



# Why Prisoner Support ?

Prisoner support should be an essential facet of any anarchist's political activities; yet our prisoner support groups attract little actual support from our fellow anarchists. Why is this?

Of course, it is natural for us to support someone we are close to, friends and family or even a comrade from ones affinity group, when they are banged up. Yet why do so few anarchists support comrades from within the wider movement, let alone prisoners in general? Mutual aid and solidarity are surely a central tenet of the anarchist 'belief system', one brick that any anarchist society should be built upon, yet it is often in short supply.

## Not Sexy Enough

We know prisoner support is not glamorous, or even rewarding in terms of apparent immediate effect: we don't see our circle A spray-painted on the wall, cash points glued-up, disruption caused by a picket, or our article printed in our favourite propaganda rag (though most of those can also be used as a weapon in any prisoner support campaign). Prisoner support is largely invisible, the writing of letters, the sending of money and the giving of other practical support. Yes, we might go to a benefit gig for prisoner support, but are we going to donate funds or because we like the bands?

We might read a call-out for support for a particular prisoners' campaign, but are we really paying attention? Are we going along to prison pickets when they are called? This is one simple and effective way of showing solidarity & support for individual prisoners, and shows the prison bosses that we outside the prison walls know and care about what they try to do to our comrades on the inside. And prisoner support groups regularly get feedback on these events showing clearly that they work - the prison authorities take notice and are less likely to abuse the prisoners supported.

## Certainly Not Trivial

Writing letters may seem a trivial method of showing support for prisoners but it is a concrete and practical starting point, and one that also lets those 'inside' know that those 'outside' are showing them solidarity.

But there are few anarchist prisoners you say. It's true the level of struggle in this country is low, and that is reflected within the prisons, but that is no reason for being complacent. Anarchists should be seeking out class struggle activities to support wherever they occur, inside prisons and in the wider communities, in the UK and abroad.

Another area where practical solidarity is valuable is in sending funds to prisoners or their support groups. Whilst the £ may be weak at present, our cash goes a long way in places such as Eastern Europe & South America.

Another is taking your solidarity to the streets. A classic example of this is the Greek prisoners' hunger strike in November 2008, when most prisoners in Greece's 21 prisons went on 18-day hunger strike to support a 45-point demand for prison reform. Mass demos and solidarity actions outside the prisons helped secure major concessions from the Greek state.

## The Social Prisoner 'Problem'

This brings us to the so-called 'social prisoner' issue, often a problem within the anarchist movement, with more liberal elements decrying any involvement with 'common criminals'. Fortunately, most anarchists involved in prisoner support see it in a different light.

Therefore, when we come across prisoners who have become radicalised by their prison experiences, who are engaged in the class struggle against the system of social control that is prison, we should be supporting them in their struggle. After all, we as a movement need to get the idea of a non-hierarchical decentralised class-free society more widely accepted, and those at the sharp end of the state's system of social control should be more receptive than most.

Also, when anarchist prisoners that do end up inside are looking around for comrades to engage with in resistance, who else can they make common cause with in struggle? So we should be showing them solidarity now, not waiting till it becomes a reward for the mutual aid and solidarity that they have themselves shown our imprisoned anarchist comrades.

## Revolutionary Solidarity

Just as prisoner support should be more than just first aid to fallen comrades, support for other class struggle prisoners should be a conscious act of revolutionary solidarity, of practical everyday anarchist politics. Prisoner support cannot be reduced to just a form of charity, it should be an integral part of the anarchist struggle, against the prison society and in support of the new society we wish to see built in the ruins of the old.

In the end the most important thing we all can do is to get out there and get active. It is only through struggle and building a revolutionary movement that we will help not just anarchist prisoners, but everyone in need of solidarity.

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