

KEEP THE FIRES BURNING

A PUBLICATION BY AND FOR CALIFORNIA PRISONERS

“In The Spirit of Abolition” - Jailhouse Lawyers Speak Calls For Shut ‘Em Down Demonstrations on Millenials are Killing Capitalism

Select excerpts from a conversation on a podcast between J (the host) and two anonymous members of Jailhouse Lawyers Speak. JLS is a clandestine group of imprisoned abolitionists in the so-called United States. The episode is about the call from JLS for mass outside demonstrations on 8/21 and 9/9.

Transcribed by Alice M. Quach. Please write us if you want a copy of the full transcription.

[...]

JLS: So, first of all, thank you for giving us a platform to even discuss these “Shut ‘Em Down” demonstrations call that we’ve made to action. One of the things is definitely a sense of urgency to listen right here because for us we’re actually witnessing a slip in prisoner support, and I think a lot of this had to do with the election process that we just recently witnessed on the Presidential Election. I think we had a lot of people that was probably in the camps, particularly just to challenge anything that they could link back to the Trump administration. So I think a lot of those people now, they kinda went over to the Biden camp now and they’re not really saying anything about a lot of pressing issues that prisoners have. As a matter of fact, a lot of issues we’re finding, a lot of them are kinda back-pedaling. The issues are not so urgent now all of a sudden. So these are just some of the more immediate things that we see that has been taking place now. You know, and not only that, but let’s look at the suffocation of the voices in the prison. When you have, we was already screaming about deaths, about inhumane living conditions in the prisons, in jails in this country. But then you have, actually in your face, prisoners being infected by COVID-19 and prisoners literally dying. And people are literally not saying anything. Nothing, I mean, it’s like, people are saying something but not on the scales that it should be on. And so, that definitely tells us that we have lost a lot of ground right now, because this should have been something that people should have been up roared about right now. So, yeah, that’s one of the reasons that kinda draws us out. And also, although I see a slipping, what we do recognize is we haven’t slipped so far

to where we cannot catch this, and that’s the whole thing, to be able to catch it and to be able to re-center the prisoners movement, to be able to re-center our voices, because that’s something that’s been smothered, to re-center our voices and let people know that we are still organizing, that we still wanna be heard, and that we still moving in the direction of dismantling the prison slave complex and to get those that are more solid already, uh, with this particular agenda, to get them more centered as well, to get them back focused into the movement and into the actions that need to take place so we can bring this change. So that’s some of the things right there just to keep it simple. [...]

JLS: Okay, right. First of all, I want everybody to know that, we all know that August 21st is very significant as well as September 9th. Anytime we mention August 21st, a lot of times, we definitely mention it back to comrades George Jackson, the evolutionary process of the prison movement at that particular point. But also, we can link it all the way back to the plantation days as well because you know, we only consider prisons an extension of the old plantation, you know what I’m saying? It’s just a modern day version of the old plantation, so this is why we can bring up people like Frederick Douglass, Nat Turner, because we want people to understand it’s a continual struggle, and we can link it all the way up to Attica for obvious reasons because Attica has been a continuous process, you know, of this particular struggle. It’s shown the big head and sometimes in a more obvious way than we see in other places. Attica is traditionally recognized on the scale that it is because of the way the forces went in and the damage that was actually done showed us how far the state is willing to go. So, these are definitely significant events, but also, I don’t want people to forget this significant event, the national prison strikes of 2016, the national prison strikes of 2018, once again, a continuation of the prison movement. So, just wanna kinda bring that as it related to the dates in particular. [...] And one of the things we have to make sure that people understand is that this is definitely a call in spirit of abolition. We have to begin to dismantle these prisons and get rid of them. Right now with the winning of Joe Biden, I know people don’t like to hear this right here, but this does not mean a decrease in prisons. Matter of fact, we were very fearful this means an increase in the prison population. So it’s very, very important. This is another reason why it’s such

an urgency to this call right here. To get people back on track, you know. [...]

JLS: One of the things we do notice, there's been a lot of urgency right now, as it relates a lot of groups right now, we know they've been sounding the alarm, and once again, that's not really getting the feedback that should be gotten. [...] I think people got caught up in the hype. I think people did not ask the questions that they needed to ask, you know. Well, they didn't follow up. Because we all knew what the problems were. They didn't follow up. People were so desperate to get rid of this bogeyman from up top, you know. And right now, they was suffering, we did not look at this man close enough, by, you know, thinking they could push him to the left or something like that, right? That was some crazy reason they was thinking they could push him to the left, you know. But, he's shown he's the same dude. You know, he's the same man that pushed a lot of policies back in the day that appalled a lot of people, you know. But same dude. Nothing has changed, and he has been consistent about that. Matter of fact, he was actually stubborn about a lot of this stuff during this campaign, you know. He wasn't talking about changing anything. All he did was just nodding his head and showing that he can beat Trump, you know, that's it, you know. And people went for that. So, it's really, really sad I think where we're at today, and I figured sad where we're at as it relates to prisons and jails and ICE in this country today [...].

J: One other thing I wanted to talk about is there is a current threat right now for federal prisons, POPs, to eliminate physical mail and replace it with electronic scans that go into tablets and everything gets recorded and digitized. [...]

JLS: And if you give a prisoner the chance to write, we're actually seeing them move out, is in phases. We're seeing prisoners around the country being issued these tablets. And these tablets actually have the ability, you know what I'm sayin, to be able to upload mail to the tablet. You know, I think in some areas, it was already photocopied and sent to prisoners a photocopy, something like that. But nonetheless, these tablets, we also feel like is gonna have a big play into some of the Smart Communications. Not only on that level, but also visitation. I think we're not gonna see traditional visitation come back the way they was. I think it's gonna be, I think it's been way too much money gained on the way they're actually doing visitation right now. So to touch back on Smart Communications, very scary thought, very disturbing, we do feel like this is something people need to get on. Actually I was already talking to one or two organizers out there already about figuring out ways to begin to address this before it hits full steam, so you gonna see us soon begin to address this particular topic and begin to organize around it, because it's gonna be something that we're gonna see spread around the country because it's a moneymaker. And

that's what it's about at the end of the day. It's about making money. And they can make all the excuses they want, but this is all it's about at the end of the day. It's making money. [...]

JLS: [...] The security part of me also knows that it is definitely about surveillance. One of the things too, I wanna add, to speak on surveillance, is very recently, they had this high profile case that popped up and it was dealing with jail service and it was talking about they was able to use the networks of a lot of different options that the prison system around the country and to be able to connect certain people and certain information, to be able to solve certain cases and things of that nature, right? And this case, it was some type of ring, illegal ring that was going on. But, it just shows that almost everybody, somebody that's in these people's system, you see what I'm sayin? And it's making a lot more easier for the state entities as well as the government entities to be able to track conversations, but not only track conversations, but spy on people, to be able to gain a hell of a lot more intel even on things that are not necessarily going on back here, but that are going on out there, loved ones, or friends are sharing with people because they're forced into certain communication channels, to share this particular information. And no matter how secret they think they may be, these people are figuring out codes, they're figuring out lingo, they're figuring out everything, and so, yes, when you talking about that, that is definitely another way of being able to monitor us, but not only to monitor us, but to monitor the outside people as well as organizations that we may be dealing with on the outside as well. And we can never forget that part right there. A lot of this, when you start talking about security, a lot of this also outside governmental agencies work with prison systems in order to get information on regular citizens out there. And this has to be known. [...]

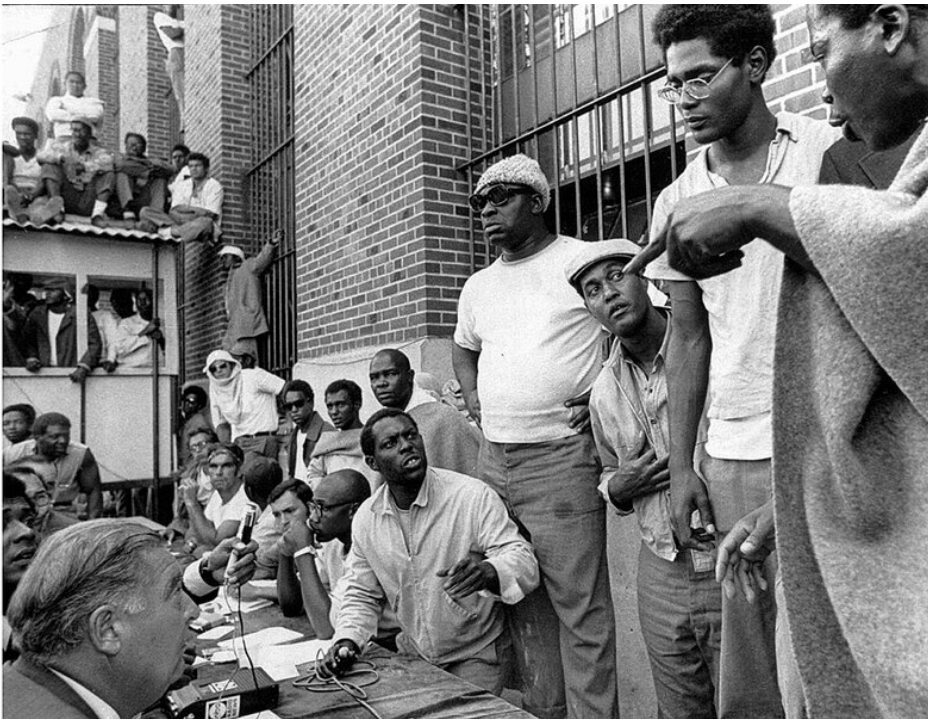
JLS: Yeah. We made a change to the ten demands as it related to number nine. Obviously we was dealing with the Pell Grants on number nine. Number nine has been changed to the needed release of all political prisoners. Now, to point number nine, although the, all the other points, nine points was a collective around the nation. Point number nine was particularly because it's a JLS organizing platform at this point, something that we made a decision on as a JLS entity as a organization. And we made that decision because the political prisoners that we actually have in this country today are not necessarily getting the recognition they need to be getting. They haven't really been very well voiced in our movement. They've been voiced in the movement but not on the level that they need to be voiced on. People need to know that we support, we support, even though I believe all prisoners to some degree are political prisoners, but nonetheless, this particular designation for them, we need to have it, but not only we need to have it, but we need to work full

overtime to bring these elders home. So recently we've been working on things on our own platform or connecting with something call strategic release. This is something they came up with, that Pelican Bay amongst the California prisoners, um because they didn't feel like their story was getting out. A lot of them was being held in Pelican Bay and because of their political beliefs. And they wanted to get their story out, let people know they have political prisoners and we you know, we should be treated as such. And the only very recently they began to bring this strategic release out and begin to include the other political prisoners as well as other politicized or political prisoners around the country that people may not know of. So this is something that we're also working with as well on the strategic release side. But, um, once again, we just want people to understand that political prisoners, people need to know who they are in this country. We need to do everything in our power to get these elders home because in some cases, the system has it in their minds to let these individuals die. If you know about COINTELPRO, which is all out there now, there is no reason you shouldn't be fighting to get home someone that, that you know, is a victim of COINTELPRO. There's absolutely no excuse. I mean, we have all the records, we have all the documents, we have no excuse any longer to set down on our hands and treat these people as if they are just regular people, you know, and just kind of waiting their time out, the way you put a system to work when it's actually the system that captured them for social containment reasons, you know. This wasn't, I always tell people there are prisoners for two reasons, economic, you know, social containment. In

this case right here, for them, social containment, so uh, in a way, so that's another reason why we did develop and we all voted to agree to our process to add point number nine.

J: Great. You know, you and I have talked a number of times over the years, and you're always, you know, we've talked a lot about abolition. We've talked about the distinction between slavery and prison abolition and where they intersect as well. [...]. So, I'm just curious if you have any thoughts on that, or wanted to share anything about that and whether you're seeing a need to renew the spirit of abolition.

JLS: At heart, we feel that it is a, that's a very good question because when we was talking about abolition, we was discussing all the different areas of abolition as a word, presently and historically. [...] So, we're talking about the spirit of abolition. We're definitely talking about renewing that flyer. We need to renew the flyer, renew the conversation, and even if we're not necessarily all in agreement on the definition of abolition, you know, we have to come together and understand at least the root of it and what it means and what we're trying to accomplish, you know. [...] But, once again, definitely about renewing it and taking control and taking control out of the hands of the people that don't wanna see this happen. So, we have to take control of this and we're taking control of our own destiny and our own reality and what abolition means to us. This is why we say the spirit of abolition, cause this is what all our ancestors moved on. They moved in the spirit of abolition. [...]



From left, Richard Clark with elbows on table, Carl Jones-El, Herbert X Blyden, Frank "Big Black" Smith, Roger Champen, and Elliot "L.D." Barkley negotiating with the New York commissioner of corrections during the Attica prison uprising in September 1971. This September 9th will be the 50th anniversary of that historic moment. If you would like to know more write and let us know and we'll send you an in depth history of that moment.

Routine Mail Digitalization Threatens Vital Prison Communications and Resistance

This article was written by an outside comrade in Florida Prisoner Solidarity about the fight against mail digitalization. It relies heavily on the information compiled and reported by Samantha Melamed of the Philadelphia Inquirer and Aaron Gordon of Vice News

A frightening shift in how people behind bars can communicate with the outside world has taken root. State and local officials across the so-called United States are increasingly working to eliminate routine paper mail, instead opting into the use of software from third party contractors to sort and deliver communications to prisoners. While prison officials claim that the digitization of routine mail will stamp out the universal dilemma of contraband, early examples of the transition suggest otherwise. The precedence of routine mail digitalization in the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PADOC) reveals that much more sinister agendas are at play.

The PADOC began the process of fully digitizing routine mail in the Fall of 2018. After an emergency authorization approved by Governor Wolf, the PADOC entered an agreement with Smart Communications, a company based in so-called Florida, to utilize their software MailGuard for an annual rate of \$4.5 million. In the months leading up to the authorization of the contract, PADOC Secretary Wetzel placed the department on lockdown on August 29th of 2018, citing reports received from central and western PADOC facilities of 57 staff becoming ill following 27 incidents. Staff reported symptoms of light-headedness, dizziness, elevated blood pressure and heart rate, ultimately leading to the administration of naloxone to over half a dozen employees.

Emergency responders and researchers stress that overdose due to incidental exposure to fentanyl and K2 (a synthetic cannabinoid, also referred to as “Spice”) is highly unlikely. Experts at the American College of Toxicology report that mere contact with the powder form of fentanyl cannot be absorbed, and when aerosolized, fentanyl is not concentrated enough to result in overdose. As for K2, researchers and first responders chimed in to categorically deny the possibility that K2 exposure could be the culprit for the symptoms detailed by prison staff. Still, prison and state officials with no specialized knowledge or training on incidental drug exposure cannibalized the mass psychogenic illness of their staff to fuel their contraband mythology.

Recent reporting from VICE about a pitch given by Smart Communications to the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) substantiates further that the motives behind routine digitization of mail have little to do with

the contraband hysteria being peddled by prison officials. In their proposal to the VADOC, Smart Communications directly marketed their software MailGuard’s services as a way to surveil the communications of prisoners and curtail “gang” activity by monitoring outside connections. Mailguard collects a variety of electronic data, such as physical address, IP address, phone numbers, and even the GPS information of devices using the systems. Archived letters are searchable by keywords and Smart Communications stores them for up to seven years. The VADOC did not ultimately enter into a contract with Smart Communications, however, the VADOC’s routine institutional practices involve photocopying all routine mail, including drawings and photographs to deliver to prisoners, then shredding the original copies on the spot. Prisoners never get to see or hold the original photographs, drawings, and letters themselves.

Pennsylvania isn’t the only state doubling down on this strategy to justify routine mail digitalization. In the fall of 2020, the Florida Department of Corrections (FDOC) announced it would revisit its policies on routine mail processing. It would not be until the spring of 2021 for families and outside supporters to be given transparency about the specifics of the proposed mail rule change.

A public hearing held by the FDOC on June 11, 2021 gave family members and outside supporters an opportunity to testify on the proposed changes to routine mail. Like so-called Pennsylvania and Virginia officials, FDOC officials claim that contraband necessitates a shift to digitized mail to prevent the trafficking of illicit substances into FDOC facilities. During the hearing, family members stressed the ways that JPay already fails to deliver on the communication services. Costs quickly add up, and JPay technology is outdated and dysfunctional, and the customer service is paltry.

Abolitionist collective Florida Prisoner Solidarity (FPS) consistently receives correspondence from prisoners across the state who are denied access to tablets on CO’s discretion. Others report that tablets are frequently not charged and inaccessible. There is an existing record of FDOC prisoners having their messages and media purchases erased during changes in communications contractors. Following the FDOC’s switch from Access Corrections to JPay in 2018, a class-action lawsuit was filed against the FDOC for erasing \$11 million in music purchases. A settlement was reached in 2020 in favor of the prisoners to the tune of \$3.9 million. Still, the FDOC continues to collect substantial commissions on the bank fees required to download MP3s and send messages through JPay.

Seakers at the June 11th hearing also emphasized the way that the elimination of paper mail cuts off one of the few tactile forms of support that prisoners can receive other than

physical visits. No guarantee has been given whether pictures will be scanned in black and white or color, presently the possibility of further sapping the color out of prisoners' lives. One former prisoner remarked on how letters become memories you hold onto for the rest of your life. With the new changes, these letters would be left behind on tablets upon release or erased when prison officials decide to switch service providers.

One comrade in Florida State Prison writes, "The economic war, including price gouging on email service stamps, on the loved ones and supporters of prisoners continues to escalate. Prisoners do not work or get paid for prison labor, so it is the loved ones and supporters of prisoners who are footing the bill for this ransom. A high price is paid for supporting and associating with prisoners." He questions also how prisoners will be able to initiate contact with outside correspondents, especially their legal counsel.

This move can also compromise legal confidentiality. With an electronic platform, personnel will be able to read prisoner's incoming and outgoing legal mail. In addition, prisoners are presently able to initiate correspondence with an outside contact, organization, or business at their discretion. If prison staff can reject or disappear legal mail, and prisoners are unable to reach outside parties to seek legal counsel, communicate with outside organizers and media contacts, it is possible we may be witnessing the collapse of existing measures available to hold prison officials and staff accountable for abuse.

Concerns from inside and outside the prison walls of so-called Florida are well-founded and have precedence. Outside supporters and family members with contacts across so-called Pennsylvania report delays upwards of a week to deliver and receive mail, with poor copy quality rendering much correspondence illegible, as well as whole pages missing entirely. Photos that were guaranteed in color are frequently delivered in black and white, grainy and distorted. Aaron, an organizer based in occupied Lenape land who has been involved with the efforts of the Philadelphia Human Rights Coalition, and who supported hunger strikers during the height of the uprisings last summer, weighed

in on consequences on routine mail digitalization. While historically Aaron has corresponded with locked up family and friends by sending hand-written letters, the challenges posed by mail delays in the last 16 months in particular has caused him to stop writing paper mail entirely.

Aaron says that with the added delays of COVID-19 behind bars, he would send a paper letter and in two weeks he might get one back that someone was put in the hole, or that something alarming had happened--witnessing those around them showing symptoms of COVID, or showing symptoms of COVID themselves--and by the time he received the letter it was no longer possible to intervene from the outside. Digitization has made the process of sending paper mail long, arduous, and it is unclear what communications will be flagged. As such, Aaron has found it easier to send an email through Global Tel Link (GTL) email service ConnectNetwork or wait for a call. During the terrifying time of the pandemic and the uprisings, where a delay and communication could mean the worst, two weeks to receive a message was too long.

The growing capacity of the State to store and surveil the digital activities and fingerprint of prisoners and their networks has alarming consequences for the privacy, access, and repression of routine communications. State repression and counterinsurgent tactics are evershifting and escalating, and the notion that the State and its agencies will be sitting on piles of data is alarming. Though devastating and far-reaching in its consequences, mail digitalization presents another reason to maintain our commitments and prioritize critical conversations across the walls.

Not only are the intentions of routine mail digitalization clear, the infrastructure and strategies being put into place to surveil, repress, and disconnect prisoners from the outside world and resistance has been outlined in detail. Armed with this information and assessment of corrections' strategies we can be prepared to take necessary steps. Proactive legal challenges can be made by movement lawyers, and public awareness can be raised, and prisoners can be equipped to push back.

Stop Crimes Before They Happen

Criminal Intelligence – Anticipate and prevent criminal activity with analyzed data



The corrections landscape is constantly evolving, especially in terms of the intelligence required to keep inmates, staff, and the public safe. GTL's Intelligence Solutions are designed for the next generation of correctional facilities by connecting systems, leveraging automation, and implementing technologies to readily identify actionable intelligence critical to ensuring a facility's safety and security. Our solutions can collect, analyze, and compare call statistics, visitor information, accounting information, gang affiliations, and other data points to reveal illicit activity, expose suspicious patterns, and discover hidden networks. We also can provide trained and credentialed intelligence analysts and digital forensics examiners to support officers and staff members involved in an investigative capacity.

GTL has the range of tools and services and depth of expertise in corrections and law enforcement investigative practices to offer a comprehensive array of solutions in the intelligence space.

While Global Tel Link and CDCr are marketing the roll out of the new tablet system and security infrastructure and something that will provide more access for prisoners and an avenue for bringing COs to account for mistreatment. This is absolute double talk. The GTL website is far from shy in presenting itself as an advanced digital security product to be deployed by, and to the benefit of, prisons and police.

One comrade/inside reporter has made the assessment that the implementation of the new camera systems that you all have been witnessing might mean the end of the 602 process. Basically, CDCr would do what it does by attempting to remove prisoner agency from the equation and insist that accountability would come straight from Sacramento. It's unclear if this is in the works or not and is difficult to know, but we want to try and get a conversation going about what y'all assessment is of the issue. What do you think?

the ballad of a ghost

by komrade underground

i am just a ghost
i died the year of 2005
unreported... unrecorded
just dismissed into the abyss of nowhere
to unlive for eternity, with the living
With promises, that i will never be loved or actualized...
just remembered
...sometimes

i am just a ghost

so no one ever has to admit to seeing me
or knowing me
or loving me
unless they become tired of my non-presence and they call
the team to exorcise my non-existent
but really,
i mean,
who wants to admit that they believe in ghosts
that they see a ghost
that they love a ghost

i am sometimes just a voice
without any physical space or place in this world
just words, quiet words

that ppl irl get to turn on and off when they choose to believe
I have no choice
except to
be alone or be around...
but never to be with
or actually there

i am just a ghost
so i don't understand how to love
or why that,
how i love is wrong
or maybe that i love too long
or that i want to love like a song
not a diary
stories that no one will ever read
i am just a ghost
and the hardest thing is that i still have emotions
and my feelings never left with my physicalities
and i have to survive amongst the living
i have to watch ppl live
watch ppl only notice me in their periphery
because i don't actually exist
just kinda here .. kinda there ..
kinda

i am just a ghost
and maybe one day i will no longer be
and maybe one day i might get free
and maybe one day my love will matter to more than just me
and maybe one day the world will see...
that i was never a ghost.

***IRS Update to Prison Officials re Letter 4883C,
5071C, 6330C or 6331C Received by Incarcerated
Persons***

This is the text of a letter recently sent to prison officials from the IRS that we are passing on for your knowledge. We are not tied to the IRS in any way and still cannot give individual tax advice in most cases.

Dear Prison Official:

We are writing to update you about the Economic Impact Payments (EIPs) to incarcerated persons under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, Pub. L. No. 116-136, 134 Stat. 281 (March 27, 2020). The purpose of this notification is to advise you of the steps that should be taken to submit information to the IRS if the incarcerated person receives a 4883C, 5071C, 6330C or 6331C letter. These letters are sent to verify identity before we process the income tax return or issue a refund.

Procedures if a 4883C, 5071C, 6330C or 6331C letter is received

- Send an email to prisoner_file@irs.gov using the literal “TPP EIP” in the subject line. Contact information is for Prison Officials use only.
- Complete the enclosed template which includes.
 - › Incarcerated Persons Name
 - › Control Number on the letter received
 - › Adjusted Gross Income Amount -1040 Line 8b
 - › Refund Amount – 1040 Line 21a
 - › Name, Title, and Email of the Requesting Official
 - › Name of Facility

Please ensure all your facilities receive a copy of this email.
Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,
Internal Revenue Service

Editor's Note

We are always eager to hear from you! We need your thoughts, works, and feedback! Thank you to those who have contributed art and writings so far, you're what make this possible. A huge part of the goal of this paper is to generate and amplify important conversations between folks inside and also out.

We try to publish the pieces we receive as they are, so we make little to no changes unless you ask us to edit your work. If you are able to, please consider submitting your writing through JPay, we'll add you to one of our accounts on request. We also anonymize all submissions from the inside per our editorial principles. Space is often limited, but even if we aren't able to publish your letter, it may spark important conversations.

We think the pieces here are thought-provoking and deserve to be read, though they may not always directly reflect the views of Oakland Abolition & Solidarity. Please send any stories, feedback, inquiries, responses, artwork, or anything else you'd like to share to:

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