liberal democratic restoration, representing the return of the traditional landowning elite to political power. Born into the wealthy Cojuangco clan, her social background as a member of the landed gentry fundamentally shaped her administration's policies. While her government restored formal civil liberties, it maintained the essential economic structures of the old order, most notably through the failure of genuine agrarian reform on her own family's 6,000-hectare estate, Hacienda Luisita.—*Material*.

¹⁹ The term *desaparecidos* refers to the "disappeared"—victims of forced disappearance who are abducted by state security forces or paramilitary groups and whose whereabouts remain unacknowledged.—*Material*.

peared following their arrests, and 218 people died from massacres. From January 1987 to September 1991, there were 18,281 arbitrary arrests, 701 involuntary disappearances, and nearly 2,000 extrajudicial killings.

The 1992 national elections brought President Fidel Ramos,²⁰ a major implementer of martial law and the total war policy, into power. In 1992, Ramos was compelled to repeal the Anti-Subversion Law, and with much work done by human rights groups, releases of political prisoners were facilitated. However, Ramos maintained many repressive decrees promulgated under martial law, militarized the civilian government by appointing at least 92 former military and police officers in key positions and resorted to the practice of criminalizing political offenses instead of addressing head-on the roots of political dissent. Human rights groups conducted activities for the repeal of repressive laws, for the release of political prisoners, and to seek justice for human rights violations.

As Joseph Estrada assumed the presidency, he signed in August 1998 the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL), the first point in the substantive agenda of the peace negotiations between the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP)²¹ and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP). Articles in the CARHRIHL contain affirmation of the Hernandez doctrine and review of cases of all political prisoners and their release, as well as the GRP's work for the immediate repeal of repressive laws including Marcosian decrees.

²⁰ Fidel Ramos (1928-2022) served as president from 1992 to 1998, overseeing the aggressive integration of the Philippines into the global neoliberal order. Before assuming the presidency, he was a central architect of the Marcos dictatorship's repressive state apparatus, serving as the chief of the Philippine Constabulary, the primary agency responsible for the mass arrest, torture, and surveillance of dissidents under martial law.—*Material*.

²¹ The National Democratic Front of the Philippines, established in 1973, serves as the formal united front of the underground revolutionary movement, including the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the New People's Army. By articulating a program of national sovereignty and social justice, it seeks to build a broad alliance among the oppressed sectors of Philippine society. As the political representative of the revolutionary forces in peace negotiations with the Philippine government, the NDFP utilizes the diplomatic arena to propose fundamental socio-economic reforms, such as national industrialization and genuine land reform, while maintaining that a lasting peace is impossible without addressing the systemic poverty and inequality inherent in the current capitalist social order.—*Material*.

But soon after, the regime terminated the peace negotiations and eventually discarded all agreements between the NDFP and the GRP forged in almost 10 years of talks between the two panels. Illegal arrests and detention, killings and massacres, enforced disappearances, and violent dispersals of rallies continued. Before he was ousted from power, in December 2000, Estrada announced that he would release some 200 political prisoners convicted of or being prosecuted for offenses allegedly committed within the context of armed insurgency. This, however, did not materialize as Estrada was removed from the presidency the next month.

Estrada also scuttled the government's peace process with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, resulting in forcible evacuations of Moro communities during bombings and indiscriminate firing operations of the Philippine military.

The regimes of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, Benigno Aquino III, Rodrigo Duterte,²² and current president Ferdinand Marcos Jr.²³ saw the increased criminalization of political offenses, as counterinsurgency programs were framed in the US "war on terror" campaign and the subsequent adoption of the "whole of government," "whole of society," and "whole of nation"²⁴ approaches to counterinsurgency.

²² Rodrigo Duterte (born 1945), who served as president from 2016 to 2022, utilized a populist, anti-elite rhetoric to consolidate executive power while overseeing a massive escalation of state-sponsored violence. The son of a provincial governor and a longtime mayor of Davao City, his social background is rooted in the "sub-national authoritarianism" of regional political dynasties, which he scaled to a national level. His administration is defined by the "war on drugs," a campaign of extrajudicial killings that primarily targeted the urban poor, as well as revolutionary activists and political opponents, serving as a brutal mechanism of social control that liquidated "surplus" populations created by decades of economic marginalization.—*Material*.

²³ Ferdinand Marcos Jr., son of the dictator, assumed the presidency in 2022, marking the return of the Marcos dynasty to the pinnacle of state power through a sophisticated campaign of historical revisionism that reframed his father's dictatorship as a "golden age." Having served as a provincial governor and an officer in the Philippine Constabulary during the martial law era, his ascent represents the rehabilitation of a political lineage once ousted for systemic kleptocracy and human rights abuses.—*Material*.

²⁴ These are integrated strategic frameworks that mobilize the entire state bureaucracy and civilian sectors to neutralize the revolutionary movement. By expanding the mandate of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), they shift counter-insurgency from a purely military concern to a multi-sectoral campaign that utilizes social services, localized peace engagements, and development

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Red-baiting, red-labeling, or red- or terrorist-tagging by government officials and agencies have been on an uptick, seemingly to mark their targets of “neutralization.” Civilian agencies of government have been oriented for counterinsurgency purposes but with a predominantly militarist approach. Such has resulted in more than 2,000 extrajudicial killings of civilians, nearly 300 victims of enforced disappearances, hundreds of victims of torture and more than 1,300 political prisoners. The climate of impunity worsened, especially during the Duterte administration’s “war on drugs” which normalized staged crime scenes, planting of evidence, and other various forms of violations of the right to due process, as well as Duterte’s scuttling of the talks of the NDFP and GRP, all of which is continued by Marcos Jr. up to present.

The use of laws and the Philippine justice system for political repression has been deeply institutionalized, with the enactment of laws such as the Human Security Act, the Anti-Terrorism Law and the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Law, and the massive use of criminal charges against activists and revolutionaries. Government bodies were created to either systematize the filing of trumped-up charges against activists and revolutionaries and put them in jail, or to justify their killings, disappearances, arrests, and torture. To date, more than 200 had been charged using the terror laws, with more 80 arrested and detained based on these charges.

Almost all 700 political prisoners at present face criminal, not political, charges ranging from murder, attempted or frustrated murder, arson, robbery, kidnapping, and illegal possession of firearms and explosives, coupled with facing rebellion or terrorism charges. More than half face the trumped-up charges of illegal possession of firearms and explosives, probably due to the ease by which these charges are concocted through planting of evidence and the presumption of regularity protocol in the military or police operations during arrests and the non-bailable provisions regarding these charges.

While in jail, the extremely slow-paced justice system enables prolonged detention even of those who are still in the process of being tried

programs like the Barangay Development Program as tools of pacification. Critically, this strategy effectively blurs the line between combatants and civilians, institutionalizing “red-tagging” and surveillance across all levels of society to isolate dissent and enforce ideological conformity, thereby preserving the existing social order through a totalizing coordination of state and private resources.—*Material*.

in court. There is no regularity of court hearings, prosecution witnesses are given wide latitude in being remiss or postponements in giving their testimonies in court, and perjured testimonies as well as planted evidence are admitted as evidence. It is estimated that a political prisoner is kept in prison for an average of 5 to 6 years, before most of the charges against them are dismissed or they are acquitted of these charges.

In the meantime, they are subjected to prison conditions in one of the most overly congested jails in the world, with an average of more than 500% over-congestion prison rate in the last five to ten years. Political prisoners are mixed with common offenders in cramped detention cells, where many sleep on bare floors or would have to pay a hefty fee for a decent bed. Food is rationed, with government allotting Php 75.00 (or USD 1.20) per day as a budget and few more pesos minus that are lost in the web of jail corruption. Thus, prisoners, including political prisoners, are left with food that is unhealthy, at times rotten, and barely digestible, while access to drinking water and water for hygiene and sanitation is very minimal.

Prison conditions likewise aggravate the medical conditions of the elderly and those with illnesses, including especially debilitating ones. With a very measly Php 15 (USD 0.25) per day medicine budget, without regular doctors and nurses in jails, without health care including reproductive and mental health facilities and services in jail, many political prisoners have considered these prisons as the “cemetery for the living.”

Administrative policies in relation to accreditation and registration of non-profit or non-governmental organizations have been hewed in accordance to the laws on terrorism, which meant a more restrictive environment for and increased state intrusion on the operations of NPOs (non-profit organizations) and NGOs (non-governmental organizations), as well as more stringent processes on funding. International solidarity allies, some of them based in the Philippines for years, have faced deportation proceedings and blacklisting of the immigration office.

In all these and more, the intent of the reactionary regimes is clear – to destroy the revolutionary movement and to quell political dissent of the citizens. Political imprisonment and lawfare are but among the tools of repression that are deployed, though other tools such as the use of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, and other grave violations have not wavered.

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Through the years, the legal and democratic movement in the Philippines has utilized legal and campaign tactics and forms to counter such machinations. Court battles are being waged in the lower courts up to the Supreme Court to question the legal bases of the arbitrary or illegal arrests and detention. Legislative proposals of progressives in parliament are coupled with mass campaigns to frustrate or blunt attempts to impose more draconian legislations, pursue bills which uphold rights to due process, and defend against arbitrary and illegal arrests.

Engagement in these arenas is combined with campaign tactics, which range from effective documentation of human rights violations; mobilization of legal, campaign, and public advocacy, logistical and financial support at the local and national levels; organizing of political prisoners, families of political prisoners, and support groups; and utilization of international mechanisms of support and solidarity.

Innovations through development of newer forms in both legal and campaign tactics are likewise inevitable. Legal remedies and strategies are tried out in judicial and quasi-judicial bodies. Social or digital technologies have enabled broader campaign platforms. Alliance and organizing tactics inside and outside prisons are shared and developed, as international solidarity support and mobilization of the international community are likewise works in progress.

One must note, however, that as the objective conditions remain unresolved—i.e., the root causes of the armed conflict including the predominance of US imperialism in the country's affairs, the feudal exploitation of the majority of peasants, the rot of bureaucrat capitalism, and the fascist machinations of the State—the struggle continues. Through these, and the greater work of organizing, education, and mobilization in the rural and urban communities in the country, there is continuity of the political work and organizations.

Joint Interview: Samidoun (Paris-Banlieue) & International Red Aid (Toulouse)

Editor's Note: For this fourth issue of Material, dedicated to the question of (political) prisoners, we sought to pose a series of key questions to several organizations engaged in the struggle against imprisonment. We believe this exercise allows readers to compare the approach taken by each respondent as well as the broader political context in which they operate. For this first iteration of this interview process, we received responses from two organizations: Samidoun (Paris-Banlieue) and International Red Aid (Toulouse).

Material: Could you describe how, in your context, the state, through laws, policing, detention practices, or other mechanisms, produces political prisoners on a mass scale—and how this process fits into its broader strategy of containing, disorganizing, or destroying revolutionary movements in this time of history? How does imprisonment seek not only to punish individuals but also to break collective morale, instill fear, or isolate revolutionary forces from the masses? In this regard, we would like to hear how your organization/movement has analyzed and responded to this in the past and present.

Samidoun (Paris-Banlieue)¹: Regarding this question, we will discuss the specific context of Palestine, which lies at the heart of Samidoun's international struggle.

In Palestine, imprisonment is part of a wider context of settler colonialism, similar to what Algeria, Ireland, and other countries have experienced. As a result, in Palestine, prison is a tool of repression designed to subdue society as a whole. However, it targets those activists and fighters involved in national liberation movements with particular intensity, as they are the most advanced segment of the oppressed masses engaged in struggle. Dialectically, it is through the repression of these fighters that the Zionist state affects the people as a whole: workers, peasants, fishermen, students, and intellectuals. This reality is pervasive throughout Palestinian society: there are prisoners in every family and every generation.

Israel attempts to fragment the realities of the different areas of Palestinian territory in order to divide its population: there are around a hundred arrests per day in the West Bank; prior to October 7, Gaza was under blockade; Palestinian refugees face specific forms of discrimination in Jordan and Lebanon; and so on.

Repression through imprisonment is a pervasive phenomenon in the Palestinian context. A quarter of Palestinian men have been incarcerated since 1967, and since 1948, there have been over a million prisoners. In occupied Palestine, those arrested are tried by military courts and subjected to daily raids carried out by the Zionist army. Those imprisoned civilians are then sent to interrogation and investigation centers and subsequently brought before military courts where the conviction rate is around 99%.

This type of administrative detention is a tool of repression that allows Zionist authorities to imprison Palestinians based on “secret” records and files to which neither the defense nor the prisoner has access. Without a

¹ In English: “Samidoun (Paris-Suburbs).” Unlike the North American context, in many European countries—and in France in particular—the rapid and planned urbanization of the outskirts of large and medium-sized cities in the 1960s and 1970s led to a concentration of the working class in these “villes nouvelles” (“new towns”). By the 1980s and 1990s, as white workers gained opportunities to become homeowners themselves in even more distant suburbs (made accessible by the construction of highways across the country), the “villes nouvelles” became areas where the most precarious members of the largely non-white working class were concentrated.—*Material*.

trial or judgment, provisional sentences of several months are often extended, and it is common for prisoners to remain under this “administrative detention” regime for years. Currently, as of March 2026, there are nearly 3,500 detainees held under this system, not counting those in Gaza.

The repressive prison and legal system we have just described dates back to Mandatory Palestine.² Its tools were originally developed by the British colonial administration even before the establishment of the Zionist entity in Palestine, clearly illustrating the colonial continuum that exists between British imperialism and the Zionist entity. Prisons are, in fact, often located on the sites or foundations of detention facilities from the British Mandate era, as is the case with the Damon Women’s Prison.³ This legacy is also reflected in the legislative framework, as seen in the law on “illegal combatants,” modeled after similar legislation in the United States.⁴

The history of mass incarceration in Palestine dates back to the 1930s, during the time of the first anti-colonial strikes and actions, which in turn triggered the earliest forms of state repression against this emerging resistance.

In the 1960s, with the advent of political parties such as Fatah, the PFLP, and the DFLP, the prison population increasingly consisted of activists engaged in political-military actions, numbering several thousand inmates at the movement’s peak. In this context, the enemy’s objective was—and still is—to weaken the resistance by cutting off its fighters from the popular base on which the guerrillas draw their strength. It is vitally important for the occupying power to silence the most determined re-

² Mandatory Palestine was a British colonial entity established post-WWI (after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, which had governed the region for 400 years by that point) to economically exploit the territory and facilitate the Zionist project through the violent suppression of indigenous Arab national liberation movements.—*Material*.

³ Damon Prison is a high-security facility located in the Haifa district, originally built as a tobacco warehouse during the British Mandate and repurposed as a colonial site of confinement. It was infamously used by the British to incarcerate Arab nationalists after the suppression of the 1936–1939 Arab Revolt.—*Material*.

⁴ The Israeli “Incarceration of Unlawful Combatants Law” (2002) is a direct structural mirror of the US “Unlawful Enemy Combatant” designation created by the Bush administration following 9/11. By inventing a category that is neither “civilian” nor “prisoner of war,” both states carved out a legal gray zone to justify indefinite detention without trial and the suspension of Geneva Convention protections.—*Material*.

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sistance fighters, to cut them off from their communities, and to make them disappear. The prison experience thus aims to deter any return to the struggle by former prisoners, scarred by multiple traumas and the weight of reprisals threatening their families, rendering it increasingly costly for them to continue participating in the struggle for liberation.

From this situation grew the need for an organization of political prisoners inside the penal institutions themselves. It was necessary to create the material conditions to transform the destructive prison environment into a place of confrontation with the enemy and a school of revolution. This is how the reality of prisons has evolved throughout history, in step with the ebb and flow of prisoner exchange agreements or periods of rapid increase in the number of prisoners, forcing the movement to continually adapt.

What is important to emphasize—if not to reiterate—is that the enemy’s desire to break the morale of the resistance fighters has, on the contrary, given rise to a movement that turns prison into a school of the Palestinian revolution. Prisoners are the vanguard of the liberation struggle. When referring to them, terms like “Palestinian hostages” tend to be overly humanitarian or even moralistic: the men and women in question are, above all, individuals who have been repressed by a colonial entity, with previous generations having fought to ensure the political dimension of their incarceration is recognized. (Similarly, there were no Zionist “hostages,” only prisoners of war.) Whatever the reason for which a Palestinian is imprisoned, all the decisions made by the colonized are linked to the overall fate of their people.

International Red Aid (Toulouse): As part of their strategy of preemptive counterrevolution, imperialist states have developed a vast legislative arsenal. In this context, and in the face of the structural crisis it is currently undergoing, French imperialism has, in recent years, introduced a growing number of new measures aimed at strengthening its instruments of coercion. These measures do not target only revolutionary movements—which do not currently exist on a mass scale—but seek above all to contain any inclination emanating from various sectors of

the proletariat, particularly non-white segments of the population, toward challenging the established order.

Under these conditions, it cannot be said that the French state produces political prisoners “on a large scale.” (However, it is noteworthy that France held one of Europe’s longest-serving political prisoners, Georges Ibrahim Abdallah, for over forty years.) This statement nevertheless warrants some nuance. During every phase of heightened antagonism with the state, many people are imprisoned, as was the case during the Yellow Vest movement in 2018⁵ or the riots following the police killing of Nahel Merzouk in 2023.⁶ Furthermore, several anti-fascists have been repressed and incarcerated following clashes with neo-Nazi groups. The most emblematic case remains the pretrial detention of nine antifascists in the case linked to the death of the neo-Nazi Quentin Deranque in Lyon.⁷

The fact remains: In all these situations, the issue of incarceration—and even more so the struggle against it—is largely ignored by broad segments of the revolutionary movement, and even more so by progressive circles. This can be explained in particular by years of pacifism and by the dominance of social democracy in various spaces of struggle, which have largely contributed to depoliticizing the issue of repression, even though it is an integral part of the revolutionary struggle. This observation must, however, be updated: we are seeing the development of

⁵ The Yellow Vests (“Gilets Jaunes”) emerged in October 2018 as a spontaneous uprising of mostly rural working-class elements and professionals against a newly introduced “carbon-tax,” embodying the more general neoliberal austerity measures implemented in France over the last several decades. Bypassing traditional trade union mediation, the movement became more ideologically left-wing and radical in its methods before it was met by a high level of state repression.—*Material*

⁶ The police execution of 16 year old Nahel Merzouk sparked riots all over the French *banlieues* (ghettoized working-class suburbs) against the structural racism of the French repressive apparatus.—*Material*

⁷ In February 2026, neo-Nazi Quentin Deranque died of injuries suffered during a brawl with anti-fascists in Lyon. The clash was provoked by a neo-Nazi mob (of which Deranque was part), accompanying the far-right identitarian “feminist” collective Nemesis, at a protest against MEP (Member of the European Parliament) Rima Hassan’s (a prominent Palestinian activist) talk held at Lyon’s Institute for Political Sciences. What followed was a media smear campaign of unprecedented scale, leading to Deranque being honored with a minute of silence in the National Assembly, as well as threats of all kinds directed at La France Insoumise (to which Hassan belongs), a self-proclaimed “radical-reformist” party vilified by the right and the center for its pro-Palestinian and (moderate) anti-fascist positions.—*Material*

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self-defense frameworks, particularly in Autonomist circles,⁸ which have been hit hard in recent times.

Material: How has “lawfare”—the strategic use of the legal system as an instrument of repression—been deployed in your context recently and how has it evolved? Have there been recent national or international judicial frameworks (such as anti-terrorism legislation, deportation regimes, or administrative measures) that have targeted militants and organizations? Is the balance shifting, in terms of states investing more into lawfare compared to “regular military” anti-insurgency tactics, or vice versa? How does lawfare-based repression function to demoralize, isolate, or contain the revolutionary movement in your experience? Has your movement been able to effectively resist or undermine this use of lawfare?

Samidoun (Paris-Banlieue): In our context, as an international solidarity network in support of Palestinian prisoners operating in many different countries, we have faced numerous manifestations of “lawfare” waged against us by imperialist states. While these repressive offensives did not begin after October 7, 2023, they intensified during the imperialist-Zionist genocidal onslaught. Founded in support of hunger strikes led by Palestinian, Arab, and internationalist detainees in colonial prisons since 2011, our network confronts lawfare in a variety of ways.

In November 2023, the German government banned our organization within its borders. We had a very active chapter there, made up of several refugee comrades, most of whom came from camps in Palestine or elsewhere in the region. This broad crackdown was accompanied by attacks on activists and their families, including attempts to strip them of their refugee status, bans on demonstrations, and regular arrests. Germany is home to the largest Palestinian population in Europe and occupies a dominant

⁸ The shift toward the organization of self-defense mechanisms and tactics reflects a strategic break from state-mediated security in favor of horizontal, communal protection against resurgent far-right violence.—*Material*

Rooted in Italian Operaismo (Workerism) of the 1960s, what came to be called “Autonomism” shifted focus from party-style organizing to the self-activity of workers, eventually expanding into the German Autonome scene of the 1980s. This milieu birthed the Black Bloc—a tactical formation of masked, uniform dress designed to neutralize police surveillance and defend squatted social centers.—*Material*

position within the European imperialist order. The fact that the assault on our organization was launched after October 7, 2023 follows a clear political logic. These two factors (Germany's position within European imperialism and the fact it hosts the continent's most important Palestinian diasporic population) make it a central strategic battleground.

One of the major offensives against Samidoun in the current period took place in North America with Samidoun's designation as a "terrorist organization" in Canada in 2024 and sanctions against the network by the US Treasury at the same time. In 2024, the French government dissolved the Collectif Palestine Vaincra ("Palestine Will Prevail Collective").⁹ In the Netherlands, a dissolution order was also issued against our chapter there, though it was not enforced. To wage this legal war effectively, states are adapting and drawing inspiration from one another. In Belgium, this is reflected in particular by the so-called "Arizona" reactionary government's¹⁰ determination to implement procedures aimed at dissolving organizations, explicitly targeting Samidoun and other components of the social movement. This offensive is part of a broader logic of repressive cooperation

⁹ The close connection between the Collectif Palestine Vaincra (CPV) and Samidoun (Paris-Banlieue) stems from a longstanding organic relationship forged by a common political heritage and a shared membership within the Samidoun network over many years. CPV's political contributions in France, both in terms of organizational methods and theoretical reflection, has consisted of introducing within the heart of the social movement: (1) a clear political line in favor of a free Palestine spanning from the river to the sea; (2) a staunch support for the Resistance and its prisoners; (3) reclaiming the historic theories of the resistance movement from the 1960s and 1970s. Their work is also rooted in the history of the struggle for the liberation of Georges Ibrahim Abdallah. The above-mentioned process reached a major milestone with the founding of Urgence Palestine in October 2023, centered on the struggle against genocide, support for total liberation, and, more generally, the Resistance. Now, three years later, Urgence Palestine has established its presence on a national scale, and is gaining influence in different local scenes as well, enabling it to advance within the larger social movement political demands of an increasingly higher level.

¹⁰ The Arizona coalition (named after the colors of the US state, Arizona's flag)—the right-wing government led by Flemish nationalist Bart De Wever (New Flemish Alliance; N-VA) that took power in early 2025—represents an important shift toward a "security-state" model designed for implementing a violent anti-social economic program, and repressing any resistance from within the working-class. This intensification of repression, mirrored in the violent police response to the massive 150,000-strong anti-Arizona protests in October 2025 and March 2026, marks a significant weakening of the right to protest in the country.—*Material*.

among imperialist states. The criminalization of Samidoun thus prolongs the process that began in 2021, when the Zionist regime classified Samidoun and five other organizations as “terrorist,” paving the way for their international ostracism.

These sanctions are never isolated. Whenever a state succeeds in banning or criminalizing a section of our network, Zionist groups in other countries rely on these designations to legitimize new offensives against Samidoun or its affiliated organizations. The mechanisms vary depending on each state’s specific legal arsenal—whether or not an organization can be dissolved, the use of administrative procedures, “designations” made at the national or European level,¹¹ etc.—but the logic remains the same. In most cases, a convergence of actors from political and media circles works to create a climate conducive to these attacks, laying the groundwork for repression. In France, moments of high social tension, such as the feminist demonstrations on March 7 and 8, 2025, gave rise to a sustained series of media attacks. These intensified when activists from Urgence Palestine and Samidoun organized to prevent the presence of fascist and Zionist groups (like the femi-nationalist, Nemesis collective) at the demonstrations themselves, or when the March 7 protest focused on the release of political prisoners, with slogans calling for the start of a new intifada. This political and media campaign has even led to explicit threats of dissolution made by ministers against the two organizations.¹²

Furthermore, it is important to clarify that this is not an attack on Samidoun as an organization, but rather an attack on the political work

¹¹ The EU’s new “hybrid threat” and “foreign interference” designations—codified in the 2024–2026 “Democracy Shield”—allow the state to freeze assets and raid groups like Samidoun by administrative decree rather than criminal trial. Simultaneously, the “ProtectEU” agenda reclassifies climate protests and blockades as “attacks on critical infrastructure,” effectively treating civil disobedience as a form of “violent extremism” to justify preemptive surveillance and mass detention.—*Material*.

¹² In this brutal smear campaign, several French ministers issued explicit threats to dissolve Samidoun. While 24-hour news channels (CNews, BFMTV, etc.) covered various events and actions organized by Samidoun, the pressure intensified to the point of Samidoun being mentioned during political discourses held in important institutions, notably at a session of a parliamentary inquiry commission in France and during debates in the European Parliament. Laurent Nuñez—former Paris police chief who became Minister of the Interior—went so far as to ban the March 7 demonstration, justifying his decision in a letter to the French Associated Press (AFP) on March 5, 2025, citing the call to demonstrate by Samidoun and Urgence Palestine and the

centered on prisoners and martyrs, in support of the Palestinian Resistance, and against the active role our governments play in the colonization of Palestine. The imperialist states fear the formation of a broad and strong movement against imperialism, capable of standing alongside the resistance forces in and around Palestine, to confront our own rulers. The issue of prisoners and the honoring of martyrs are therefore primary targets of Zionist repression. A recent illustration of this is the “Palestinian Authority’s” submission to Zionist and imperialist demands—notably those of the European Union and the United States. For example, on February 10, 2025, Mahmoud Abbas issued a decree ending the payment of financial allowances to the families of Palestinian prisoners and martyrs.

The legal tools deployed against Samidoun, particularly in Canada, are part of the anti-terrorist arsenal that has been used for decades against Palestinian organizations, which are placed on “lists of terrorist organizations.” These lists also include numerous anti-imperialist and revolutionary movements around the world. Such dynamics are therefore not new and are part of the security-driven, Islamophobic, and imperialist paradigm that solidified after 2001, particularly in the United States. The case of the *Holy Land Five* is emblematic in this regard. On November 24, 2008, five Palestinian community activists who were members of the Holy Land Foundation—one of the leading Muslim charitable organizations in the United States—were sentenced to lengthy prison terms by the US courts for supporting humanitarian aid efforts to Gaza. Even today, two of them, Shukri Abu Baker and Ghassan Elashi, remain incarcerated, serving sentences of up to 65 years in prison.

The example of the *Holy Land Five* shows that, in the imperialist centers, Palestinians in exile face particularly intense repression, and increasingly so since October 7, 2023. The ban on Samidoun in Germany and the attacks against Mohammed Khatib, the network’s European coordinator and a native of the Ain al-Hilweh camp in Lebanon,¹³ are part of this

presence of the slogan “From the River to the Sea.”

In the end, the ban was lifted on March 7 (the day of the protest), but it set a precedent in this regard. As for the feminist movement at the heart of that day’s demonstration, a significant part of it called for opposition not only to identitarian groups like Nemesis, but also to more “liberal” organizations like Nous vivrons, which hold explicitly Zionist positions.

¹³ The attacks against Mohammed Khatib are part of a relentless crackdown car-

assault. Repression is intensifying and relies on the racist and imperialist legal systems of Western capitalist states. From border controls to anti-terrorism laws and the repression of social movements, these states have a full arsenal at their disposal to strike ever harder against Palestinians.

At this time (March 2026), several Palestinian refugees are incarcerated in European prisons. In France, Ali, a Palestinian refugee from the Balata camp, has been in pretrial detention since May 2024 on charges forwarded by the Zionist authorities.

In Italy, Ahmad Salem, a 24-year-old Palestinian, has been imprisoned for over six months awaiting trial. Anan Yaesh, an activist from Tulkarem, has been imprisoned for two years and was sentenced to five and a half years in prison on January 16, 2026, accused of “association with terrorism” based on intelligence provided by the Zionist authorities to the Italian government.

Also in Italy, on December 27, 2025, during a series of coordinated raids, Mohammed Hannoun, president of the Associazione dei Palestinesi in Italia (API), along with Ra’ed Dawoud, Yasser Elasal, Khalil Abu Deiah, Adel Abu Rawwa, Raed Al-Salahat, and Reyad Albustanji were arrested by Italian police. These arrests were based on Zionist accusations regarding the collection of millions of euros in donations for Palestinian institutions, but the state primarily targets the institutions’ support for the families of martyrs and prisoners. On January 19, Adel Ibrahim Salameh Abu Rawwa, Raed Al Salahat, and Khalil Abu Deiah were released, while the other four remain behind bars and face prosecution.¹⁴

Mustafa Ayyash, a Palestinian journalist from Gaza, has been imprisoned in Austria since November 17, 2025. On September 19, he was ar-

ried out by various states over the past several years, as evidenced by his arrest and detention for several days in Crete, followed by his deportation from Greece to Belgium. Despite the support of 70 organizations that signed an appeal launched by Samidoun Paris Banlieue to secure his release, his conditions of detention were harsh, causing him, among other things, a skin condition. Now barred from entering Switzerland for ten years, banned from the Netherlands, and recently from Greece as well, he lives in exile in Belgium under constant pressure.

¹⁴ The question arises as to whether there is a “before” and “after” Meloni in Italy: experience shows that repression has ebbed and flowed since she came to power in 2022. The events surrounding the Freedom Flotilla to Gaza marked a period of intense struggle in the country, but today they are triggering a backlash from an alarmed government, resulting in the arrest of activists, particularly targeting the

rested by the Dutch police and subsequently placed in detention. At the time, he was in the Netherlands to file a lawsuit against the Austrian government following a raid on his home. After two months in custody, he was extradited to Austria, where he remains incarcerated. In Belgium, several Palestinians from Gaza—Mahmoud Abu Hadayed, Anas Seyam, and Hamouda Albayyouk—were deported to Greece. On October 7, 2025, Mahmoud Farajallah took his own life in a correctional facility while being held in administrative detention. Another young man from Gaza, Ali Abu Taha, remains incarcerated.

This brief overview of a few different cases of repression highlights the inter-imperialist coordination in terms of legal warfare and in repression. The current phase of intensified repression relies heavily on proceedings initiated by the Zionist authorities against Palestinian refugees. It also extends to increased surveillance of money transfers and forms of community aid, which are criminalized under the guise of fighting terrorism. It should also be noted that the “Europeanization” of repression is intensifying in many areas: strengthened police cooperation, cross-border prosecutions—as evidenced by the arrest warrants issued by Hungary in the context of the “Maja T” or “Budapest affair,”¹⁵ targeting anti-fascists—but also the tightening of conditions imposed on those in exile and the ongoing militarization of borders.¹⁶

Association of Palestinians in Italy. This architecture of repression, built on systematic surveillance over several years, is now taking the form of arrests and fines, which our Italian comrades interpret as a significant strengthening of the overall repressive apparatus. However, it is important to provide some nuance, as this phenomenon transcends partisan divides: in Canada, it was the “progressive” Trudeau who banned Samidoun, while in the United States, this measure was taken under the Biden administration.

¹⁵ The Maja T. case (or “Budapest affair”) represents the practical application of the EU’s “transnational repression” model, where the collaboration between German and Hungarian security apparatuses bypassed a high-court injunction to “blitz-extradite” an anti-fascist in June 2024. Maja’s subsequent 40-day hunger strike in 2025 against solitary confinement and “shackled” show-trial conditions created widespread outrage among anti-fascist, left-leaning, and more generally democratic circles.—*Material*.

¹⁶ The 2024–2026 “New Pact on Migration” and Frontex (the EU’s border control agency) expansion have transformed the EU border into a militarized “black hole” where the right to asylum is in the process of being liquidated.—*Material*.

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Furthermore, the issue of blocking and criminalizing financial and material aid to Palestinian institutions will become a major challenge for solidarity with Palestine. Repressive measures often begin with individual or collective designations issued by the US Treasury, as was the case with Mohammed Hannoun in Italy a few weeks before his arrest. These mechanisms are still largely invisible but are set to become tools for repressing community self-organization and support from working-class immigrant and Muslim communities for Palestine. The community association Humani"Terre in France, which is under investigation for financing "terrorism," is a telling example. In France, this logic also manifests through the use of administrative measures—and thus, by nature, extrajudicial ones—such as the freezing of assets. Several activists have been affected, including Omar Alsoumi, one of the founders of Urgence Palestine, as well as various associations and collectives.¹⁷

Finally, there is a fundamental difference between the level of repression targeting the solidarity movement here and that targeting Palestinian resistance forces on the ground. The legal war waged by the imperialist West sheds light on our own position and that of the states in which we live. The fact that similar tools are used both against us and against political and military organizations rooted in the masses—capable of inflicting tangible losses on the enemy—must not lead us to overestimate ourselves. On the contrary, it must allow us to highlight the coherence of the repressive apparatus and the political role assigned to us within this framework. First, the Zionist entity is the organic extension of Western imperialism in the Middle East: the colonization of Palestine thus serves to defend the strategic interests of this imperialism. In this context, as Georges Abdallah emphasized in an interview with Masar Badil in January 2026:

The Palestinian keffiyeh and flag have become much more than mere national symbols; they are universal symbols of the struggle

¹⁷ In the broader context of the repression of Anti-Zionism in France, the Loi Yadan (scheduled for final parliamentary debate in April 2026) serves as the legislative anchor for a systematic criminalization of Palestinian solidarity by officially making "calls for the destruction of a state [of Israel]" a form of "apology for terrorism." It functions alongside the Separatism Law and the administrative dissolution of groups like Urgence Palestine and the Union juive Française pour la Paix (UJFP, "French Jewish Union for Peace") to create a seamless repressive net.—*Material*.

against Israeli fascism, on the one hand, and of resistance to the rise of fascism in Europe and around the world.

Consequently, the imperialist West upholds these interests by suppressing the solidarity movement with Palestine and the Palestinian diaspora.

On an international scale, our role, from the very heart of the imperialist centers, is to organize collectively against repression and for liberation. We must not let our enemies fragment us through their labels, their repressive mechanisms, and their propaganda, which seek to isolate the struggles from one another. Our strength lies in our unity. It is up to us to intensify our efforts to build an international grassroots foundation for resistance, capable of standing up to the ongoing legal and political offensive. If the legal war is intensifying, it is also because imperialism fears this prospect of unity and grassroots grounding.

The banning and imprisonment of Palestine Action activists must therefore be seen in relation to the effectiveness of their direct actions against the current war machine—actions that have contributed to the closure of arms factories and offices linked to the arms trade involved in genocide.¹⁸

International Red Aid (Toulouse): In France, various legal, police, and judicial measures exist to crack down on revolutionary and progressive activists. Since the 1980s, and even more so after the 2015 attacks,¹⁹ the anti-terrorism arsenal has been significantly strengthened. In particular, it has

¹⁸ Palestine Action has moved beyond symbolic protest to the physical dissolution of genocide supply chains, forcing the permanent closure of Elbit Systems sites in Oldham (2022) and Bristol (2025). In July 2025, the British state responded by proscribing the group as a terrorist organization, a move ruled “unlawful” by the High Court in February 2026 for being a disproportionate interference with the right to protest.—*Material*.

¹⁹ The 2015 attacks were carried out by radicalized militants affiliated with Al-Qaeda (January) and ISIS (November), many of whom were French or Belgian citizens. The violence targeted sites of symbolic and social importance, including the *Charlie Hebdo* offices, a kosher supermarket, the Stade de France (football stadium), and various Parisian cafes as well as the Bataclan theater. These acts were driven by a Takfiri jihadist ideology that sought to punish the French state for its military interventions in the Middle East and to polarize European society by fueling domestic communal tensions. The government used the ensuing national trauma to implement a permanent “state of emergency,” expanding police powers and surveillance that have since been disproportionately used to suppress social movements and non-white neighborhoods.—*Material*

expanded to include certain criminal charges, such as “criminal conspiracy in connection with a terrorist enterprise,” which allows for preemptive police interventions before any act is even committed.

At the same time, several other provisions introduced under the state of emergency (see footnote 5) have been incorporated into common law, facilitating administrative searches, house arrests, and the extension of surveillance measures, including in activist contexts. Added to this are other legal tools, such as the creation of the offense of “unlawful assembly, participation in criminal conspiracy with the intent of committing violence, or public insult.”

These legal mechanisms, which are obviously not limited to combat “Islamic terrorism” alone, are part of a broader strategy to manage challenges to the established order. Several trials of the revolutionary left have been carried out using these measures, such as the so-called *Affaire « du 8 décembre 2020 »* (“December 8th Case”).²⁰ In particular, they allow for the use of preventive arrests, widespread and exceptionally long police custody periods, restrictive judicial controls (bans on demonstrating, reporting requirements), as well as prison sentences. At the same time, we are witnessing a militarization of law enforcement and the development of new technological tools, ranging from the use of artificial intelligence in video surveillance systems, to the deployment of drones in the management of protests and working-class neighborhoods.

Beyond their individual effects, these measures also have a collective impact, helping to deter participation in political organization and mobilizations. The use of pretrial detention, immediate court appearances, or certain detention conditions—such as solitary confinement or geographical isolation—thus constitute a set of repressive measures with both individual and collective implications.

It is clear that these measures affect the revolutionary movement. However, they are not the primary cause of its weakness and disorganization. Those shortcomings are due to the prevalence of reformism in France—including within the radical left—which represents the decisive factor in this

²⁰ The *Affaire « du 8 décembre 2020 »* (“December 8th Case”) refers to the arrest of seven left-wing activists, including a veteran of the YPG in Rojava, accused of the “crime of terrorist conspiracy.” Despite the absence of a specific plot or targets, the state secured convictions in 2023 by criminalizing everyday practices like encrypted messaging (Signal) and airsoft training.—*Material*

regard. In France, International Red Aid remains a modest organization, present only in Toulouse. Faced with this reality, we seek to re-politicize the issue of the struggle against repression by linking it to a revolutionary perspective.

Material: When faced with the imprisonment of activists and/or guerillas, how has your movement responded? Have you been successful in organizing solidarity with prisoners and their families beyond humanitarian support? How have you managed the continuity of political work and organization despite the capture of key comrades—and potentially entire politico-military fronts? In what ways has repression forced you to innovate organizationally or strategically? At what point does repression force the acceptance of strategic retreat?

Samidoun (Paris-Banlieue): Let's return here to the Palestinian context itself.

It is extremely difficult for families to visit prisoners because the detention centers are located within the 1948 borders, forcing many Palestinians to pass through numerous checkpoints and thus endure humiliation at the hands of the Zionist army. Furthermore, only the children and female members of the immediate family—mothers, sisters, or daughters—are allowed to visit the prisoner, thereby excluding any adolescent or adult male family members.

As we mentioned earlier, prisoners initially had no rights: no books, no pencils, no paper, no kitchen, and no library.

Scattered across numerous prisons and very few in number per detention center, the incarcerated resistance fighters also had to cope with meals that were practically inedible. At that time, prison life was truly inhumane; extremely destructive for those held there.

Thus, the first generation began demanding the right to receive books, to gather among Palestinian prisoners, to have their own food, as well as pens and paper for writing. Their tools of struggle included hunger strikes, sometimes organized on a massive scale, at the cost of several martyrs. It was not uncommon for the Zionists to use force-feeding—a form of torture that often led to death—when the prisoners went on strike. Subsequently, conditions improved, hard-won through struggle. But it was only after the

first Intifada—the “Intifada of the Stones”²¹ that took place from 1987 to 1993—when tens of thousands of young Palestinians were locked up in colonial prisons, that they transformed the prison into a true school of the revolution, making sure that incarceration would not be a break from the Palestinian revolution as a whole.

To build this school of the revolution, the necessary material conditions had to be put in place. During the first Intifada, the number of prisoners rose from several thousand in the 1960s and 1970s to over 10,000—many of them very young, including numerous women—who had not received much political or theoretical training. For the most part, they had joined the struggle at a very early age to take part in the ongoing uprising. They were therefore trained in prison, and it was from among their ranks that leaders such as Yahya Sinwar, Nael Barghouti, Ahmed Saadat, Marwan Barghouti, and others emerged.²²

A well-known example of a prisoner’s trajectory is that of Walid Daqqah. He was imprisoned in 1986 after being accused of participating in a military operation. Initially sentenced to life in prison, he was ultimately given a 37-year term. Daqqah was a simple gas station attendant who, due to his conviction and his involvement in the armed struggle, came into contact with the leadership of the resistance and, through hard work, became one of the greatest theoreticians of the resistance, as well as a playwright and poet whose reputation became widely known. He fell as a martyr on April 7, 2024, a victim of medical negligence that lets sick prisoners die or fails to treat illnesses contracted in their cells.

There have always been theoretical work or other writings coming out of prison. Samidoun strives to make this prisoner literature available, especially since, as mentioned, they represent the most advanced segment of the

²¹ In the First Intifada (1987–1993), Palestinians combatted Israeli civil control over Palestinian society through mass boycotts and autonomous “popular committees,” rendering the occupation functionally ungovernable. Israel responded with the “Iron Fist” policy of mass bone-breaking and administrative detention.—*Material*.

²² Nael Barghouti’s 2014 re-arrest proved that “secret evidence” can override any release deal; Ahmed Saadat’s and Marwan Barghouti’s trials served to criminalize popular uprising and Marxist resistance: the prison functions as a site of attempted political decapitation. Yahya Sinwar’s 23-year detention further illustrates this cycle, as he utilized the “prison academy” (prison as a “school of the revolution”) to study the occupier’s psychological apparatus, eventually transitioning from a captive to the architect of the October 7th offensive.—*Material*.

revolution, always ready for confrontation and unwilling to accept liquidationist agreements. The hunger strike is one form of this refusal, though it is the most costly. It is not the only one: there is also the exfiltration of documents and the tactic of “cell blockades.” One famous case comes to mind from 1993, at the time of the Oslo Accords: while the prisoners in a women’s unit were scheduled for release, three of them remained locked up. This led to a cell blockade lasting several months by the detainees so that all could be released together. In doing so, they rejected the arguments of certain members within the movement who sought to sweep the matter under the rug or pressure them into accepting a deal with the prison authorities.

So why is the prisoners’ struggle so important to Samidoun? The answer is quite simple: If prisoners are a priority for the Palestinian resistance in general, they must also be a priority for those who support the revolution. Let us not forget that the Al-Aqsa Flood of October 7 also aimed to break the Zionist prisons; in fact, today we see that many prisoners initially sentenced to life imprisonment—sometimes for terms of several hundred years—are now being released and are joining the resistance as free men. Despite this, the Zionists’ savagery has since focused its efforts on prisons themselves, extending the genocide behind bars. This is because the Palestinians’ struggle within colonial prisons poses a constant challenge to the occupier and the balance of power depends on the strength of the movement, both inside and outside. Since October 7, we have witnessed a return to conditions that are at times harsher than those faced by the first generation of prisoners: hard-won rights have been swept away by the Zionist authorities; the possibility of collective and political organization has vanished; and old forms of torture are reappearing, creating unprecedented difficulties. Therefore, it can be said that genocide is also taking place inside prisons, and the primary challenge for the prisoners’ movement is to survive this unprecedented offensive.

Furthermore, Samidoun also addresses the issue of pro-Palestinian prisoners in imperialist detention centers, such as the case of the Palestine Action and “Filton 24” activists,²³ imprisoned in the United Kingdom. In

²³ The “Filton 24” activists were arrested for the August 2024 disarmament of Elbit Systems’s Bristol hub and subjected to 18 months of pretrial remand. Despite jury acquittals on major charges in early 2026, the case continues to be defined by the state’s persistent use of retrials and “terrorist” labeling to prosecute direct action against the arms trade.—*Material*.

their regard, our work is carried out in the same way as for prisoners in Palestine: spreading prisoners' writings, providing translations, and distributing propaganda—all without resorting to humanitarianism.²⁴ This sometimes involves letter-writing workshops, which create an emotional and human connection with the prisoners, often making the authors of these letters more committed and engaged in their support for the Resistance.

It is important to note that in 2026, Samidoun is an organization that can no longer operate on social media due to Meta's censorship. Despite efforts to ban us, our work continues, and we persist in giving voice to the Resistance and carrying out political work to honor the prisoners, the martyrs, and the Palestinian Resistance in general—even in places where Samidoun has been banned.

International Red Aid (Toulouse): Our organization played a significant role in the campaign in Europe to support Georges Abdallah for over twenty years. We organized direct and concrete support in France—including monthly prison visits and regular exchange of letters—and built mobilization campaigns centered on defending the prisoner's revolutionary identity.

It is this mobilization—based on the coordination of resistance both inside and outside prisons, and driven by the determination of the imprisoned revolutionary protagonist, Georges Abdallah—that made it possible to secure his release. This approach also guides the development of other campaigns, notably in support of the Red Brigades/Communist Combatant Party prisoners²⁵ in Italy, Nikos Maziotis²⁶ in Greece, and many others.

²⁴ Humanitarian discourse often functions as a "sanitation" of politics, reclassifying the Palestinian struggle from a movement for national liberation into a passive crisis of "human suffering." By focusing strictly on aid and victimhood, this rhetoric erases the political agency of the resistance.—*Material*.

²⁵ The Red Brigades/Communist Combatant Party (BR-PCC) prisoners, notably Nadia Lioce, Roberto Morandi, and Marco Mezzasalma, remain symbols of the "long resistance" against the Italian state's 41-bis prison system. This draconian system, which imposes total sensory and social isolation, is a tool of political liquidation designed to break the ideological will of the last combatants of armed struggle from the 1990s-2000s.—*Material*

²⁶ Greek Anarchist militant Nikos Maziotis, a central figure of the group Revolutionary Struggle ("Epanastatikos Agonas"), has been imprisoned since 2014, following years of urban guerrilla activity against Greek and international capital. His struggle

Contribution from the Secretariat of the International Red Aid

The International Red Aid was founded twenty-five years ago. It has extensive experience in supporting revolutionary prisoners. Twenty years ago, it spearheaded the campaign for the release of Georges Abdallah. The International Red Aid sees its work as an integral part of the revolutionary process, and its relationship with prisoners is therefore of a particular political nature.

Since the International Red Aid operates through its various branches, all of which face specific local and national realities, we, as the International Secretariat, are unable to answer the specific questions *Material* posed. However, due to its transnational nature and long experience, our organization has a unique perspective—global, political, and concrete—on the reality of revolutionary prisoners. It is this perspective, which transcends the diversity of national realities, strategic projects, and political cultures, that we will outline here.

Imprisonment as a Stage of Commitment

Imprisonment should not come as a surprise to revolutionaries. The timing and manner of arrest, the conditions of interrogation and con-

is defined by a rejection of the state's judicial legitimacy and a commitment to armed propaganda as a response to the devastating structural adjustment programs imposed on the Greek working-class.—*Material*

material

finement, the procedures of the trial, and the severity of the sentence—all these factors may lead to unexpected outcomes. But the prospect of being detained is one that the revolutionary has accepted upon entering the struggle.

By leaving the struggles waged on the street, in clandestinity, through guerrilla warfare conducted in jungles, in cities, or in mountains, the revolutionary entering his prison cell is merely changing trenches. While many people on the outside perceive this as a break, as a major disruption (all the more so if they are politically uneducated), revolutionaries see it as a continuity—the continuity of their commitment.

Revolutionary prisoners can be categorized in many ways: by their ideology and political project; by their country of origin; by their conditions of detention; the length of their sentence, and so on. But beyond all these differences, however significant they may be, a shared determination drives them—a determination that alone can explain their choices and positions. This determination is the will to remain political subjects.

A Single Imperative...

Therefore, the question that immediately arises for the imprisoned revolutionary is, “How, in this new situation, can I be useful to the revolutionary process?” Sometimes he or she is a member of an organization (or a tradition) that has already provided an answer; sometimes he or she must deduce it for themselves based on their concrete current conditions.

The imperative for prisoners is to refuse being reduced to objects, to victims of repression appealing for solidarity based on pity and compassion. They must once again become political subjects, influencing events, transforming reality, calling for solidarity rooted in the fraternity of struggle. This is the primary motivation, the most decisive of imperatives.

...With Different Approaches

How do imprisoned revolutionaries remain useful to the revolutionary process?

1. Publicly demonstrating a position of resistance

This involves refusing to collaborate or to betray one's principles. The public, ostentatious nature of this stance is particularly important. If the

position of resistance is known to the outside world, it strengthens the revolutionary cause. By presenting themselves as unbroken and unrepentant, prisoners counteract the negative impact of the announcement of their capture and weaken the deterrent effect of imprisonment on the wider movement. They transform what is, at first glance, a demoralizing event into a source of subjective strength.

2. Becoming a Better Revolutionary

Revolutionary prisoners read, study, educate themselves, learn foreign languages, etc. This explains why it is so important for them to receive books and newspapers, to be able to keep their notes, etc. They generally strive to maintain their physical condition, do sports, and it is not uncommon for them to quit smoking.

3. Contributing politically and theoretically to the struggles on the outside

Prisoners use the time available to them to read (and ideally discuss) with the aim of producing analyses useful to the revolutionary struggle. These can be assessments of their actions, statements explaining their organization's policies, calls to mobilize, declarations of solidarity with other struggles, and so on.

For long-term prisoners whose organization has been dismantled, this also means carrying forward the proposals and achievements of that organization and leveraging its experience for the benefit of the entire revolutionary movement.

4. Organizing and politicizing "social" prisoners

This ranges from the politicization of a cellmate (and sometimes even prison guards!) to the organization of strikes, riots, prisoner unions, or simply acts of solidarity (sharing food with destitute prisoners, etc.). We know how effectively the Black Panthers were able to recruit and politicize "social" prisoners.¹

¹ The Black Panther Party revolutionized the concept of the "social prisoner" by theorizing that the incarcerated Lumpenproletariat were victims of a colonial judicial system. Through the leadership of figures like George Jackson, the Party transformed prisons into "cadre schools," politicizing gang members and "common" criminals into revolutionary militants.—*Material*

5. *Organizing riots and escape attempts*

We will mention two examples here:

The prisoners of the Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front,² most of whom had been captured after the ambush that nearly cost General Pinochet's life, were held at the Santiago prison in 1987. They set out to dig a tunnel in order to escape. It took them three years of work and overcoming countless difficulties to finally succeed: 49 political prisoners escaped on January 30, 1990.

On June 19, 1986, political prisoners from the Communist Party of Peru (PCP) rose up and took control of the prisons in Frontón, Lurigancho, and Callao. Armed with knives, firearms, and homemade bombs, they fiercely resisted the assaults of the Peruvian army, which subsequently carried out summary executions, bringing the total number of prisoners killed to over 300.

6. *Fighting for amnesty*

In some countries, such as Spain, the tradition of fighting for amnesty is deeply rooted in the traditions of the labor and revolutionary movements. However, this demand has not been taken up by prisoners belonging to movements that refuse to appeal to the authorities (which would amount to acknowledging their legitimacy), such as the RAF prisoners in Germany,³ who did not even fill out forms requesting their release. Thus, in some countries, prisoners fight for their own release provided it can be achieved under specific conditions (such as not renouncing their beliefs, etc.). In other cases, prisoners may fight for the liberation of prisoners

² The Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front (FPMR) was the armed wing of the Chilean Communist Party, established in 1983 to overthrow the Pinochet dictatorship. Drawing from the "Mass Rebellion" strategy, the Front gained legendary status through high-profile actions like the 1986 assassination attempt on Pinochet, and the 1996 "Flight of the Century" prison break.—*Material*

³ The Red Army Faction (RAF), or Baader-Meinhof Group, emerged from the 1968 West German student movement as an urban guerrilla formation aiming to trigger a revolutionary break through armed struggle. RAF prisoners launched collective hunger strikes against isolation torture ("Isolationshaft"). These strikes were not merely humanitarian pleas but tactical mobilizations to bridge the "wall of silence" between the urban guerrilla and the mass movement, forcing the state to reveal its repressive character.—*Material*

other than themselves, making the effort purely political. One can think of the various movements led by Kurdish prisoners for the release of Öcalan.⁴

A Battle of Symbols

The example of the demand for amnesty shows that prisoners' choices depend (and must depend) on the political culture of their class and their country, because the front lines of the prison struggle are often shaped by symbolic issues. The same symbol can have a strong ideological impact in some societies and none at all in others, which explains why the same factor can lead to a fight to the death here and be of no meaning whatsoever elsewhere. For example, wearing a prison uniform is unacceptable for prisoners in Turkey or Ireland, but of no consequence to prisoners in Belgium or the United States. Another example is speaking to the court during a trial: unacceptable for prisoners belonging to the Red Brigades in Italy (since, symbolically, within the Italian revolutionary movement, this amounts to collaboration—an acknowledgment of the court's legitimacy) and customary for prisoners of Revolutionary Struggle in Greece (where, within the Greek revolutionary movement, one must defend the revolutionary cause through speech). If we try to understand these differences in terms of "more radical/less radical," or "more just/less just," we are missing the point entirely. The battle of symbols can only be judged in direct relation to the specific political culture to which it resonates, and within which it serves as an echo.

The prisoners (and thus their resistance) themselves have symbolic value. And this value sometimes extends far beyond the struggle of their organization or their specific political choices. This is how Leonard Peltier⁵

⁴ Abdullah Öcalan, founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), has been held in total isolation on the prison island of İmralı (Turkey) since 1999. In prison, he transitioned from Marxist-Leninism to Democratic Confederalism. Since 2021, he has faced a "blackout" of incommunicado detention, though 2025–2026 has seen a tentative shift as he called for a "peace law" and disarmament, calling for a *de facto* liquidation of the Kurdish national liberation struggle.—*Material*

⁵ Leonard Peltier, a leading militant of the American Indian Movement (AIM), has been imprisoned since 1977 following a biased trial for the deaths of two FBI agents during the 1975 Wounded Knee siege. His incarceration is seen as a "political kidnapping" by the settler-colonial state to decapitate the indigenous sovereignty movement and secure corporate access to tribal mineral resources. His sentence was commuted to home confinement by the outgoing Biden administration in January

became the symbol of the oppression of Native American peoples, how Mumia⁶ is the symbol of systemic racism within the US police and justice system, and how Öcalan has come to symbolize the Kurdish nation as a whole. In general, even when they are committed to a specific revolutionary project (that of their organization), prisoners become a symbolic rallying point for the revolutionary cause in the broadest sense of the term.

Hunger Strikes

It is only in light of all these imperatives and all these determinations that we can understand prisoners' struggles and, in particular, hunger strikes. Let us consider three historical examples: the hunger strikes of the Red Army Faction prisoners, that of the Irish Republican prisoners in 1979, and the one of the revolutionary prisoners in Turkey in 2000.

The prisoners of the Red Army Faction carried out several collective hunger strikes, two of which cost the lives of prisoners: Holger Meins on November 9, 1974, and Sigurd Debus on April 16, 1981. The goal of these strikes was to end solitary confinement. This was seen as a necessary condition for political activity (and particularly for the collective preparation for trials, which were viewed as a platform where the revolutionary project could be defended).

The hunger strike by Irish republican prisoners, which claimed the lives of seven IRA and three INLA inmates in 1981,⁷ was the culmination of a series of struggles centered on the "special status" of republican prisoners, which had begun with the struggle of the 300 "blanket men": prisoners who remained naked under a blanket because they refused to wear the prison uniform. This special status distinguished them from common

2025.—*Material*

⁶ Mumia Abu-Jamal, a former Black Panther, has been incarcerated since 1981 following a trial widely condemned for racial bias and judicial misconduct. While his death sentence was commuted to life without parole in 2011, he still faces "death by incarceration" through systemic medical neglect that has left him nearly blind and in failing cardiac health.—*Material*

⁷ Led by Bobby Sands, the 1981 Hunger Strike was the culmination of a five-year struggle by IRA and INLA prisoners to regain "Special Category Status," rejecting the British state's attempt to criminalize the Irish republican movement. The martyrs' sacrifice fundamentally delegitimized British "normalization" policies, catalyzed a massive electoral shift toward Sinn Féin, and demonstrated the prison's role as a primary front in the anti-colonial struggle against the Thatcher government.—*Material*

criminals and brought them closer to the status of prisoners of war, which held immense symbolic value in Ireland (as seen in the “military” forms adopted by the republican forces: uniforms, ranks, etc.). This hunger strike also placed the IRA within its historical continuity (several major figures of the Irish national liberation movement died in hunger strikes⁸). The prisoners also demanded access to mail and visits.

In 2000–2002, revolutionary prisoners in Turkey (belonging to several organizations) staged a major hunger strike to oppose their transfer to separate cells housing one to three people, whereas until then they had lived in large communal dormitories. It was an extremely deadly strike: 112 prisoners died (including 30 during the assault on the dormitories where they had barricaded themselves), and many were left disabled or had their lives cut short. The culture of sacrifice is strong in Turkey (as throughout the Muslim cultural sphere). The fact that a person gives their life for a cause directly elevates that cause within this cultural sphere. Hunger strikes that lead to death (and other forms of action resulting in the revolutionary’s voluntary sacrifice) have a political and ideological impact quite different from that in Europe. This struggle therefore had a dual purpose: to preserve the large prisoner communities, and to demonstrate the prisoners’ spirit of resistance and sacrifice.

Community and Communication

The issue of prisoner solidarity (and thus the struggle against solitary confinement, the separation of prisoners across different facilities, etc.), and the issue of communication (receiving books, mail, and visits), recur in nearly all struggles waged by revolutionary prisoners. Community and communication are indeed the prerequisites for nearly all political activity. They are political demands in and of themselves, rather than requests related to comfort, the humanization of detention, etc.

⁸ Fasting to the death has been widely used as a weapon against British criminalization throughout the history of the Irish national liberation struggle, notably exemplified by Thomas Ashe (1917) and Terence MacSwiney (1920). MacSwiney’s death after 74 days in Brixton Prison transformed the Irish struggle into a global cause, theorizing the hunger strike as a means to “conquer not by those who can inflict the most, but those who can suffer the most.”—*Material*

The Enemy's Intentions

When dealing with revolutionary prisoners, the authorities, in addition to security concerns applicable to common criminals (preventing riots, breakouts, etc.), have a specific additional objective: to prevent “contagion.” Revolutionary prisoners are therefore confronted with an enemy who assesses the stakes in much the same way as they do, and who will tend to cut them off, if not from the rest of the world, then at least from the rest of the prison.

There is sometimes a tendency to overestimate how the enemy plans detention, imagining a large group of decision-makers and specialists scientifically devising a program that impacts every detail of the prisoner's life in order to destroy their political consciousness.

Conversely, there is also a tendency to underestimate this planning by attributing it to a “villain in charge” hostile to revolutionaries, or to a prison warden seeking to maintain order by isolating potential troublemakers. The reality lies somewhere between these two extremes; it varies by country and era, and requires a specific analysis in each case, without negligence or paranoia.

It is true that counter-revolutionaries have carried out studies and developed highly elaborate programs to break prisoners. Their foundational program dates back to 1963. That year, based on research in experimental psychology, the CIA formulated a scientific program⁹ aimed at breaking prisoners by inducing a state of psychological regression to bring them under control. This program combined isolation, sensory deprivation and over-stimulation, sophisticated interrogation techniques, etc.

But the police, judicial, and prison systems are like any other state apparatus, similar to the postal service or the railways: it certainly has zealous and intelligent decision-makers, but it also contains idiots and negligent individuals; there are vast resources but also bureaucratic red tape; there are flawless PowerPoint presentations but also prison overcrowding that needs to be managed on a daily basis; there are precise instructions for offi-

⁹ The 1963 KUBARK manual codified the CIA's shift toward “scientific” torture, using sensory deprivation and psychological regression. By weaponizing isolation and disorientation rather than just physical pain, the state aims to shatter the subject's identity and ideological resistance—a foundational counter-insurgency blueprint still mirrored in today's high-security isolation regimes.—*Material*

cials but there is also their sloppy enforcement when they are burdensome or tiring for those same officials; and so on. Once again, each situation deserves a specific analysis.

Unity as a Tendency and a Choice

Outside prison, the revolutionary movement is generally fragmented into different factions, tendencies, and political and strategic positions. But when it comes to confronting repression as revolutionary prisoners, a tendency toward unity quickly emerges. The terrain of struggle is simplified; choices are less complex than on the outside; there are fewer “opportunities” to disagree; and the reasons to fight alongside one another are more numerous and more obvious.

This explains why the struggles of revolutionary prisoners (and, on the outside, support for these struggles) exhibit a higher level of unity than other fronts of struggle. The three examples of hunger strikes we gave above illustrate this well: Sigurd Debus died during a hunger strike by RAF prisoners, but he was not a member of said organization; the Irish prisoners’ strike brought together members of the two major republican organizations, the IRA and the INLA. As for the strike in Turkey against Type F prisons,¹⁰ it brought together prisoners from a dozen different organizations, which on the outside were sometimes at each other’s throats.

Revolutionary prisoners thus play, by virtue of their objective situation, a role as catalysts during moments of unity and in processes of rapprochement between revolutionary forces.

The most successful example of this trend toward unity is the “June 19, 1999 Platform,”¹¹ in which more than a hundred revolutionary prisoners—communists, anarchists, anti-fascists, and anti-imperialists—from a dozen countries affirmed their common principles of resistance and defined themselves as a community of struggle. The International Red Aid was formed in response to this process of unification among prisoners.

¹⁰ Type F prisons are Turkey’s high-security “isolation cells” introduced in 2000 to dismantle the collective resistance of political prisoners. By replacing large wards with small-group isolation, the state sought to break the ideological cohesion of revolutionary groups like the DHKP-C.—*Material*

¹¹ “Plate-forme du 19 juin 1999,” *Libérons Georges Abdallah*, *Samizdat.net*, April 14, 2014, accessed 2025, <https://liberonsgeorges.samizdat.net/non-classe/plate-forme-du-19-juin-1999/>.

Support for Revolutionary Prisoners

The primary duty of those supporting revolutionary prisoners is therefore to recognize and respect their identity. This involves understanding the priorities of their demands and providing them with the means to continue acting politically. It involves removing obstacles to this political activity (and notably solitary confinement), supplying prisoners with political information, and amplifying their voices. This does not imply endorsing their theoretical or strategic choices, their positions, or their methods. Yet, to refrain from speaking on behalf of a revolutionary prisoner due to a political disagreement would be the most criminal manifestation of sectarianism.

Similarly, support for prisoners must not be conceived as “caring for the wounded.” Prison itself is a battlefield, and it has direct repercussions and influences on the broader battlefields of proletarian and people’s struggles. Depending on the course of the struggle within prison, the struggles outside will be strengthened or weakened. Prison does not serve merely to neutralize revolutionaries; it also and above all serves to intimidate our class. Moreover, it is a weapon of deterrence.

Allowing prisoners to act as revolutionary agents strips prison of its dark, mysterious, and frightening nature. The revolutionary process is marked by cycles of “struggle/repression/resistance.” The ability of revolutionary forces, inside or outside prison, to emerge victorious and strengthened from this third phase of the struggle, is crucial for the future of the general process. Prisoners play a central role in this phase.

















Political Prisoners, Lawfare, and the Revolutionary Response in the US

**Comrade B,
General Secretary of Lal Morich**

The mass-scale production of political prisoners in the US can only partially be explained by the need to satisfy the population requirements of an USD 80 billion Prison Industrial Complex. The disproportionate size of its domestic prison population relative to the rest of the world is no secret, with estimates that somewhere between 20% to 25% of the world's prison population is housed in the US.¹ We cannot understand such magnitude in strictly economic terms nor through the profit motives of a single industry. Rather, we must understand the mass-scale production of prisoners first and foremost as counterinsurgency: a political effort to contain and atomize a revolutionary class. The United States relies on inherently polit-

¹ The Sentencing Project, *Mass Incarceration Trends*, The Sentencing Project, May 21 2024, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/trends-in-u-s-corrections/>.

icized forms of criminalization which fracture the social forces most likely to produce sustained resistance. Across schools, clinics, welfare offices, workplaces, housing systems, and courts, oppressed nations and racialized surplus labor are monitored by the state long before any crime occurs. Prison is merely a visible endpoint of this process. The broader carceral apparatus normalizes surveillance, restricts collective capacity, and makes resistance costly. Everyday encounters with state institutions generate records, classifications, and assessments that follow people across their lives. These records accumulate into durable profiles that justify escalating intervention while presenting repression as neutral administration.

To avoid a class reductionist approach, we must address the US both in its advanced capitalist stage and equally as a settler-colonial project. Capitalist development in the imperial core depends on the uneven management of labor, including the production of surplus populations who are excluded, hyper-exploited, or disposed of amidst crisis. Settler-colonialism adds a deeper structural layer, one rooted in displacement, genocide, and the long-term stabilization of settler sovereignty. Together, these forces shape how criminalization is politically organized and justified across generations.

While oppressed nations share in the subordination of their collective sovereignty, economic development, and cultural reproduction to imperial or colonial powers, they carry pre-existing class relations formed under imperialist domination. Oppressed nations are racialized in ways that manage their incorporation into a settler-colonial order. This racialization reduces politically formed peoples into fixed social categories and uses those categories to sort, discipline, and exploit them through labor markets, policing, and social institutions. In this context, citizenship and legal status do not function as stable guarantees of protection. They operate instead as administrative tools within a broader system that targets racialized surplus labor and governs whole communities through surveillance, exclusion, detention, and removal.

The nature of the settler-colonial project is not simply to stratify classes within the US along racialized lines, but to use politicized criminalization as a mechanism for maintaining the underdevelopment and exploitation of oppressed nations. This process serves a dual political function: it stabilizes capitalist accumulation by managing surplus populations, and it

constrains the political agency of those sectors most structurally positioned to contest the existing capitalist-imperialist order. The revolutionary potential in the US lies primarily in its racialized surplus labor population which is composed of many oppressed nations that are bound to one another through shared military domination, economic exploitation, and institutional repression. The state identifies an emergent revolutionary class because their social position (colonized, surplus, racialized) places them in structural antagonism with capital.

This effort to atomize the racialized surplus population is not possible through a single institution, nor through the actions of several institutions working in isolation. The mass-scale production of prisoners in the US requires collaboration across institutions that uniquely leverages the function of each. The character of criminalization may be quite simple: in the US, it is criminal to be poor and to be poor is to be a criminal. This reduction, as stated above, must account for the dichotomizing of settler and oppressed nations domestically, not merely an ideological division, but one fixed in space and wedded to how different racialized sections of the proletariat in America connect to, collaborate with, or are targeted by its carceral institutions. We will begin with a brief overview of how major institutions have criminalized poverty along racialized lines in a manner that has defined a surplus labor population composed of oppressed nations, containing and fragmenting those oppressed nations as a process of assimilation into the settler-colonial order.

Part 1: Criminalizing the Revolutionary Class

Criminalizing the Revolutionary Class Through Education

US schools containing the racialized surplus population serve as feeder systems into the criminal legal system through policing, suspension, and punitive discipline. The process begins in early childhood programs with behavioral surveillance and labelling.² Early childhood programs increasingly rely on continuous observation frameworks where children's behavior is constantly recorded, coded, and stored as assessment data. This

² Joel Mittleman, "A Downward Spiral? Early Childhood Behavioral Labeling and Later Educational Exclusion," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2019): 124-146, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0038040718784603>.

includes social-emotional “readiness,” self-regulation, and compliance indicators. Behavior interpreted as developmental delay, intellectual disability, or emotional disturbance is disproportionately assigned to Black children, beginning at or near school entry, including kindergarten and early elementary years. Here, the foundational values of capital are laid in contrast to the economic, social, and cultural deviance of racialized, surplus labor. Contrasting values reduce the national character of oppressed nations into a racial hierarchy compatible with the settler-colonial project. Misclassification of disability, special education segregation,³ and routine involvement from “School Resource Officers” deepen this sorting function.⁴ School Resource Officers are police officers stationed in schools. Under the guise of security and crime prevention, these officers serve as a liaison between policing and education by extending police powers of surveillance, search, and arrest directly into the schools.

Once the state has marked children as “high-risk,” the school ceases to function as a site of education and becomes a pre-carceral administrative hub. Everyday adolescent behaviors (arguments, defiance, emotional breakdowns) are reframed as threats. These behaviors are tracked by teachers who are deskilled into front line security guards.⁵ Disciplinary referrals, psychological assessments, special education placements, and attendance reports form a data trail that follows students across grade levels and institutional boundaries.⁶ Data-sharing between schools, police, and child welfare agencies integrates racialized children into a unified intelligence system.⁷ Juvenile court involvement and probation become mech-

³ Paul L. Morgan, et al., “Are Black Children Disproportionately Overidentified as Having Intellectual Disability?” *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 50, no. 1 (2017): 36–49, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309705518_Are_Black_Children_Disproportionately_Overrepresented_in_Special_Education_A_Best-Evidence_Synthesis.

⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Discipline Disparities for Black Students, Boys, and Students with Disabilities*, (report, Washington, DC: GAO, 2018), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-18-258>. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-18-258>.

⁵ Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*, 30th anniversary expanded ed. (Russell Sage Foundation, 2010).

⁶ Alice Bradbury and Guy Roberts-Holmes. *The Datafication of Primary and Early Years Education: Playing with Numbers*, (Routledge, 2017).

⁷ Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor*, (St. Martin’s Press, 2018).

anisms of soft incarceration, instruments which fracture racialized youth from their communities and consolidate them into alienated, lumpenized sections. Schools routinely transmit information to child welfare agencies, courts, and police departments.⁸ Behavioral reports and disciplinary histories become part of broader surveillance systems that shape how children and their families are treated by other institutions. Police presence in schools further collapses the boundary between schooling and law enforcement, turning routine discipline into early exposure to carceral authority. Suspensions, expulsions, or “alternative placements” force children into environments designed to normalize surveillance and prepare them for incarceration in adulthood. These methods of pushing children out of school accelerates entry into precarious, informal, or criminalized labor, placing young people directly into the economic positions that capital reserves for the racialized surplus population.⁹ This neutralizes the ability of oppressed nations to consolidate politically by destabilizing youth, fragmenting families, and suppressing the early formation of collective identity. By the time many students reach adulthood, state control is normalized, resistance is criminal, and the foundation for mass political imprisonment has been laid.

Criminalizing the Revolutionary Class Through Healthcare

Healthcare inequality materializes through disinvestment and environmental hazard engineered by the state. Polluted water, toxic industrial zoning, food deserts, high maternal mortality, and untreated chronic illness are all disproportionately located in territories defined by racialized, surplus labor.¹⁰ Healthcare encounters serve as the earliest points in life where

⁸ Paul J. Hirschfield, “Preparing for Prison? The Criminalization of School Discipline in the USA,” *Theoretical Criminology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 79-101, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480607085795>

⁹ Victor M. Rios, *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*, (New York University Press, 2011).

¹⁰ Paula A. Braveman, et al., “Health Disparities and Health Equity: The Issue Is Justice,” *Annual Review of Public Health* 101, no. 32 (2011): 1-23, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2010.300062>, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3222512/>;

Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*, 3rd ed. (Westview Press, 2000);

U.S. Department of Agriculture: Economic Research Service, Food Access Research Atlas, (public data, Washington, DC, USDA, updated regularly), <https://www.ers.usda>.

poor and racialized communities are catalogued into risk systems. Hospitals, pediatric clinics, school-based health centers, and emergency rooms collect data that identifies families for child welfare scrutiny, immigration enforcement, and police follow-up.¹¹ The carceral features of healthcare are most pronounced where the settler-colonial project historically concentrates surplus populations and restricts the capacity of oppressed nations to accumulate collective strength. Rather than merely denying medical services, the healthcare system produces a structured environment where illness, surveillance, and punitive intervention become tools of political containment.

Lack of access to care for uninsured, migrant, or low-income people pushes individuals into informal survival economies that are then criminalized by the state. Mandatory reporting laws, presented as “child protection,” “public health,” or “safety interventions,” function as tools of preemptive criminalization.¹² Substance use during pregnancy,¹³ missed

gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas;

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Pregnancy-Related Deaths*, (report, CDC, updated regularly), <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/pdfs/mm6835a3-H.pdf>;

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, *2023 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report*, (report, AHRQ, December 2023), AHRQ Pub. No. 23(24)-0091-EF, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK600459/>;

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (University of California Press, 2007).

¹¹ National Center for Youth Law, *HIPAA or FERPA? A Primer on Sharing School Health Information in California* 2nd ed. (National Center for Youth Law, 2018), <https://youth-law.org/wp-content/uploads/2018.10.23-hipaaorferpa-california.pdf>;

Jeremy R. Simon et al., “Law Enforcement Information Gathering in the Emergency Department,” *Journal of the American College of Emergency Physicians Open* 4, no. 2 (2023), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9972077/>;

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Children’s Bureau, *Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect*, (report, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, updated 2019), <https://www.childwelfare.gov/resources/mandatory-reporting-child-abuse-and-neglect/>;

Physicians for Human Rights, “Health Care and U.S. Immigration Enforcement: What Providers Need to Know,” (Physicians for Human Rights, 2019), <https://phr.org/our-work/resources/health-care-and-u-s-immigration-enforcement-what-providers-need-to-know/>.

¹² Anne Zimmerman, “Our System for Reporting Child Abuse Is Unethical,” The Hastings Center for Bioethics, September 29, 2023, <https://www.thehastingscenter.org/our-system-for-reporting-child-abuse-is-unethical/>.

¹³ American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, “Opposition to Criminaliza-

medical appointments, non-compliance with treatment plans,¹⁴ and visible signs of poverty (e.g., inadequate clothing, food insecurity, crowded housing) generate referrals within the healthcare system to “Child Protective Services” or law enforcement. Mandatory reporting requirements, law-enforcement access to medical records, and the criminalization of pregnancy outcomes serve as mechanisms through which healthcare encounters reveal themselves as state monitoring events. Clinicians are deputized to act as an extension of the state’s criminal legal system, reporting suspected drug use, undocumented status, “noncompliant” parents, or psychiatric “risk” to police and child protective systems.¹⁵ Psychiatric emergencies, overdoses, and medical welfare checks often trigger police responses rather than clinical care. Indigenous communities disproportionately experience forced psychiatric hospitalization;¹⁶ Black patients are more likely to encounter armed officers during emergency calls;¹⁷ migrant families face immigration enforcement within hospitals themselves.¹⁸

tion of Individuals During Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period: Statement of Policy,” American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, last modified July 2024, <https://www.acog.org/clinical-information/policy-and-position-statements/statements-of-policy/2020/opposition-criminalization-of-individuals-pregnancy-and-postpartum-period>.

¹⁴ Carole Jenney and Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect, “Recognizing and Responding to Medical Neglect,” *Pediatrics* 120, no. 6 (2007): 1385-1389, <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/120/6/1385/70531/Recognizing-and-Responding-to-Medical-Neglect>.

¹⁵ Kara S. Wallis, “Harmful Reports: How Federal Mandated Reporting Legal Frameworks Inflict Trauma and Surveillance,” *CUNY Law Review* 28, no. 2 (2025): 395-432, <https://www.cunylawreview.org/harmful-reports-how-federal-mandated-reporting-policy-entrenches-racism-in-healthcare-delivery-and-undermines-public-health/>.

¹⁶ Joseph P. Gone and Laurence J. Kirmayer, “On the Wisdom of Considering Culture and Context in Psychopathology,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 54, no. 5-6 (2017): 645-670, https://www.indigenousspsych.org/Interest%20Group/Kirmayer/2010_Gone_Millon_JPG-LJK%20Wisdom%20of%20Culture.pdf.

¹⁷ Yannis K. Valtis, et al., “Race and Ethnicity and the Utilization of Security Responses in a Hospital Setting,” *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 38, no. 1 (2022): 30-35, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-022-07525-1>.

¹⁸ Ashlee Fox, “Navigating ICE Presence in School and Healthcare Facilities,” National Association of Social Workers, February 2025, <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Legal-Defense-Fund/Legal-Issues/Navigating-ICE-Presence-in-School-and-Healthcare-Facilities>.

James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale University Press, 1998).

Hospitals generate profit from the racialized, surplus population through emergency interventions, chronic disease management, and billing structures engineered around instability. Meanwhile, preventive services, reproductive care, community clinics, and culturally grounded healing practices remain underfunded or absent. The commodification of bodily survival functions as a soft form of counterinsurgency: people cannot fully engage in revolutionary activity when managing untreated illness, caregiving burdens, medical debt, and prolonged exposure to preventable conditions. The system disciplines racialized, surplus populations not merely through force but through the structural exhaustion of everyday life.

Criminalizing the Revolutionary Class Through Social Services

The entry point into social services, whether through welfare offices, child protective services, housing authorities, disability benefits, or unemployment systems, begins with an administrative encounter intended to collapse the defining qualities of various oppressed nations into common institutional frameworks.¹⁹ This is a critical process in racialization which dissolves national character.²⁰ Intake protocols translate poverty into risk categories, interpret survival strategies as indicators of instability,²¹ and make households of the racialized, surplus population visible to the state as potential sites of neglect, noncompliance, or criminality.²² The state identifies a strata most likely to generate unrest by reading their basic needs as indicators of deviance.

The racialized, surplus population is subjected to ongoing monitoring that connects their eligibility for welfare with their compliance to institutionally framed norms. Mandatory check-ins, home inspections, drug testing, employment verification, attendance at state-approved programs, and the constant threat of case closure function as coercive measures to

¹⁹ Scott, James C. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998.

²⁰ Dorothy Roberts, *Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families and How Abolition Can Build a Safer World* (Basic Books, 2022).

²¹ Kaaryn S. Gustafson, *Cheating Welfare: Public Assistance and the Criminalization of Poverty* (New York University Press, 2011).

²² Chris Herring, "Complaint-Oriented Policing: Regulating Homelessness in Public Space," *American Sociological Review* 84, no. 5 (2019): 709-737, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419872671>.

maintain this compliance.²³ These practices reorganize time, labor, and domestic life around state scrutiny. The racialized, surplus population is managed not only through police or prisons but through networks of case-workers, inspectors, and eligibility officers whose decisions can destabilize entire families. Compliance structures maintain underdevelopment of the oppressed nations by making survival contingent on obedience. The constant threat of the state taking away essential “benefits” for survival dissuades participation in protests, tenant unions, workplace organizing, or mutual aid networks that the state deems subversive.

The antagonistic role of social services is most visible in child protective services, eviction proceedings linked to housing authorities, and “fraud” investigations which target welfare benefits. These systems use punitive interventions that resemble police operations: warrantless home searches, rapid removals of children, coordination with law enforcement, and participation with courts in the case of prosecution.²⁴ Family separation functions as a mechanism that maintains settler power by destabilizing the social reproduction of oppressed nations.

Social services do not operate in isolation. They form an administrative nexus linking healthcare, education, policing, housing, labor departments, immigration enforcement, and courts. This integration produces a multi-sectoral order of politicized criminalization in which a single welfare infraction can trigger cascading consequences: loss of housing, CPS intervention, police surveillance, and legal proceedings. Welfare administration becomes a quiet but effective mechanism of counterinsurgency, maintaining underdevelopment while presenting control as care.

Criminalizing the Revolutionary Class Through Labor Markets

Labor markets accessible to the oppressed nations operate as a screening and disciplining apparatus that decides who is allowed into relatively stable waged work, on what terms, and who is relegated to permanent precarity. Employment is both a site of exploitation and a screening pro-

²³ Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*, Updated ed. (Vintage Books, 1993).

²⁴ Tarek Z. Ismail, “Family Policing and the Fourth Amendment,” *California Law Review*, October 2023, <https://www.californialawreview.org/print/family-policing-and-the-fourth-amendment>.

cess that converts prior institutional contact into barriers to work. Criminal records, credit scores, drug testing, and culturally biased professionalism standards convert prior encounters with police, schools, and welfare agencies into barriers to work.²⁵ This hardens the line between a formally employed stratum and a structurally unemployed, semi-legalized stratum concentrated within the oppressed nation.

Temp agencies, gig platforms, day labor sites, and “second chance” employers extract labor from criminalized workers while keeping them permanently vulnerable to firing, re-arrest, and deportation. Surveillance at work (cameras, GPS, productivity software) fuses economic exploitation with quasi-carceral control. Employers increasingly collaborate with police, immigration authorities, and private security to manage “risk.”²⁶ Workplace raids, information sharing, and on-site policing make the job itself a site of potential arrest and deportation, especially for migrants and formerly incarcerated people. Precarity ensures continued exposure to policing, courts, and administrative enforcement. The labor market is not only the field of exploitation; it functions as a sorting mechanism that concentrates the most dangerous potential revolutionary base (young, racialized, surplus labor) into zones of chronic unemployment, informal hustles, and carceral supervision.

Criminalizing the Revolutionary Class Through Immigration

Immigration law merges civil and criminal power²⁷ to treat migrant workers from the oppressed nations as a super-exploited, deportable work-

²⁵ Devah Pager, *Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration* (University of Chicago Press, 2007);

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Rev. ed. (The New Press, 2020).

Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Duke University Press, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11smrv3>;

Ann Arnett Ferguson, *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity* (University of Michigan Press, 2001).

²⁶ American Immigration Council, “Understanding ICE Raids at American Workplaces,” American Immigration Council, October 9, 2025, accessed January 19, 2026, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/fact-sheet/understanding-ice-worksite-raids/>.

²⁷ César Cuauhtémoc García Hernández, *Crimmigration Law* (New York University Press, 2015).

force whose political activity can be quickly neutralized.²⁸ Visa overstays, unauthorized entry, and work without authorization are framed as criminal threats.²⁹ This produces a large, racialized population whose everyday survival is formally illegal. Migrant workers are hyper-exploited in agriculture, logistics, domestic work, and service sectors. Simultaneously, the criminalization of migration status also makes any attempts at unionizing, striking, or joining overtly revolutionary organizations easily undermined. Oppressed nations migrating from Central American, Caribbean, African, Asian, and Arab countries are managed through bilateral agreements, foreign aid conditioned on enforcement, and cross-border intelligence sharing. This is how sending countries are conditioned to police their own citizens on behalf of the US. The US projects its internal carceral logic outward, turning sending countries into extensions of its detention and policing regime.

As crisis deepens, national security is foregrounded in the criminalization of migrant labor. This is the political basis by which the threat of detention and deportation extends into the entire racialized, surplus population. Recent escalations spearheaded by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have targeted a wide variety of oppressed nationalities including legal citizens. Enforcement actions routinely terrorize whole neighborhoods, ensnaring citizens and noncitizens alike through raids, surveillance, and data-driven targeting.³⁰ A surge of over 2,000 federal agents were deployed to Minneapolis in January,³¹ and tensions intensified with the murder of legal observer Renee Good on January 7, 2026. The murder of Good demonstrates not just escalatory tactics against op-

²⁸ Nicholas P. De Genova, "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31, (2002): 419-447, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.31.040402.085432>.

²⁹ Kitty Calavita, "Immigration Law, Race, and Identity," *Annual Review of Law & Social Science*, no. 3 (2007), <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.lawsocsci.3.081806.112745>.

³⁰ Steven Hubbard, "ICE Uses a Growing Web of AI Services to Power Its Immigration Enforcement Surveillance," American Immigration Council, December 18, 2025, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/ice-uses-ai-immigration-enforcement-surveillance/>.

³¹ PBS NewsHour, "2,000 Federal Agents Sent to Minneapolis Area to Carry Out 'Largest Immigration Operation Ever,' ICE Say," PBS, January 6, 2026, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/2000-federal-agents-sent-to-minneapolis-area-to-carry-out-largest-immigration-operation-ever-ice-says>.

pressed nationalities, but the extension of state violence to target allies of oppressed groups.³²

What determines exposure is not simply nationality, but the racialized position within surplus labor markets and heavily policed spaces, as well as proximity to these spaces. Surplus workers are policed, detained, or expelled to discipline labor, suppress organizing, and manage populations made redundant by capitalist crisis, regardless of formal nationality. As capitalist crisis intensifies, it is this section of racialized, surplus labor that become the criminalized class. Immigration enforcement thus operates as a class and racial control mechanism rather than a narrow tool of border regulation. Immigration control is a frontline counterinsurgency mechanism against a potentially explosive alliance: oppressed domestic colonies and the migrant proletariat. It fractures internationalist solidarity and makes the most radicalized segments of the working class the most “deportable,” isolating them from long-term organizing.

Criminalizing the Revolutionary Class Through Nonprofits

The nonprofit sector (NGOs, foundations, service organizations) operates as a soft carceral apparatus that absorbs discontentment, manages crisis, and channels oppositional energy into depoliticized, state-compatible forms. The nonprofit’s role is not primarily coercive, but rather they serve a regulatory function shaping how harm is defined, measured, and responded to within limits acceptable to the state and capital. Many nonprofits run programs funded by state or foundation contracts that require detailed data collection, “risk assessments,” and proof of “behavioral change.” Participation in “reentry,” youth mentorship, violence interruption, or homeless services becomes a method for monitoring and norm enforcement. Compliance is tracked, progress is quantified, and deviation is flagged. Surveillance is embedded in service delivery, and refusal or nonparticipation can result in exclusion from essential resources.

Political activity is narrowed through this process. Radical demands are translated into depoliticized language (i.e., framed as issues of resilience,

³² Rachel Leingang and Maanvi Singh, “‘Make No Mistake, This Is an Occupation’: ICE’s Deadly Presence Casts Long Shadow over Minneapolis,” *The Guardian*, January 17, 2026. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jan/17/minneapolis-twin-cities-ice-dispatch>.

equity, or inclusion rather than power, exploitation, or domination). Notably, the Black Lives Matter movement began in 2014 with a clear framework on policing as a structural tool of racial domination, not a technical failure.³³ As nonprofits and private foundations attached themselves to the movement between 2015 and 2018, the call for an end of racial capitalism transformed into appeals to racial equality under capitalism, and police abolition was reframed into calls for public safety.³⁴ By 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement had fully transitioned to reform policies of “trauma-informed policing” and inclusivity.³⁵ Organizers from oppressed nations are often recruited into professional roles where their labor is redirected toward program management and grant compliance. In the case of Standing Rock, protests which began in 2014 with clear political aims connected to Indigenous sovereignty and critiques of settler-colonialism,³⁶ the clearing of camps and mass arrests were followed by heavy recruitment of Indigenous organizers into nonprofits. These organizers served as program coordinators, policy fellows, outreach directors, and environmental justice managers who were then positioned to appeal to large foundations.³⁷ These appeals required avoidance of anti-state or anti-development language, as well as alignment with foundation donors, driven by budget restraints and timelines. Community anger is absorbed into service provision, while collective confrontation is discouraged as risky or counterproductive. Nonprofits often play the role of mediator in moments of crisis, discouraging militant tactics and steering communities toward reformist

³³ Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Haymarket Books, 2016).

³⁴ Dylan Rodríguez, “The Political Logic of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex,” *The Scholar & Feminist Online* 11, no. 1-2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373001-002>, <https://sfonline.barnard.edu/dylan-rodriguez-the-political-logic-of-the-non-profit-industrial-complex/>.

³⁵ INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, 10th anniversary ed. (Duke University Press, 2017).

³⁶ Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (Verso, 2019).

³⁷ Kyle Powys Whyte, “Indigenous Climate Change Studies: Indigenizing Futures, Decolonizing the Anthropocene,” *English Language Notes* 55, no. 1-2 (2017): 153-162, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00138282-55.1-2.153>, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2925514.

channels. In practice, this neutralizes mass anger that might otherwise flow into independent organizations with revolutionary politics.

By channeling struggle into individualized services and measurable outcomes, nonprofits fragment collective capacity and delay the development of independent organization. Crisis is managed rather than resolved, and dependence on external funding enforces caution and moderation. Within the broader system of politicized criminalization, nonprofits help stabilize control by softening its appearance, ensuring that racialized surplus labor remains governed, monitored, and disorganized even in spaces nominally dedicated to support.

Criminalizing the Revolutionary Class Through Housing

Housing policy structures who has stable shelter, who lives under permanent threat of eviction, and who is forced into homelessness or carceral environments (shelters, encampments). Racially exclusive housing has deep historical roots in the US. Dispossession, segregation, and surveillance are built directly into housing systems, ensuring that instability remains a permanent condition for racialized, surplus labor.³⁸ Redlining and gentrification concentrate Black, Indigenous, and migrant communities in over-policed neighborhoods. Gentrification in particular removes long-standing residents under the language of development while intensifying surveillance and enforcement. These processes fracture community networks and disrupt the continuity necessary for collective organization.³⁹

Public housing is saturated with police, surveillance cameras, and “behavioral” rules that function like parole conditions. Residents are subjected to extensive rules governing behavior, visitors, occupancy, and use of space. Surveillance cameras, police patrols, and information sharing between housing authorities and law enforcement normalize constant monitoring. Minor infractions become grounds for eviction, fines, or criminal

³⁸ Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Harvard University Press, 1993).

³⁹ BakerHostetler, “ICE Raids and Increased Immigration Enforcement Are Here – Is Your Business Prepared?” BakerHostetler, February 14, 2025, <https://www.bakerlaw.com/insights/ice-raids-and-increased-immigration-enforcement-are-here-is-your-business-prepared/>.

charges, transforming housing insecurity into a mechanism of discipline. Landlords, backed by courts and sheriffs, wield eviction as a routine tool.

Constant displacement undermines long-term organizing, breaks up tenant networks, and keeps families in survival mode. “Nonpayment,” overcrowding, informal subletting, and domestic conflict produced by capitalism become grounds for legal expulsion.⁴⁰ Sweeps of encampments, bans on camping and public sleeping, and policing of shelters turn homelessness into a quasi-criminal status. “Anti-camping” rulings such as *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson* have been upheld by the US Supreme Court, empowering cities nationwide to levy fines or jail time against unhoused people for the act of sleeping or camping in public.⁴¹ Being unhoused brings constant police contact, fines, and warrants, another channel into jails and prisons. As a result, approximately 15% of the people incarcerated in US prisons or jails were homeless in the year prior to incarceration⁴² and those released from incarceration are ten times more likely to experience homelessness.⁴³ Shelters themselves often impose surveillance, curfews, and compliance requirements that mirror probationary control,⁴⁴ further reinforcing a revolving door between homelessness and incarceration.

Displacement keeps communities fragmented and politically weak, while repeated police contact reinforces criminal profiles constructed elsewhere. Housing policy functions as a central pillar of counterinsurgency, managing racialized surplus labor by making survival precarious and collective life permanently unsettled.

⁴⁰ Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (Crown Publishers, 2016).

⁴¹ *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson*, 603 U.S. 520, 23-175 (June 28, 2024), https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/23pdf/23-175_19m2.pdf.

⁴² Dallas Augustine and Margot Kushel, “Community Supervision, Housing Insecurity, & Homelessness,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 701, no. 1, (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716222111398>, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9762769>.

⁴³ Lucius Couloute, *Nowhere to Go: Homelessness Among Formerly Incarcerated People*, Prison Policy Initiative, August 2018, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/housing.html>.

⁴⁴ New York City Department of Homeless Services, *Family Services Statement of Client Rights and DHS Code of Conduct* (DHS-118a), (government form, NYC DHS, September 12, 2022), https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/DHS-118a_FS.pdf.

Criminalizing the Revolutionary Class Across Sectors

The United States maintains a layered, mutually reinforcing system of politicized criminalization that targets oppressed nations as racialized, surplus labor populations. Rather than operating in isolation, institutions apply distinct but coordinated methods of classification that sort people according to perceived risk, noncompliance, or instability. These classifications do not emerge from criminal behavior; they are produced through routine institutional contact and used to justify escalating state intervention.

Healthcare, education, and social services form the earliest layers of this system. Schools translate poverty, trauma, disability, and behavioral difference into disciplinary records, attendance data, and psychological assessments. Healthcare systems apply psychiatric labels, triage algorithms, mandatory reporting, and substance-use monitoring that convert illness or crisis into administrative risk. Social services formalize these judgments through case files, risk assessments, and reporting requirements that document family structure, income, medical history, and perceived parental failure.

Each institution claims a distinct mandate, but together they construct a profile that follows individuals across sectors. Information circulates across institutional boundaries, producing a unified apparatus of surveillance. Educators and healthcare workers are mandated reporters whose employment depends on forwarding families into welfare, child protective services, or police systems. Caseworkers regularly coordinate with courts and law enforcement, turning social services into an early pipeline for incarceration. Institutional assessments reinforce one another, transforming poverty-produced behaviors into evidence of criminal disposition rather than signs of structural decay.

Once established, this profile becomes actionable in labor markets and housing systems. Employers use background checks, attendance histories, drug tests, and workplace surveillance to exclude racialized workers from stable employment and funnel them into precarious, heavily policed jobs. The behavioral judgments first produced in schools later justify workplace discipline and “risk management” policing. Housing systems compound this process through redlining, discriminatory zoning, eviction courts,

shelter policies, and surveillance systems that destabilize communities and force repeated police contact. Being unhoused becomes a criminal condition, guaranteeing further institutional encounters that deepen the carceral profile already in place.

Immigration enforcement provides an additional layer of discipline. Legal status is converted into a permanent risk category that renders entire communities deportable and therefore criminally suspect. Employers weaponize this vulnerability to hyper-exploit migrant labor while threatening arrest or deportation if workers organize or resist. In 2024, Mexican migrant workers sued a Connecticut farm/contractor alleging systematic exploitation under the H-2A program, including threats of deportation and restrictions that kept workers vulnerable because the visa structure ties authorization to the employer.⁴⁵ This is a rare case of migrant workers collectivizing and taking action. In most cases, fear of state capture drives avoidance of healthcare, schools, and public services, reinforcing isolation and precarity while feeding back into housing instability and workplace abuse.⁴⁶

The nonprofit sector operates as a soft buffer within this system, absorbing social harm without disrupting its causes. Through contracts tied to state and foundation funding, nonprofits translate community need into metrics of vulnerability, behavioral deficiency, and program compliance. Data collection, risk scoring, “violence interruption,” and reentry programs perform the surveillance and behavioral regulation that police and immigration authorities rely on but cannot openly administer. While framed as care or reform, these functions help stabilize the broader apparatus of control.

The strategic outcome is coordinated underdevelopment. Healthcare withholds treatment while expanding surveillance. Schools restrict access to education while maximizing exclusion. Social services impose punitive oversight instead of material support. Housing policies displace communities rather than secure stability. These criminalizing logics feed directly into

⁴⁵ *Zavala Martinez v. Manzana, LLC*, No. 3:24-cv-01900-VAB (D. Conn. Dec. 2, 2024), Complaint. Clearinghouse for Labor & Employment Cases, Case No. 46943.

⁴⁶ Drishti Pillai, “CMS Plans to Share Data with ICE Could Exacerbate Immigrant Families’ Fears About Accessing Health Coverage and Care,” Kaiser Family Foundation, November 21, 2025, <https://www.kff.org/quick-take/cms-plans-to-share-data-with-ice-could-exacerbate-immigrant-families-fears-about-accessing-health-coverage-and-care>.

material

policing, courts, immigration enforcement, and carceral databases. Each institutional response creates the conditions for noncompliance, interprets noncompliance as a threat, and mobilizes punitive response. In doing so, the state shapes the criminalized subject long before any “offense” occurs. The intertwined sectors: (1) displace community self-organization with bureaucratic gatekeeping; (2) individualize structural harm as pathology, misconduct, or parental failure; (3) fragment kinship and neighborhood networks that traditionally serve as bases of resistance; (4) direct large portions of racialized youth into juvenile and adult carceral pipelines; and (5) ensure that the experience of state intervention is normalized before political consciousness can develop.

This is counterinsurgency. Criminalization is not episodic but environmental, a constant low-grade pressure that narrows political horizons and normalizes state intrusion. Institutional language attempts to simultaneously dissolve national character of racialized, surplus populations while keeping them crisis-prone: “low-income” or “underserved communities” become “at-risk populations,” then “crime-prone areas,” and finally real-estate “opportunity zones” as repression intensifies. Across sectors, the shared orientation is to manage, contain, and fragment racialized, surplus populations which serve as the most potent subjects of resistance to a capitalist-imperialist system. Production of political prisoners in this environment is not an exception but a structural outcome.

Part II: Lawfare and the Role of Courts

While police and administrative agencies initiate surveillance and enforcement, lawfare provides the legitimacy that transforms repression into governance. The state maintains a wide array of legal statutes and procedural tools at its disposal. Legal charges are at the discretion of prosecutors, who may also strategically choose which laws to use and how to stack charges as a means of creating maximal pressure rather than reflecting the level of harm. This often provides a means by which courts enable the state to criminalize association, coordination, and political commitment rather than direct acts of violence.

One of the most consequential instruments in this process is the use of racketeering and conspiracy statutes. Laws originally designed to prosecute organized crime allow prosecutors to treat loosely connected individuals as

members of a single criminal enterprise. Under this logic, the state does not need to prove that each defendant committed a specific illegal act. It only needs to assert that individuals shared an affiliation, message, or objective with someone who did commit an illegal act. Relationships themselves become evidence, and political organizing is reframed as criminal coordination. The Atlanta “Stop Cop City” case provides a clear model. City and state authorities used the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization (RICO) Act charges to frame a decentralized protest movement against police militarization as a criminal conspiracy. Individuals were charged not primarily for specific acts, but for their alleged association with a shared political objective.⁴⁷ Conspiracy charges function similarly by lowering evidentiary thresholds and shifting the burden onto defendants to disprove intent. Attendance at meetings, shared fundraising or housing, mutual aid, protest coordination, or expressions of solidarity can be framed as participation in a criminal plot. These statutes are intentionally broad, enabling prosecutors to speculate about plans rather than demonstrate completed actions. Political activity is criminalized preemptively before it can materialize into formal organization.

Racketeering statutes and conspiracy laws allow the state to use any loose practical or even ideological ties as a means of criminalizing above-ground organizations. The clearest example of this is the designation of Samidoun, an international Palestinian Prisoner support network, as a “terrorist organization” based on erroneous claims that the organization is a formal fundraising wing for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.⁴⁸ These tools are disproportionately used against movements rooted in the oppressed nations, whether that is Palestinian solidarity work, Black liberation struggles, Indigenous-led environmental movements threatening corporate or state interests, immigration justice movements that confront state violence directly, etc. In such circumstances, even political speech

⁴⁷ Christopher E. Bruce and Hina Shamsi, “RICO and Domestic Terrorism Charges against Cop City Activists Send a Chilling Message,” American Civil Liberties Union, September 21, 2023, <https://www.aclu.org/news/free-speech/rico-and-domestic-terrorism-charges-against-cop-city-activists-send-a-chilling-message>.

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of the Treasury, “United States and Canada Target Key International Fundraiser for Foreign Terrorist Organization PFLP,” (press release, U.S. Department of the Treasury, October 15, 2024), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2646>.

collapses into criminal association, and anti-imperialist solidarity itself can be framed as a criminal security threat. In the case of Palestinian solidarity work, the 2001 Holy Land Foundation Case,⁴⁹ 2009 KindHearts Foundation Case,⁵⁰ and post-October 7 surveillance of University organizations such as the Students for Justice in Palestine⁵¹ provide examples across multiple decades where groups were investigated, surveilled, or referred to law enforcement under terrorism and material-support-adjacent rationales, despite engaging in protected political speech. Disruption to infrastructure and commerce have long been heavily criminalized, particularly acute within movements opposing environmental devastation caused by pipelines, extractive industries, and militarized land use. Property damage is seen as equal to, or in some cases more criminal than, harm to human beings, creating a legal framework for equating destruction of property as extremist violence. Simple acts of vandalism such as spray-painting are elevated to federal crimes,⁵² and recent legislative proposals deem property damage as a “terrorist violent mass action.”⁵³ The expansion of domestic terrorism designations intensifies this pattern. “Domestic Violent Extremism” is defined as individuals or movements based in the US that are motivated by ideological goals and may commit or support violence to achieve political or social objectives.⁵⁴ The Department of Homeland Security

⁴⁹ American Civil Liberties Union, *Blocking Faith, Freezing Charity: Chilling Muslim Charitable Giving in the “War on Terrorism Financing”* (American Civil Liberties Union, 2009), <https://www.aclu.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/blockingfaith.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Charity & Security Network, “USA v. Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development,” Charity & Security Network, last updated August 24, 2020, <https://charityandsecurity.org/litigation/holy-land-foundation/>.

⁵¹ Palestine Legal, “Palestine Legal Condemns Wave of Campus Anti-Protest Policies Intended to Suppress Student Activism,” Palestine Legal, September 12, 2024, <https://palestinelegal.org/news/2024/9/12/palestine-legal-condemns-wave-of-campus-anti-protest-policies-intended-to-suppress-student-activism>.

⁵² U.S. Department of Justice. “Protestor Sentenced in Connection with Damaging U.S. Government Property at Union Station Following Protest,” (press release, United States Attorney’s Office District of Columbia, April 4, 2025), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/pr/protestor-sentenced-damaging-us-government-property-union-station-following-protest>.

⁵³ International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, “US Protest Law Tracker – Proposed State Terrorism Laws,” ICNL, last modified on January 21, 2026, <https://www.icnl.org/usprotestlawtracker/>.

⁵⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation and U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Strate-*

(DHS) and the FBI both use the term “Domestic Violent Extremist” as an intelligence gathering category rather than a criminal charge. The absence of any legal definition allows the label to be applied selectively based on ideology rather than conduct. Once attached, it justifies heightened surveillance, pretrial detention, severe sentencing exposure, and public vilification. Political dissent is reframed as a national security threat, and supporters or peripheral participants are swept into the same prosecutorial net. Beyond militant direct action, the broader impact of racketeering statutes and conspiracy laws can criminalize efforts of building dual-power and undermining repressive institutions. Mutual-aid networks such as food distribution, bail funds, and disaster response are scrutinized as potential fronts for illicit activity such as money laundering, despite addressing needs the state itself refuses to meet. These legal strategies of politicized criminalization redefine solidarity, coordination, and care as threats, while insulating the structures of capital, empire, and racial control from being meaningfully challenged.

Lawfare is cheaper than mass deployments of police or troops. In Los Angeles, the Pentagon said the June 2025 deployment to Los Angeles of 4,000 National Guard troops and 700 Marines would cost USD 134 million,⁵⁵ while prosecutorial budgets total approximately USD 40 million over the same time period. Lawfare is also easier to present as neutral, a fact of its function that has been noted as far back as 1924 by Soviet legal theorist Evgeny Pashukanis.⁵⁶ Pashukanis’s theory is upheld by modern polling data in the US. Recent data shows 51% of Americans oppose military deployment in Minneapolis amidst mass deportation campaigns,⁵⁷

gic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism, (report, FBI & DHS, June 2023), https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2023-07/23_0724_opa_strategic-intelligence-assessment-data-domestic-terrorism.pdf.

⁵⁵ International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, “US Protest Law Tracker – Proposed State Terrorism Laws,” ICNL, last modified on January 21, 2026, <https://www.icnl.org/usprotestlawtracker/>.

⁵⁶ Evgeny Pashukanis, *The General Theory of Law and Marxism*, Chapter IV: “Commodity and the Subject,” in *Evgeny Pashukanis: Selected Writings on Marxism and Law*, eds. Piers Beirne and Robert Sharlet, trans. Peter B. Maggs (Academic Press, 1980), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pashukanis/1924/law/index.htm>, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pashukanis/1924/law/ch04.htm>.

⁵⁷ YouGov America, “Would You Support or Oppose the Military Being Deployed to Your Local Area?” YouGov, January 15, 2026, <https://yougov.com/en-us/daily-re>

while over the last five years Americans have maintained a strong majority support for increased immigration enforcement through courts and legal proceedings.⁵⁸ Organizers are buried under charges, court dates, fines, probation conditions, asset seizures, and travel restrictions. Significant organizer capacity is then forcibly redirected from movement building and towards legal survival. Lawfare does not operate through courts alone; it is reinforced by a coordinated escalation across federal, state, and municipal levels that normalizes repression while diffusing responsibility. Each level contributes distinct tools, yet all are aligned toward the same outcome: raising the cost of political participation while preserving the appearance of legality.

At the state level, a wave of anti-protest laws such as Missouri HB 355, Kansas SB 172, and South Dakota SB 151 have redefined acts like property damage, trespassing near infrastructure, or blocking transportation routes as forms of terrorism or “critical infrastructure sabotage.”⁵⁹ These laws conflate protest activity with violent extremism by elevating damage to property (pipelines, construction sites, highways, police facilities) above harm to people. This allows states to impose severe felony charges, enhanced sentences, and expansive surveillance on protesters whose actions are disruptive but political in nature. Participation in protest becomes so legally risky that only isolated or desperate individuals remain.

At the federal level, agencies expand the category of “domestic violent extremism” in ways that are intentionally broad. Legal frameworks targeting “anarchism” or “anti-fascist” movements intentionally avoid defining the particulars of political expression. The state develops these frameworks to reinforce broad and ideologically flexible criminalization by refusing to name coherent political programs. Through immigration enforcement, collaboration between the DHS, local police departments, and federal da-

sults/20260115-7af9b-3.

⁵⁸ Hannah Hartig, “Growing Shares Say the Trump Administration Is Doing Too Much to Deport Immigrants in the U.S. Illegally,” Pew Research Center, survey conducted October 6–16, 2025, published December 15, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/12/15/growing-shares-say-the-trump-administration-is-doing-too-much-to-deport-immigrants-in-the-us-illegally/>.

⁵⁹ International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, “US Protest Law Tracker – Proposed State Terrorism Laws,” ICNL, last modified on January 21, 2026, <https://www.icnl.org/usprotestlawtracker/>.

tabases allows immigration status to function as an ever-present threat. Digital tracking (license plate readers, social media monitoring, data brokers, and biometric systems) makes it easier to identify, locate, and pressure individuals involved in organizing. Deportation becomes not just an immigration tool, but a political weapon that can be used to dismantle movements.

At the municipal level, local governments provide testing grounds for these strategies. This approach transforms a city-level political conflict into a high-stakes criminal prosecution, such as the previously stated case of Atlanta's Stop Cop City. Broad frameworks for criminalization allow legal prosecution to exit formally organized bodies into their wide bases of support. These frameworks are linked by strategic alignment: state laws escalate penalties, federal categories legitimize surveillance, immigration enforcement adds coercive leverage, and municipal prosecutions provide test cases that normalize repression. Together, they allow the state to manage political resistance without openly banning protest or admitting political motive. The effect is that organizers are forced to operate under constant threat, movements are fragmented by fear and legal pressure, and the revolutionary class is disciplined into isolation.

In moments of crisis (mass uprisings, anti-war mobilizations, threats to state legitimacy) police and military-style force is deployed openly. Dylan Rodríguez's *Forced Passages* correctly argues that the US does not "fall" into repression during crises, but rather that crises reveal its ongoing domestic war waged against targeted populations. In the wake of the George Floyd uprisings, nearly 62,000 National Guard were deployed across at least 24 states.⁶⁰ The deployment of riot gear, mass arrests, curfews, and National Guard units during the George Floyd uprisings is not a breakdown of civil governance; it is the overt phase of a war that is usually administered quietly through schools, welfare, policing, courts, and surveillance. In the present moment, federal agents from ICE and DHS bypass state law in nationwide deportation and incarceration campaigns, and threats by the Trump administration to invoke the Insurrection Act have become increasingly

⁶⁰ Alexandra Sternlicht, "Over 4,400 Arrests, 62,000 National Guard Troops Deployed: George Floyd Protests by the Numbers," *Forbes*, June 2, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexandrasternlicht/2020/06/02/over-4400-arrests-62000-national-guard-troops-deployed-george-floyd-protests-by-the-numbers/>.

likely.⁶¹ Riot gear, mass arrests, curfews, National Guard deployments, and aggressive crowd control reveal themselves as tactics perfected in external colonies for use within against oppressed nations internally.⁶² Once an immediate crisis subsides, legal mechanisms are engaged to discipline, isolate, and dismantle movements in the long term. Lawfare is particularly effective in this role as it blurs the line between civil and criminal punishment. Protest zones are restricted through court orders, as was the case for sites near Standing Rock in 2019 where demonstrators protested the South Dakota Access Pipeline. Mutual-aid spaces are shut down for code violations, most visibly in large mutual aid groups like Food Not Bombs⁶³ but also common in community-based mutual aid groups. Civil injunctions, zoning violations, probation conditions, and administrative penalties serve as punishments which do not require criminal convictions. Punishment by the welfare state and legal system both potentially threaten one's survival. Individuals are barred from associating with others, attending demonstrations, or entering certain areas as part of pretrial release or probation, even when no guilt has been established.

This blurring allows repression to occur without meaningful accountability. Repression distributed across institutions allows each process and tactic of politicized criminalization to appear routine in nature. Administrative detention, pretrial incarceration, and indefinite legal proceedings further reinforce this dynamic. People can be jailed because they are deemed a "risk," didn't meet conditions for bail, or because they are entangled in overlapping institutional jurisdictions. The process becomes the punishment. Even when charges are dropped, enough damage has already been done through lost time and physical, emotional, and mental impacts. This form of repression is particularly effective because it targets collective capacity rather than individual actions: isolating leaders, draining resources, and turning participation into a long-term personal risk. Militants and

⁶¹ Callum Sutherland, "Trump Threatens to Invoke the Insurrection Act to Deploy Troops to Minnesota. Here's What That Means," *Time*, January 15, 2026, <https://time.com/7346519/trump-threatens-insurrection-act-deploy-troops-minnesota/>.

⁶² Dylan Rodríguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

⁶³ Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)* (Verso, 2020).

committed organizers are often singled out and tied up in legal proceedings that can last years. The RICO Case against Atlanta Stop Cop City organizers began in 2023 and was dismissed by judges in 2025. While this legal victory is one to celebrate, bail funds, legal defense costs, lost wages, and fines drain organizational resources that would otherwise support political education, infrastructure, or expansion.

Impacts on the organization of the revolutionary class are layered: isolation, anticipatory fear, resource extraction, fragmentation, and self-censorship. The sum of their impacts serves to steadily degrade the capacity for political movements to reproduce themselves. Internally strained and without adequate resources, political movements remain in a state of reaction.

Part III: The Response of Revolutionaries

These pressures have required a response that is uneven and constrained, yet remain efforts whose embryonic forms give insight into how state repression is contested in the imperial core. The character of decentralized and compartmentalized movement efforts remain a more secure but ultimately reactionary challenge to state power. Organizations of collective and horizontal leadership persist through repression by slowing intelligence gathering of the state, but do so at the cost of strategic and centralized efforts of the revolutionary movement. This makes repression less effective: removing one person does not collapse the organization, stall campaigns, or erase institutional memory. It also reduces the pressure placed on any single individual, lowering burnout and vulnerability. These networks are harder to infiltrate, harder to dismantle through arrests, and more resilient under sudden disruption. They allow movements to survive raids, leadership losses, and legal attacks that would cripple centralized organizations. The revolutionary potential of horizontal networks, however, remains low in a manner that becomes impossible to ignore. Campaigns lose coherence, strategies become fragmented and scattered, and long-term planning ceases to take place.

High levels of digital and operational security insulate militant revolutionaries and programs from state repression; revolutionary movements have increasingly adopted digital security practices, encrypted communication platforms, and operational secrecy to protect themselves from sur-

veillance, infiltration, and preemptive prosecution. Information is heavily contained on a “need-to-know” basis so that if one channel is compromised, the entire structure is not exposed. This is most evident in communication strategies over messaging apps like Signal, where a large number of different group chats reflect varying levels of political and practical consolidation. Five consolidated revolutionaries may have a separate chat from a mass organization of ten others, and together the mass organization may manage different chats of allies, volunteers, and supporters for each campaign or program they operate. High levels of security often devolve into a hyper-security culture that cripples organized ability to mobilize mass-based efforts, fracturing collective knowledge and connectivity in favor of secure practice. This has been the case for Rapid Response development in neighborhoods where a handful of committed individuals are unable to expand beyond 10–15 trusted members, or neighborhoods where several disparate networks are unable to collectivize their efforts. These neighborhoods have experienced the impact of fragmentation as slow response times and missed reports. Hyper-security which alienates movements from the masses is commonplace, and when state-repression does penetrate the hyper-secure revolutionary organization, legal repercussions are swift and uncontested. The reliance on community defense, mutual aid, and underground forms demonstrate the capacity of the revolutionary class to meet its own needs and defend itself where the state actively harms or abandons it. They build trust, material solidarity, and practical skills. However, when pushed underground for extended periods, these forms of organizing are difficult to sustain. Operating outside formal structures means fewer resources, constant risk, and heavy reliance on a small number of highly committed people. Mutual aid and underground work can stabilize communities in crisis, but without a viable path to scale, they can become trapped in permanent emergency mode. ICE-related rapid response networks are only one example of this permanent state of emergency, but this circumstance dates back to Free Breakfast Programs and Survival programs run by the Black Panther Party for Self Defense in the 1960s and 1970s. It is a permanent state of emergency that continued into the 21st century when Occupy Wall Street organizers built decentralized mutual aid networks after Hurricane Sandy in 2012, or the thousands of mutual aid groups that emerged in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic,

most of which are now defunct due to repression, organizer burnout, and general instability. The work becomes intense, exhausting, and difficult to reproduce across wider populations. These practices are not incorrect, but repression forces them to carry more weight than they can sustain on their own.

Programmatic efforts of mutual aid, legal defense networks, and community defense groups combat the isolation of revolutionaries and oppressed nations by turning individual repression into collective responsibility. These efforts materialize more specifically as jail support teams, bail funds, court-watching groups, and long-term legal defense committees. Jail support teams ensure organizers are cared for during an initial arrest or indictment, often the most disorienting moments of repression. Bail funds prevent unnecessary pretrial detention. Legal committees coordinate lawyers, track court dates, manage communications, and prevent burnout by distributing responsibilities across solidarity networks. Community defense groups deepen consolidation amidst intensifying immigration repression, most visible in highly impacted urban centers such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York City. These community defense groups maintain several program areas where broad sections of the masses stratify their engagements based on self-assessments of risk. Community outreach, legal and skills-based training, and rapid response networks broadly define the program areas within community defense groups. Outreach programs provide public propaganda campaigns which highlight state violence. Community legal training demystifies state violence at the level of community, taking preemptive measures to reduce panic and fight disinformation. Skills-based training provide practical measures for surveilling, documenting, and responding to state violence. These trainings can both prepare community members for preserving their own safety amidst intensifying state violence, or prepare community members for rapid response networks. Rapid Response networks refer to coordinated community patrols, most heavily concentrated in the oppressed nations, and coordinated community mobilizations. Networks are most prominent in heavily targeted cities like Los Angeles, Minnesota, New York City, and Chicago. These rapid response networks are built to bring maximum community visibility and pressure at the front-line of conflicts where federal agents and local police attempt to detain or conduct raids on migrant communities.

When ICE attempted large raids of migrant vendors on Canal Street in New York City, rapid response networks across Manhattan and Brooklyn mobilized hundreds of supporters and forced federal agents and local police to disperse.⁶⁴

Small sections of the movement integrate prisoner support into long-term political education and organizational culture. Prisoner support has been particularly integrated into sustaining the long-term health of Black liberation struggles. Letter writing, commissary support, public statements, and study groups centered on incarcerated comrades reinforce the understanding that repression is a predictable feature of organizing that attempts to isolate revolutionaries. The practice of circulating prisoners' writings, statements, and messages provide both political clarity and a connective thread to movements outside of prisons. These messages serve a crucial role in political education: clarifying the stakes of organizing, the nature of state power, and the costs of resistance.

Independent media organizations such as Unicorn Riot, Atlanta Community Press Collective, News2Share, and Status Coup News play a complementary role in fighting disinformation by countering state narratives. They work to document arrests and center the political context of repression, reducing legitimacy of political repression and creating space for public solidarity. Independent media is not, in and of itself, capable of contesting repression, only reducing legitimacy and creating space for public solidarity. These media efforts have often required a coupling with public campaigns that challenge excessive charges, expose political prosecutions, or pressure institutions. Strategic litigation, civil rights complaints, and coordinated public defense can turn the legal arena into a contested space, though these efforts provide diminishing returns amidst intensifying contradictions. Coordinated public campaigns help contextualize repression as political rather than criminal by highlighting selective prosecutions, inflated charges, politicized "terrorism" rhetoric, and legal overreach. Public campaigns combine legal analysis with grounded storytelling, translating court documents into accessible language, situating charges within histories of political struggle, and emphasizing the famil-

⁶⁴ Richard Hall and Rebecca Schneid, "New Yorkers Appear to Foil ICE Raid Before It Begins," *Time*, November 30, 2025, <https://time.com/7337578/ice-raid-new-york-mamdani/>.

ial and community costs of repression. In the RICO case against Atlanta Stop Cop City organizers, defense committees, independent media, and legal observers translate indictments into plain-language explanations of “association-as-crime,” situate charges within histories of counterinsurgency against oppressed nationalities and revolutionary movements, publish court updates that explain bond conditions, surveillance, and legal delays, and center the impact on defendants and their communities.

As conditions intensify in the imperial core, mechanisms of neoliberalism revert towards their fascist tendencies and the popularization of socialist and anarchist ideologies emerge as dominant forms of organizing mass-based efforts to curtail state violence. A microcosm of this phenomenon can be seen when immigration-related nonprofits fail to build independent programs to address escalation of state violence amidst mass deportations. In absence of effective nonprofit programs, immigration nonprofits are forced to attach themselves to community-based Rapid Response efforts which exist outside of institutions. In New York City, the Hands Off NYC Coalition represents a collection of nonprofits and labor unions that were mostly absent from Rapid Response development in the first half of 2025. In the second half of 2025, this coalition began rolling out a series of nonprofit programs targeting localities where Rapid Response networks had developed. This is a means of maintaining institutional relevancy, demilitarizing movements, and absorbing revolutionary potential into more easily co-optable forms of organization. In their opportunistic attachment to community-based efforts, the nonprofits reveal opportunities for revolutionaries to build dual power, legitimizing militant and revolutionary efforts. However, the situation is not without familiar tensions amongst the Western leftists around hierarchy, centralization, and principled politics. Decades of revisionism, Western and male chauvinism, sectarianism, opportunism, and co-optation define the Western left as a movement of loosely connected factions which lack any coherent political program. As such, revisionist socialist organizations and decentralized anarchist networks have been visible at the fore of organizing against state violence, and the political program of revolutionary socialists remains scattered. One of the hyper-visible revisionist socialist organizations is the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), which employs a mobilization-without-organization model of nonprofit style rallying. This model is marked

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by rallies that have no clear targets, escalatory tactics, political continuity, or strategic goals, but keep the hosting organizations in the media ecosystem to maintain political relevancy. Simultaneously, PSL leadership will assign protest Marshals to quell any militancy during mobilizations. These organizations are mostly absent from the direct confrontations with the state that occur in programs like the Rapid Response development against ICE, but will position themselves in the front of media presence covering ICE-related responses.

Yet these revisionist organizations and anarchist networks remain limited in their abilities to meet the continued escalation of state violence and, in their limitations, make clearer the necessity of revolutionary socialism. Centralized and hierarchical command structures, democratic centralism, a consolidated political program, and disciplined cadres appeal to a growing number of the progressive allies. Sections of the broad masses that have been historically averse to revolutionary socialism show an increasing interest in the ability of these methods to cover programmatic gaps and heighten the organization of community-based efforts that oppose state violence. Within the crucible of state violence, repression, and the limits imposed by revisionist or decentralized tendencies, the necessity to combine scattered fractions of revolutionary socialists within the deep sectors of the proletariat remain practical and urgent as ever.

Conditions and Rights in jails: My experiences

N. Ravi

N. Ravi is a revolutionary activist. He joined Andhra Pradesh Radical Students Union (APRSU) in 1985 while studying for a Master's of Science (Agriculture?) and became a full time activist of the Revolutionary Student Union. He was arrested in 1988 and spent a year in Musheerabad jail with TADA (Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Prevention Act) cases. After his release on bail, he joined the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi for his Ph.D. In 1998, he left his studies to join the revolutionary movement in Bihar and later Jharkhand. He worked there till 2009. He was arrested in November 2009 along with his wife, and spent nearly seven years in the prisons of Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. Upon his release in April 2016, he has been participating in democratic and progressive movements and is engaged in writing political and polemical articles from a Marxist point of view and translating books from English to Telugu and vice-versa. He was again arrested for eight months for working

in an anti-fascist organization, Forum Against Hindutva Fascist Offensive. His collection of articles on the Caste Question in India is published as a book in Telugu, English, Hindi, Punjabi, and Tamil languages. He is currently an Executive Committee member of the Former Revolutionary Students Forum.

There are about five and half lakh¹ prisoners in Indian jails. Among these prisoners, over 75% of them are under-trial prisoners. In the European countries, this figure is less than 25%. The ratio of under-trial prisoners to convicts in India is one of the highest in the world. Prisons are severely overcrowded, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra. The occupancy in these jails is nearly 125–140% beyond their capacity. An overwhelming proportion of the prisoners belong to Dalit, Adivasi, OBC,² and minority communities.³

The slow judicial process is the main reason behind the large number of under-trials. Due to overcrowding the prisons are beset with the problem of poor sanitation and hygiene conditions.

Medical facilities in prisons are understaffed and under-resourced. Many prisoners die due to delayed medical treatment. Custodial torture and abuse by prison staff remain widespread despite legal prohibitions. Illegal punishments (solitary confinement, beatings) are quite common. Bribery is often demanded for basic facilities, relatively better placement in the barracks, visits from relatives, etc.

Weaker prisoners additionally suffer from abuse from the goons, mafia gangs etc., who enjoy special privileges by bribing the jail officials.

These are the general conditions that prevail in Indian prisons.

Let me now describe these issues based on my personal experience. I have spent eight years in prisons in Musheerabad, Hazaribagh, Charlapally, Visakhapattanam, Tenughat and Khammam⁴ as an under-trial Maoist

¹ 1 lakh = 100,000—Material

² Other backward class—Material

³ (National Crime Record Bureau. *Prison Data from NCRB: Year and State-wise Number Undertrial and Convicted Prisoners, Prison Capacity and Occupancy Ratio*, <https://dataful.in/datasets/19004>).

⁴ Musheerabad district jail (demolished in the 1990s) and the newly constructed

prisoner in 1988–1989, 2009–2016, 2019–2020. Except for a few months in Tenughat sub-jail in Jharkhand's Bokaro district and for two weeks in Khammam district jail in Telangana, I was always kept in single cells and the infamous Anda cell⁴ (in Hazaribagh) [See below]. I have observed various prison conditions, though I do not have much direct experience of general barrack life.

Here one has to say that there are certain differences in the prison conditions for political prisoners and for other prisoners. I will attempt to present a picture of both.

As far as food and other jail facilities are concerned, the conditions are similar. Political prisoners—especially the senior ones—face many restrictions regarding their movement in the jail. Their contact with other prisoners is often severely restricted. However, they are generally treated with respect by the fellow inmates and jail officials as they often lead struggles for the improvement of prison conditions such as better food, medical care, and premature release of convicts, etc.

During my first stint in Musheerabad jail during 1988–1989, I was kept in cells along with other political prisoners. At that time newspapers were provided, but many parts were redacted—especially news related to jails or the Naxalite movement. During interviews with relatives and friends, special branch police personnel would stand beside us listening to the conversation. We were allowed only two books at a time for reading. Despite the Supreme Court rulings forbidding it, we were handcuffed when taken to courts.

In 1994, Naxalite prisoners led a state-wide hunger strike that lasted for 58 days (December 26, 1994 to February 21, 1995) with 32 demands regarding callous conditions of the jails and 11 political demands. A strong solidarity movement was built outside also by the Struggle Committee to Defend Prisoners Rights led by now deceased Professor G. N. Saibaba and others. Various mass organizations joined and conducted various solidarity programs. Relay hunger strikes, where people sat on a hunger strike daily, were continuously held in Hyderabad and other cities as long as the hunger strikes in the jails continued. Seeing that the prisoners are not budging, government bowed to the pressure and accepted the demands.

Charlapally Central jail are in Hyderabad, Telangana. Hazaribagh and Tenughat jails are in Jharkhand and Visakhapatnam jail is in Andhra Pradesh.

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Many convicts were released through a special government order after a Sentence Review Board was constituted and recommended the pre-mature release of prisoners who fulfilled certain conditions like minimum number of years spent in prison etc. Censorship of the newspaper, eavesdropping at the interviews stopped. Food allowance were increased. Naxalites prisoners were allotted separate barracks and kitchens, which allowed them to focus on political studies, discussions, etc. These improvements lasted nearly a decade. However, due to the decline in the revolutionary movement in the then united Andhra Pradesh and later in the twin Telugu states⁵ and the decrease in Naxalite prisoners, the jail authorities gradually revoked these facilities. Now, every time, one is forced to fight for basic rights like medical care, books, etc. Sometimes, one is forced to fight it out in the courts and take orders from the courts. Recently in Charlapally jail, on behalf of comrade Amitab Bagchi (72), lawyers had to file a petition in the High Court to direct the jail officials to take him to hospital as his long incarceration for 16 years as an under-trial prisoner took its toll on his eyesight and hearing. Likewise, jail authorities even denied dictionaries as part of the harassment and they were only allowed after a court order.

Conditions in Jharkhand Jails

From my personal experience, I can write about the conditions in Jharkhand prisons. In Jharkhand jails there is much overcrowding. Therefore as soon as a new prisoner comes (interestingly called “naya aamad” meaning new income) he or she is asked to cough up money to the prisoner warder of the *aamad* ward. (Generally repeat offenders or regular jail birds are made prisoner warders of the *aamad* wards. They have to regularly pay a commission to the jailer or head warder for getting this coveted post). If the new inmates are from relatively middle class backgrounds and don't cough up the money, then they are allotted beds near the toilets and made to clean them. In Tenughat jail, the prisoner warder along with his goon friends beat the new inmates and threaten them on the first day itself and made to call their families to deposit money in the given bank accounts. The amount varies depending on their assessment of the finan-

⁵ After nearly about one and half decades of struggle for a separate state of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh state was divided into two states: Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

cial condition of the newcomers. Prison authorities ignore this, as they get their monthly commission. This is more or less the case in all the jails in Bihar and Jharkhand.

That was the prevailing situation when I was taken to that jail in January 2014. So, we, the Naxalite prisoners, decided to end this practice. It was routine matter for Naxalite prisoners to meet daily during lunch hour or otherwise. One day we decided upon the next course of action. So, the next day when all prisoners gathered for taking food, we announced that we are going to teach these goons a lesson and asked all to join us. We went to the yard where those goons were resting and we beat them. Within minutes, siren was sounded and security guards from outside the prison rushed inside to lathi-charge⁶ and to disperse all.

The beating of the new inmates stopped, but the administration and the goons found new ways of extortion after some time.

Food quality in Jharkhand prisons is generally very poor. There is a lot of corruption here. Though by law the prisoners have to be given meat once a week, it is never provided. In the name of providing special food on the occasion of Durga Puja (Dussehra), Holi, and Sankranthi, (Hindu festivals), Ramzan (Ramadan), and Christmas prisoners are asked to sign away their weekly meat allowance in exchange for occasional special meals. But there is a huge gap in the costs involved in providing the special food twice or thrice a year and the weekly meat provision.⁷ In fact there is also directive by the Bihar government against this practice. But this goes on with impunity, violating the directive. We had to take up a hunger strike to stop the reduction of the weekly meat to once a month prior to the festival. General prisoners were not strong enough to insist on it. As we were confined to Anda cell, there were limitations in organizing them. Ultimately, we succeeded in securing weekly meat for those in Anda cell and other solitary cells. The authorities continued cutting down the meat provision for the general prisoners.

The general quality of the food is very poor. Dal and curry are watery. In central prisons, generally sufficient quantity of rice is provided. But in

⁶ A coordinated baton charge—*Material*

⁷ Generally, only family members can deposit money. Sometimes, when the conditions are favourable and the movement outside can provide some money, it still must be deposited only by family members.

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Tenughat, one has to fight daily even for rice. When we confronted the superintendent regarding this and regarding the general quality and quantity of the food, he was so shameless to say that he had to give five lakh rupees⁷ in bribes to the higher authorities to stop his transfer from there, at the far end of his career. Therefore, he had to earn that amount from somewhere, apart from monthly fixed amounts he had to give to the higher-ups.

The Tenughat superintendent openly admitted this fact, and it is the case almost in all the jails.

In Hazaribagh jail, the milk used to make tea was made of very cheap milk powder, perhaps only manufactured only for use in jails. There was a directive regarding this that only milk or milk made of Amul (the brand of a quasi-government cooperative milk federation) milk powder had to be used. When we, in Anda cell went on a hunger strike in 2011 for three-four days on some other pressing demands, one of our demands was that the directive be implemented. From then on they had to shift to providing proper milk for tea, as well as curd.

Another huge source of income for the jail officials is stealing the convicts' wages. They are never given their full, entitled wages. Even when they are given some of their wages, they have to bribe the officials. The wages to be given to the convicts are not regularly increased as per the Supreme Court judgement that dictated that the minimum wages prescribed to the workers outside must be given to the prisoners depending on whether they are skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled, etc., after the deducting the overall expenditure incurred by the jail department per person. Minimum wages outside are increased after worker struggles once every few years. But the wages of prisoners are not increased correspondingly.⁸

It is a general rumor that the contractor who supplies provisions to the jails in Jharkhand can get even jailors and superintendents transferred if they don't fall in line. However, it usually never comes to that as they enjoy mutually beneficial "arrangements."

Common Features Across Indian Jails

There are some common features in all the jails of India, as they basically follow the British era jail manual and the feudal practices established

⁸ An average unskilled worker gets Rs. 500 daily wage. This amount represents more than two and a half years of earnings of an unskilled worker.

at that time by the colonizers and their puppets. In the Telugu state jails, all new entrants are asked to stand in line, and the superintendent comes for inspection. At that time, prisoners are told to stand barefoot. Only the “Naxalite” prisoners do not obey this feudalistic practice. The submission of the prisoner to the authority starts from there. Even though the under-trials are only accused persons and not convicts, jail authorities view them as only criminals. By law, under-trials should not be assigned any work. But they are engaged in all types of cleaning works in the jails. Only for certain kinds of jobs they are paid. But they are just paid as per the whims and fancy of the jail authorities. No system is followed for that.

In the Telugu states, every morning the superintendent goes to visit all the barracks. During this “round,” prisoners can air their grievances also, regarding their cases, medical condition if any, etc. They also inspect for the cleanliness of the barracks and toilets etc. But in Jharkhand jails there was never ever any such “rounds.” So prisoners do not get to air their grievances. It is nearly impossible to get audience with the superintendent or jailor. Sometimes we had to refuse to take food even to visit the jailor/superintendent, even though it is clearly stated in the jail manual that it is the duty of the superintendent to go for a daily round. Tenughat sub-jail, and sub-jails in general in Jharkhand, used to be very filthy, sometimes with the overflowing sewage. Superintendent never set foot in the barracks and the yard for inspection. We had to force the jailor to come and take a look at the conditions. Only then it was repaired.

Medical Facilities

Every jail has a hospital, but there is always a paucity of funds for the medicines. After the formation of Telangana, the budget allocated for medicines and supplies in jails was drastically cut down. Only a meagre INR⁹ 2000 (USD 70) per day is allotted towards medical expenses for all the inmates in Charlapally central jail, which houses 1500-2000 prisoners. Many inmates suffer from diabetes, high blood pressure etc. who need daily medication. Apart from them, there are outpatients. Superintendents also urged us to fight with the government for more allocation of funds or file petitions in courts.

⁹ Indian Rupees.—*Material*

In Jharkhand jails, the situation is far worse. Many sub-jails¹⁰ have no doctors. In Tenughat jail, where I was stationed for some time, an RMP (Registered Medical Practitioner) lifer convict was the in-charge doctor. He was not even a medically qualified and legally registered RMP. He could however treat the patients for all minor ailments, and he was indispensable. Therefore, when a Government Order was issued by the Jharkhand government after a hunger strike by the lifers (and a bandh call—a general strike—was made by the CPI(Maoist) in support of it in 2014), for the release of convicts who were qualified and recommended by the board constituted for that purpose, the superintendent did not recommend him, though he was more than qualified.

Prisoners have to be taken to outside hospital for treatment when treatment cannot be done in the jail hospital. Some criminal Dons, or bosses, misuse this provision to bribe the doctors and other officials and go out in the name of treatment and enjoy luxurious lives in the outside hospitals. Bihar and Jharkhand high courts ruled that a medical board has to be constituted to recommend treatment outside. These Dons circumvent this provision relatively easily though they now had to bribe more persons. However, this made the life tougher for the general prisoners. A medical board could not easily be assembled as the doctors in the outside hospitals were already overburdened with their work there. Even when they recommend outside treatment, there was a problem of the provision of an escort. Escort police had to be provided by the general police and not the jail officials. Sometimes, escort police were not provided for months. For Naxalite prisoners this was much harder as they are supposed to get more “secure escort.” In one such instance, we had to go on hunger strike for three days demanding that a “Naxalite” prisoner be taken to hospital. Only then was she taken to the hospital. Sometimes, we in Anda cells had to go on hunger strike to be taken to the jail hospital as well.

In another instance one general prisoner in Tenughat jail was taken to an outside hospital and a catheter was inserted into his urethra. He was

¹⁰ There are central, district, and sub-jails. There are 2-5 central jails in each state depending on the size of the state. Convicted prisoners with more than seven years sentence are kept here. Those under-trial prisoners and prisoners with lighter sentence belonging to the districts where these jails are situated are also placed here. Each district has a district jail. There are a few sub-jails within every district where local offenders with minor felonies are placed.

asked to come again after 15 days for removal. Meanwhile, Assembly elections were declared in Jharkhand and for almost two months no escort was provided.¹¹ He had to walk around carrying that urine bag. He could have been taken to the hospital with prison security staff as they do in case of emergencies. But the superintendent did not provide that escort. Such are the pathetic medical conditions prevailing, especially in Jharkhand jails.

Situation in Anda Cells

Anda cells are prisons within prisons. They got this name because of their egg shape. There are certain differences in the structure of Anda cells in different jails. These Anda cells gained notoriety throughout India and afar after G. N. Saibaba¹² was incarcerated in them.

These cells in egg-shaped barracks are a closed structure. There is a grate above, in the small open space in front of the cells. As a 'Maoist' leader, I was directly taken to the Anda cell on my second day of entry into the jail, after spending the first night in the *Aamad* ward. Throughout my incarceration in Hazaribagh Jayaprakash Narayan central prison, I was kept only in an Anda cell.

There were no fans in Anda cells or, for that matter, in any cells in Jharkhand prisons. There was no scope for any cross ventilation in Anda cells. It was unbearable in summers. There was no sunlight in winters. We went on hunger strike demanding that fans be provided in cells on par with other barracks. Deputy Inspector General of Jails from Ranchi, the state capital, visited Hazaribagh jail. He argued that there was the risk of committing suicides in cells if ceiling fans were provided. Then we brought

¹¹ Prisons do not have exclusive security personnel for escorting prisoners to hospitals or courts. They depend on the general police, and the police claim staffing shortages on the pretext that they are providing security for the elections.

¹² G. N. Saibaba was a former professor of English at Delhi University and a prominent civil liberties activist. He was known for his outspoken criticism of state policies, especially in relation to tribal rights, militarisation, and dissent. Despite being over 90% physically disabled and dependent on a wheelchair, he was arrested in 2014 under the UAPA [Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act] and later sentenced to life imprisonment, a case that drew widespread national and international concern over human rights, due process, and the treatment of disabled prisoners. He was later acquitted of all charges by the High Court of Nagpur, Maharashtra. But the long prison life took its toll on his health and he passed away in a hospital while undergoing treatment within a year of his release.

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to his notice that in the prisons of Andhra Pradesh, ceiling fans are indeed provided in cells also and that if they are so apprehensive about that then they could as well provide wall fans. Finally they accepted all our demands. From then on, fans were provided in all the cells in Hazaribagh and later throughout the Jharkhand jails.

Visitations

Prisoners have a right to visitations by relatives and friends. Under-trial prisoners are entitled for one visit per week and convicted prisoners for one visit per fifteen days. Hazaribagh prison has perhaps the worst facility for these visitations. There were only two windows with two three layers of iron meshes. Visitation was permitted only from 8 AM to 12 Noon. Within these four hours of time nearly 150 to 200 hundred prisoners have to complete their conversations through those two windows. So, at any time, fifteen to twenty people would be standing on both the sides of the windows and keep shouting so that something is audible to their near and dear ones. After repeated fight with the jail authorities they extended the time of visitation up to 4 PM. The requests to increase the space and windows did not yield any result. They typically came up with the answer that the jail is up for renovation, which never materialized due to red-tapism and some legal hurdles.

Though it is clearly mentioned in the prison manuals and pronounced in various judgements that family and friends can visit the prisoners, authorities in various states issue orders restricting these visitations in the name of security.

Literature and Letters

Many jails are notorious for not delivering letters to and from prisoners. Though there are many judgements about giving any non-proscribed books to prisoners, they do not always follow these rules and judgements, especially in the case of Naxalite prisoners. For one year, I was in Charlapally prison, in Hyderabad while my wife, B. Anuradha, was in Hazaribagh prison. Naturally we wrote letters to one another, always taking care to register-post them so that we could track them. Initially, in Hazaribagh prison either they were not posting her letters or not delivering my letters

to her. The books I sent her were also not given to her. Then she filed a petition in the Sessions court (District courts) regarding this violation of her rights and also went on hunger strike for three days demanding that the books and letters be given to her. When the judge ruled in her favor, the jail authorities started to deliver every letter and book.

In Jharkhand and Bihar, general police conduct raids on jails to confiscate illegal mobile phones, etc. In one such raids, the police took away all my letter correspondence, other written records, and court judgements etc. Immediately, the next day, we protested by observing a day's hunger strike and also wrote petitions to the High Court, Human Rights Commissions, etc. They had to return every single paper confiscated after Human Rights Commission ordered the Superintendent of Police of Hazaribagh to return them.

Handcuffing

There are explicit Supreme Court rulings that the prisoners shall not be handcuffed while transporting them from or to court or hospital. But the police, as well as the jail authorities, and even the judiciary do not care at all about these rulings, which constitutes the law of the land. We petitioned the courts to implement the Supreme Court judgements. Only then, they stopped handcuffing us.

Thus, in our experience we had to take recourse with hunger-strikes on many issues from time to time and also file petitions in the courts to fight for our rights. Sometimes we just wrote slogans on papers and held them aloft in the court premises to catch people's attention. "Prison Rights" published by the Human Rights Law Network¹³ and various judgements by high courts and supreme courts and circulars (Government Orders) by the governments aided us in our fight. We also had to try to mobilize outside support, as well as the help of the media for the struggles. Only then we could we be successful in our struggles for our rights.

There is a saying in Jharkhand jails that "*jail kaa kanoon dhain din kaa*": rules in prisons only last for 2, 3 days. Prisoners' rights are also won

¹³ Human Rights Law Network (HRLN) is an NGO founded in 1989 by a small group of concerned lawyers and social activists. Today, HRLN is considered the India's leading public interest law group, with a national network of more than 200 lawyers, paralegals, and social activists in 26 states/Union Territories.

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and lost depending on the officials, prisoners, and their strength, etc. One needs to constantly keep fighting for them.

Excerpts from Rosa Luxemburg's Prison Letters (1904–1918)¹

To Karl Kautsky

Zwickau Prison, 1904.

Dear Carolus:

Thanks for the information. I, too, had not expected much from the Press Committee.² I shall now refrain for the present from publishing the article, for I can well understand that a press discussion can't be conducted adequately from the prison cell. There is one thing, though, that I want to urge most earnestly upon you: write a few words to [Georgi] Plekhanov³ (his address, if necessary, is to be found in my home), in order to inform him as to the fate of the article; he is waiting for its publication. Will you do that? Thank you in advance! Reassure him that later, when I am free

¹ The first letters below are taken from an anthology edited by Luise Kautsky, *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky from 1896 to 1918*, translated and published in English in New York by Robert M. McBride & Co. in 1925. The letter to Sophie Liebknecht dated November 21, 1916, is taken from the compilation *Letters From Prison* produced by the Publishing House of the Young International in 1923. As for the remaining letters, they are from various other sources, including Soviet ones.—*Material*.

² Press committee of *Vorwärts*.—Louise Kautsky. [*Vorwärts* (*Forward*) was the official newspaper of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD).—*Material*.]

³ One of the founders of the Russian Social-Democratic party.—Louise Kautsky.

again, we shall certainly find an opportunity to raise the whole question and to say the right thing in our press. (Tell him, too, that the executive committee of the party is on *our* side.)

So you now have other fights to fight! I am quite happy about this, for it shows that these dear people felt our victory in Amsterdam quite severely. As far as I can judge the situation, they intend to have their revenge at Bremen—and that is a broth that we shall salt good and hard for them! That’s why I am vexed at your envying me the cell. I don’t doubt but that you will hit Kurt,⁴ George⁵ & co. quite thoroughly on their so-called heads. But you must do it with spirit and joy and not as though it were a bothersome *intermezzo*, for the public always senses the spirit of the combatants, and the joy of battle gives resonance to a controversy and ensures moral superiority. To be sure, you are now quite alone, as I observe; August⁶ will surely remain in the vineyard of the Lord till Point 18, and Arthur dear and Pauly dear⁷ are “elegiac,” as you put it. Would that thunder and lightning struck them seven fathoms deep into the ground, if they can still be “elegiac” after such a congress!!—between two battles, when one is happy to be alive! Carl, this present “brawl” is certainly not a forced skirmish, fought out in the gray atmosphere of listlessness, such as you have been compelled to fight many a time in recent years! The interest of the masses is astir again; I feel it even here, penetrating through the prison walls. And don’t forget that the Internationale is now looking with bated breath upon us—I should rather say, upon you, for the starting point of the whole controversy is Amsterdam. I am writing you all this not to stir you up to rebellion—I am not so devoid of good taste as all that, but rather to make you *happy* at the controversy, or at least to transmit *my* joy to you, for here in No. 7 I can’t do much with that commodity.

Do you know, I have thought a great deal about Amsterdam, about the general position of the international movement and the prospects of our Marxism in the Internationale.⁸ There is so much to say to you about it, but that must wait. The moral of the whole story for me is this: there is an im-

⁴ Kurt Eisner, later premier of the short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic.—Louise Kautsky.

⁵ George Gradnauer, Saxon socialist leader.—Louise Kautsky.

⁶ August Bebel.—Louise Kautsky.

⁷ Arthur Stadthagen and Paul Singer.—Louise Kautsky.

⁸ This is the Second International, which was a Federation of socialist and labor parties existing between 1889 and 1916.—*Material*.

Excerpts From Rosa Luxemburg's Prison Letters

mense amount of work *to do* and especially an immense amount to *study*—I mean the movement in the different countries. I have a feeling that we (the Germans) will gain a supremacy and influence even by the mere *knowledge* of the movement in the other countries; and on the other hand I feel that we shall strengthen our position (in the narrower sense) within the *German* movement by our very approach to the Internationale. In a word, I am happy to be alive.

Please send me your articles, *but in the form of clippings*. I am sure that Clara is not “elegiac” but appreciates her contact with you and me. Both of you will have hot days ahead in Bremen. Do arrive at an understanding with her in time; one can depend on her. I should so much like to have a letter from *her*. *À propos* of the 4th Volume,⁹ when will it appear? You see, I should like to write a review of it; a number of thoughts about this material are crowding into my head.

And now to you, dearest Luise, or rather, now only to you, for this whole letter is for you too. Oftentimes you understand my mood better and more quickly (if there is anything to “understand”). There was so much I wanted to write, and yet I must be so brief! Well then, only this much, that your letters put me in the sunniest frame of mind. Thank you a thousand times for every word. You are giving me such a vivid picture of your surroundings! Send the heartiest letters from me to Holland. Write often, but only when you *like* to—don't force yourself to. I kiss you all and the boys. Greetings to Granny.

Your
Rosa.

[P.S.] Louise dear, write to Troelstra¹⁰ and tell him that I shall embrace the first opportunity to visit Frau Sjoukje¹¹ when we get there. You may

⁹ Kautsky was at that time preparing the fourth volume of Marx's *Capital*.—Luise Kautsky.

¹⁰ Pieter Jelles Troelstra was the founder of the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP) (Netherlands). As a leader of the Dutch socialist movement, he is known for his failed 1918 attempt at insurrection (dubbed the “Troelstra's Mistake”) and his advocacy for parliamentary reform.—*Material*.

¹¹ Troelstra's first wife.—Louise Kautsky. [Sjoukje Bokma de Boer is better known by her pen name, Nienke van Hichtum. She was a Dutch children's author and prominent socialist activist.—*Material*.

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send a photograph perfectly safely. Write me two words immediately from Bremen¹² as to what the situation there is.

To the Editors of the *Neue Zeit*

Barnim Street Jail

Berlin, December 25, 1915.

Comrades: In February Franz Mehring¹³ will be 70 years old. I should like to ask whether you would like to have me write a short article of about 1½ printed pages, for this occasion and how long before I should have to send it in?¹⁴ I cannot send this inquiry openly to you, since the article would have to be in your hands before my liberation [February 18, 1916] and I am anxious to publish it without having it censored here. (It would appear, of course, only after my return to freedom).

For this reason I request you to send me the reply by the same route.

With socialist greetings,

Rosa Luxemburg.

To the Editors of the *Neue Zeit*

Barnim Street Jail

Berlin, January 6, 1916.

Comrades: I am engaged in writing a counter-criticism in defense of my book on “Accumulation” and should like to ask whether you would be ready to publish this work as a supplement to the *N. Z.*,¹⁵ especially since it is in the main a reply to the criticism by Otto Bauer¹⁶ published in the *N. Z.* I estimate

¹² Socialist party convention in Bremen, September 18-24, 1904.—Louise Kautsky.

¹³ Franz Mehring was a German Marxist historian, politician, and leading theorist of the SPD's left-wing. He was also co-founder of the Spartacus League alongside Rosa Luxemburg.—*Material*.

¹⁴ The editors had already arranged with Eduard Bernstein about a birthday article for Mehring, and it was Bernstein who wrote it.—Louise Kautsky.

¹⁵ The *Neue Zeit*.—*Material*.

¹⁶ One of the best known present leaders in the socialist movement of German Austria. Foreign minister in one of the early cabinets following the revolution.—Robert M. McBride.

that it will be 4–5 printer's sheets long. My observations will be conveyed in the most popular manner possible, without any mathematical schemes and will be calculated to give the wider public an idea of the problems involved and an insight into their practical, political significance. At the same time I should like to request you kindly to inform me how much time, in that case, I should have in which to furnish the manuscript so that it may reach you in time for the next supplement.¹⁷

With socialist greetings
R. Luxemburg.

To Luise Kautsky

Barnim Street Jail
Berlin, September 13, 1916.

Carissima,¹⁸

I really don't know where my thoughts are to look for you now (your last sending bore the postmark Krummhübel¹⁹). In any case I trust these lines will reach you.

Your birthday greeting on the 11.8 [August 8th]. brought me rather sad joy: for the first time I could not even send you a letter; I am permitted to write but two letters monthly, added to which is the time it takes for them to travel—four days to three weeks—I hope you have gained something out of your summer and have recuperated nicely.

¹⁷ The editors replied as follows:

To Mrs. Dr. R. Luxemburg.

Berlin, January 6, 1916.

Dear Comrade Rose:

The publishers have informed us during the summer of this year that, in order to keep down expenses, we may no longer print supplements, nor are we to exceed 32 pages per number—which hardly gives us space to discuss the questions of the day thoroughly. Under these circumstances it is unfortunately impossible for us to publish as extensive a contribution as you offer us. As to what the conditions with reference to space will be after the war, that, of course, it is impossible to foretell now. With friendly greetings on behalf of the editors of the N. Z.

E. Wurm.—Luise Kautsky.

¹⁸ Italian for "dearest."—*Material.*

¹⁹ Today known as Karpacz, this Polish town located in Silesia (Śląsk in Polish, and formerly a German territory) was well known as a prominent spa resort.—*Material.*

I now have a request to make. You know about the Korolenko translation on which I am at work.²⁰ Could you look about for a publisher? I am hardly in a position to stir here. Dietz²¹ has declined, just as I expected. There remain therefore only bourgeois publishers or possibly the *Neue Welt*²² or Döscher in the *Vorwärts*. Turn in my name to whomever you consider best (only not to Diedrichs²³ in Jena). For your information the following: the exact title is *A History of My Contemporary*. In reality it is an autobiography of Korolenko, an excellent work of art, at the same time a first-rate cultural and historic document; it embraces the period of liberal reforms under Alexander II,²⁴ the Polish uprising, the first oppositional and revolutionary stirrings in Russia, and thus reflects the transition from the old feudal Russia to the present capitalistic. Moreover, the scene is laid in Volhynia,²⁵ in other words, in the western border provinces, where Russian, Polish and Ruthenian²⁶ elements make a curious mixture. Size 28 printer's sheets. Hannes Diefenbach²⁷ acted as godfather to the first chapters. I know that he would be pleased. Ask him whether it is possible to send him the continuation out to the front, i.e., whether between his ever equally victorious spring and autumn offensives and defensives he would

²⁰ Vladimir Korolenko (1853-1921) was a Russian-Ukrainian humanist writer and Narodnik (agrarian socialist, "populist") activist. While imprisoned in 1918, Luxemburg translated Vladimir Korolenko's *A History of My Contemporary* from Russian into German.—*Material*.

²¹ Constantin Dietz (1866-1942) was a German social-democratic printer and publisher.—*Material*.

²² The *Neue Welt* ("New World") was a German socialist publishing house and periodical associated with the SPD.—*Material*.

²³ Diederichs Verlag was founded by Eugen Diedrich and operated in the Thuringian city of Jena.—*Material*.

²⁴ Alexander II (1818-1881), known as the "Czar Liberator," was the emperor of Russia who emancipated the serfs in 1861. However, he was later assassinated by revolutionary populists (the aforementioned "Narodniks") for refusing to grant a constitution.—*Material*.

²⁵ Volhynia is a historic region in Eastern Europe, spanning parts of modern-day Ukraine, Poland, and Belarus.—*Material*.

²⁶ Ukrainian.—*Material*.

²⁷ Hannes (or "Hans") Diefenbach (1884-1917) was a German physician and close friend of Rosa Luxemburg who was killed in action during World War I. His death profoundly affected Luxemburg, who maintained a deep intellectual and emotional correspondence with him throughout her imprisonment.—*Material*.

find leisure to read this thing and of course to return it soon. You see, I have great respect for his literary taste, and for him it would be a change from his rough warrior's task. Write soon, for then I shall receive the letter "in due time." I embrace you and send many greetings to all Hans-es, including the young painter and your boys.

Your Rosa.

[P.S.] Many thanks to Hannes for the *Triumphgasse*.²⁸ What is his address, anyway, I have already forgotten it.

To Luise Kautsky

Wronke²⁹ Prison

Undated, with the official mark, "seen D.7.2."

Dearest Lulu³⁰:

So you are quiet and cheerful again, I hope. With sympathetic understanding you have felt my pronounced sensitiveness, and I thank you for it. I have, as a matter of fact, become somewhat like a human being without skin: I shudder at every shadow that falls upon me. It seems that the year in Barnim street, then the four months of frantic work and now again seven months of solitude in various stages have not passed by without leaving their mark.

Do you know what idea is now pursuing and frightening me? I imagine to myself that I am about to go into a gigantic hall filled to overflowing, that the strong light, the babel of voices of the multitude strike me, and that the usual thunderous applause greets and accompanies me as I make my way toward the platform—and I have the feeling that I shall suddenly take French leave! I am seized with a *horror pleni*³¹ and even the prospect of sitting together with five or six friends and of possibly having to hear loud laughter is depressing. Oh, you have no idea what a torture it was, when after the year in Barnim street I had to receive 80 (literally 80) persons on the very first day and say a

²⁸ A novel by Ricarda Huch.—Luise Kautsky.

²⁹ Today spelled Wronki, in Polish.—*Material*.

³⁰ Luise Kautsky.—*Material*.

³¹ Latin for "fear of fullness," describing Luxemburg's feeling of being suffocated by an accumulation of tasks and social obligations.—*Material*.

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few words to each one of them. The memory of my cell seemed like a paradise to me. And now additional seven months have been loaded onto me.

But that makes no difference! I hope this fear will leave me, especially when warm weather sets in and spring comes at last. And it is then, precisely, that I want to see you here—in May. I am making a certain very definite calculation in connection therewith, which will surely meet with your approval, after once we have had a chance to talk together here. So make your arrangements accordingly.

When I am with you again, you will, as usual, take me on your lap in your large, deep chair, I shall bury my head in your shoulder, and Hans will play us the *Moonlight Sonata* or the second movement from the *Pathétique*.³² Then everything will be all right again.

A thousand thanks for what you are doing for my Korolenko. But what am I saying! Hasn't it always been self-evident that you are showing nothing but kindness to me? A hearty hug to you!

Ever and unchangeably your

R.

To Sophie Liebknecht

Wronke Prison

November 21, 1916.

My dear little Sonichka,³³

I hear from Mathilde³⁴ that your brother has been killed at the front. The idea that you have this fresh blow to endure is a great shock to me. Lately there has been one trouble after another.

And yet I cannot be with you, to cheer you up a little!... I am uneasy, too, at the thought of your mother, wondering how she will bear this new sorrow. These are sad days, and all of us have lost many of our loved ones. As during

³² *Pathétique* refers to Ludwig van Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor, Op. 13; its second movement (*Adagio cantabile*) is celebrated for its profound, lyrical beauty and sense of calm.—*Material*.

³³ Sophie Liebknecht: early member of the Communist party of Germany (KPD) and wife of Karl Liebknecht.—*Material*.

³⁴ Mathilde Jacob (1873-1943) was Rosa Luxemburg's devoted secretary and close friend.—*Material*.

the siege of Sevastopol,³⁵ every month seems a year. I do hope I shall be able to see you soon, for I am longing to do so. How did you hear about your brother; through your mother, or direct? What news of your other brother?

I did so much want to send you something by Mathilde, and I had absolutely nothing but the little colored kerchief; don't make fun of it; I only sent it to show that I love you. Write a line or two as soon as you can, to let me know you are all right.

Love to Karl and your dear self.

Your

Rosa

[P.S.] Much love to the children.

To Stefan Bratman-Brodowski^{36, 37}

Breslau Prison

September 3, 1918.

Dear Comrade,

Your note pleased me very much. At last we are gradually beginning to communicate with each other again. When will we, God willing, speak and work with each other again?!... Thank you for the presents. I am not really badly off for food, think of Leo [Jogiches]³⁸ instead, who needs it very badly. It seems to me that you could now get in touch with him,³⁹ which would certainly please him a lot. I would prefer regular news rather than

³⁵ The 1854–1855 siege of Sevastopol (the largest city of the Crimean peninsula) was the centerpiece of the Crimean War, where Allied forces (French, Sardinian, Ottoman, and British) captured the strategic Russian port after a full year of brutal trench warfare and heavy bombardment.—*Material*.

³⁶ Stefan Bratman-Brodowski (1880–1937) was a Polish-Jewish revolutionary and diplomat who served as a close associate of Rosa Luxemburg in the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL).—*Material*.

³⁷ Originally written in Polish. Published in Moscow by Feliks Tych in *Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung (IWK)*, September 1991, II.3, 360.—*IWK*.

³⁸ Leo Jogiches (1867–1919) was a Polish-Jewish revolutionary and the longtime political partner and former romantic companion of Rosa Luxemburg.—*Material*.

³⁹ Probably via Mathilde Jacob, Rosa Luxemburg's secretary.—*IWK*.

food—all kinds: about the Beki,⁴⁰ about our people and their work (what you hear about) and also about the situation in Switzerland [everything] which one cannot find out from the press. I am very interested in as lively as possible contact with what is going on and it is sometimes most difficult to get information from the (geographically) nearest sources,⁴¹ partly because there are only a few people and they are terribly busy, but mostly because they are fools and daydreamers (I am referring to the Germans).

On what terms are our people now with the left PPS [Polish Socialist Party]?⁴² Something surprises me: at the beginning of the war inasmuch as I spoke to Walecki,⁴³ it seemed to me that there were almost no differences (between us and them), I thought that the war situation would even hasten a convergence. Meanwhile comrades from Poland (or also from Russia) write to me that they have drifted apart from the Left [PPS] who are completely disorientated. What do you know about it[?] In any case, give my greetings to Walecki.

Stand your ground, till we meet again at work! A warm handshake.

RL

[P.S.] It would also interest me if you could supply me with interesting items being published in Switzerland when it is convenient.

I would like to know what role Robert Grimm,⁴⁴ the *Nationalrat*,⁴⁵ is

⁴⁰ Bolsheviks.—*Material*.

⁴¹ Probably a reference to the Berlin Spartacus group comrades.—*IWK*.

⁴² The Left PPS originated when the PPS in Russian Poland split in 1906. The right-wing of the PPS then set up its own party under Jozef Pilsudski. Shortly before the outbreak of war fusion negotiations between the two groups were well advanced. Bratman-Brodowski led the negotiations on behalf of Social Democracy. The fusion finally came about in mid-December 1918 when both founded the Communist Party of Poland.—*IWK*.

⁴³ Maksymilian Horwitz-Walecki (1877-1937) a key left PPS leader who discussed with Rosa Luxemburg the fusion of the two Polish Parties at Berlin in 1914 and 1915.—*IWK*.

⁴⁴ Robert Grimm (1881-1958) Chairman of the Swiss Social Democracy and from 1911 a deputy in the National Assembly. During World War I he led the International Socialist Commission in Berne (i.e., the Zimmerwald movement).—*IWK*.

⁴⁵ *Nationalrat* is the German word for a Swiss National Deputy. Why Rosa Luxemburg wished to stress this is unknown.—*IWK*.

playing at present. Can one still count on him? How do the Swiss (lefts like Platten & Co.⁴⁶) view the politics of the Beki?

To Adolf Warski⁴⁷

Berlin,

End of November or beginning of December 1918.

When our party (in Poland) is full of enthusiasm for Bolshevism and at the same time (in a secretly printed pamphlet) has come out against both the Bolsheviks' Brest peace⁴⁸ and their agitation with the slogan of "national self-determination" then it is enthusiasm coupled with a critical spirit—what more could we desire! I too shared all your reservations and doubts but on the most important questions have dropped them and in many cases have not gone as far as you. Terrorism certainly indicates weakness but it is aimed at internal enemies who build their hopes on the existence of capitalism outside Russia and receive support and encouragement from there. If a European revolution comes, then the Russian counter-revolutionaries will not only lose their support but—what is more important—their courage too. In other words the Bolshevik terror is, above all, an expression of the weakness of the European proletariat. Indeed the agrarian relationships [in Russia] which have been established are the most dangerous, the sorest point of the Russian revolution. But here too the truth holds good—that even the greatest revolution can only accomplish what development has ripened. This sore point too can only be healed through the European revolution. And this is coming!...

⁴⁶ This refers to the Swiss socialist Fritz Platten and his associates, who famously organized the "sealed train" that transported Lenin and other revolutionaries from Switzerland through Germany to Russia in 1917.—*Material*.

⁴⁷ Originally written in Polish. Related by Adolf Warski in Rosa Luxemburg's *Position on the Tactical Problems of the Revolution*, Hamburg 1922, 6–7.—*IWK*.

⁴⁸ The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was the 1918 separate peace agreement between the new Soviet government and the Central Powers, which ended Russia's participation in World War I at the cost of massive territorial concessions.—*Material*.

material

To Vladimir Ilyich Lenin⁴⁹

Berlin,

December 20, 1918.

My dearest Vladimir,

I am making use of the journey of uncle⁵⁰ to send you all warmest greetings from our family, [The Spartakusbund] from Karl [Liebnecht], Franz [Mehring] and the others. May God grant that the coming year will fulfill all our wishes.

All the best!

Uncle will tell you about our circumstances and activities. In the meantime I press your hands and send you my greetings.

Rosa

⁴⁹ Originally written in Russian. Published in *Pravda*, 2 February 1919.—IWK.

⁵⁰ Eduard Fuchs (1870–1940) was instructed by the headquarters of the Spartakusbund [Spartacus League] to get directly in touch with Lenin and other influential representatives of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) and the Soviet state. He offered his services because during the war he had met Lenin several times in Switzerland, had his confidence, and had been entrusted by the Soviet government with the function of Civil Commissioner for the Russian prisoners of war in Germany. Using this mission he traveled to Soviet Russia where he spoke with Lenin between the 26th and 28th December in Moscow. Edward Fuchs handed over the letter and draft program written by Rosa Luxembourg entitled *What does the Spartacusbund Want?*—IWK.

Cinema Against Confinement: The Political Prisoner in Selected Filipino Film Productions (1984–2025)

Epoy Deyto

In the context of the Philippines, the term “political prisoner” was deeply popularized at the height of the Marcos dictatorship from the 1970s to the early 1980s. The nature and condition of imprisonment, however, seems to be changing as the nature of the regime’s oppression varies. While the fundamental character from the Marcos dictatorship to the present regime remains unchanged, something peculiar as to how the phenomenon appears to us as images seems to be present.

Across Philippine cinema, political imprisonment appears not only as a legal condition but as a visual and ideological problem. From early documentary testimony during the Marcos dictatorship to contemporary films produced amid intensified counterinsurgency campaigns, images of detention reveal how the state names, frames, and disciplines dissent. This trajectory is examined through *The Politics of Detention*, a 1984 documentary released by Haring Ibon and KAPATID (Families and Friends of Political

Prisoners); *Orapronobis*, a 1989 narrative feature directed by Lino Brocka; *River of Tears and Rage*, a 2021 documentary released by Kodao Productions and directed by Maricon Montajes; and *Bloom Where You're Planted*, a 2025 feature-length documentary directed by Noni Abao. These films span four decades of political struggle and cinematic intervention.

My analysis will try to unite the images and depictions made by the above films regarding the nature of political imprisonment, particularly how the state faces its political detainees. Treatment here is seen as a superstructural symptom: How the state forces treat their political detainees reflects how the Philippines positions itself within the US-imperialist framework.

Armando Malay, one of the interviewees of *The Politics of Detention*, stated that the phenomenon of political imprisonment does not discriminate between classes and “spares no one who dares defy the US-Marcos Regime.” It is from this perspective that the documentary frames its subject matter, naming several people who have been jailed—from farmers and workers to company executives and university officials.

The first subject to be highlighted by the film is Fidel Agcaoili, a committee member of the Communist Party of the Philippines, who was the longest to be imprisoned: 10 years by the time of his interview. At the time, he was on trial for rebellion and subversion, similar to the cases of other detained members of the Communist Party, including Jose Maria Sison and Luis Jalandoni. Outside of the communists, other personages named in the documentary such as Rommel Corro (publisher of the *Philippine Times*), Horacio Morales (executive vice-president of Development Academy of the Philippines), Nemesio Prudente (president of Philippine College of Commerce), and a priest named Fr. Jose Dizon all faced similar charges.

Rebellion and subversion are charges taken as a violation of a law penned during the Cold-War-era red scare, painting communists as an “organized conspiracy to overthrow the Government of the Republic of the Philippines... for the purpose of establishing in the Philippines a totalitarian regime subject to alien domination and control.”¹ Similarly, anyone

¹ Republic Act no. 1700 of 1957, “An Act to Outlaw the Communist Party of the Philippines and Similar Associations, Penalizing Membership Therein and for Other Pur-

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who expresses anti-imperialist or anti-capitalist sentiments are painted as communists.

While being a fictional narrative, *Orapronobis* utilizes close realism to situate the context of the post-dictatorship Philippines. Fr. Jimmy Cordero (played by Philip Salvador), a political prisoner who was pardoned by the new regime, continues his activist work as a human rights advocate in light of the promises of democracy under the Corazon Aquino presidency. The film's depictions of former political prisoners reflect the kind of politics brewing at the time. Some have chosen the parliamentary side, working with concerned groups and NGOs like Jimmy, while some of his former comrades chose to pursue the militant line underground.

Jose F. Lacaba's screenplay treats the then contemporary politics of the left as they weigh their options during a moment of great political confusion. Unlike in the Marcos dictatorship, activists are not "forced" to commit to militant forms of activism under the Aquino faux democracy. The movie concludes with Jimmy deciding to participate in the underground struggle once again, after experiencing firsthand the new face of fascism after following the loss of a loved one. Militancy is not just a byproduct of necessity (as the only truly viable means against fascist oppression) but also of reason as driven by the inseparability of personal and political stakes: the militant activist as a humanist agent of history.

In this sense, depicting Jimmy the humanist (one who factors in the personal aspects of his political decision making) is an important counter-propaganda to the kind of image the enemies of the militant activist would use. Aided by "former" activists like Commander Kontra (Bembol Roco) in the film, these enemies depict activists as inhuman and sacrilegious through the semiotic legacies of the imperialist red scare and Satanic panic.

Brocka's examination of former political prisoners and how their enemies depict them in *Orapronobis* is an important precursor to more recent contemporary cinematic treatment of the subject—such as the documentary *River of Tears and Rage* directed by the former political prisoner Maricon Montajes—matter as these concerns unfold on an accelerating

poses," Supreme Court E-Library, June 20, 1957, <https://elibrary.judiciary.gov.ph/thebookshelf/showdocs/2/25077>.

scale in real life. The documentary follows detained human rights worker, Reina Mae Nasino, attending the wake and last rites of her infant, River. Montajes interestingly juxtaposes the feed from the livestream of the wake, exposing exchanges between online spectators with contrasting remarks: One side appeals for the police to respect the grieving parties, with some questioning about how the police treats the family of Nasino; the other side echoes state propaganda that casts activists as terrorists.

How the police forces treat Nasino, as captured by the documentary, can be seen as a glimpse of how the Philippine state treats political prisoners. Activists who face persecution from the state are commonly given unbailable criminal cases, such as possession of high-powered ammunition (as with the case of Nasino) or terrorist financing. Given the legal nature of the cases, the state can deny “politics” as motivation for persecution. Defense witnesses claim that the cases are trumped up from planted evidence—thus the pursuit comes not from any valid criminal claims but from the stature of the people accused as activists. Montajes was able to capture Nasino in moments of vulnerability and anger, as a mother whose unjust imprisonment led to her months of pregnancy behind bars, only to be separated forcefully despite appeals.

In recent years, the depiction of the activist—by extension the political prisoner—as painted by Philippine state propaganda has moved on from the image of the rebel, the godless heretic, towards the image of the terrorist. There is no question that the reactionary government is following the script of the imperialist US with the similar development of their boogeyman of communism. In 2025, the Philippine national budget allocated 1.95 billion pesos (33 million USD) on these campaigns through the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC)². The NTF-ELCAC couples community livelihood programs with militarized red-tagging forums, promising financial rewards to those who point out alleged “communist” fighters and sympathizers. It is within this context that we can situate the subjects of Noni Abao’s *Bloom Where You’re Planted*. Running at 80 minutes, the documentary follows two ac-

² Rainer Allan Ronda, “Proposed jump in NTF-ELCAC budget defended,” PhilStar Global, September 11, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2025/09/11/2471949/proposed-jump-ntf-elcac-budget-defended>.

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tivists dealing with state persecution and a journalist remembering a friend slain by reactionary forces. In the same spirit as the humanism in Brocka's feature and Montajes's documentary, *Bloom Where You're Planted* depicts a counternarrative against the state's claim of terrorism by highlighting the daily lives, worries, and hopes of its subjects.

With the lush and healthy lands of Cagayan Valley used as the film's background, we first follow Agnes Mesina, regional coordinator of Makabayan People's Coalition, as she carries out her activist work alongside her life as a mother and a friend. She is being pursued by the Philippine government with the charge of financing terrorism. The film then follows a peasant community organizer, Amanda Echanis, who was arrested with her one-month-old child just months after her father, agrarian-rights activist Randall Echanis, was brutally murdered. Highlighted in the film is Echanis's attempts at creative work and returning to school while still being held in pre-trial detention for the illegal possession of firearms.

Cagayan Valley is a relevant terrain of political contradictions. While the presence of organizers such as Mesina and Echanis in this part of the Philippines signals a significant reach for activist work and resistance for the benefit of the people, especially the peasantry, the state's response is further militarization and continuous NTF-ELCAC campaigns. The documentary depicts how the images of these two organizers, especially Mesina, are being branded by state operatives through scare campaigns, aligning her with communists that the Philippine government conflates with terrorism.

Across dictatorship, liberal democracy, and the present moment of intensified counterinsurgency, political imprisonment in the Philippines persists as a structural feature of governance rather than a historical aberration. These films demonstrate that the figure of the political prisoner evolves in name—from subversive, to rebel, to terrorist. The mechanisms of the name remain anchored to the same function: the neutralization of dissent that threatens entrenched power. What this cinema makes visible is not only the violence of incarceration but also the ideological work that accompanies it, shaping how repression is justified, denied, or normalized.

At the same time, these cinematic representations insist on a humanist politics that refuses the state's dehumanizing narratives. Whether through

material

Brocka's militant humanism, Montajes's intimate portrayal of grief and injustice, or Abao's attention to everyday resilience amid persecution, these films assert that political commitment is inseparable from lived experience. In foregrounding care, memory, and collective struggle, they affirm that resistance not only survive imprisonment but redefines it. The political prisoner, as rendered in these works, stands not as a symbol of defeat, but as evidence of unresolved contradictions that continue to demand historical reckoning and political change.

Regulated Filmmakers, Deregulated Film Industry: Some Problems in the Philippine Film Industry and their Solution

A. Hunt

An essay about the 2024 QCinema International Film Festival, which once again coincided with nearby housing demolitions, the film industry's growing dependence on international co-productions, screenings of censored films, Hollywood dominance of distribution, and contradictions of the industry as talked through with local film workers and organizers.

QCinema International Film Festival

After arriving in the Philippines last November to serve on the jury of QCinema International Film Festival, I learned about a series of housing demolitions in Sitio San Roque¹ that have coincided with the festival every

¹ QCinema and Sitio San Roque are located about 4 km apart in the "North Triangle" of Quezon City, the wealthiest of 16 cities in Metro Manila since 2020. It is a hub for business, retail, higher education (University of the Philippines Diliman, Ateneo, etc.), Information and Communications Technology, Philippine mass media (such as television networks ABS-CBN and GMA and all major film studios and agencies). Sitio San Roque is located on public land near numerous government agencies like

year for at least the past six years (2018–2024).²

Since 2010, the National Housing Authority and Quezon City Local Government Unit have partnered with private developer Ayala Land to destroy this longstanding urban poor community to make way for Vertis North, a “mixed-use” estate featuring luxury malls, hotels, and a resort-casino. In 2013, the first edition of QCinema took place in the first Ayala shopping mall in the area. These public-private partnerships stem from Executive Order 620-A, which authorized in 2007 the construction of the Quezon City Central Business District (QCBD), to make northern Metro Manila “globally competitive”³ and “the center of gravity of all commercial activities.” In other words, it is another World Bank economic policy for big bureaucrats and big landlords to deepen and diversify the country’s stifling dependence on foreign capital and junk imports. As the Philippines literally buys the US’s trash, foreign corporations extract the country’s largess of raw materials and export it to imperialist nations for cheap. The US maintains access to 9 military bases (and more yet, unofficially) to hoard sites of resource extraction, violently repress and surveil the countryside, and provoke war with China. In short, the semi-feudal semi-colony has been elaborately set up to produce super-profits for its prior occupier and current exploiters at a constant and growing expense to itself.

Philippine film production is also increasingly dependent on, and influenced by, outside “support.” Since COVID-19, the industry has leaned more heavily on international co-productions with Southeast Asian, East Asian, and Western countries, while its titles continue to be priced out of their own cineplexes by Hollywood movies. All but a handful of Philippine theaters today reside inside of mega malls owned by the country’s wealthiest clans: the Ayalas, the Sys, the Zobel, etc.—age-old sellouts. One of the only showcases for “independent” (let alone any) Philippine cinema, QCinema International Film Festival, was a creation of the Quezon City

the Department of Public Works and Highways, the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency and the Public-Private Partnership Center.

² Epoy Deyto, “Double Feature: QCinema and Sitio San Roque,” *missing codec*, November 9, 2023, <https://www.missingcodec.com/essay/double-feature-qcine-ma-and-sitio-san-roque/>.

³ Junior Philippine Geographical Society, “Counter-mapping: Sitio San Roque, Philippines,” *Guerilla Cartography*, June 27, 2022, <https://www.guerrillacartography.org/blog/counter-mapping-sitio-san-roque-philippines>.

Film Development Foundation and then actor-mayor Herbert Bautista. It has always necessarily aligned with the broader objective to prime the city for foreign investment and dig the dirty syringe of private enterprise deeper into the city's critical public endeavors. Today, QCinema is the premier funder and exhibitor of what is popularly considered the nation's "independent cinema," or cinema dependent on private wealth and a handful of increasingly privatized public film institutions rather than the major studios—though both sources generally stem from the same comprador ruling class and foreign capital. These include, on occasion, genuinely progressive and militant films like 2024's *Rampage (O Ang Parada)*, *Objects do not Randomly Fall From the Sky*, and *Invisible Labor*, or many works by Kiri and Sari Dalena⁴ in other years, despite ongoing red-tagging and vicious counterinsurgency. The festival is a key facilitator and symbol of the further liberalization and globalization of the Philippine film industry, as an extension of that of the city and the country at large.

As more land and property are privatized through public-private means for local and foreign elites, urban poor—often already "internally displaced" from the countryside due to state violence, US war games, and increasingly severe economic precarity due to the worsening crisis of neoliberalism—have fewer options. Internal refugees in the Philippines bear the sharpest edge of the primary contradiction between imperialism and self-determination. They are displaced internally by new development projects of the native elite, whose express purpose is to service one foreign power or another. And if they are finally pushed out of their country to an imperialist nation, they become part of the deeply exploited migrant labor that is integral to the perseverance of that imperialist nation.

Encountering these blatant contradictions as one of QCinema's foreign guests, representing their growing reach and reliance, pushed me to scrutinize the film industry I had merely planned to visit. On my three-month trip, I also witnessed the screenings of two previously censored films and the infiltration of the Metro Manila Film Festival—known for showing exclusively Philippine cinema in theaters nationwide for the only time out of the year—by Hollywood studios. Deeply informing and influencing my

⁴ For decades, the Dalena sisters have made experimental, narrative, and documentary films and art in other mediums about the National Democratic Movement and the Communist Party of the Philippines and its underground movement.

understanding of these industry shifts are the refreshing and lucid essays of film critic and professor Epoy Deyto, whose article, “Double Feature: QCinema and Sitio San Roque,” exposed me to the demolitions that recur during QCinema. He is a frequent collaborator and protege of filmmaker and film historian Nick Deocampo, whose materialist film history is essential to understanding the roots of US imperialism in the Philippine film industry and how they have evolved today. My understanding is filled out by interviews with Deyto, Mayday Multimedia Executive Director Brian Sulcipan, and Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP) Chairman Joey Reyes.

On November 8, 2024, the opening day of QCinema, the Quezon City government oversaw the demolition of around 300 family homes,⁵ not in Sitio San Roque as expected, but in the barangay⁶ Bagong Lipunan ng Crame (“New Society” of Crame). The city provided no relocation plan for the hundreds of families it displaced. Just hours after canopies displaying her name for politicians to oversee the evictions from the shade were pitched at the demolition site, Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte opened QCinema with a disclaimer: her speech would be short this year, only introducing festival partners, sponsors, and subsequent speakers. Perhaps she had come from a long day’s work.

As Deyto reminds us in the aforementioned essay,⁷ psyops “do not always need to be deliberate cover-ups or distractions.” Surplus cultural state apparatuses of comprador ruling class dictatorships always primarily serve imperialist and comprador interests, which include, consciously or not, the spectacle of ostensibly “independent” and free creative expression for the minority middle strata, distracting from the everyday economic and military violence committed against the overwhelming majority of the population.

⁵ Jayson Rubrico, “Demolisyon sa Brgy. Bagong Lipunan ng Crame, QC, nauwi sa gulo; Higit 300 pamilya, apektado,” *SMNI News Channel*, November 8, 2024, <https://smninewschannel.com/demolisyon-sa-brgy-bagong-lipunan-ng-crame-qc-nauwi-sa-gulo-higit-300-pamilya-apektado/>.

⁶ Smallest territorial and administrative district and local government unit. Fights and other neighborhood squabbles are usually mediated by the barangay captain.

⁷ Epoy Deyto, “Double Feature: QCinema and Sitio San Roque,” *missing codec*, November 9, 2023 <https://www.missingcodec.com/essay/double-feature-qcinema-and-sitio-san-roque/>.

The Executive Director of the Quezon City Film Commission (QCFC), Liza Diño-Seguerra, followed Belmonte, affirming the government film agency's

commitment to expanding QCinema beyond our local cinephiles and creating a vibrant hub for the global film industry.... We launched the QCinema project market, a fantastic platform for co-production and investment tailored to Filipino and SEA filmmakers.... We saw a significant increase in our international attendance which only fuels our passion to keep this momentum going.⁸

She went on to highlight, exhaustively, the 21 Filipino co-produced titles in that year's program (*Viet and Nam*, *Don't Cry Butterfly*, etc.), a forum for discussing "how filmmakers are merging the narrative depth of arthouse cinema with engaging structures of genre storytelling, reaching new audiences and creating films that resonate across cultural and linguistic divides" (hinting at the ways international co-productions have influenced the form and content of Philippine films to be less locally specific and more broadly appealing—often leading to a reliance on remixed genre tropes spruced up with self-orientalizing local detail). Finally, she declared the city's bid to become a UNESCO Creative City of Film, a certification that would prop a door to an allotment of the national budget and more international funding. In keeping with the theme, *Directors' Factory Philippines*, four short films produced locally in Dapitan but under the Cannes Directors' Fortnight initiative's French mentorship, opened the occasion. Neoliberalization in the name of international cooperation and ASEAN (the Southeast Asian capitalist bloc) solidarity would remain the overriding message of the festival. While the city covered the flights and lodging of festival guests like myself from around the globe, residents of Bagong Lipunan ng Crame were suddenly fending for new homes and livelihoods just a 20-minute walk away.

From this violence against the poor comes the ruling class surplus, from which a meager portion is drawn to distribute conditional resources to petty-bourgeois artists. As the film industry opens itself wider to exploitation by the world capitalist system, the already limited creative freedom of

⁸ Transcribed while attending the festival opening.

filmmakers becomes further entangled in the interests of their diversifying patrons. Many co-productions come with crew quotas, whereby the local production must hire key creative roles (producers, cinematographers, editors, etc.) from the investing countries. Throughout QCinema, filmmakers bemoaned these quotas. At best, they lead to infrastructure that might be reappropriated when the masses seize state power or relatively innocuous, fruitful cultural exchanges. At worst, they lead to the consolidation of cultural production between reactionary ruling classes and creative and practical divisions and compromises. A friend at the festival griped to me about a post-production sound crew in Taiwan who struggled to reproduce the distinct soundscape of a film set in Quiapo, a historic district in Manila—whereas the right local hire would have been more familiar and intuitive with its aural patterns and locally known signifiers.

The co-produced film must also, in one way or another, broaden its purview to the broadest audience of the partner countries and the world's largest markets; ideally, it is “universal” enough to appeal to an imagined global audience with increasingly homogenous taste and expectations. In withholding so much political and cultural depth and specificity, producers and distributors weaken viewing appetites on a mass scale. This broadening of form and content does not always occur in the obvious manner of, say, a western creative producer forcing changes to casting or a script, though I heard many such overt cases in passing and in panels at QCinema. In the “Case Studies on Co-Production: Cannes Directors’ Factory” panel,⁹ on the short films that opened the festival, producers and “Factory” mentors admitted to telling the co-directors of *Silig* that the first script they submitted “didn’t sound like them” before asking them to draft a new script from scratch. In another instance, the local producers of the Factory pushed the *Walay Balay* filmmakers to cast one of their go-to fair-skinned celebrity actresses, Shaina Magdayao, in a film about the siege on Marawi by the US-backed AFP [Armed Forces of the Philippines], which decimated the Muslim capital and displaced over 100,000 indigenous Maranao, many of whom remain internally displaced to this day. This casting imposition whitewashes the tragedy

⁹ From notes I took while attending the Case Studies on Co-Production: Cannes Directors’ Factory panel in person on November 11, 2024.

while new tourist and military sites continue to supplant the ruins that once held decades of Moro history and culture.

At the same time, it is not inconceivable that *Silig's* co-directors could have written an initial script that did not in fact sound like themselves to appeal to what they assumed the Factory wanted. Neither is it inconceivable that the co-directors of *Walay Balay* might not have challenged their producers' lazy casting suggestion in fear of losing the opportunity, or future opportunities, with internationally powerful industry players.

Critic and filmmaker Epoy Deyto explained,

[Creative producers] tweak your material. Or rather, since it should be an act of self-regulation, you tweak your material on your own accord, believing that it is you—to get that grant.¹⁰

I talked with a local screenwriter who told me:

We [a film studio attached to a large Philippine production] were targeting the Chinese market at the time. We were watching how Hollywood responds to the Chinese market. The conservative number for a Chinese theatrical run is USD 1 million USD in a week. The studio creative head said that Hollywood has been removing some of the religious and nationalistic material from their IPs because it needs to be generic enough to be fed to the Chinese market.¹¹

Between 2014 and 2024,¹² the US's share of the global box office nose-dived from 85.6% to 69.5%, while China's tripled from 5.5% to 16.5%.¹³ Less developed industries like the Philippines are affected by and necessarily tail the trends of the global market. The screenwriter explained,

There are very few incentives to buy Filipino material right now. I think that's also one of the difficulties of our project. We tried

¹⁰ From my discussions with Deyto.

¹¹ From my interview with a local screenwriter who chose not to be named to protect their career and professional relationships.

¹² <https://www.the-numbers.com/movies/production-countries/#tab=year>.

¹³ This is according to The Numbers, which calls itself "the largest freely-available database of movie business information on the web." It overrepresents the US box office because it lacks comprehensive box office data for non-US countries; Therefore, the US probably accounts for an even smaller percentage of the global box office.

to make it as generic as possible, and it's still failing. Maybe my impulse in the beginning was correct—we should have made it as Filipino as possible. There are a lot of ideas that were just removed because the creative head said the Americans would not get that reference!¹⁴

More recently, however, Hollywood seems to be pivoting slightly from dominating Philippine cinemas with just Hollywood movies to controlling Philippine film production and owning distribution rights for a cut of their box office and screening fees. This could be Hollywood acknowledging the Philippine audience's growing desire for a sovereign, national cinema as well as its relative decline as the unmatched producer of technically superior film commodities. Regardless, their purpose is to own and control more of the local industry and increase profits.

This struggle of Filipino filmmakers to genuinely express themselves through the country's means of film production and distribution reflects the broader struggle of the Philippines for national sovereignty and genuine democracy.

"At least in the Philippines we don't have the illusion that we're independent," Deyto said. "Maybe some filmmakers are deluded that they're independent, but generally we are not." I had asked him how film workers in the Philippines reckon with the contradictions of their labor, primarily rooted in US imperialism. Most QCinema attendees I met openly discussed them; Visayan¹⁵ writer and filmmaker Ligaya Villablanca, for instance, wrote an essay for the festival's Critic's Lab about the concurrent housing demolitions, their resentment of the Manila-centric film industry, and yearning for their film community back home in Leyte.¹⁶

¹⁴ From my interview with the anonymous local screenwriter.

¹⁵ A person from Visayas, the southern provinces.

¹⁶ Villablanca has roots in Leyte and Cebu, where there is a history of regional, Cebuano Cinema distinct from the dominant Tagalog and Hollywood cinemas of Manila. After a brief boom in the '50s, with some Cebuano movie-stars making Hollywood appearances, the industry struggled to compete with the scale of the Tagalog industry and greatly declined in the '60s onward. Today, there are grassroots efforts for independent Cebuano cinema like the Binisaya International Film Festival, but resources are scant, and tensions continue to brew around misrepresentation and exclusion of the Visayan islands and other provinces by the Manila-centric industry.

The festival selected them for the Alexis Tioseco and Nika Bohinc Award for Film Criticism.

While I have struggled on a less than minimum wage income (around 25K USD compared to 34K USD) on New York living expenses, most of the film workers I met in the Philippines in similar and higher positions, made in the range of only 3–4K USD a year¹⁷. Depending on the region, minimum wage in the Philippines ranges from Php 316.00–Php 645.00 (5.52 USD–11.27 USD) a day, with many agricultural workers in the countryside receiving far less. In the 2020 short documentary *Pagkatapos ng Tigkiriwi (After the Dead Season)*,¹⁸ farmers reported monthly wages of Php 3000–4000 (54.00 USD–72.00 USD a month), or around 648 USD–864 USD a year, *not* accounting for steep loss and expense from the dead season, which can last up to half of the year. These conditions, in addition to constant sham development, bombings, and surveillance, push agricultural workers to the city (to neighborhoods like Sitio San Roque), where they are subject to displacement again.

For these reasons, over 7,000 Filipinos leave the Philippines to seek higher-paying work every day, often only to accrue new layers of exploitation and state repression abroad. Most of the Filipino migrant workers I know were swindled by their recruitment agency (charged ludicrous fees their families often need to collectively take loans out for) and misled into thinking a visa and a job suiting their work experience awaited them upon arrival. The reality was instead that their employers harbored them in a cycle of debt, wage theft, 24-hour work days, and threats against their vulnerable status to continue working in deeply exploited and inhumane conditions. The constant threat of ICE detention, whose torture and med-

¹⁷ According to Ibon Foundation, the price per kilo of well-milled rice in the Philippines in 2025 rose from Php 43 to Php 48; regular milled rice from Php 39 to Php 40; imported garlic from Php 110 to Php 156; *baguio* beans from Php 120 to Php 131; *galunggong* from Php 259 to Php 267; and chicken from Php 200 to Php 223. Meanwhile, the average minimum wage across the country is Php 481, just enough to afford some chicken, rice, and vegetables. It's a wonder how people manage to cover just rent and utilities. Although cost of living is cheaper in some ways than in the US, many essential imported goods, tech, and tools are more expensive. In my time in the Philippines, the only thing that always cost less was service (jeepneys, taxis, tool, and vehicle repairs, physical therapy, etc.) due to extremely low wages.

¹⁸ Produced by Unyon ng Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (UMA) and Mayday Multimedia; it can be watched for free at <https://cinemata.org/view?m=vceTZuvtB>.

ical neglect push many migrant workers to “self-deport” back to the Philippines¹⁹, makes them perpetually suspended between nations in a state of utmost precarity—often forcing them to organize.

In the Philippines, I met many film workers who planned to move to the US or South Korea because of the increasingly untenable contract wages. More and more, the Philippine petit bourgeoisie is unable to secure property or means of production and is descending the class triangle into the proletariat (the national bourgeoisie is also down-sliding into the petit bourgeoisie). Should they choose to brave what options they have back home, they’ll have to depend on the financial support and resources of institutions tied to the systems that oppress them.

So we have no choice but to be complicit [in state violence]. We can’t get out of that. I never actively campaigned for a boycott during QCinema [due to the parallel demolitions], because a lot of friends are also involved. But it’s more a matter of remembering. Have it in your memory that you are participating in something horrendous, or more horrendous than it appears to be.... It’s always these complications between your constitution and the general history of class violence that we have.²⁰

Deyto named several major art galleries, including Silverlens²¹ and Ayala Gallery, as those “owned by landowning people with a history of shooting peasants.” To supplement QCinema’s production grants for shorts—as a higher and higher budget is required for “independent” short film production to compete in the global market—many filmmakers seek additional funding from private art institutions like Tarzeer Pictures (also

¹⁹ I attended hearings of many people in ICE detention at the end of the Biden administration, where it was clear that everyone who “chose” to self-deport simply could not withstand the terrible conditions inside the detention centers long enough to resolve their status—a deliberately labyrinthine process that seemed almost impossible to complete with the additional obstacles of being detained. Almost all the detainees described feeling mentally and physically “unwell” and needing to get out as soon as possible.

²⁰ From my conversations with Deyto.

²¹ Silverlens co-founder Isa Lorenzo is the sister of Regina Lorenzo, Chair and CEO of the Lapanday Food Corporation. The Lorenzos are an infamous agribusiness family. In 2016, Lapanday guards shot and injured at least seven farmers who were asserting their right to land which was awarded them the year before.

a gallery space), only to find that they are also connected to big comprador capitalists like Enrique Razon, who built the aforementioned resort-casino on top of Sitio San Roque and is leading a hydro-power dam project that will leave around 12,000 people in Laguna province²² without land or means to make a living.

* * *

While Deyto felt there are lines that artists in the Philippines should not cross, he did not call for moral purity or total abstention. After all, the iconic filmmaker Lino Brocka was, he said, “one of the biggest guys around” but also one of “the biggest organizers of artists. I think he’s unmatched. And I think that kind of strategic position played well.” In addition to critiquing the Marcos Sr. regime in his films, Brocka founded and was the chairperson of Concerned Artists of the Philippines [CAP], a broad progressive organization for artists and cultural workers which persists today. CAP chapters have even launched overseas and in the US, in cities like Portland and, most recently, New York City. In the 1987 documentary profile *Signed: Lino Brocka*, the director famously says to camera,

I think the Filipinos were too kind, you know. I think we were too lax on them. They should have been killed, as far as I’m concerned. My answer to that question about Imelda and [Ferdinand] Marcos before was always no tears for them. Absolutely no tears. I think they should have been killed. As far as killing them is concerned, I would volunteer to be in the firing squad. I would want to be in the firing squad. And as a matter of fact, I don’t know how to fire a gun. But for them, I think I will train.

Deyto also pointed to Kiri Dalena’s *The Guerilla Is a Poet* (2013) as an important film reared from contradiction but honed into a lasting tool for the national liberation struggle. He didn’t condemn it, because otherwise the film, and its expressive utility, would not exist. *Poet* is a documentary-narrative feature about the founding of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People’s Army (NPA). The film takes the perspective of the armed national liberation struggle (the longest in history and ongoing), yet was funded by CineFilipino, under the MVP group

²² Just south of Metro Manila.

of companies owned by Manuel V. Pangilinan, one of the ten wealthiest people in the Philippines. He is the Chair of Philex Mining Corporation, whose operations have led to tailing spills, deforestation, and deaths of workers. As a poisoner of the land and people, its facilities have been directly targeted by the New People's Army.²³

I asked Deyto if there was ever a campaign to boycott a cultural institution in the Philippines by any national democratic mass organizations, or the multi-sectoral orgs that make up the fight for genuine democracy in the Philippines. Off the top of his head, he couldn't think of any. The call from Filmworkers for Palestine to boycott Berlinale²⁴ did not seem to translate to the Philippines (see Antoinette Jadaone's *Sunshine* and other Philippine titles). But a few months later, there were pervasive, organized calls by Philippine presses and literary organizations to boycott the Frankfurt Book Fair in Germany for its financial ties to Israeli tech, surveillance, and defense systems. The same call was re-organized and made this year. And this October, Kiri Dalena called out Tarzeer's ties to Enrique Razon, pushing people to reconsider their grant applications (see footnote 2).

Responding to Dalena's post, Manila-based poet Angelo V. Suarez wrote on Facebook:

More and more galleries and art platforms are being unmasked—not just for catering to the needs of landgrabbers and rights violators for luxury collectibles, but for being owned, run, and impresario'd by landgrabbers and rights violators themselves. Hopefully more and more artists recognize how small the emancipatory potential of art-making is, and how huge the stakes are for participating in the wider struggle for national democracy and socialism. Organized with-

²³ "Philex Rushing to Open Destructive Mining in Surigao Del Norte," *Ang Bayan Ngayon*, March 20, 2024, <https://philippinerevolution.nu/angbayan/philex-rushing-to-open-destructive-mining-in-surigao-del-norte/>.

²⁴ There have been widespread calls to boycott German cultural institutions in response to the German state's repression of Palestinians and Pro-Palestine activists. At the 2024 Berlinale, or Berlin International Film Festival, Executive Director Mariëtte Rissenbeek condemned Hamas for October 7 and called for the release of Israeli hostages. Many filmmakers were viciously attacked by German media and politicians for delivering pro-Palestine speeches at the festival. And Berlinale filed criminal charges over "antisemitic posts" when someone hacked their social media accounts and released a statement as if the festival was actually holding itself accountable for its complicity in the genocide.

in this framework, artmaking can multiply and make effective any emancipatory potential.²⁵

All but one or two US filmmakers, despite their relative comfort and safety nets for risk, have chosen not to withdraw from film institutions complicit in the genocide of Palestinians, or (more importantly) have yet to seek political organizations and integrate and struggle with the exploited majority, though many have re-appropriated their platforms to propagate pro-Palestine stances and/or joined cultural groups like Filmworkers for Palestine, which has the broad based support to apply popular pressure on complicit companies like MUBI²⁶ (from whose publication, *Notebook*, this very article was withdrawn).

But as mentioned, elite film institutions can contain a positive aspect in spite of themselves, occasionally producing progressive discussion and work that culturally and/or materially support national liberation struggles. The Razon-linked Tarzeer Pictures has financed films like Maria Estela Paiso's *Objects do not Randomly Fall from the Sky*, which has since been used as a high-production value propaganda and educational tool by national democratic mass organizations and as a means of fundraising for the fisherfolk in the film, who viscerally endure the consequences of inter-imperialist contradictions between the US and China.²⁷ But, as the poet Suarez²⁸ warned, "the emancipatory potential of artmaking" in the mainstream, "the independent,"²⁹ and the avant-garde was frail to begin with and wilts every day. As contradictions heighten and conditions worsen, arts institutions become not only harder to game for resources but

²⁵ Angelo Suarez, "More and more galleries and art platforms are being unmasked," Facebook, October 12, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1CiA4Pk5DP/>.

²⁶ Elsa Keslassy, "Mubi Boss Efe Cakarel Clarifies Relationship With New Investor After Backlash Over Israeli Military Ties, Sets Advisory Body and Fund for 'Artists at Risk'," August 14, 2025, <https://variety.com/2025/film/global/mubi-ceo-responds-backlash-sequoia-investment-1236488609/>.

²⁷ US Military Exercises destroy the environment and prevent fisherfolk from working while Chinese vessels steal their catch and use force to terrorize them.

²⁸ Cultural worker and volunteer for Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (UMA, Federation of Agricultural Workers).

²⁹ Angelo Suarez, "More and more galleries and art platforms are being unmasked," Facebook, October 12, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1CiA4Pk5DP/>.

more violently antagonistic (through censorship and surveillance) toward the oppressed masses and the cultural workers whose labor they rely on.

* * *

When I asked Deyto about the tactic of cultural boycott in the Philippine national liberation struggle, he told me:

[I think it's the other way around. We are mostly censored here. It's mostly a campaign of putting material out there. Even when Viva films released *Made in Malacanang* [a recent historically revisionist pro-Marcos film³⁰] I don't think we ever called for its boycott. What we did, though, was make a film in response to that. A year later, Joel Lamangan made *Oras de Peligro* and released it the same week as the sequel to *Made in Malacanang*.³¹

After navigating the contradictions of production, Filipino filmmakers are regulated and censored in exhibition and distribution. *Lost Sabungeros*, a documentary about the disappearance of over 30 cockfighting aficionados, played at QCinema the year I attended, after Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Film Festival canceled its premiere, citing “security concerns” they never elaborated on. Some speculated that the *e-sabong* (online cockfight gambling) tycoon “Atong” Ang and Senator Ronald dela Rosa (a chief orchestrator of ex-president Rodrigo Duterte’s extrajudicial killings³²)—dangerous individuals implicated in the disappearances by the film—forced Cinemalaya to cancel the screening. More likely it was due to the romantic connection³³ between “Tonyboy” Cojuangco, the Chairman of Cinemalaya, and actress Gretchen Barretto, who is directly implicated in the murders by the film.

In the same year, the festival premiered a documentary about the enforced disappearance of an activist: JL Burgos’s *Alipato at Muog* (*Flying*

³⁰ EpoY Deyto, “Maid in Malacanang,” *missing codec*, August 4, 2022, <https://www.missingcodec.com/cinema/maid-in-malacanang-2022/>.

³¹ From my discussions with Deyto.

³² Bonz Magsambol, “Would you believe, drug war ‘architect’ Dela Rosa to launch own probe inviting Duterte?,” October 16, 2024, www.rappler.com/newsbreak/inside-track/dela-rosa-launch-own-senate-probe-inviting-rodrigo-duterte/.

³³ Rachele Siazon, “Tonyboy Cojuangco 27-year relationship with Gretchen Barretto,” February 3, 2021, <https://www.pep.ph/news/local/156477/tonyboy-cojuangco-gretchen-barretto-27th-anniversary-a716-20210203>.

Embers and a Fortress). But a few weeks later, the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB) rated that film “X: NOT FOR PUBLIC EXHIBITION.” They cited, among other reasons, its potential to “undermine the faith and confidence of the people in their government and/or duly-constituted authorities.”

They weren’t wrong. Burgos’s impassioned film about his family’s almost two decades long search for his brother Jonas, a beloved organizer of peasant farmers who was abducted by state forces at a shopping mall in broad daylight, clarifies the irredeemable nature of the current system of Philippine government in an expression of matured rage. In 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) were responsible for his brother’s disappearance. But to this day, no suspect has been cited in contempt; in fact, every one of them has been promoted to sterling military and government positions. The principal suspect in the case, General Eduardo Año, is now the national security advisor of the Marcos Jr. Administration.

At a screening and panel that I attended at Adamson University-College of Law, Burgos described a meeting with the MTRCB, where they itemized their reasons for censoring the film, starting with, “What if General Año comes for us?”

“Remember,” the director told the audience, “They’re not the military’s lawyers.”

Of other reasons cited, #7 stays fresh in mind: “*Parang* leftist (It’s kind of leftist.)”

They also called it “subversive.” Burgos reminded the audience that there is no longer an Anti-Subversion Law.

The moderator asked the panel, including Burgos’s mother Edith and the film’s lawyer, if they considered the “X” rating censorship from a legal standpoint. The lawyer answered without hesitation, “Yes, it is clear. They were using a presidential decree, and we know where presidential decrees come from—the time of Martial Law.” Several months later, in June 2025, the Senate proposed a bill that would expand the MTRCB’s jurisdiction to streaming and digital content and grant it quasi-judicial powers to hear cases and impose sanctions.

A day before it was slated to premiere, a documentary about China’s territorial aggression in the West Philippine Sea, Baby Ruth-Villarama’s

Food Delivery, was removed from Puregold Cinepalo Film Festival, though the MTRCB only gave it a mild PG rating.³⁴ On March 12, 2025, the filmmaker and festival director wrote together in a statement, “While the decision was made jointly by the festival organizers and film creators, it is clear that external factors played a role in this outcome.”³⁵

Puregold is the Philippines’ fifth largest supermarket chain. China is the Philippines’ largest importer in general and its third largest importer of food. It would be bad business for Puregold to disappoint its major suppliers. Bigger picture, the Philippines is caught in the middle of the US’s impending war with China and bound to absorb the brunt of the crossfire. Despite many viewers and reviewers conflating *Food Delivery*’s censorship with progressiveness, the film is in fact unabashed propaganda for the US-backed Armed Forces of the Philippines, which, like the Philippine National Police, directly originates from the Philippine constabulary who served as a frontline in the genocide of over a million of their own people in the Philippine-American war.

With film festivals mostly taking place in mega malls, where political dynasties peddle foreign products, independent filmmakers are not only unlikely to receive a commercial or independent theatrical release, but are at risk of censorship even after they secure a festival premiere. Consciously or not, this curbs filmmakers from pitching projects for development (they also rely on festivals like QCinema and Puregold Cinepalo for funding and access to industry-standard production equipment) that might offend any international stakeholders, whose diversifying interests can be difficult to account for. Safer, then, to retreat into postmodern remixes of narrative and form or to relegate the violent political reality of 90%³⁶ of Filipinos

³⁴ Lé Baltar, “‘Feels like censorship’: Baby Ruth Villarama on West PH Sea docu’s film fest removal,” *Rappler*, March 15, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/entertainment/movies/interview-baby-ruth-villarama-food-delivery-west-philippine-sea-documentary-censorship/>.

³⁵ Manual to Lyf, “Joint Statement On the Withdrawal of ‘Food Delivery’ From the Puregold Cinepanalo Film Festival,” Facebook, March 25, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/manualtolyf/photos/joint-statement-on-the-withdrawal-of-food-delivery-from-the-puregold-cinepanalo-/1137096618429708/>.

³⁶ The percentage of the Philippine population that makes up the peasantry and proletariat according to *Philippine Society and Revolution*. Amado Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution* (Pulang Tala Publications, 1971).

to background atmosphere, occasionally trickling into the isolated drama of individuals, couples, or families fussing distractingly in the foreground.

The same year that *Lost Sabungeros*'s screenings were canceled at Cinemalaya, Ayala staff sabotaged³⁷ the festival's Philippine premiere of *Asog*, a documentary-narrative feature about how Ayala, the real-estate giant, stole the land of over 6,000 people who were displaced by Super Typhoon Haiyan.³⁸ All Cinemalaya screenings that year were held exclusively in five Ayala Mall Cinemas.

Of theatrical bookings in mall cineplexes, Deyto explained:

There are at most three Philippine titles competing with one another, and you have everything else slotted to Hollywood—[sometimes at least] two screens per title. By the principle of free competition we are already defeated.³⁹

Checking Gateway Mall's showtimes as I write this line (April 11th, 2025), 9 out of 11 screens are playing Hollywood movies: *The Amateur*, *Captain America: Brave New World*, *Drop*, *The Minecraft Movie*, *Mickey 17*, *Nosferatu*, *Locked*, *Snow White*. The two Filipino titles are *Lilim* and *My Love Will Make You Disappear* (a studio dramedy about an unironic romance between a tenant and her landlord). Several cineplexes today are not showing any movies produced in the Philippines. A few slots are sometimes reserved for popular titles from East and Southeast Asia.

After Hollywood seized global hegemony from the European film industries that collapsed during World War I, a cartel of major American studios including Warner Bros., Universal, and MGM established branches and theaters in the Philippines. According to Nick Deocampo's *Film: American Influences on Philippine Cinema* (2011), the US State Department, backed by the looming threat of US military bases, threatened to

³⁷ "Asogfilm, "Why did one of Asia's biggest corporations just try to sabotage the national premiere of this microbudget film?" Instagram, August 10, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C-fzBxMv-SH/>.

³⁸ One of the most intense tropical cyclones ever recorded and among the deadliest to ever hit the Philippines. In 2013, Typhoon Haiyan (or Yolanda as it's known locally) struck the Visayas region. The Philippine government's privatized, corporate-led and investment-driven rehabilitation program ensured the affected masses remained devastated while a ruling few profited massively from the death, destruction, and displacement.

³⁹ From my discussions with Deyto.

decrease Philippine sugar exports if the Philippine Congress “adopted protectionist measures to limit the number of US films on local screens.” Posed with this threat to a major cash crop, the Philippine Congress dropped its “protectionist posture,” and for their cooperation the occupier rewarded them with increased sugar exports, albeit temporarily. At the time, 80% of the films shown on local screens were American. By the mid-1930s that percentage reached around 95%. Wielding its political, military, and economic influence, the US forced its cultural propaganda on the Philippines via the mass media and Hollywood, which advertised the superiority of American imports and beauty standards, imposed the English language (unlike European film industries, Hollywood did not provide Tagalog subtitles), and manufactured consent in the people for their own exploitation and repression.

Today, branches of US distributors like Warner Bros. Philippines must be nationally owned and operated according to law. But as recently as 2017, US studios were still taking 70% of the net box office.⁴⁰ Hollywood has kept its hold over the Philippine box office, now with local middle-management integrated for plausible deniability. Under the current Marcos Jr. Administration’s neoliberal economic “ChaCha” (Charter Change),⁴¹ though, direct foreign ownership of Philippine mass media⁴² (and other sectors) could soon return. Even when the Philippine government was at its most stringently protectionist following the country’s devastation by Japan and the US in World War II, imposing an import control tax that halved Hollywood’s box office in the country, “Hollywood outgunned local film production by 4 to 1.”⁴³

Hollywood begins booking [in theaters] 12 months earlier here [Deyto said]. That’s unfair, because if we want to compete we have to rapidly speed up our production—which, in the current state

⁴⁰ Michael Lim, *Philippine Cinema and the Cultural Economy of Distribution* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03608-9>.

⁴¹ Refers to Bong Bong Marcos Jr.’s amendments to provisions in the 1987 Constitution, essentially further liberalizing foreign direct investment in mining, water, and land while expanding terms in office, particularly the presidency.

⁴² Delon Porcalla, “Lawmaker backs foreign media ownership under Cha-cha,” *Philstar Global*, February 4, 2023, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2023/02/24/2247244/lawmaker-backs-foreign-media-ownership-under-cha-cha>.

⁴³ Nick Deocampo, *Philippine Cinema and History* (Bughaw, 2023), 368.

of things, would only lessen the quality of our work—and the quality of our people. If we want to show the most mainstream [Philippine] movies in theaters, they end up finalizing the film a month before their intended showing date. That's a very short period to warm up audiences to your material.⁴⁴

Philippine productions already shoot at a breakneck pace over a short span and inordinate working hours. Vivamax, the studio that produces the bulk of the country's feature-length productions, according to Deyto, had recently (at the time of our discussion in late 2024) shot a feature in just two days and had been reported for a 20-hour workday. In my discussions with filmmakers, all of them acknowledged 24+ hour workdays as a regular occurrence in both commercial and independent production.

Between 2023 and 2024, Vivamax increased its productivity by 50%. “We reached a pre-1980s number this year,” he said of overall features produced. “Before we were boasting about 300 during martial law. Right now, we're at 280 feature films, and 70% of it is Viva.” But Vivamax releases the vast majority of its productions (mostly softcore porn) directly to its own streaming channel, while its theatrical distribution is mostly reserved for foreign titles by Universal, Paramount, CJ Entertainment, etc.

Even last year's Eddie Garcia Law,⁴⁵ ostensibly passed to improve on-set labor conditions, seemed, according to Mayday Multimedia Executive Director Brian Sulcipan, intended to say to international investors in film: “This country is ready for your capital.”

Sulcipan is also a member of Eyes on Set, an initiative responding to the law's lack of built-in enforcement of its own low standards. “[Cultural workers] were wondering if the law was going to be used to facilitate more international productions in the country,” Sulcipan said.⁴⁶ As a labor advocate familiar with the general conditions of workers, he was also surprised the law allowed for 14-hour workdays when similar laws for other

⁴⁴ From my discussions with Deyto.

⁴⁵ Named after the veteran actor. In 2019, he tripped on a cable wire and broke his neck while filming a TV series. There was no medical team on standby. The law aims to enhance the protection of workers in the movie and television industry by improving safety and working conditions, regulating work hours, requiring employers to comply with the minimum labor standards in the Philippines, etc.

⁴⁶ From my discussions with Brian Sulcipan.

sectors uphold 8–12-hour day limits. “It’s a standard that is still open to exploitation. It kind of just reiterates most of the existing labor laws for the film industry, which of course were never much to begin with.”⁴⁷

Deyto explained:

There is that collaboration between the ruling classes of cinema here and Hollywood that makes it even more difficult to actually benefit the market.... Because technically people who should be supporting you are against you. The bookers believe they can only play three Filipino titles per week to avoid competition. They do not recognize Hollywood as a competition to local films. Instead they are thinking that local films are [only] competing with one another. But there’s not much of a science to it. It’s a classic ruling class assumption, that we just need to follow because they said so.⁴⁸

Between the first and third quarters of 2024, SM⁴⁹ reported a Php 12 billion increase in box office revenue (not including concessions). As local production declines and grows more dependent on international co-productions, local cinemas, showing predominantly Hollywood films, have increased their profit. “It makes you wonder why isn’t it going back to the industry,” Deyto said. “Unless they are not counting themselves as part of it, which is a problem. Is it really a separate thing?”⁵⁰

Films produced outside of the Philippine studio system are rarely if ever booked in mall cinemas. Only through his collaboration with President Marcos Jr.’s godson and ex-creative communications adviser Paul Soriano, was the internationally renowned Lav Diaz able to show his 250-minute film *Phantasmia* in mall cineplexes like Ayala, Gateway, and SM this January (2025). His epic-in-length body of work often reckons with legacies of martial law under the Marcos regime, which is why his proximity to the dynasty today (through Soriano and his production company Ten17P) has raised some eyebrows even among fans.⁵¹ Their collaborations began when

⁴⁷ From my discussions with Brian Sulcipan.

⁴⁸ From my discussions with Deyto.

⁴⁹ The SM Group of Companies ran by the Sy Family, among Asia’s twenty wealthiest families.

⁵⁰ From my discussions with Deyto.

⁵¹ Lé Baltar, “‘Phantasmia’ review: Memory as olfactory hallucination,” *Rappler*, September 28, 2024, <https://www.rappler.com/entertainment/movies/lav-diaz-phantos->

Diaz and his producers were unable to secure European funding for *A Lullaby to a Sorrowful Mystery* (2016) and had to search for the money back home.⁵² For his Gael García Bernal starring *Magellan*, which premiered at Cannes this year, he seems to have secured a higher budget through a calculated collaboration between local Blackcap Pictures and Ten17P (Soriano) and foreign co-producers, including Rosa Filmes (Portugal), Andergraun Films (Spain), Lib Films (France), El Viaje Films (Spain), and Volos Films (Taiwan), which took seven years to come to fruition. To upscale film production and distribution, Philippine filmmakers are pushed into convoluted co-productions and relations with local compradors only to elaborately recreate a colonizer's 16th century circumnavigation of the globe to say again that he is bad.

In fairness, it seems the 164-minute *Magellan* is not the film Diaz wanted to make, but the feature-length concession to his co-producers in order to realize the 9-hour director's cut (closer to his usual runtimes) that he referenced frequently in early press.⁵³ More recently, Diaz has made a point of calling this 9-hour cut not a director's cut of *Magellan*, but a separate film altogether. Perhaps it is the film he most wanted to make, within the already limited confines of the kind of films that can be made under such a deal.

The government film agency under the office of the President, the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP), acquires foreign independent titles for distribution in commercial mall cinemas (sold at a discounted ticket price) but does not offer the same support to Philippine independent titles. Current FDCP chairman Joey Reyes told me he was interested in "a kind of solution/program to help [Filipino] filmmakers with distribution," but explained, "although we cannot distribute films,

mia-review-memory-olfactory-hallucination/.

⁵² Michael Guarneri, «Lav Diaz: Philippines Year Zero» *Débordements*, October 2, 2018, <https://debordements.fr/lav-diaz/>.

⁵³ Melanie Goodfellow, "Lav Diaz Hints At Cannes Debut For Ferdinand Magellan Film With Gael García Bernal; Reveals Near-Death Experience: 'It Became A Personal Journey To Understanding Immortality,'" *Deadline*, April 6, 2025, <https://deadline.com/2025/04/lav-diaz-hints-cannes-ferdinand-magellan-gael-garcia-bernal-1236361133/#:~:text=Talking%20to%20Deadline%20after%20the,the%20project%20eight%20years%20ago.>

material

we can facilitate films to be distributed by big companies abroad.”⁵⁴ It’s unclear to me what keeps the government agency from licensing local titles when they continue to acquire foreign ones.

Like the festival heads, Reyes also believes co-productions are part of the solution.

One thing we realized, the Filipino movie industry is in really bad shape! Let me put it this way, as of last year, we had a grand total of 57 films shown [theatrically]. These are both independent and mainstream movies. And out of 57 there were only three that made money. It’s the job of the agency to find out the reason behind this and how we can sustain the local movie industry—and one solution is we need the co-productions. All over the world, everybody is doing co-productions. Every film council has film incentives to offer. Unfortunately we are not a rich country, we cannot even compete with Thailand or Saudi Arabia, but we have to match this with something else.⁵⁵

In fact, to repeat a watchword of the national democratic movement, the Philippines is rich but the people are poor. Its riches are exported to already rich nations, who offer a fraction of it back with expanding terms and conditions.

Through Reyes, I was surprised to learn that the Philippines was the first country in Asia to impose a digital tax on Netflix.

The digital tax is mostly dedicated to cinema production [Reyes explained].... So hopefully we can get more funds to seed money to co-finance films by Filipino producers who they know will not necessarily be commercial to the Filipino audience alone but will have global appeal.... There has to be the importance of cooperation, of co-production and collaboration. It’s a trend all over the world that you get investments. And you better start creating works worthy of these investments. Stop thinking of just the

⁵⁴ From my discussions with Joey Reyes.

⁵⁵ From my discussions with Joey Reyes.

Filipino audience, although you still should make work for the Filipino audience.⁵⁶

The Philippine government, however, infamously misappropriates public funds, most recently and infamously with the billions (USD) it stole from the people for “Ghost Flood Projects,” or the nonfunctioning/nonexistent public-private flood prevention developments that have left Filipinos susceptible to mass death and displacement by typhoons. And as we’ve seen for decades, the further opening of Philippine industries to foreign capital and control has only made the nation diversely dependent and more cut off from its own resources, which would be enough to provide its every need several times over. Co-productions in the world capitalist system and between reactionary ruling classes in different capitalist countries are not a viable solution for liberating the Philippine film industry, for making it self-sustainable, or for returning it to some nostalgic prior condition.

An example of what ASEAN film solidarity looks like currently: While I attended a festive dinner for Cannes Directors Factory’s cast and crew at CMB Film Services Inc., the largest film equipment rental house in the Philippines, a video started to play unannounced on a massive screen overlooking our tables. We watched a drone camera as it soared over miles of eerily vacant land, tourist resorts, and film sets in Yangon, Myanmar. CMB, it turned out, had purchased all these and erected an overseas rental house in partnership with Forever Group, a real estate and media giant known for its intimate ties to Myanmar’s fascist military junta and its brazen, pro-junta propaganda, spread across four major television channels and two radio stations. CMB also revitalized Forever Group’s Myanmar Media Development Center, an incubator for producing new reactionary media makers.

With Myanmar’s tourism industry freefalling since the 2021 military coup and the junta’s relentless airstrikes on often already internally displaced people, it’s hard to imagine CMB not buying the private land—presumably stolen and long unused—for a steal.

⁵⁶ From my discussions with Joey Reyes.

When the video ended, CMB offered the Filipino and international filmmakers at the dinner a free day of shooting on their new land and sets in Myanmar.

Metro Manila Film Festival

There is a single exception to Hollywood's domination of Philippine theatrical screens and box office. For at least one week a year since 1975, movie theaters nationwide show only Filipino movies for the Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF). It was an initiative of then Manila Mayor Antonio Villegas⁵⁷ to showcase the national cinema in first-run movie houses otherwise reserved for Hollywood.

Partnering with the Metro Manila Development Authority, "the MMFF is more of a memorandum order than a regulation," Deyto explained. "So it is left as a suggestion for private enterprises [to only show MMFF films]."⁵⁸ Because it was always highly lucrative for cineplexes to screen the festival program, it was in their interest to obey the city's polite suggestion. MMFF began on Christmas day and lasted until early to mid-January, prime box office season. "American distributors got offended [by the loss of a week of profitable playdates],"⁵⁹ Deyto told me. "Jack Valenti came here, the president of the MPAA [Motion Picture Association of America] at the time, and threatened Imelda Marcos that, if they continue, they'll stop importing sugar."

But when the FDCP shifted MMFF programming to independent rather than commercial movies by tweaking a submission guideline in 2016, theaters dropped out of the festival for the first time and kept to their usual Hollywood programming.

⁵⁷ Villegas was part of the Liberal Party, the opposition party to Marcos Sr.'s Nacionalista Party. Although they played an unstable but important role in exposing the outright corruption of the Marcos regime, policy-wise they were functionally similar: Open the Philippine economy for foreign benefit while also flaunting superficial "Filipino First" initiatives, often in the cultural sector. Villegas moved (or fled?) to the United States with his family in 1972 after being implicated or initially framed in the Plaza Miranda Bombings, now generally understood to be a potential false flag operation to consolidate the regime and impose martial law the following year.

⁵⁸ From my discussions with Deyto.

⁵⁹ "First Metro Film Festival," *Philstar*, May 20, 2017, <https://www.philstar.com/entertainment/2017/05/20/1701938/first-metro-film-festival>.

Until now, I don't think FDCP has disclosed the box office earnings of the 2016 festival [Deyto said].... I think everything flopped at the time.⁶⁰

While you're talking to me right now, I'm not a socialist. I always ask for the bare minimum, and that is government regulation [laughs]. [Cinemas pulling out of MMFF is] all the consequence of self-regulation. I do think the businesses, not the people, should be regulated by the government. But the state is regulating the people and not the businesses.⁶¹

Today, MMFF programming is split between mainstream and independent films and has semi-recovered its earning power. In 2023, it broke its own box office record by raking in Php 1.069 billion (roughly USD 18.85 million). But in 2024, the festival attendance declined by an estimated 720,000⁶² people and only a few titles made money. The day before the 2023 MMFF, the *Manila Bulletin* published the article "Is MMFF fair? Hollywood studios say no, cite trade barriers."⁶³ In it, the Motion Picture Association (MPA) called for the end of the "screen restriction" (which we know is just a suggestion) of MMFF, "oppressive" taxation, and restrictions on foreign ownership in the domestic film industry. They've also found loopholes. Mall cinemas today can show American blockbusters in IMAX and 3D theaters while they play MMFF films on standard screens (no locally produced films have been shot on IMAX cameras, which are not available to rent in the Philippines).

In a strange development, Hollywood has begun acquiring MMFF titles, allowing them to get their hands on the only week of Philippine box office that they've ever been denied. In 2023, Warner Bros. Pictures acquired *Mallari*, a horror film about the country's first known serial killer. It is the first mainstream Filipino movie that Warner Bros. Pictures is dis-

⁶⁰ From my discussions with Deyto.

⁶¹ From my discussions with Deyto.

⁶² Isagani de Castro Jr., "[ANALYSIS] MMFF won't break P1-billion box-office record: Is Philippine cinema dead?," *Rappler*, January 15, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/voices/rappler-blogs/analysis-metro-manila-film-festival-box-office-2024/>.

⁶³ Ben Arnold de Vera, "Is MMFF fair? Hollywood studios say no, cite trade barriers," *Manila Bulletin*, December 24, 2024, <https://mb.com.ph/2024/12/24/hollywood-slams-mmff-cites-trade-barriers>.

tributing in the country.⁶⁴ Brian Diamante, the founder of the Philippine production company behind the film, said, “Warner Bros. is very particular on their standard, and they have rules. To keep up with that, somehow we have to spend more. The film itself cost us Php 80 million [1.4 million USD].”⁶⁵ It was the most expensively produced film at MMFF that year and the second-highest grossing.

In 2024, it was uncanny to see Hollywood studio logos brandished onto the front and back of MMFF titles that most Americans will never hear about: Warner Bros. Pictures acquired *The Uninvited* and Columbia Pictures acquired *Green Bones*. It is the first time in eight years that Columbia Pictures (now owned by Sony Pictures Entertainment) is distributing a Philippine produced title. With Hollywood production faltering (its budgets inflating as their global sales dwindle) will they continue to shift toward allowing more Philippine cinema to be produced and released in theaters, so long as they can retain rights and their split of the box office? Are they beginning to seed loose pocket change to produce lucrative local cinema in exchange for that ownership? Deyto joined me in speculating, “This might be Hollywood’s move to stop non-American titles from flowing over to other regions: buy their distribution licenses and release them in a limited manner, only to never release them again.”⁶⁶

Hollywood-Manila Bridge

Peasants in the Philippines have suffered from landlessness for centuries, and every land reform since the Spanish era has failed to shift the distribution of land from a faint fraction of a fraction of the population to the vast majority. The homes of urban poor, like those in Sitio San Roque, are being demolished on public land, while local and foreign movie pro-

⁶⁴ “Warner Bros. in pioneering domestic film distribution pact,” *Context.ph*, November 26, 1993, <https://context.ph/2023/11/26/warner-bros-in-pioneering-domestic-film-distribution-pact/>.

⁶⁵ Ted Cordero, “Warner Bros banks on PH movies’ potential, inks deal with Pinoy film company,” *GMA Network*, November 29, 2023, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/money/companies/889944/warner-bros-banks-on-ph-movie-sector-s-potential-inks-deal-with-pinoy-film-company/story/>.

⁶⁶ From my discussions with Deyto.

ductions are offered cheap or free temporary access to it to produce film commodities that appeal to the international market.

In March 2025, Hollywood executives met with First Lady Liza Marcos at the Sunset Marquis hotel in West Hollywood to launch a program to attract more foreign productions to the Philippines. They pushed to streamline government permits, waive visa fees, reach 25% cash rebates, and make new grants for international co-productions. Winston Emano, the founder of the media strategy firm that moderated the launch, considered the initiative “an expansion” of the so-called “Hollywood-Manila Bridge concept.”⁶⁷

“With so many locations owned or controlled by the government, these can be catalogued and these locations offered free of charge not just to foreign productions but to local productions, too,” said Jun Lope Juban Jr., one of the “go-to guys for international productions in the Philippines,”⁶⁸ present at the convening with the fascist Marcos.

Juban has facilitated such blockbuster Philippine shoots as *The Bourne Legacy*, *Platoon*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, and *Apocalypse Now*. At the beginning of a documentary about the making of the Francis Ford Coppola film, *Hearts of Darkness*, production designer Dean Tavoularis says,

There were 600 people working on this thing. In Hollywood or New York, it's quite a big deal if you want [to hire] another person—the fringes and salaries—it's thousands of dollars! So for a dollar a day or three dollars a day—I hope we weren't taking advantage of people, but that's what they were paid. So you could get, not one person, but ten, twenty, or a hundred!⁶⁹

Early in Eleanor Coppola's book *Notes on the Making of Apocalypse Now*, construction coordinator John La Sandra tells the author, summarizing (perhaps incidentally) the semi-feudal system maintained in the Philip-

⁶⁷ Ruben V. Nepales, “Hollywood-Manila bridge: How to lure international productions to film in PH?,” *Rappler*, March 31, 2025, <https://www.rappler.com/entertainment/movies/how-lure-international-productions-film-philippines/>.

⁶⁸ Nepales, “Hollywood-Manila bridge”

⁶⁹ Transcribed from the documentary *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*.

piners by the US and its compradors, “Manpower costs less than machine power here.”⁷⁰

The ability to exploit cheap labor and cheaply or freely access land in the Philippines, with the “legal” protection (like the Eddie Garcia Law⁷¹) and facilitation of local bureaucrat capitalists, remains a draw to foreign productions. These are often justified by claiming they benefit the local economy. But in Baler,⁷² where the *Apocalypse Now* crew set up their HQ, the production “caused severe food shortages in the marketplace that forced most residents to go without meat and many produce items, causing a tripling of beef prices.”⁷³ Often, these deregulated foreign productions simply reproduce already normalized wage exploitation, destruction of the environment, and privileges to land.

Ferdinand Marcos, Sr. and his cronies, however, did profit from Coppola’s renting of guns, fighter jets, military trucks, and 40 Huey Helicopters, which the regime reserved the right to recall from set at a moment’s notice to strafe and bomb peasants, indigenous people, and guerrillas in the countryside.

Cinemaralita, a Film Festival at a Barricade

In 2019, a film program supported a barricade in Sitio San Roque, at the height of the community’s resistance to the recurring demolitions of their homes by Ayala Land and the QC Local Government Unit. As part of a traveling festival organized by SIKAD (a cultural national democratic mass organization for the urban poor) called “Cinemaralita,” documentaries and short genre films were projected onto the remains of one of the 700 houses that were razed the year before to build the Enrique Razon resort-casino mentioned before. This half-demolished home of a taxi driver (still living nearby on the premises) was repurposed into an assembly

⁷⁰ Eleanor Coppola, “August 24, Pagsanjan,” in *Notes on the Making of Apocalypse Now* (Simon and Schuster, 1979), 116.

⁷¹ Law that lays out new labor standards for film production but not any means to enforce them.

⁷² Capital of Aurora province, on the East coast of Luzon. A surfing culture grew here after the release of *Apocalypse Now*.

⁷³ Gerald Sussman. (1992). “Bulls In The (Indo) China Shop,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 20(1): 24–28, 1992, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01956051.1992.9943960>.

area for demonstrations, meetings, and workshops, where volunteer artists integrated with San Roque residents and together produced artwork about the community's history and experiences. This was part of a larger anti-demolition, *barikada* (barricade) campaign with an alliance of residents and organizations including KADAMAY, which has organized several campaigns for the urban poor and housing occupations over the years.

According to the essay "Cinemaralita and the Prospect of a Radical Film Aesthetic from Community Feedback,"⁷⁴ written by members of SIKAD (including Deyto), the goal of the film screenings were

mainly aligned with the political aspect of community organizing: first, to boost the morale of the community members who are on night watch to guard against anticipated demolitions and its lurking task force; second, to consolidate the members and to respond to the Barikada campaign through vigil night programs; then lastly, to gain more external support from other chapters, allies from middle-forces and multi-sectoral solidarity.⁷⁵

The organizers note how residents asked to rewind the film to reference certain scenes in discussion and how they learned from critical audience feedback. For example, one response was that the inclusion of profanity and certain imagery made it less inclusive for younger audience members. In the essay, the SIKAD organizers work through situating the role of the program:

The community members are also part of the general cinema audience. Which means they are within the realm of mainstream taste, the taste perpetrated by the bourgeoisie. However, due to the political nature of Cinemaralita, this was never really considered an issue. As cited in the goals of Cinemaralita above, it is less concerned with such limits of bourgeois taste than it is with political organizing.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Gerone Centeno, Epoy Deyto, and Joshua Sales, "Cinemaralita and the Prospect of a Radical Film Aesthetic from Community Feedback," in *Radical Film, Art, and Digital Media for Societies in Turmoil*, eds. Ursula Böckler, Julia Lazarus and Alexandra Weltz-Rombach, (K. Verlag, 2023), 435-443.

⁷⁵ "Cinemaralita..." 438.

⁷⁶ "Cinemaralita..." 441.

They go on to write about decentering cinema from “the aggrandizement of the film-artist, moving toward the audience” and about its more active, radical potentials. They remain lucid throughout, reminding us once more in the end that it “is not by forcing the general audience to see what bourgeois aesthetics view as ‘radical,’ ‘avant-garde’ or ‘experimental’ that radicalization in film happens, but in having films and filmmakers participate in radical political projects.”⁷⁷

They do not contrast the Cinemaralita Barikada program against that year’s QCinema, which would kick off two months later within walking distance. The class struggle of the overall *barikada* campaign hacks closer to the root of the basic problems which lead to secondary, cultural contradictions like QCinema than any counter use of cinema or counter film festival. In the Philippines, there are cultural national democratic mass organizations (sometimes even more than one) dedicated to supporting each sector in a given area. Cultural workers are and have been ubiquitously engaged in class struggle alongside peasants and the proletariat. The national democratic movement is uniting the broadest possible united front of stable and unstable allies—including the proletariat, peasantry, petit bourgeoisie, and willing elements of the national bourgeoisie—against an increasingly isolated 1%, the big comprador bourgeoisie and big landlords.

It is not merely by removing cinema from its navel that it will be liberated. Nor by striking cultural institutions, though US artists have privileges they’ve yet to leverage against them. As the SIKAD organizers put it, “the protracted struggle is not just a struggle within the industry and between filmmakers and their style.”⁷⁸ Radical films and radical programming cannot by themselves, or even primarily, liberate even just the film industry, nor can they be considered a fully liberated use of the medium. That comes later in a classless society. At this point in history, we can create cinema toward our independence, in collaboration with revolutionary and national democratic mass organizations, but there is no such a thing as “independent cinema.”

What is to be done, then? The answer will differ per your national liberation struggle and the situation of your surplus industrial cinema. But Deyto has outlined a forthright program for the “Revitalization of Philip-

⁷⁷ “Cinemaralita...” 442.

⁷⁸ “Cinemaralita...” 442.

pine Cinema” in his book *Post-Dilawan*⁷⁹ [(a pejorative term for liberal)] *Cinema and the Pandemic* with core lessons that might be adaptable to different contexts.

This is the reason why independent cinema—that is cinema that is not dependent on any institution and that is fully decentered—does not exist here. On every claim of independence is the violence that made its appearance—not its actual existence—possible: the decline of public spaces, dwindling numbers of public transportation, further defunding of public education funneled into the Vice President’s corrupt schemes, the killing of teachers, the killing of artists, the killing of activists, the killing of youth, the killing of the poor, and all those deaths that loom around us. Philippine cinema—historically—is a cinema shifted by changes of domination, [whose] maintenance is always [precarious] and driven by fear.

We—as an audience, filmmakers, or even citizens—probably know what kind of actual violence is needed for independence to happen. Whether that be independence in cinema or other things. We know the potential of violence to alter things—just like how the state’s violence [has] alter[ed] our lives for the past decades without any significant changes. From this logic, we know that significant change requires a significantly different quality of violence. We know the kind of violence that is needed to maintain the happiness of the few, and we also know that a quantitatively different kind of violence is needed for us to finally experience happiness and enjoyment. If what awaits in the future is death from the violence of the state, we also know that it will take a different kind of violence to alter this future towards living.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ *Dilawan* is a pejorative term for liberal.

⁸⁰ Epoy Deyto, *Post-Dilawan Cinema and the Pandemic*, rev. ed. (Shonenbat Books, 2023), 96.

13-Point Program for the Revitalization of Philippine Cinema:

1. *Death to the Landlords!*
2. *The national bourgeoisie must succumb to the masses, redistribute land and wealth!*
3. *Death to the Marcoses!*
4. *Death to the Cojuangco-Aquinos!*⁸¹
5. *Death to the Dutertes!*
6. *Double death to the Marcoses and Cojuangco-Aquinos and Dutertes!*
7. *Death to US Imperialism!*
8. *Death to Chinese Imperialism!*
9. *Down with neoliberalism! Defenders be put to people's court!*
10. *Put class traitors into trial in the people's court!*
11. *Resume the GRP-NDFP peace talks!*⁸² *Oust the next president of the Philippines if this is not on the table!*
12. *Onwards People's Agenda! Sign and Implement CASER [Comprehensive Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms]!*⁸³
13. *If your cinema disagrees with any of these, death to your cinema!*⁸⁴

⁸¹ Two of the most prominent political dynasties merged with the marriage of Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr. and Corazon "Cory" Cojuangco, the president after Marcos Sr.

⁸² Peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and The National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) have been on and off since 1986. They have not resumed under Bong Bong Marcos Jr.

⁸³ NDFP proposal for reforms as the basis of unity for the broadest united front. The result of dozens of consultations with organized groups in guerilla fronts, progressive mass organizations from various sectors, and marginalized groups.

⁸⁴ Epoy Deyto, *Post-Dilawan Cinema and the Pandemic*, rev. ed. (Shonenbat Books, 2023), 99.

Submissions Process

We invite scholars, militants, activists, and artists to submit their work to *Material* for future issues. We are looking for articles (historical, philosophical, journalistic, literary criticism, etc.), poetry, art, and short fiction. Although we are happy to consider work by people from different progressive anti-capitalist traditions, all submissions will be submitted to a review process by scholars/organizers in the relevant fields.

For prose submissions (articles, essays, fiction) please format your work in a standard Word or Open Office page, double-spaced, with a limit of 8000 words. Poetry submissions should be no longer than 3000 words, spaced and arranged according to how the author wants the poem to appear on A5 dimensions. Visual art (photographs, drawings, etc.) can be submitted in any image format but should be 300 dpi, 148x210 mm minimum. Do *not* submit PDF files and please use Times New Roman, 12 point. Scholarly work that requires citation should use footnotes and *Chicago 18th Edition* rules for formatting.¹

We are happy to receive responses to any work in previous issues. If accepted, they will be published on the *Material* website: materialjournal.net/submissions. All guidelines detailed above apply.

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¹ You can find the Chicago Manual of Style at chicagomanualofstyle.org.

