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A BRIEF HISTORY OF PRISONS
AND RESISTANCE TO THEM
IN SO-CALLED CANADA

In an effort to broaden our coverage of prisons across the borders to both the North and South of us, we've brought in some comrades from so-called Canada to share a history of the establishment of the Canadian prison system, as well as a history of resistance in Ontario and Quebec.

While we know there is always resistance that we will never hear about outside the prison walls, these folks have done their best to contextualize what resistance has looked like across decades. We're excited to share this history!

B L O C P A R T Y

Bloc Party is an ongoing column that looks at State repression, counter-insurgency, prisons, political prisoners, as well as what people are doing to resist them.

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INTRODUCTION

This piece is written by a couple people who have been engaged in anti-prison, prisoner justice, and prisoner support organizing for almost ten years. We are not academics, nor are we ex-prisoners. However, much of the information compiled within this text comes to us from people who have done a lot of time and a lot of research and we are grateful to them for sharing their stories and their research. We consider this to be a working document, and welcome your feedback at: canprisonzine@riseup.net

This text started off as a presentation for Americans on the Canadian prison movement. It also covers our relationship to the prison movement from our perspectives in Kingston, Ontario and Montreal, Quebec.

Most of this article focuses on the situation in federally run prisons. In Canada, people are sent to federal prison if they receive a sentence of 2 years plus a day, and they are managed by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). We generally zoom in on the situation in federal prisons for men in Ontario and Quebec even though there is much history to be told regarding federal prisons and provincial jails elsewhere in Canada. Also, we are both white anarchists who have, for the most part, organized and heard stories from cis men.

We want to say up front that the history in this article is not comprehensive, and leaps forward decades at a time—otherwise this would have turned into a book. We focus most of our energies on the 1970s because the stories we have heard over the years from people on the inside tend to focus on those years as the beginning of an era that is perhaps now coming to a close.

From what we have heard, norms set for prisoner solidarity and expectations vis a vis the administration in the 1970s tended to carry on for the decades afterwards. Though many things have changed since then, focusing on the 1970s seemed like a good way to center the stories we wanted to tell.

PENITENTIARIES, SLAVERY AND COLONIAL EXPANSION

A good way to reveal the underlying intent and function of a repressive institution like the Canadian prison system is to dig into its history. A lot of solid work has come out of the U.S. in the last few decades that effectively describes the U.S. prison-industrial complex as the ongoing legacy of slavery. While Canada did indeed have slavery (contrary to official myth) and slavery in Canada is part of the history of prisons in this country, it's also necessary to situate the emergence of the Canadian penitentiary system as part of the project of British colonial expansion.

Canada likes to present itself as, historically, a safe haven for Black people escaping slavery in the United States. However, the institution of slavery existed here until 1833 and was followed by an era of Jim Crow like segregation. There have been centuries of overrepresentation of Black people in state run institutions of confinement. White supremacy, as an institution in Canada, was shaped by the enslavement of Black people. In the almost two centuries since the abolition of slavery, Black people have been consistently criminalized, policed, and harmed by the state and civil society. Although making the easy connection between a prison that used to literally be a plantation is harder to do north of the American border, there is no doubt that slavery and criminalization of Black people has shaped the institution of prison in Canada.

Following Canadian Confederation in 1867, colonization and settlement continued to rapidly spread west of Ontario. Along with the establishment of the North-West Mounted Police and the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, penitentiaries were constructed to extend Canadian law and assert colonial jurisdiction in the west.

Stony Mountain Penitentiary provides a telling example. Following the Red River Rebellion inspired by Métis leader Louis Riel, the Province of Manitoba was imposed and Stony Mountain Institution was constructed in Winnipeg. The first warden at Stony was a member of the military unit stationed nearby who had been dispatched to put down the rebellion. When a second uprising broke



out in 1885, known as the North-West Rebellion, the partially-built Canadian Pacific Railway carried military troops and North-West Mounted Police to outmaneuver the Métis, Cree, and Assiniboine rebels. After a short show-trial Louis Riel was convicted of high treason and hanged, on orders of Canada's

first Prime Minister, John A. Macdonald. The other rebel Chiefs were incarcerated at Stony Mountain, where their health deteriorated rapidly. Shortly after

FURTHER READING

BOOKS

The Hanging of Angelique by Afua Cooper

Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to Present by Robyn Maynard

Bingo! by Roger Caron

Prisons in Canada by Luc Gosselin

Only A Beginning: An Anarchist Anthology by Allan Antliff

Writing As Resistance: The Journal of Prisoners on Prisons Anthology (1988-2002)

Clearing The Plains by James Daschuk

ARTICLES & WEBSITES

Canada's Long History of Anti-Black Racism
solidarityacrossborders.org/en

âpihtawikosisân's Online Learning Resources
apihtawikosisan.com/aboriginal-issue-primers/legal-links

Tracking the Politics of Crime and Punishment in Canada
tpcp-canada.blogspot.ca

"Our Destiny is Not Negotiable": Native Brotherhoods and Decolonization in Ontario's Federal Prisons, 1970-1982
www.academia.edu/4467572

Native Spirituality in Prisons
wiinimkiikaa.wordpress.com/native-spirituality-in-prisons

Conversations with Dino Butler
www.dickshovel.com/dino.html

The Penal Press: A History of Prison From Within
penalpress.com

Journal of Prisoners on Prisons
jpp.org

Discipline and Punish: Prison 'rehabilitation': another form of punishment and control
mcgilldaily.com/2015/02/discipline-punish

Canada Has a Black Incarceration Problem
torontoist.com/2016/04/african-canadian-prison-population

being released, they died.

The history of the prison system is also tied up in the residential school system. The residential school system were boarding schools that the government forced indigenous children to attend.



The similarities between prisons, asylums, poorhouses, workhouses, Houses of Refuge, reformatories, reform schools and residential schools is no accident. The residential schools set up in the 1860s and 70s were modeled on the 'industrial schools' and 'reformatories' organized by Upper and Lower Canada, which were themselves hybrids of prison and school for younger offenders. Even the 'curriculum' – forced labor, with a vocational bent, remedial schooling, quasi-military discipline – was similar. The chief difference is racial – 'saving' a child in a residential school meant trying to abolish all aspects of their previous identity and material existence, and the entire 'rehabilitation' apparatus was turned to "kill the Indian, save the child."

1930S-1960S

There has always been resistance to confinement, but starting in the 1930s, prisoners in Canada began to organize as prisoners. The riots at Kingston, St. Vincent De Paul and Dorchester in 1932-33, followed by demonstrations during the rest of the decade at those and other prisons, set the pattern in that they were the first explicitly political disturbances organized by prisoners as prisoners. Previous riots and strikes although organized around work conditions or food or removing a particular guard, rarely questioned the entire basis of the prison, or demanded outside intervention.

This era also ushered in a cycle we can clearly identify in Canadian Penitentiaries. The cycle starts with a wave of resistance inside that escalates to riots and strikes. This creates a political scandal. The government responds by appointing a body (Royal Commission or Inquiry) to investigate and make recommendations. If the same government is in power, some recommendations are implemented, especially the more regressive ones like more control, more prisoner labor, more segregation. Sometimes the new reforms and/or new facilities are so much worse, that this triggers another cycle.

Here's an example of the cycle in action. There was a major riot at Kingston Penitentiary in 1954 where the building was set on fire. In the aftermath of the riot, the Fauteux Commission was convened to respond to a perceived crisis, which recommended work and social programs be created to modify "behaviors, attitudes and habits". The commission set in place a new army of specialists inside prisons (social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, criminologists) and

also created the Parole Board to “create better relationships between guards and prisoners”.

At the same time these reforms were implemented, prison construction boomed. The government built 25 new prisons by 1970. In this time period, there was a trend towards a widening of the security classification system in prisons. The creation of the first ultra-max and the first halfway house were evidence of this trend. Two of the new max prisons—Millhaven in Ontario and Archambault in Quebec—were identically designed and came to symbolize the violent unrest throughout the 70s, which would lay the basis for the contemporary prison movement in Canada.

Another important marker of this time period was the unionization of the guards in the federal penitentiaries. This unionization in 1968 gave the guards a surge of power that contributed to the escalating tension through the 1970s as they ensured the government could not implement reforms demanded by the prisoners. If any guard was seen as being too soft on prisoners, the dominant hardcore guards would brand them a ‘con-lover’ and dole out “beatings at the local Legion Hall, slashed tires, rocks thrown through their living-room windows, and threatening phone calls.” The guards’ union continues to be a reactionary organization that uses prisoners as pawns, and is very politically active in opposing the campaign against solitary confinement, for example.

1970S

The 1970s were a decade marked by violent unrest and repression inside Canadian pens and continue to act as a reference point for the contemporary prison movement. In Ontario, Millhaven Institution was constructed, where authorities planned to transfer all the prisoners from Kingston Penitentiary. Rumours were circulating amongst prisoners that Millhaven would be an environment of complete control, that it would be impossible to take collective action there, and so prisoners started planning a final stand at Kingston Pen. As tensions increased, the administration cracked down on communication with the outside world and on social activities inside, and abolished prisoners organizations, sending anyone they suspected of planning unrest to segregation. In April 1971, Kingston Pen saw the largest prisoner uprising in its 178 year history. Six guards were taken hostage and prisoners took control of the building, destroying most of it. The hated brass bell, which regulated the daily routine of prison life and rang 178 times each day, was smashed to bits.

The standoff lasted 4 days. Prisoners hid their hostages, made weapons and barricaded entrances, which deterred an immediate raid. Hundreds of soldiers were deployed from the nearby base. General assemblies were held inside to make key decisions. After anonymous guards fed vicious rumours to the media about sex-

with liberals, and we try to avoid fighting simply to return to the shitty status quo and not for our dreams. We can’t forget that the Liberal Party is Canada’s “natural governing party” and in many ways our primary enemy as anarchists.

ENDNOTES

1. You can hear her and her lawyer talking about the case here:
www.radio4all.net/index.php/program/90763
2. Her website is at:
freenyki.org
3. You can hear audio from her here:
www.radio4all.net/index.php/program/84312
4. epic.noblogs.org/flyering-visitors-at-collins-bay-institution
5. demandprisonschange.wordpress.com

In moments where we need support the most, what we actually need is usually pretty clear, but our capacity can be lacking. When things are quieter, we can build capacity by establishing material infrastructure for sharing resources and skills, making personal connections of affinity and solidarity, as well as setting up channels for private and public communication across borders.

BP: *“At least you’re not in prison in the U.S.” We’ve discussed with comrades here in the States how a primary export of the U.S. is the prison industrial complex. We saw that reflected in your historical overview. In both the expansion period and “Mari- onization” of the 70’s, as well currently with the harshening of conditions. In seeing a presentation by you that covered the history and current context of Canadian prisons, we were struck by how much more access to things prisoners have there that just seem wild by comparison. But, the U.S. seems to be ever expanding its horrifying bullshit across the border. Do you see that reflected up there, and if so, in what ways?*

It’s true that certain privileges and policies exist here that seem unthinkable in the U.S. Some of these measures were won through struggle, others were the state’s attempt to contain the general unrest in the 1970s, while some others are initiated by government because they more effectively fit into a ‘rehabilitative’ ‘correctional’ framework. As we noted in our history piece, usually when the gov- ernment offers prisoners a carrot, there is a corresponding stick, and the spec- trum of social control that divides and classifies prisoners is expanded.

In some ways, things up here are just different, not better. We don’t want to downplay the brutality of the U.S. prison system, nor do we want to fall into the trap of Canadian exceptionalism or the false dichotomy of “punishment vs. rehabilitation,” which are two tactics in the service of social control. On aver- age, (although there is no “life without the possibility of parole” up here) prison- ers with a life sentence serve more of that time in prison than prisoners with a life sentence in the U.S. It’s also true that for a long time, the Canadian federal system has liked to claim that it is more effective at ‘correcting’ people than the Americans, which translates to a more elaborate regime of routine, discipline and surveillance, all guided by a very detailed ‘correctional plan’ tailored to each individual prisoner by a team of cops and social workers and screws. This is why in Canada, you can’t send a book directly to a prisoner (it must go to the librar- ian), or you have to be pre-approved by the administration before being allowed phone calls or visitation with a prisoner.

If we understand the Canadian state as liberal order, where incarceration can sometimes be a little more comfortable than south of the border, then our task as anarchists in this place is to develop analysis and practice to effectively attack liberalism.

We just emerged from a decade of Conservative federal rule heavily influenced by the U.S. right. In times of rollbacks and crisis we might find common cause



ual assaults occurring inside, the prisoners had journalists tour the prison they controlled. A local support group camped out among the cops, media, guards and army with a large banner that said “We Support The Prisoners.” Prisoners inside saw it and responded with their own banners: “Thank You For Your Sup- port,” “Under New Management,” and “The Devil Made Me Do It.” Some pris- oners formulated demands, while others were determined to die in battle. The prisoners demand for a Citizens Committee to mediate the crisis was granted.

On the 4th day, negotiations were deadlocked over the question of amnesty, the government was signaling an imminent assault, and there was a power strug- gle among the sleep-deprived, hungry prisoners, A faction took control that believed it necessary to show the army they were capable of killing hostages, and organized a brutal display of violence against prisoners from the protective custody unit, who were considered by the general population to be ‘undesirables’ and assumed to be sexual predators and snitches (although this is not always the case). Two prisoners were killed in the beatings, which according to ex-prisoner Roger Carron’s account demoralized the rebels, and led to their negotiated sur- render shortly thereafter.

Most of the rioters were transferred to Millhaven and locked up in segregation, partly as punishment and partly because Millhaven was still under construction. The system took retribution:

[Millhaven] early history was marked by the use of clubs, shackles, tear gas and dogs, often in combination. Dogs were let loose on prisoners in the yard and in their cells. Gas was used to punish prisoners frequently—in March 1973, as often as three or four times a week. Prisoners who were first shackled, sometimes hands

and feet together, were then beaten with clubs, made to crawl on the floor, and finally gassed.

– 1976 Commons Justice Committee

Earlier hostage takings, namely one that happened in January 1971 in Kingston Penitentiary, involved racialized prisoners demanding better treatment for non-white prisoners. The 70s also marked an era when racialized prisoners got more organized, a prominent example being spread of the Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood that fought for access to cultural and spiritual programming for indigenous prisoners and exists to this day. Using hunger strikes, connections with indigenous communities on the outside, and lawsuits, the Brotherhood and Sisterhood were a force to be reckoned with and continue to organize to this day.

On August 10, 1974 Eddie Nalon bled to death in Millhaven's segregation unit after cutting himself with a razorblade, after a lengthy dispute with the institution over a transfer. The investigation into his death revealed that the guards had disconnected the emergency signaling system. On the first anniversary of his death, prisoners refused work and food to mark Nalon's death and to show solidarity with an ongoing strike at British Columbia Penitentiary, a strike that would spread to Collins Bay and Joyceville Institution in Ontario. Involuntary transfers resulting from protests and strikes inside would then help spread word of the struggle across the country. After the death of prison organizer Robert Landers in 1976 in Millhaven segregation, August 10 would come to be known as Prisoners Justice Day or PJD, and continues to be a major day of mourning and protest at jails and prisons across Canada.



THE 1970S IN QUEBEC

As an introduction to writing about this period of time in prisons in Quebec, it is necessary to give some Quebec specific context. In the 1960s, the popular movement for Quebec separatism was heating up. In 1970, the Front de Liberation de Quebec (FLQ), an armed national liberation group, carried out two kidnappings, one of which ended in the assassination of Pierre LaPorte. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau (the current Prime Minister's father) passed the War Measures Act and sent the army into Quebec, which resulted in the arrest of around 500 people in Montreal and the surrounding areas. The culmination of this struggle was the election of the Parti Quebecois to power in the provincial government in 1976. Some folks affiliated with the FLQ ended up in the federal jails in Quebec while some sought asylum in Cuba. This atmosphere of struggle

overlapping with the prison justice & prison abolitionist movements. Jim Campbell, one of the founding members of Bulldozer, actually wrote an interesting report-back from the 1994 Anarchist Black Cross Conference in New York, which we would encourage readers to check out for more perspective on this question.

BP: *Can you talk a little more about the importance of the pre-existing infrastructure of Anarchist Black Cross's in the response to repression around the G20? How did that play into anti-repression efforts?*

We asked this question to a friend involved with ABC Toronto in 2010, who emphasized the importance of pre-existing relationships that made it possible to draw on a large network of ABC chapters and related groups for fundraising, legal support and to spread the word very quickly. There were websites, publications, newsletters and listservs in place with large audiences who could be mobilized to support arrestees. Finally, having a regular presence in Toronto meant that people who wanted to get involved with support work had a clear entry point. In Montreal, there was no ABC at that time. A lot of the support was coordinated by folks involved in the CLAC, some of whom had experience from the Quebec City FTAA Protests in 2001.

Definitely being involved in ongoing projects to support prisoners can help anarchists figure out how to support each other when shit hits the fan. Knowing the ins and outs of the prison system before you or your best friends get arrested can give you a sense of what could be coming and how to navigate the struggles ahead.

BP: *In what ways do you think we can better support our comrades in Canada in their efforts to bulldoze these prisons? What does prison abolition collaboration look like across borders?*

De-normalize and de-center the U.S. in how we understand 'what's going on.'

Sometimes when doing prisoner support, we can get caught up in the specificities of the particular prison (or state system) that we're facing. When thinking about collaboration across borders, it's important to also see the similarities across jurisdictions in order to transform individual experiences into collective struggles.

For instance, the Demand Prisons Change⁵ letter that some prisoners in Canada wrote shares many similarities with the list of demands issued from Attica during the 1971 uprising. Struggles about conditions in prisons are often about basics of life like food, communication with other humans, opportunities for learning and growing, and access to family and community. When we understand each other better, effective solidarity across borders becomes more possible, and we hope this article is a contribution in that direction.

a section on prison reform:

You should conduct a review of the changes in our criminal justice system and sentencing reforms over the past decade ... Outcomes of this process should include increased use of restorative justice processes and other initiatives to reduce the rate of incarceration amongst Indigenous Canadians, and implementation of recommendations from the inquest into the death of Ashley Smith regarding the restriction of the use of solitary confinement and the treatment of those with mental illness.

In Ontario, we've seen a significant shift where much of the left has re-oriented its strategy in the hope that the new government will be persuaded to enact various reforms. Inside, we still see a lot of unrest, but not 'tremendous upticks,' as some folks are definitely still holding out for a 'political solution' to certain grievances. We're wary of this renewed sense of hope in government, and the degree to which it can pacify our struggles. That said, it's too early to predict the level of resistance to the current regime, as unmet expectations can also have a radicalizing effect.

It does seem that prisoners here are aware of what's going on south of the border, and this has been true for a long time. While they were very different in many ways, the Kingston Pen Uprising occurred only a few hours drive away and a few months before the Attica Uprising in 1971. While it can be difficult to pass news through the walls, anarchists and other folks here have put some effort into spreading word* of unrest down south such as the September 9th national strike in 2016, which in one instance led to a support letter from inside.

BP: *We loved the name of the 90's prisoner newsletter you mentioned briefly "Bull-dozer: The Only Vehicle For Prison Reform." Fucking classic! Prison newsletters have a vibrant history in the U.S. as well. In the last 5 years we've seen a number of prison newsletters published by anarchists in collaboration with contacts inside prisons. After many years of anarchists primarily focusing on traditional ideas of political prisoner support (as a response to the large number of political prisoners taken in during the 1960's and 70's), there is a recent tendency towards focusing on broader prisoner support amongst anarchists. From your history and overview, it seems like anarchists in Canada have generally taken a broader approach to prison rebellion and prisoner support for much longer. Can you speak to this and share any thoughts?*

Prison sentences do tend to be shorter here than in the U.S. and we have not seen many long-term 'political' prisoners/prisoners of war incarcerated in this country in recent decades. One notable exception would be the Direct Action 5, anarchist urban guerillas active across Canada in the 1980s, who were given long prison sentences in 1984. So anarchists organizing prisoner support here have mostly put their efforts into contributing additional energy to U.S.-based political prisoner support and/or working with politicized prisoners active inside,

created a context for the struggle inside prisons in Quebec as people involved in movements on the outside ended up in prison and movements on the inside heated up in their own right.

In 1976, a massive work strike started in the federal prison called Archambault in Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, Quebec. 350 prisoners began a work strike to force an improvement in their living conditions and to express sympathy for a strike that was already underway at another federal prison called St. Vincent de Paul in Laval, Quebec. The Archambault strikers' central demand was for physical contact with visitors.

An outside group composed mostly of wives, families, and friends of the prisoners organized two demonstrations during the 1976 strike; one in front of Archambault and one in front of St. Vincent de Paul. Prisoners at a provincial



prison on the island of Montreal began a sympathy hunger strike. Two former St. Vincent de Paul prisoners accidentally blew themselves up with a bomb they were trying to place in a bus station near the prison as a gesture of support for the strike. The Archambault strike ended after about five months when the prison administration formally recognized the prisoners committee. Permis-

sion was also given for frequent visits to the institution by a citizens committee. Prison officials also announced that physical contact during visits would begin in spring 1977.

In 1978, Archambault warden Michel Roy was murdered. Paul Rose, an imprisoned member of the FLQ, who was then a member of the prisoners committee at Archambault, told a Montreal newspaper that conflict at the prison had become serious. He and other members of the prisoners committee had been transferred to the segregation block at a different federal prison in Quebec as a result of their advocacy on behalf of other prisoners at Archambault. The warden had denied that conditions were deteriorating in the prison and refused to relate to the prisoners committee as a negotiating body of any kind. Three former prisoners (one of whom had escaped in 1977 and was on the run) were charged with the murder of warden Michel Roy and during their trial, one of them said that they did it in order to draw attention to the poor conditions at Archambault.

The 1970s ultimately ushered in the abolition of corporal punishment and capital punishment (which was replaced with the life sentence). The Office of the Correctional Investigator created to 'address prisoner concerns.' Prisoners Com-

mittees, which were by and large organizations (both aboveground and under-ground) that were formed by grassroots prisoners to organize resistance and



communicate with the outside world, were recognized and regulated in federal prisons in 1978. Importantly, the act of recognizing the Committees and entrenching their role in policy was part of a CSC strategy to pacify resistance. Inmate Committee membership is subject to approval by the administration,

and anyone who goes 'too far' can be removed. Committee members are under tremendous pressure from the administration to manage unrest by channeling it into 'constructive' channels such as CSC controlled grievance processes. That said, the role of Inmate Committees in mobilizing or pacifying resistance depends on the specific institutional context.

These reforms also extended the logic of security classification, which provides incentives (privileges) for 'good behaviour' while incarcerated, such as the ability to work outside the institution, kitchenettes for cooking personal meals, contact visits, etc. Of course, these privileges are more effective instruments of control with a corresponding expansion of punitive brutality and dehumanization for 'badly behaved' prisoners with a higher security classification. So Millhaven-style max prisons were constructed at the same time as minimum security camps throughout the 1970s.

1980S AND 1990S

The turmoil inside Canadian prisons in the 1970s led to some tweaks to the system, but the struggle continued through the 80s and 90s with many of the same reference points. We'll briefly touch on three issues of focus from that period: control units, harm reduction, and the scandal at the Prison For Women.

In the 80s, we can see prisoners and their supporters warning against Marionization, which was language used to describe the generalization of the control unit prison model in Marion, Illinois. Marion was built in 1963 to replace Alcatraz, and is most famous for the brutal behaviour modification and drug experiments done on prisoners there. It served as the basis for ADX Florence in Colorado and Pelican Bay in California.

In Canada, there were 'Special Handling Units' built on the grounds of maximum security prisons in each region in the late 1970s. They were, along with Life 25 sentencing, understood as part of the tradeoff for the abolition of the death penalty in 1976. Life 25 is short for a sentence of 25 years to life where one becomes eligible for parole after 25 years, but will be on parole until their death.

ics of the people who are around us is a smart thing to do as anarchists and is connected to organizing with people who don't hold the same political values as us. As anarchists, we need to think more about who we are reaching out to, who we are building coalition with, and who we are building close relationships with as those are all political questions that can affect our ability to meet our goals. In the end, getting clear on our collective intentions and goals in any given struggle can help a lot in terms of bridging differences in values and social positions.

BP: *There are stark differences in the histories of Canadian and U.S. prisons as well as striking similarities. The 1970's were a time of widespread, global civil unrest. From prisons to the streets, the world was in revolt against institutionalized power structures of all stripes. Here we are again, in a moment of widespread civil unrest that spans the globe. From the prison strike of September 2016 to struggles for Indigenous sovereignty across the Americas, we're seeing tremendous upticks in struggle. In what ways do you see prisoners resisting in Canada? Do you think word of the prisoner resistance here in the States has reached inside the barbwire there and had any impact on organizing efforts or resistance?*

We want to preface this answer by saying it's very hard to speak of Canada as a coherent thing. Canada is a very large country with strong regional identities, which is why we are mostly limiting our points to the provinces where we live, Ontario and Quebec. That said, it does make sense to speak of a national context in terms of prisoners incarcerated in federal institutions, as the federal government controls the laws and politics that largely determine the conditions of confinement. So it makes sense that federal prisoners, who get transferred all over the country (definitely if they take a leading role in any resistance inside) have some sense of a shared history and connection, and as a result we see traditions like Prisoners Justice Day across the country, and sometimes a strike started in one province will spread rapidly to the others.

Prior to 2015, Canada endured 10 years of Conservative Party rule, which was heavily focused on a 'law and order' agenda. Prisoners bore the brunt of countless attacks on their dignity, conditions and quality of life, including both significant changes such as the introduction of mandatory minimum sentencing, and petty affronts such as the elimination of pizza party fund raisers for charity. Predictably, these almost daily attacks on their lives, combined with a total unwillingness to even appear interested in compromise, sparked a lot of resistance, although it also led to a situation of depression and resignation for some.

In 2015, Liberal Party Leader Justin Trudeau was elected Prime Minister. He is young, charismatic, well-versed in anti-oppression jargon, and uses a lot of Obama-like rhetoric: hope, change, and sunny ways. Shortly after being elected, Trudeau published an open 'mandate letter' to his Minister of Justice, including

insubordination. Still, abolitionists and anarchists both tend to lack connections among the non-activist prisoners. Some anarchists are looking to break out of this specific milieu. One way to do that is to reach out to prisoners facing repression for their participation in uprisings, such as the Saskatchewan Penitentiary Riot.

BP: *You also mentioned an abolitionist organizer, Kim Pate, who now sits in the upper house of parliament. “This raises the question of whether prison abolitionism as an ideology implies meaningful opposition to the state itself.” We’ve discussed this before in Bloc Party, what does it mean when our struggles against prison from an anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian are taken into the mainstream? What do we need to be wary of? We’re certainly not at the point of having self-identified abolitionists in the senate here in the States, but in 2016 even Hillary Clinton was speaking out against “mass incarceration.” What do you think anarchists need to be wary of in collaborating in anti-prison efforts with those who don’t hold the same political values?*

In Canada, the Senate is appointed by government, not elected. Kim Pate claims that she accepted the position because in doing so, she couldn’t be banned from entering any prison in the country. Yet, she has stopped openly talking about abolition since being appointed, and that is troubling. Just like when prison justice activists talk to the mainstream media and leave open the possibility of prison for “the worst of the worst,” it becomes clear that being against mass incarceration is different than being for the abolition of prison.

We think it’s important to be able to collaborate with others across political difference while maintaining our integrity and refusing to water down our politics. When we approach it this way, we can actually hold others accountable for the politics they profess and keep openly pushing an anarchist, anti-prison politic that is true to what we want. That said, there is a point at which a person’s choices mean that they shouldn’t be trusted, and another point at which we begin to recognize them as enemies. We don’t necessarily consider Kim Pate to be an enemy, but her appointment to the Senate should be a wake-up call for those of us who oppose the state about the degree to which some self-described abolitionists are willing to collaborate with government. Why was Pate’s transition to the Senate so unsurprising, seamless and even uncontroversial?

Kim Pate’s decision to accept the Senate appointment also raised questions for us about social position. In reality we are socially closer to Kim Pate than we are to many many people in prison. She is really two or three degrees from us socially. That has happened for a few reasons, one of which is about social position—she’s a white, university educated, upper-middle class woman who is working as a professional. There is a lot of overlap there, not just with us, but many people in our milieu. We think being aware of patterns in the demograph-

Throughout the 80s CSC kept expanding its policy definition of ‘dangerousness’ and more prisoners ended up in the SHU. In 1984, the Special Handling Unit prison was built in Quebec to replace the individual units across Canada. Life in the SuperMax SHU is especially violent, miserable, and under complete video surveillance. A transfer to the SHU is a common punishment for escape attempts, violence directed at guards, or if a prisoner is classified as ‘radicalized.’

Another major focus in the 1980s and 1990s was harm reduction amidst skyrocketing rates of HIV, Hepatitis C and tuberculosis within Canadian prisons, rates that were up to 70 times higher than outside prison. Prisoners agitated for educational resources, safe tattoo programs and needle exchanges. Out of this context, we see the emergence of organizations such as PASAN that continue to do important educational and advocacy work inside and out.

While it’s true that what happens behind prison walls is largely invisible to the public, it’s doubly true in prisons designated for women. In Canada, women were incarcerated in a special unit of Kingston Penitentiary until 1935, when the Prison For Women (P4W) was built across the street. In April 1994, following a fight, six women were put into segregation. 2 days later in the segregation unit, there was a suicide attempt, a slashing and a brief hostage-taking.

After guards publicly demonstrated for the transfer of the women involved in these incidents, the Warden ordered in the all-male Emergency Response Team to do a cell extraction and strip search of 8 women in segregation, which was videotaped as per the procedure. The women were then shipped to a special unit in Kingston Penitentiary. A year later, following an investigation, the video footage of the raid and strip searches were aired on the investigative CBC program Fifth Estate, generating public outrage and leading to a federal inquiry and the rapid closure of the Prison For Women, replaced by Grand Valley Institution in Kitchener, Ontario. Women’s prisons continue to have the highest suicide rates in the country, and the death of Ashley Smith in segregation in 2007 has reignited the cycle of incident, public outrage, government inquiry and recommended half-measures.



CURRENT CONTEXT

From 2007-2012, there was another prison expansion boom in Canada. In the name of “tough on crime” politics, then Prime Minister Stephen Harper built or expanded 30+ prisons across the country. Legislation contributed to the trend

towards more people doing more time in Canada. Fewer people were getting parole, parole restrictions were getting harder to follow, and more people were being thrown back in prison on parole violations like “lack of transparency” (its just as vague as you’re thinking).

In 2013, Harper cut the pay for federal prisoners by “raising the price of room and board” even though prisoners hadn’t had a pay raise since the 1980s and there was already a provision for room and board set in the original pay rate. The pay cut was followed by a wave of work strikes across federal prisons in Canada. The work strikes ended when things moved into the court system with a lawsuit on behalf of the striking prisoners. In January 2018, the Federal Court ruled against prisoners, which will likely lead to more unrest. Federal prisoners now make about \$3 a day if they are at the top of the pay grade in the institutions (a pay grade which is getting harder to access).

In general, it seems that things are getting harder inside. Prisoners report less solidarity among prisoners and more psychological pressure to conform to Correctional Services set behavioral norms just to get furloughs, parole or trailer visits with family.

The things that prisoners fought for in the 1970s are slowly disappearing. Access to education and trades are drying up, families are being put through more security measures before being allowed inside, and most programming is run by Correctional Services staff, not independent specialists. A prisoner being denied parole by the Parole Board of Canada in the Harper era was told that his decade plus years inside weren’t so bad. “At least you’re not in prison in the US”, they told him.

After the election of Justin Trudeau, some federal prisoners were hopeful that things would change. They wrote an open letter to Trudeau demanding changes to the federal prison system. They got a form letter back from the Justice Minister thanking them for their letter. None of the changes they called for have been implemented, although it does seem like more people are being granted parole than during the Harper era.



NOUS PROTÉGONS LE MANQUE D'ACCESSIBILITÉ AUX SERVICES MÉDICAUX À L'INTÉRIEUR DE LA PRISON. SEULEMENT DES GENS ATTENDENT À L'INTÉRIEUR PENDANT DES ANS POUR UN DIAGNOSTIC. PUIS SONT MIS SUR UNE AUTRE LONGUE LISTE D'ATTENTE POUR UNE INTERVENTION CHIRURGICALE. SA PEUT PRENDRE DES MOIS POUR VOIR UN MÉDECIN OU UN DENTISTE. NOUS PROTÉGONS LE MANQUE DE SOINS PALLIATIFS. IL Y A UN MANQUE D'ASSISTANCE DE SOINS PERSONNELS POUR LES DÉTENUÉS ÂGÉS, LAISSANT DE NOMBREUX SANS COMPASSION OU DIGNITÉ.

RACE AND CANADIAN PRISONS

As we said in our history section, white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and colonialism are fully manifested and cemented in the prison system. Indigenous adults

uals were still fighting their institutional charges and changes in security classification.

In November 2015, women in the now-closed provincial prison in Montreal, called Tanguay, released a statement about austerity measure in prison. Decrying the slashing of public services in Quebec, the statement describes the small food portions, the moldy conditions, and the dilution of cleaning products available to prisoners. It also explains the lack of access to medical services, the lack of prenatal care for pregnant women, and the impact of harsher sentencing. The letter demanded “food that meets our nutritional needs, accessible and adequate medical services, specific follow-up for pregnant women, care for people going through withdrawal, adequate provision of sanitary products, more social programs, more classes that can lead to a job, access to therapy” and calls for a social strike. The Tanguay Prison for Women was closed in the year following the release of this letter and all the women were moved to an ex-federal prison in Laval, a suburb off the island of Montreal.

BP: *You talked about the overlap and divergences of abolitionists and anarchists. You said a few things that we took immediate note of and hoped you might expand upon. You said that abolitionists tend to “more supportive of and comfortable with ‘non-violent’ resistance.” Do you find that they restrict support efforts of those prisoners willing to engage in other tactics? If so, what has that looked like and how have anarchists responded or intervened?*

We spent a lot of time discussing this question, both between us (the authors) and in consultation with comrades. It has become clear to us that people use the term ‘abolitionist’ in different ways. There are anarchists who also identify as abolitionists and there are abolitionists who become Senators and everything in between. However, we have not seen any evidence that abolitionists (as a broad category) restrict support efforts of prisoners who engage in tactics other than ‘non-violence.’ Instead, we think that just like on the outside, there is class of people in prison who are relatively articulate and may self identify as activists (and some of them as abolitionists). Some of these prisoners, in trying to be ‘constructive,’ will channel the frustration and anger of others towards calls for political reform, legal battles and non-violent resistance. Many abolitionists, especially those with academic credentials and institutional connections, are well-positioned to advance these struggles by advocacy in mainstream media, activist campaigns, lobbying government, etc. So those are the voices that get heard in the end.

To be clear, we think many abolitionists are solid, committed people and we’re glad they do this good work. Non-violent resistance is often the best practical option available to prisoners who suffer severe consequences for the slightest

placed in maximum security units are essentially in solitary confinement.

In the latest report from the Office of the Correctional Investigator there is a section on the maximum security units in federal prisons for women. The report details how cramped and closed the cells are and how being forced into the maximum security wings means that one can no longer access programs, education, or the gym or library. It says, “[prisoners] can be subject to strip searches every time they return to their unit. This system is unique to women’s corrections”. In short, without even getting into high rates of suicide and the story of Ashley Smith (which is heartbreaking and you can read about the inquest into her death and know that we are not aware of any of the recommendations being implemented), it’s not hard to see that struggles facing women incarcerated in Canada are intimately connected to systems of heteropatriarchy, settler colonialism, white supremacy, ableism, and anti-Blackness.

BP: *Also, in the U.S. women are the fastest growing prison population. Do you see this trend in Canada as well?*

As of 2015/2016, 16% of adults admitted to provincial prisons were women. For federal prisons, women are between 7 and 8% of the prison population. The total number of women in prison in Canada (in both provincial and federal prisons) has been increasing in the past 20 years. In 1999, women represented 10% of the population in provincial prisons and 5% of the population in federal prisons. The number of indigenous women in prison increased by 109% between 2001 and 2011. 41% of women in provincial prisons in 2013 were indigenous (fuck vice news but this article is pretty good). As of 2017, Indigenous women represented 50% of the maximum security population in federal prisons for women. Like we said in our longer article, the history of settler colonialism in this country really clearly shapes who ends up in prison.

BP: *Resistance in women’s prisons in the States can be hard to track, almost to the point where people have the idea that it simply doesn’t happen. In our experiences of connecting with rebellious women on the inside, we’ve heard that resistance often manifests differently than you might see in a male facility. Do you see this hold true in Canada as well? What can you tell us about resistance among incarcerated women currently?*

In 2015, women at Grand Valley Institution were facing repression for being in queer relationships (having a romantic relationship with a fellow prisoner is against CSC policy). Folks were in the hole, facing institutional charges and transfers to different security ranges. They decided to get organized. The subsequent campaign, called GVI Watch, was supported by people on the outside, who organized a call in campaign to the prison’s administration. In the end, queers in GVI were allowed to create a queer support group, although individ-

make up nearly 24% of admissions to provincial prisons while representing 3% of the Canadian adult population (provincial prisons house both people sentenced to 2 years less a day and people awaiting trial). The figure is 20% for federal sentenced custody.



Indigenous people in Canada are more likely to receive prison sentences (as opposed to house arrest or community sentencing alternatives) than white people. Indigenous women are especially targeted by the prison system. Currently, Indigenous women make up 36% of all people sentenced to provincial/territorial prison sentences.

To put these trends into a time period, between March 2003 and March 2013, the number of people incarcerated in Canada increased by 2,100 people or 16.5%. The number of Indigenous people in prison increased by 46.4%. The number of Indigenous women who received federal prison sentences increased by 80%. The number of people from visible minority groups who were imprisoned increased by 75%. The number of Black people in prison increased by 90%. Over that same ten year period, the number of white people in prison decreased by 3%. All these statistics are from the Annual Report from the Office of the Correctional Investigator from 2013. The Correctional Investigator is the official Ombudsman for prisoners in the federal prison system.

In that same report from 2013, there is a section on the situation facing Black people who are incarcerated. Black people in prison in Canada make up 9.5% of the total prison population as opposed to 2.9% of the population outside prison. Black prisoners are more likely to be put in administrative segregation, more likely to be classified as high security, less likely to be assigned work in prison, and less likely to be able to access culturally relevant (and honestly, non-racist) programming. There are stories in that report about folks attempting to do a GED inside being forced to read racist books as part of the program. There are very few programs that connect Black prisoners with Black community members on the outside – which is super important in a federal context because often, you have to demonstrate that you have community connections to the Parole Board if you want to be released before the expiration date of your sentence.

To add to this snapshot of white supremacy, anti-blackness, and colonialism as related to the Canadian prison system, we’ll share a story. We heard a story of someone who had been in prison since he was a teenager. He has a life sentence. When he was in the process of applying for parole, he (like everyone else) was mandated to do a “psychological assessment”. At the same time, he was apply-

ing for recognition of membership in an Indigenous nation. He got his results for the psychological assessment before the government formally recognized his membership. Initially the assessment said that his likelihood to re-offend was 20%. However, once his status was recognized and that status (he is Métis) was included in the assessment, his likelihood to re-offend shot up to 50%. Nothing else had changed, they didn't redo the assessment. It was simply that his racial status on the assessment changed.

This is just a small picture of the realities of white supremacy, anti-blackness, and colonialism in Canada as they relate to the prison system. There are tons more stories not shared here. Please be sure to check out the further reading suggestions at the end of this zine.

ANARCHISTS AND ABOLITIONISTS

In Canada, there is a distinct prison abolition movement that both overlaps with and diverges from anarchists struggling against prisons. There are many committed, sincere and solid people who primarily identify as prison abolitionists. Historically, prison abolitionists have supported so-called social prisoners, while many anarchists have been involved in political prisoner/prisoner of war support. However, anarchists may also identify as abolitionists, recognizing that all imprisonment is political. In recent years, especially with the influence of insurrectionary anarchism on anarchist milieus in Canada, anarchists have made steps towards supporting anyone resisting in prison.

Abolitionists, on the whole, tend to be more interested in direct support and reform-oriented campaigns and legal battles, and are more supportive of 'non-violent' resistance. In some cases, they may have more resources and be in a better public position to support prisoners than the anarchist movement. Anarchists have sometimes found themselves mostly supporting prisoners south of the border or elsewhere in the world, given the framework of political prisoner/prisoner of war/anarchist prisoner support and the dearth of prisoners who fit this framework in the Canadian prison system.

It is possible that political differences between those who see a future where there are no longer prisons, but the state is intact, and those who want to see an end to the state and its prisons will be exacerbated in the Trudeau years with a return to hegemonic liberalism in federal politics. A stark example of this is Kim Pate, a self-described abolitionist who has spent her life advocating for women in prison as Executive Director of the Elizabeth Fry Society. In 2016, Pate was appointed to the Senate, the Upper House of Canadian Parliament, where she has gone pretty quiet about abolition, talking instead about 'decarceration.' This raises the question of whether prison abolitionism as an ideology implies meaningful opposition to the state itself.

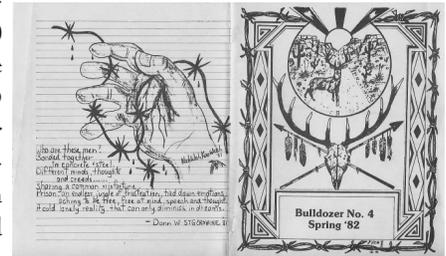
Second, we want to highlight issues being brought to light in general in terms of struggles facing women in prison. The first is the situation facing pregnant women and newborn babies in the prison system. Most women who give birth while incarcerated have their babies taken away from them right away. Folks on the inside and the outside have been advocating for, firstly, an end to incarceration, period. As part of that advocacy, there was an effort to develop guidelines for Mother-Baby Units in the prison system so that newborn babies could stay with their mothers. As of 2016, some prisons in BC are implementing programs for some mothers. But, many other women face long bouts away from their kids while incarcerated, including newborns whose fates are decided by social workers unfamiliar with the programs that are available. Most of the news around this in the past few years has been about provincial prisons in British Columbia. The federal government responded to the news by increasing the amount of existing spots in the mother-baby programs in federal institutions, although spots remain limited.

Last, we want to highlight issues facing trans women incarcerated in Canada. Up until very recently, trans women were incarcerated in prisons for men in Canada, a reality that exposed many women to violence and harassment. Due to a lawsuit brought on the inside by Fallon Aube, and advocacy on the outside, like the time when Teresa Windsor asked Prime Minister Trudeau why trans women were being incarcerated in men's facilities at a town hall in Kingston, Ontario, the Correctional Services of Canada have released a new policy regarding trans women in prison in the last month. As of January 2018, Correctional Services Canada will let incarcerated trans people choose whether they want to be incarcerated in a men's prison or a women's prison and that choice can be based on gender identity, although we're guessing that this change will be far from accessible for all who want it because of the language that is still in the policy regarding "safety concerns" and the continued reality of transphobia both in prison and outside prison.

Given all this, it might sound like we think shit is pretty good for women in prison in Canada. Not the case! Though the government has changed some things in the last five years, many of the issues we have seen playing out in men's prisons (terrible food, lack of access to programming, lack of access to educational opportunities, overcrowding, lack of access to outside community, restrictive conditions for visitors, and on and on and on) also plague women's prisons, sometimes in a magnified way. For instance, the lack of access to adequate programming has consistently been much more of a problem in women's prisons than in men's prisons. There are also fewer women's prisons in Canada, making it more likely that women will be incarcerated far from their families and thus, receive fewer visitors. The smaller numbers of women in prison in Canada means that people

A major influence on both anarchist and abolitionist critiques of prison in Canada is the legacy of Clare Culhane. Clare cut her teeth at union organizing in the Montreal garment industry before moving to British Columbia where she got involved with the nascent Prisoners Union Committee during the tumultuous 1970s. During a riot at BC Pen in 1976, prisoners requested Clare be part of a civilian group that would help negotiate an end to the standoff. She agreed and was instrumental to negotiating a bloodless resolution, and then immediately banned by authorities from going into any more prisons. Clare became an active writer and speaker on the topic of prison abolition, got involved with organizing public events for Prisoners Justice Day, and was active in the cause until her death in 1996.

Bulldozer was an anti-prison anarchist project founded in 1980 out of the Toronto counterculture scene. They also organized PJD events and published a newsletter of prison writing called “Bulldozer: The Only Vehicle For Prison Reform.” They were raided and charged with sedition for their



open support for Direct Action, an anarchist urban guerilla group active across Canada in the 1980s. The newsletter project was revived in the 1990s as a collaboration between Bulldozer member Jim Campbell and anarchist political prisoner Bill Dunne. This project would evolve into the Prison News Service, which was published until 1996.

Across Ontario, Anarchist Black Cross projects were revived in Ontario throughout the 2000s, with chapters springing up in Toronto, Guelph, and Peterborough. This would prove to be an important support network for anarchists and others who faced repression for their organizing against the G20 Summit in Toronto in 2010. There has also been a lot of activity in solidarity with migrants resisting indefinite detention via the End Immigration Detention Network.

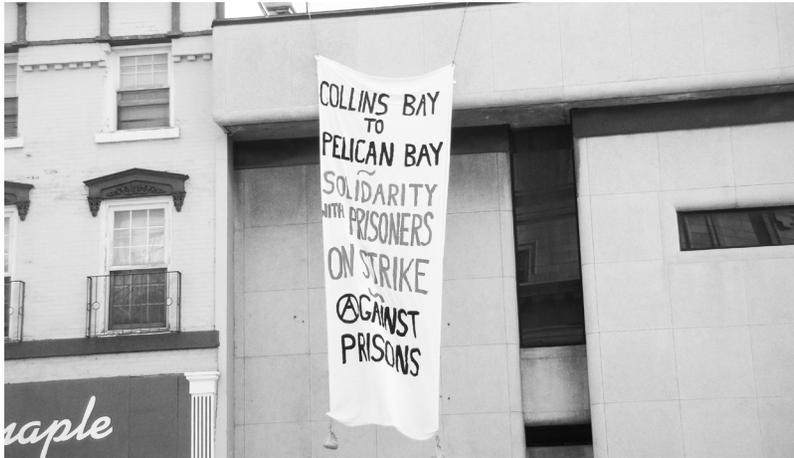
In Kingston, End the Prison Industrial Complex (EPIC) was formed in 2009 to intervene in the local Prison Farms movement with an abolitionist perspective. After the farms were closed, EPIC shifted gears and built a campaign against prison construction primarily targeting private contractors which ended after an attempt to blockade Collins Bay prison on PJD in 2012. Since 2012, EPIC has moved to espousing more explicit anarchist politics, publishing an irregular prison newsletter and acting in solidarity with the struggles of local prisoners, such as the federal prison strike against pay cuts in 2013. CFRC Prison Radio provides an important link between the 8 prisons in the broadcast range and

INTERVIEW WITH SOME FRIENDS FROM SO-CALLED CANADA

BLOC PARTY: *You talked about the high rates of suicide in women’s facilities in Canada and mentioned the story of one woman named Ashley Smith who ended her life while in custody in 2007. Can you tell us more about the struggles of women incarcerated in Canada?*

SOME FRIENDS FROM SO-CALLED CANADA: There’s a lot to say about the struggles of women incarcerated in Canada, so take this as a snapshot.

First, we want to highlight some individuals who have been speaking out about how the prison system effects women in Canada. Sheri Pranteau, a Cree woman from Winnipeg, Manitoba, who is on parole with a life sentence, has spoken publicly about the issues facing indigenous women in Canadian prisons. Arlene Gallone, a Black woman who lives in Montreal, is in the process of suing the Correctional Services of Canada in a class action lawsuit for putting her in solitary confinement for long stretches of time in the federal prison for women in Joliette, Quebec.¹ Lastly, we want to highlight Nyki Kish, a wrongfully convicted activist currently serving a life sentence at the Grand Valley Institute for Women in Ontario. She has a blog² where she writes about her experience in prison and her analysis of the prison system.³ She is still in prison. All of these individuals talk about conditions facing women in prison in so-called Canada, so go check them out in their own words!



the Kingston community for coordinating support and solidarity.

In Ottawa, there is a network of abolitionists based in the community and the University of Ottawa involved in a variety of support work and campaigns, including the #NOPE/No On Prison Expansion project led by the Criminalization and Punishment Education Project.

In Quebec, a lot of 1970s era prisoner advocacy was organized by the Ligue des Droits' Prisoners Committee, which supported the prisoners on strike in 1976 in Archambault. The Prisoners Committee was forced to end formal ties with the Ligue des Droits after Centraide (the United Way) threatened to pull the Ligue's funding if they didn't distance themselves from the Prisoners Committee. In 1984, the group became their own non-profit. They have played a big role in prisoner advocacy from the outside over the years.

The Coalition Opposé à la Brutalité Policière has also always been connected to prisoners justice support in Montreal. They were very involved in organizing around Prisoners Justice Day in Montreal on the outside in the 1990s.

Over the years in Montreal, people doing prisoner advocacy and support and anti-prison organizing have been involved in programs on the inside, organizing noise demonstrations outside of the prisons, supporting people arrested at annual demonstrations, and publicizing resistance that happens in the provincial and federal prisons in and around the city.

Montreal is currently home to a Prison Radio Show, the Prisoner Correspondence Project (a queer pen-pal program for prisoners), a Books to Prisoners chapter, various legal defense funds connected to student unions and the CLAC, and an annual New Years Eve noise demonstration outside of the prisons in Laval, a nearby suburb. Toute Detention est Politique (Every Detention is Po-

litical) has organized conferences and demonstrations, written analysis of the prison system, and publicized prisoner resistance in the provincial jail for women. The Certain Days Political Prisoners Calendar project has some of its base in Montreal. PASC organizes popular education about prison and supports



political prisoners in Colombia. Solidarity across Borders is a local migrant justice organization that is organizing against the construction of a new immigrant detention center slated to be built in the Montreal area in the coming years. Anarchists and other radical organizers in the city have also coordinated ad-hoc

support for hunger strikers in prisons in California and elsewhere in the U.S, as well as support for prisoners resisting in Quebec and the rest of Canada.

CONCLUSION

So ends our snapshot of Canadian prison history and current struggles in Kingston and Montreal. Obviously there are things we didn't cover. It is exciting to share this with people in the U.S. and across Canada, but it also feels weighty or even a little scary given how few histories like this have been written. We hope that anyone who has personal and/or research experience with these histories will engage with us. We'd love to be challenged on some of the conclusions we have drawn throughout this piece!

Contact us at: canprisonhistoryzine@riseup.net