

JUNE 11th

& LONG TERM
PRISONER SUPPORT

PO Box 6004
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USA



THE FINAL STRAW
MAY 28, 2023



Chazz speaks about continued support of prisoners from the George Floyd Uprising. You can find more on some of these prisoners at **UprisingSupport.Org**, and info for other political prisoners at **PrisonerSolidarity.Com**.

The 2023 call for support is available here, where there is also a printable zine version available:

<https://june11.noblogs.org/2023-call/>

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Chazz: Yeah, my name is Chazz. So I've been working on the uprisingsupport.org website since the beginning. We started working on this product a little bit after the uprising began and then kind of petered out. I've been doing anti-repression and prisoner support work inside of an anarchist context since, oh gosh, a very long time ago, early 2000s—so I don't make myself sound super old.

TFSR: So I was wondering if you could talk a bit about Uprising Support, the project, how it started. I think we've spoken about this for a past June 11th Conversation. As context for the audience, this conversation is going to sit alongside of some other anti-repression prisoner support stuff, as well as a reading of the June 11th statement for this year. So we are meaning for this to be within the context of wider tools and lessons that people have around the very depressing but also kind of uplifting at times and necessary work of long-term prisoner solidarity.

I wonder if you could talk a bit about how Uprising Support came together as a project and the scope of what you work on.

Chazz: [Uprisingsupport.org](http://uprisingsupport.org) started to be put together after the uprising had... it's always hard to say when an uprising ends, right? But a group of people basically came together understanding that because of the scale of the 2020 uprising, the scale of both repression and support was going to be grand. It was going to be massive. With how diffuse and how everywhere the uprising was, we noticed that there were people being criminalized and repressed for the uprising in places that maybe didn't have pre-existing support structures: smaller towns, places where anarchist or radical politics didn't have a strong footing.

So what we wanted to do was create a clearinghouse basically, for people to find information out about people who'd been criminalized during the uprising, people who'd been incarcerated, people who were awaiting trial, so that you could find people in your region or your area and lend them support. Adding into that was also people who did have pre-existing radical or anarchist or anti-oppression support campaigns. So we began to compile information. It's a really tedious process. Numbers are always hard to pin down, and in the US, obviously, there's so many levels of jurisdiction of being incarcerated. So we had people sitting in the federal system housed by the DOP, there were people sitting in county jails waiting on trials, there were people sitting all over the place. And especially in the context of COVID, the ability for us to find people was pretty hampered by this scattershot repression that happened all across the country.

There were about 350 to 400 people who were facing federal criminal charges. So at the federal level. Then anywhere from 7,000 to 15,000 (depending on who you ask) people who had just been arrested at something and were facing smaller municipal charges or state charges. So sorting through all of that took a really long time, and we're still doing that work.

So we began to reach out to people who were incarcerated, people who

had been in prison during the uprising, and send them a letter, basically informing them of the work that we were doing and asking if they wanted to be listed. That's how the beginning of this compilation started. Then on the site we try and maintain information about why anti-repression is important and a solid "how-to" if you've never written to prisoners before or worked on a support campaign. So on the "further resources" tab, we try and maintain really good and solid information about how to do the support work we're hoping that people pick up.

TF SR: You mentioned that you're still compiling this information. For people in the audience who are new to this concept, there's a constitutional right that everyone caught up in the US political system and its various levels has a right to a speedy and fair trial. But the events that we're talking about in this specific instance are from two and a half to three years ago. In the instances where you're finding people now, is it because there wasn't existent anti-repression infrastructure there and the case just sort of raises a flag for you or because people have been being pursued over this period of time by law enforcement and suddenly identifiable information is leading to a prosecution? And if it's not that, are people still languishing in county jails around charges from 2020?

Chazz: I mean, I think it's all of those things. There are a number of people who are being convicted of charges from 2020 right now. This process can go a bunch of different ways, and it has gone a bunch of different ways, depending on where in the country you are, what the process looks like where you are. Your right to a speedy trial is a really complicated matter, and I am definitely not a lawyer. But whenever we're talking about rights, you only have rights insofar as you have the capacity to fight back in a civil way. By civil, I mean in a non-criminal law kind of way, if you have the resources to fight back against these long, languishing aspects of awaiting a trial.

At the federal level, people have been sitting for a couple of years, and right now, they're either taking pleas and they're pleading out, which is the vast majority of prisoners in these kinds of situations... plead out, or they've just now been convicted. We're looking at some folks who are being added to the site recently. There's a Georgia prisoner that just got added to the site who just got convicted from from 2020 because of the length of how long it took to go to trial. So you've got people who have been sitting for a long time being held in a variety of facilities.

On our end, with the vast majority of cases that we find, we're finding because we sit and do basic internet searches, looking for keywords that pop up, and looking for cases that refer to other cases. So we've got these crazy big lists of people that we've been following through the court system for the last two years, trying to understand where they're at. Some people are out of custody, so we don't have access to contact them until they're in custody, which is a whole crazy feeling—waiting for someone to go to jail so you can contact them.

There are some people who just literally haven't started the process yet especially at the federal level. You have to remember that in a lot of places, especially all throughout 2020, the investigatory process that normally happens at a certain speed—a state level grand jury indictment or a federal grand jury indictment—those processes were stopped in a lot of places for a really long time. So there's a backlog. And the state just never forgets, right? The state never forgets. So it's currently working through its backlog of cases. In the Seattle area, they're seeing some low-level municipal cases of people who were arrested but not charged in 2020 who are now receiving a summons. The long-term nature of this is important to remember and the aspect that some people have been sitting waiting trial with no support, for some people for three years now almost.

Then the other aspect of the long term is that the state doesn't really care how long it takes to prosecute someone. People tend to rely on things like statute of limitations and all that stuff, and it's all just honestly a little bit too complicated. The state in its various forms, the city—the state, and the federal level—has figured out ways to kind of work around all of those things. For the purpose of this question, sorry to ramble, the important thing to remember is just absolutely how long term this process is, even before we talk about how long the sentences people are getting.

TFSR: That's great, I appreciate the context. The fact that you can't honestly answer it in just a few words makes sense to me. On a quick note before we talk about some of the considerations of longer-term prisoner support, I'd like if you could talk about why your project feels it's important to have consent or what concerns people who might show up on the website might have about showing up on the specific website, so why you asked that question. Then also, if you could talk a little bit more about how you find folks that are coming up with these cases now.

Chazz: So the consent aspect for us is really important. This is a point that I want to really highlight. There's not that many people on the website. I've lost count at this point, but less than two dozen usually. It goes up and down, thankfully, with releases. It's such a small, small, small number of people who either are doing prison time or have done prison time for the uprising, specifically because we're only putting people on the site who either already have their own public support campaign, and we're just copying and pasting their information because they've consented to someone to have a public support campaign, or people who we've reached out to directly to ask whether they want to be listed on the site.

We are coming at this from a very specific political angle. We're anarchists, and we've been doing anti-repression work for a long time. That's our milieu. So the information on the site is going to be circulated amongst a radical and sometimes militant left. It's gonna show up on your feed next to a picture of a burning cop car. For someone especially who's pretrial, which is not so much a thing that

we're looking at right now, but in the beginning... for someone who's pretrial, that might not be the best option for them. But depending on comfort, depending on what's going on with their legal case, and a different variety of situations.

For us, what we do (and the State has definitely hampered our ability to do this in a variety of ways) is we send out a letter that's basically a form letter, a "Hello," and try to be like, "Hey, we're interested in listing you on this website, here are all the pros and cons, here are the ways in which you could receive support based on this site." You could grow your reach for looking for support, but it could also make you a particular target for more political repression. A really huge amount of people who are on the site, and who were also criminalized in 2020, are people who are like very, very, very well-versed in understanding state repression from understanding criminalization. Basically, people who have a lot of contact with law enforcement, people have been to prison before, but not necessarily for a political outlook or for a situation that has a political undertone and overtone. That's what 2020 was.

2020 generalized in a lot of places. So that generalization meant that a lot of different people were coming out for a lot of different reasons all kind of under this banner of "fuck the police," but people feel that way for a variety of reasons that have a variety of backgrounds that lead them to that position. In our letters, we talk about if you've taken a cooperating plea, we're not going to add you. If you can't get with our anti-sexist, anti-homophobic, anti-transphobic... if you can't get with that general message. We don't require people to be anarchists, obviously, or even have a real strong political stance, but if you can't get with and are okay with our basic tenets of human dignity, then we won't list you on the site.

We say that upfront, and we are trying to be really honest with people about who the site is directed towards and who's going to be looking at it. We lose contact with people sometimes for a variety of reasons. People are shuffled around a lot they lose our information. People don't have access. People get put in solitary and don't have access to a tablet anymore (because a lot of prison correspondence is through tablet now). We've had people drop communication, but we haven't had anybody be like, "Oh, hell no." And so I think that the big takeaway for me, and what I want people to remember, is if you see two dozen people on this site, understand that those are just the people who we've managed to maintain a communication with throughout a really complicated process of communication that was being hampered by State forces almost the entire time. There's a ton of people out there who we never found in time. They did two years, and no one supported them... I should say no one from our milieu supported them. Then they got out, and they got released. We didn't find them because we didn't see the news article, we couldn't find their name, or they were never listed, and all of these things. The amount of people who needed and still need support from the uprising is much, much, much bigger than what's on our specific site.

TFSR: I want to get to some of the specificities of and different tools of long-term support. But I wonder if you could talk a little bit more along

the lines of those shared values that you mentioned in that letter, how you found it navigating offering support for people long term or engaging in conversations. Even if someone has an “FTP” [Fuck The Police] point of view when they enter into activities around one of these mass movement moments, many people come in for the first time. They may be liberals, they may be centrists, they may be any number of other things. They may be more on the boog side of things. But they enter in because they have a shared perception that there’s repression and authoritarian circumstance going on, and they’re approaching it as something that needs to be engaged and pushed back against. People’s perspectives change throughout their lives, hopefully, and they grow and deepen in their political values.

But I wonder if you had a chance to have conversations with folks who have worked through some of the shared points that anarchists or anti-authoritarians or autonomists have of political values of like not snitching, of being anti-sexist, anti-transphobic, and such.

Chazz: For the site, us as a group of people on the site, we individually, most of us, are engaged in long-term prisoner support in a variety of ways. For the purposes of the site, we don’t do support work. Our support work is getting people up on the site, hoping that someone in a regional context, in someone’s region, in someone’s area will see it, and then they will jump in and act as a direct support person, partially because of the issues that you’re talking about. Our hope for the site is that it gives an opportunity for... you know, why do we do anti-repression work? We do anti-repression work because it’s another avenue for the state to bring down our movements, and so we must confront that.

Anti-repression work is partially based on the idea that we want the uprising to continue. The moment that brought everyone out, we want that moment to be able to continue, and that happens when people stay connected. So it’s important for us, and one of the reasons we do this site is for there to be connections between people who are from the place where the person is from into the prison, if that makes sense. We want people to be able to talk to people who are from their context.

The complexities of doing long-term support are pretty vast. Let me see if I can kind of go back and hit all your points. A thing that we are seeing right now is that it’s basically year three, right? This is the third anniversary. It’s 2023, and so we’re hitting the third anniversary, and a lot of people support campaigns, these groups that came together during 2020 to support people, a lot of them have fallen apart. And that’s reasonable. That happens. We’re not here to judge people. But a lot of these long-term prisoners, in Minneapolis, in Georgia... I just found this case in upstate New York recently where somebody’s doing a 20-year sentence from the uprising. So we’ve got 5-, 10-, 15-year sentences out there. These people are going to require really, really, really long-term support. I think what that support can look like and does look like has a capacity to change over time. And this is where you can

get into the question of how to have conversations around the core politics that we could say that we all hold with people who are coming from different positions as to why they were in the streets in 2020.

I often misspeak in this way when I talk about people not having support, and that's true for a lot of cases, but a lot of people who we're finding, who don't have support from a radical community close to them, do have things like their family supports them, or the church that they go to... There's a variety of ways in which, especially people who are coming from really overly-criminalized communities, going to prison is not uncommon, so people have infrastructure there, but resources are extremely limited.

For doing the site itself, we don't have a lot of interaction with folks around the more nuanced political stances, I will say that we've never encountered anybody who's pushed back against the general tenets of anti-sexism, anti-homophobia. What those things mean to people, and what those things like manifests themselves as, is often really nuanced and really difficult and different. So you do end up in these situations where people are communicating in a way that you're like, "Ah, this is really not how I think respectful communication should go based on these tenets." But those are generally just conversations that need to be had, and that's why we find it so important for people to do support for the people who are coming from their specific contexts. Because without that context, it's really, really, honestly difficult to have those kinds of conversations with people.

In terms of the long-term support aspects, I think one of the things that we were really hoping, and I'm not necessarily sure I'm seeing this come to fruition as much as I was hoping, was that when someone's information goes up on the site, people have the capacity to see the site and then be like, "Oh, there's someone from my state who is in prison from the uprising. I didn't know that. Okay." And then begin the conversation about how to support that person. I'm using this term support over and over again, and I haven't really talked about what that means.

It means a variety of things. Over the years, I think we've all figured out that anarchists can definitely put together a letter writing night. Anarchists can definitely have a conversation amongst themselves and put together a night where everyone writes a card. I think that's wonderful. What I think we're stumbling on a little bit is the kind of aspect where... and this might come from a variety of political tendencies, a variety of backgrounds, a variety of contexts, but we're stumbling on this idea that people who were arrested and imprisoned from 2020 are a part of a broader movement of people that came together. That hasn't gone away. It's just now more dispersed.

So what I'm seeing is there's been a lack of traction around the idea of keeping people who were imprisoned in 2020 as a part of our movements. I think that that's not true everywhere, but there needs to be a higher emphasis put on maintaining relationships that are like friendships and reciprocal and based in the growth of community and conversation with people who were imprisoned in 2020, so that when those conversations or those issues around sexism, homopho-

bia, anti-racism, all of these things come up, there is space and ability to have those conversations with people who've built relationships.

TFSR: A point that you said was, “We want the uprising to continue.” If in that sort of context, I think that viewing and approaching prisoner solidarity can not only be an opportunity to just do the right thing and offer solidarity to someone who is facing repression, but a part of that repression is meant to de-politicize people’s activities and put them in the framework of criminality versus lawfulness. Maybe one of the outcomes of incarceration is meant to get people to just keep their heads down, work a job, earn money, whatever, and not engage in activities that are aimed at shifting the way that racial patriarchal settler colonial capitalism in the US operates.

Chazz: Yeah, the state is always looking for stabilization, right? The state wants to maintain a stable field in which it can both surveil and contain people. That’s just kind of like the way it goes. When things like 2020 happen, it literally bubbles over. The instability of the world in which we live is really shown. The state in its various forms, from top to bottom, is going to come back in and be like, “Okay, cool. How do we restabilize? How do we go back to the normality that we had before where we were in control?” Through criminalizing people for their actions that were inherently in a political context and making them out to be just criminal thugs or whatever. That’s the rhetoric that the media and the USAO is going to use. These are all the ideas in which the state is trying to separate people and remove them.

Prison removes people from community that they come from, and brings them into a new community. We can’t blackbox prisoners into thinking that they’re not a part of communities inside prison because that is what that is. But it creates this huge gap. For us, we’re not looking at this as a charity based model of like, “Let’s write prisoners cards so they feel better.” It’s also like, let’s continue a dialogue, and be engaged and understand that being in prison does not mean you are not a part of a larger radical milieu that should be shaping and having conversations about what to do moving forward. Because that is a part of what the state wants is to remove people from their communities and blackbox them into spaces in which they can be much more intensely managed and controlled.

So that’s a big part of what we’re hoping for with the site. The site is just a clearinghouse. It’s not doing any of the specific work. But what we’re hoping is that people are seeing the information and then jumping in and engaging with people in conversation and building relationships beyond our normal tendency to move into care work in this model that’s really a one directional charity model.

TFSR: Yeah, and a recipe for burnout for a lot of people too.

Chazz: It’s impossible. You can’t do a one way relationship with anyone for a long time, and that shouldn’t be any different in our prisoner support organizing, either.

TFSR: So I know you said that it's a clearinghouse for information. It's super helpful for that. There's also a list of resources where people who are looking to do prisoner support or to write to prisoners or what have you. They can find more information, including our interview from last year. For folks that that have already been considering anti-repression work or writing to prisoners or have been paying attention to the impacts of this, if you have any quick notes of things to keep in mind if you want to start engaging in this maybe with a group of comrades locally... The one thing that sparks to me from having written to prisoners or communicated with folks who are incarcerated for a very long time has been not to promise something that I can't follow through on, which I've tried to make a part of my regular day to day life as well from that. But I wonder if you have any cues for folks that are doing prisoner support.

Chazz: Yeah, so there's a couple of points here. Jumping in with a crew of people and offering to do support for someone is huge and should always be done with this idea of expanding capacity. Start very small and expand your capacity as you move forward and grow relationships with people. Try to imagine... People inside of our milieus who have been incarcerated can tell you this. Try to imagine being in the worst position. You're in the worst position you've ever been in, and someone jumps in and says, "I'm gonna give you these 10 things." Then you get two of them. Those two things are really wonderful. You get a letter writing night on your birthday, and then you get a chunk of money at this point, or whatever. But you lost those eight things. Not only did you lose those eight things, but there's a level of personal hurt that goes along with that.

The biggest point for me to emphasize for a lot of people is that idea that you can't really look at prisoner support as a project that you would pick up and put down. Every letter is a person. Every interaction is with another person. It's mediated through this horrible apparatus, but it's not the same as starting a garden project with your friends, and then in two years, you're like, "Ah, we're all too busy now."

So that's a really big aspect. Don't be deterred by how big the scope is. But start small. Start with letters. Start with building relationship. Be honest about capacity. Be honest about interests. It's kind of like you said, with any other relationship, with any other friendship, you would want people to be honest with you about what they have to give and what you would also like to receive. That's not going to change because one person in that relationship is incarcerated. So just keeping that in mind.

Also patience. Patience is a huge thing. It's important to remember that we create... in our persons, in ourselves, we create a lot of space for our friends to be having a hard time, to communicate poorly. We create this space because we can understand someone's context. I can be like, "Oh, so-and-so is having a hard time right now. That's why they're being a little bit short via text." But imagine that in

that context with somebody who's sitting in a cell in a situation where they're literally not getting enough food to eat in a lot of places. The position that they're in is incredibly violent. In a variety of ways, from a variety of directions. People's communication is not going to be perfect all the time. It's going to be shitty sometimes. People are going to have bad days. I don't know a better word for this, but giving a lot of grace for people to be people in possibly the worst contexts they've ever been in in their lives. So that's really important. Patience is really key.

I also think that if folks are gearing up to do prisoner support, finding people in your area who've done it, writing to groups... This is why people maintaining these anti-repression groups that are accessible is really important. I want there to be more groups out there that someone could just write an email to and be like, "Hey, we're thinking about starting this. Can you give us some pointers?" Over the last several decades, we've built a lot of institutional, for lack of a better term, internal knowledge, pitfalls, things to do, things not to do. You can learn a lot from people who are doing that work already.

Then the last point is there are already a lot of groups, especially Anarchist Black Cross chapters around the country, who are doing support for long-term political prisoners. It's mostly for people who are criminalized and put in prison for very explicit political activity, and so it's a different set of people. A lot of them have been in prison for a really long time, and a lot of these long-term political prisoners are very used to getting just a shit ton of mail and being in correspondence with just a ton of people. They are really good people to talk to and to write a letter to and be like, "I would like to start to do prisoner support, and I'm not sure how to start. Do you have pointers? Do you have tips?" Talking to these long-term political prisoners, they are just a huge, very, very patient wealth of knowledge for people who are starting out and learning how to navigate that fractured relationship building that happens inside and outside.

TF SR: Yeah, that's super helpful. In closing, are there resources that you need? Are there things that Uprising Support as a website could use help with? Or are there other ways that people can get engaged with the work that you're doing?

Chazz: Probably the most time consuming aspect for the site is still the aspect of tracking down people who were imprisoned from 2020 and figuring out what facility they're in, reaching out, all of that. A huge aspect for us that would be wonderful is if people have that kind of information to feel free to email us. Please be patient. We are a very small group. We don't get back to emails exactly on the same day. But being like, "Hey, I found this article about these prisoners." We've been sent a handful of really big lists of prisoners that people have compiled, and we'll go through it and there's a lot of people that we already know about, but then they'll be like two or three people that we've never heard of. It might seem small, but those are two or three people. They're people! Then we can reach out to those

folks. That's like a really big aspect. If people come across news articles or information or they know of people who are sitting in prison because of 2020 convictions or who are still awaiting trial, please just send us that information.

The other thing is, and some support groups are extremely good at this, but getting regular updates from support crews and support groups, people who are doing support for people. Our email's on a couple of mailing lists, and we just get regular update——sometimes it says a lot, sometimes it says very little about a specific prisoner——because they've got a support crew who's like sending out these updates. That's huge. That's super helpful for us, especially as we navigate trying to still sort through just dozens and dozens and dozens of names and across the entire US, which is huge, absolutely huge. So those two things would be really helpful for us. If we could send some of this information gathering out into the world and collectivize that a little bit.

TFSR: What's that email that people should reach out to you to? I'm sure they can find it on the website anyway.

Chazz: Yeah. So it's a **UprisingSupportSite@protonmail.com**. That's the best way to reach us. You can also find it on the homepage of the site. It's probably on a site like 100 times, but definitely on the homepage.

TFSR: Never can be too many times!

Well, cool. Thank you so much for having this conversation and for the work that you do. Have a good June 11th, comrade.

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