

THE
**Final
Straw**
A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW

The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world. Since 2010, we've been broadcasting from occupied Tsalagi land in Southern Appalachia (Asheville, NC). We also frequently feature commentary (serious and humors) by anarchist prisoner, Sean Swain.

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PRISONS KILL

RESISTING CONDITIONS IN ALABAMA, RASHID
FIGHTS CANCER & CERTAIN DAYS CALENDAR



THE FINAL STRAW RADIO - DECEMBER 2022

Cover art by Zola, as appears in the 2023 Certain Days Calendar. Zola is a queer, settler anarchist and street artist, up to no good in occupied Kanien'kehá:ka & Anishinabe territories in so-called Montréal, Quebec. They are connected to different affinity groups and collectives addressing anticolonialism, abolition, and art and activism. Zola has been doing street art for over 10 years, and their wheat-pasted characters of rioters or anonymous protestors spotlight direct action and unapologetic radical politics.

More of their work at [Justseeds.org/artist/zolamtl](https://justseeds.org/artist/zolamtl)

To hear our past shows for free, visit:
thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org

. *Updates on Rashid*

SHUPAVU WA KIRIMA: My name is Shupavu wa Kirima. I am the General Secretary of the Revolutionary Intercommunal Black Panther Party. I'm also Rashid's wife or partner, whichever term you prefer. My pronouns are she/her or they/them. I just really appreciate the opportunity to sit down and talk with you and share some of what's been going on with Rashid.

TFSR: *Thank you. I appreciate you. I know this is obviously important to you as being partners and also being comrades. This has got to be a really difficult but obviously important thing to speak about.*

Listeners to the show may have heard a couple of weeks ago, Sean Swain, a regular commentator, talking on the show about Rashid's health situation. We were lucky enough to speak with Rashid here on the show some years ago. But I wonder if you wouldn't mind reminding listeners a bit about Rashid, his work, his organizing, his writing, and just who he is.

SWK: Absolutely. Rashid is such an amazing human being. He served as Minister of Defense of our Party. He's also a very prolific writer, he wrote essays and articles on issues that directly affect oppressed people. He has been a tireless fighter and organizer for prisoners and prisoners' rights. And, as I said, just a revolutionary, is what he is. And what's happening to him is something that is, unfortunately, very typical of what they do to our leaders, particularly our incarcerated leaders. And I just want to shed light and get as much attention on him to protect him and hopefully get him the treatment that he needs.

TFSR: *It's been cool – circumstances pending – that he's been able to give updates on his situation via YouTube recordings in his own voice, which is great. But can you talk a bit about this health condition that he's suffering from? How long he and his captors have known about it? And where he is or what that health condition is, what timeline do people need to act on that health condition?*

SWK: Sure. Right now Rashid is currently located at Sussex I in the Virginia Department of Corrections. He was diagnosed with prostate cancer on July 1 of this year, after a biopsy that was performed on June 23 of this year. The

problem being Rashid has shown elevated PSA levels in his blood work for at least a year before that, and no one said a word. No one has said a word to him. And we have been in a constant struggle, since understanding on July 1 of this year that he has prostate cancer, to get him cancer treatment. To date, he has not had any treatment for his condition and he has now reached the point where he is actually experiencing pretty severe symptoms and signs that cancer has moved beyond his prostate: bleeding and swelling of extremities, particularly his legs, to the point that he was not even able to walk for a while. He has been refused medical care at every turn. He won't be seen inside the prison, and the medical professionals that work inside the penitentiary will turn him away and actually begin to be punitive in their response, throwing out his grievances, penalizing him for trying to seek treatment and to reach out to his outside supporters for help. So we've been engaged in a battle since July 1, when we understood that it was prostate cancer.

What they're doing now is particularly evil. They are going through the pretext as if they're trying to get him to his appointments. But each time they arrive late, so the appointment is missed. And this has happened four times now. Back when he first found out that he had cancer on July 1st, the doctor told him that he would be brought back to them within a week to two weeks, so that he could begin the process of figuring out his treatment plans. He would see a radiologist and an oncologist to determine if he wants to operate or do the radiation route. That was months ago, and nothing has happened. The last time that he was actually able to see the doctor was a useless visit because the doctor thought that he had had a PET scan and that was a scan that was going to see if cancer had spread outside of his prostate. Of course, he missed that appointment. So we still have no knowledge, and nothing has been able to be done. There has been no surgery scheduled. There has been no radiation treatment chosen or scheduled because we simply don't know what's going on. It's become clear at this point that it's the Virginia Department of Corrections' intent, as well as the staff and officials at Sussex I, their intent to let Rashid die from this. I don't know how else to put it, but it's clear that that's what's going on at this point.

TFSR: *To contextualize, you mentioned that he's a prolific writer. He's an artist, he communicates inside-outside. He's a revolutionary. One thing that I know about Rashid that I think is interesting and that contextualizes this, it is not an irregular thing for people, let alone political organizers, let alone organizers*

JD: yeah, absolutely. I'm happy to say that he is getting mail and able to send mail. As you said, prior to his case, he had been going through hell and shipped around the country. He'd been in solitary confinement for four years, over four years, I believe. This is all for an act of property destruction in which no one was harmed or anything like that.

He was found not guilty in this case of abuse against the guard. He's a medium level prisoner, meaning he shouldn't be in the strictest of prisons, but after this court victory, he was sent to Florence ADMAX, administrative maximum. That is the most supermax prison in the country, the harshest, the most secure, the most guarded. He is there now. He is basically in a cell for 23 hours a day. There's double doors, but he is able to get mail and books. His support team just received a letter from him the other day, and by the time this airs everything will be up on his website. There's a new poem, a new book list where you can send him books, and a whole bunch of really new stuff from him about being in Ad Max and his hopes for when he gets out in about a year.

So I highly recommend writing him, checking him out if you haven't already. His website is SupportEricKing.org. He's a great person to write to. He's all over the place. He's got many interests. He's got YouTube playlists of his favorite songs and I highly recommend writing to him, or to any of the people locked inside today.

TFSR: *Well, cool. Josh, thanks so much for taking the time to have this conversation. Thanks for all the work that you do.*

JD: Yeah, for sure. Thank you.

TFSR: *Just to note on the thing that Josh had said, when he was mentioning that Dr. Mutulu Shakur was still fighting to be released and suffering from bone cancer. Dr. Shakur has been scheduled to be released to the outside, he still has what appears to be a terminal case of bone marrow cancer that he's been suffering with since 2019. But you know, we're very happy to hear that he's going to be coming out. You should be able to still make donations to his support committee and I'm sure that they could use that money to help cover the cost of medical care and such while he's on the outside via PayPal to the address MutuluShakur@hotmail.com. You can keep up on updates on his case at MutuluShakur.com. Free them all.*

com and they have amazing radical books that you can get along with the calendar. Also AK press, Left Wing Books, a few other places like that.

TFSR: *I guess Left Wing Books is especially good if you're north of the border in so-called Canada, right?*

JD: Correct. Yep.

TFSR: *Well, cool. Is there anything that I didn't ask about that you want to talk about?*

JD: There's plenty to talk about. But if you don't mind, I'd like to just shout out some of the amazing contributors from the 2023 calendar. We had some really great people this year. Collective member, David Gilbert wrote a beautiful and moving piece about his partner Kathy Boudin, who, who died in May. Ed Mead of the George Jackson Brigade wrote a really beautiful piece about Bo Brown, a GJB member who died also this year. There's a beautiful piece by Noel Hanrahan about Mumia, there's a great piece by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, and also by Cindy Milstein, and then there's some just really beautiful art this year as well. So, I hope people pick up a copy and check it out.

TFSR: *That's awesome. You can see examples of some of that at CertainDays.org*

JD: And on all of our social media, if you don't follow us, be sure to follow us there and we'll let you know the best way to get the calendar and all the new places it's available.

TFSR: *Do you have any updates on the situation, where Eric King is at? People may recall that you and I spoke some months back about Eric's situation and how despite winning a federal lawsuit or despite successfully challenging charges of assault on an officer against a "Bad Lieutenant," if you will, in the Bureau of Prisons, he's been getting diesel therapy around a bit. Can you talk about where he's at right now and what his mail status is and any other situation?*

of color, to be denied medical treatment. When we were talking before the call, you reminded me that Mumia has been systematically denied treatment for all sorts of issues related to Hep C from his blood transfusion in 1981. As well as diabetes and other things that are really easy for people to develop inside the prison with the terrible diets that they have. Maroon Shoatz languished with cancer for a long time, Dr. Mutulu Shakur is just getting out as a reprieve, probably nearing the end of his life, because he's been sitting with bone marrow cancer for so long. And I think that it's important to point to some of the reasons that the VDOC is choosing to make this decision and have this inaction. It's an act of blocking him from getting medical treatment or getting the word out about it.

And so when I was lucky enough to speak with Rashid some years ago, I think he was in Indiana at the time, I might be incorrect? But if you could speak a little bit about the path of how he ended up leaving Virginia, maybe not the specifics, but this Interstate Compact System and the reason that state prison systems did not want to hold on to him, because that's definitely a reason that I'm inspired by Rashid's activities and organizing – his relentlessness.

SWK: Absolutely. Rashid has an overwhelming love of the people, more so than anyone I've ever met. And he has tirelessly fought for the rights of prisoners and poor and oppressed people. He is a Maoist, the theory of our party's revolutionary intercommunalism. We believe that people are going to have to become leaders in their own communities and spread this knowledge that we have of what the world is like. And that's what makes Rashid so dangerous. If he were just going around, jumping on guards and causing trouble, and doing activities that allowed people to find themselves pushed into while incarcerated, then it wouldn't be so much of a problem. But what Rashid is like and him trying to pass that understanding along to the people is what makes him so dangerous. They want to silence Rashid. Everywhere he goes with this Interstate Compact Agreement, he teaches people and he spreads the idea, this revolutionary science that we can change the system, that the system that we live under is not insurmountable, even though this is the only thing that we've ever known. It's not the only thing that's ever been. He challenges the system, he challenges the prisons.

He started off in Virginia and he was shipped out of Virginia, he's been to Texas, Florida, back to Virginia, Indiana, and Ohio. Now he's back in Virginia. Interstate Compact Agreement is a thing that they typically use for politically aware or politically active prisoners to frustrate their attempts at organizing and separate them from their families and loved ones

and supporters. And so he has been bounced around a lot. And he has now found himself back in Virginia. And it's interesting because when he first went back this year, he was placed at Nottoway, which is a very low-level, minimum-security facility, which is used for receiving and for people who are part of work programs. And he was told flat out, "Do you like it here? We can make it easy for you. If you stop organizing, if you stop writing exposés about what is going on here. Just keep your head down, mind your business, and don't make things hard for us, and we make things hard for you." And anyone who knows Rashid knows that that was out of the question. He does not suffer injustice, particularly when he sees it being acted out upon other people. He's quicker to fight for other people than he is even for himself. That's what makes this current struggle so difficult. That's why we have to fight for him. But he did not accept that. And when he got this cancer diagnosis, he began to agitate. And he began to allow us to agitate for him to get him treatment. And it needs to be understood that this most recent transfer to Sussex I, which is maximum security, may even be a supermax, if I'm not mistaken, but this was a retaliatory transfer. They told him that because of his exposing them not trying to give him treatment, them actually refusing and frustrating attempts for him to get cancer treatment. So they've been very clear that this is their intent to let this progress to the point where there's nothing we can do about it.

TFSR: *And from the state's perspective, he's a very dangerous man. Every time that he was getting kicked from one state to another, he left behind seeds of his interactions, his relationships, and reading groups or inside-outside groups and just frustrating the ability of the state to bury a person without any recourse to it. I assume this is at Notto or Sussex I, he recently wrote that he was being put into solitary or segregation there. Is that right? Is he in that situation right now? Or is he in the general population?*

SWK: The last time I spoke with Rashid, he had finally made it to the level where they would allow him to be in the general population, but they had not yet made the move. And that's because the warden there, McCoy, who was warden at Sussex II, I believe, when they had Rashid on death row a few years back, not because of a death sentence, but because they wanted to keep him sequestered and away from other people. Because, as you said, he's going to plant the seeds of a revolution wherever he goes. This guy McCoy has an axe to grind. Rashid suffered beatings and abuse at his hands. And McCoy was worried that Rashid would try to get some type of revenge.

TFSR: *Besides the projects that you all are helping to support through the sale, I know various groups are able to buy bulk copies and benefit their own initiatives by selling copies that cover price, right?*

JD: Yeah, thank you for bringing that up. It's a really great additional thing that we do. The calendars retail for \$15 each. But if your group or organization wants to buy them and raise awareness and funds on your behalf, you can buy 10 or more for \$10 each and then save that \$5 For your own projects to raise funds for your own efforts.

TFSR: *Can you talk about the work to get copies of the calendar through prison bars?*

JD: Yeah, sure. That is something unfortunately that has gotten more difficult as the years progressed. We send calendars inside to 1000's of people every year. We also sponsor copies, so if you want to send a copy in to someone inside, you can go to our website CertainDays.org and sponsor a copy for less, for \$8 a copy to someone inside. But both federally and in several states, it has become much more difficult to get calendars in to prisoners. The reasons vary. Sometimes it's because it's a calendar. And then they're not allowed to have calendars for some reason. Sometimes it's because of the writing or the art, although we always do keep that in mind and try to have as radical and amazing art as possible, but knowing that it's something that we will be trying to get inside of prisons. Sometimes we just print off PDFs of just the artwork and the essays and not send the calendar dates and somehow that makes it in. But it is an ongoing struggle to be able to get this calendar and books and just things in general to people locked up.

TFSR: *So if folks are thinking about getting copies or sponsoring additions to go behind bars, where can they order some?*

JD: Sure, yeah, there's plenty of places. The best place to go a CertainDays.org and from there we have a page where you can find all the local bookstores. It's a great to support your local bookstore. So if you have one near you that sells the calendar, that's the place to go. If not, beg and annoy your local bookstore to start carrying the calendar. You can also go to BurningBooks.com.

So you mentioned that the remaining collective member that's still behind bars is Xinachtli. I mentioned in the announcements for last week show that there's going to be a rally coming up in Austin at the University of Texas to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the political assassination or the death by incarceration of Ricardo Flores Magón that Central Texas Anarchist Black Cross is helping to coordinate with Xinachtli's Defense Committee and that they're also using that as an opportunity to have a vigil for Xinachtli and call for his release.

JD: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. It sounds like an amazing event down there. And Xinachtli has been deeply involved in that for a number of years.

TFSR: *And you've got folks who are on the outside, we've had you and Daniel and Sarah in the past speaking. Y'all still have the cross border collaboration in the the outside portions of the collective?*

JD: Yeah, yeah, we do. It's kind of expanded in the last year or so. We've added a few new members that are helping out. One in Canada and a few in the US. That's been really helpful to kind of get that new breath of fresh air into the collective and new ideas and things like that. Hopefully that comes across in the new calendar.

TFSR: *What projects are benefiting from the sale of the calendars this year?*

JD: So, money raised during the sale of the 2022 calendars is going to the group: Release Aging People in Prison, RAPP, based out of New York, that helps get aging people and others out of prison in the state of New York. This is a really progressive and amazing group. We also supplied some funds to the Mutulu Shakur legal support team. As most people know, Mutulu Shakur is battling late stage cancer and is not expected to live for many more months, but the federal government still refuses to release him. We also provided funding to the Sundiata Acoli release fund. Sundiata was finally released after 50 years in prison. I believe he is living with family and getting along well so far. We also provided funding to the Palestinian Youth Movement, the Puget Sound Prisoner Support Coalition, and Decarcerate Illinois, and several other organizations. Every year we provide funding to different groups in need, and that are on the frontlines of this battle.

I just want to make this clear, we believe in self-defense when it's necessary, but we don't do spontaneous attacks or violent acts. We want to teach people and organize the people so we can change the system. He was trying to keep Rashid in solitary, but there was no merit in it. I'm not sure if he's in or out of it at this point, because one of the things that Sussex I did to stop this push for treatment and support was they put Rashid on a three-month phone and visitation ban, while simultaneously telling him that this was a retaliatory transfer and that he has to stop going outside to ask for help for his cancer treatment. This is obviously an attempt to isolate and silence him. So when you do hear those recordings from him, that he's been making, he will have to use a prison phone, but someone else's number, have to hop on a phone to record. But we haven't heard from him. He was reaching out regularly multiple times a day, they've turned off his number, and you have to use your prison number to make phone calls inside. And so they've deactivated it. So we get information when we can the best we can.

TFSR: *So what are the demands that are RIBBP making? And what are the demands that Rashid is making immediately to stop his health degradation? And how can listeners on the outside facilitate and help that support your efforts?*

SWK: Our demands are simple: we want Rashid to receive treatment immediately; we want him to go to the doctor and we want his appointments to be kept immediately. And that's non-negotiable. We want his phone privileges and his visitation privileges to be restored immediately. We want to be able to see our comrade and hear from our comrade and know for sure that he's okay. Just to see the condition that he's in. We're also asking people to make phone calls demanding this. What you can do in your own local areas, you can have phone, banking, and phone zap sessions with your friends, your neighbors, make it a group thing, invite people over, make snacks and get on the phones and get on the computers and send emails and make phone calls. We have to make it a problem for them, we have to let them see that Rashid has the full support of the public and the people outside.

I just want people to really internalize that and come up with their own ideas in addition. What can you do in your area, hold a watch party or a reading group and read some of his articles? And then, maybe do a demonstration, things that. But phone calls and emails to the Virginia Department of Corrections and to Sussex I have to happen and have to continue to happen until we get him to treatment. We've seen what they do

to our leaders, our elders. They will let them languish and die. And it's up to the people to support our leaders. We have to. There's no other choice.

TFSR: *I'm going to put a bunch of links into the show notes after this and read a few into the script. But a lot of his articles are up and some updates from him are up at rashidmod.com. Minister of Defense, I guess is what MOD stands for? Are there any social media handles that people should be looking to for updates and for numbers, emails, script suggestions, and stuff for phone zaps?*

SWK: Absolutely. If you want to get involved, you can email defendrashid@protonmail.com. You can also check the Revolutionary Intercommunal Black Panther Party's Facebook and Instagram pages, the Panther solidarity organizations, Instagram pages, and our Twitter accounts. You can also follow my Twitter account. It's @shushu_johnson. All of the scripts and all the contact numbers that need to be contacted will be listed there.

TFSR: *Is there anything else that I didn't ask about that you want to share with the audience right now?*

SWK: Just the importance of really, really, really putting all of our power behind this and pushing for his treatment. It's crazy that this person has just languished with all the complications of untreated cancer. I can't even wrap my mind around that. Everyone's had someone close to them, or that they've known, that struggle with cancer and everyone understands the importance of immediate treatment. And this is someone who has had this for at least a year, with absolutely nothing done, no treatment at all. So just imagine that. Wrap your mind around what actually happens to the body without any type of medicine, without any type of radiation or chemo, just cancer being allowed to grow in your body. And when you couple that with the conditions in prison, the food, the unsanitary nature of everything. It's just a really, really, really hard place to be struggling with something that. And this happens on the daily basis. Unfortunately, Rashid's situation is getting particular attention because of his prominence. But people suffer and die in prison every day. And no one cares. No one does anything about it. I wish I could say that this is a unique situation, but it's not. It won't stop until we do something about it.

But the good thing is that we do have the power, there are more of us than there are of them. But we have to use our voice and we have to use

little over a year. He was in prison for a politically motivated act of property destruction following the police murder of Michael Brown in 2014. Yeah, yeah, that's about it.

TFSR: *So for listeners who don't know the project, could you describe Certain Days? This is the 22nd year of its publication, is that right?*

JD: Yeah, the 2023 calendar will be our 22nd calendar. So it's been around since just after the turn of the century. It's a joint fundraising and educational project between outside organizers around the country and in Canada, and political prisoners held within the US.

It originally started with former Black Panthers: Herman Bell and Robert Seth Hayes, and white anti imperialist political prisoner: David Gilbert. This is the first year where we can actually say that all of our founding members are no longer in prison. Herman and Seth were released a few years ago, and David was released last year. So our only current inside member is Xinachtli, who's a Chicano political prisoner imprisoned in Texas.

But every year, we create this beautiful calendar which has 12 pieces of art and 12 essays, and tons of other radical things, including radical dates throughout each month. We promote and sell these calendars to raise money for those locked inside.

TFSR: *It's really a pity that this is an audio only format for sharing this because it's such a beautiful calendar. I know that y'all have been going through the archives and pulling old editions and selling those off at a discounted rate, right?*

JD: Yeah, yeah, you can get those. You can follow us on social media and find those or email us. It's really great to see the progression of the calendar over the last 20 some years, but also just the beautiful artwork and things like that. Some people have shared pictures where they just cover their walls with the artwork from all the years and it's really beautiful, breathtaking.

TFSR: *Yeah, I've used it as president packaging before, wrapping paper. It's really startling how beautiful some of the imagery is. That way, you're kind of giving someone just a little taste of some of the dates too, maybe. Maybe seeing it around their birthday or something like that.*

. *Certain Days Calendar*

TFSR: *So I'm joined by Josh Davidson of the Certain Days Calendar project to speak about this year's installment. Thank you so much for coming back, Josh.*

JOSH DAVIDSON: Yeah, thanks so much for having me.

TFSR: *Would you mind telling listeners a little bit about yourself?*

JD: Yes, sure. I'm an abolitionist involved in the Certain Days Freedom for Political Prisoners Calendar Collective. I've been doing that for a number of years now. I'm also a member of the children's art project, CAP, with political prisoner Oso Blanco, and I'm currently writing a book with political prisoner and anarchist Eric King, where we interview current and former political prisoners about their lives inside. In addition to that, I work at the Zinn Education Project where we provide radical people's history to teachers and people around the world.

TFSR: *That's awesome. Thank you so much, again, for joining us. In case any listeners don't know about Oso Blanco or about Eric, would you mind giving a little rundown of their cases?*

JD: Yeah, absolutely. Oso Blanco is an indigenous political prisoner. He's been in prison since the late 90s. He is imprisoned for a number of expropriations, of bank robberies that he did, where he sent all the money to the Zapatistas in the Chiapas area of Mexico. He's still in prison today in some of the harshest federal prisons in the country. He wanted to come up with the idea of using indigenous artwork from people in prison to support the Zapatistas. So what we did was create cards, greeting cards and shirts with this artwork. All the money raised goes to children and people with the Zapatistas.

TFSR: *Oso Blanco is Cherokee, right?*

JD: Yes, true. And Eric King is an anarchist and Anti Fascist political prisoner who's going on 10 years in prison now. He's expected to be released in a

what resources we have, write those emails, make those phone calls. Reach out to us if you want to get involved, we hold actual meetings. We formed a Kevin Rashid Johnson Defense Committee. And like I said, anyone who wants to be a part of that, find me on Facebook, find me on Instagram, contact our Party through our social media, platforms, and we'll get you involved so we can not just change things for Rashid, but for everyone.

TFSR: *Thank you, Shupavu wa Kirima, thank you so much for having this conversation and the work that you're doing and for solidarity.*

SWK: Absolutely. Thank you. Thank you for the work that you do. And thank you for reaching out. This helps so much. It's been comrades like you and publications and media platforms that have given voice to the struggle, and I can't begin to express my appreciation for that.

TFSR: *Thank you very much.*

. *Donaldson Correctional Facility*

We spoke with Michael Kimble & Gerald Griffin at Donaldson Correctional Facility in Bessemer, AL, about the conditions of confinement there. You can find more info and writing by Michael at his website, AnarchyLive.NoBlogs.Org or write him at:

Michael Kimble #138017
William E. Donaldson Correctional
100 Warrior Ln
Bessemer, AL 35023

And you can reach Gerald at:

Gerald Griffin #247505
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TFSR: *Would you please introduce yourself for the audience with your location, or your name, or any other information that that they would find useful?*

MICHAEL KIMBLE: Okay, my name is Michael Kimble. I'm down in the Alabama prison system at William E. Donaldson Correctional in Alabama in Bessemer, AL, serving a life sentence for murder. I'm an anarchist, I'm gay, I'm a revolutionary, and I'm about abolishing the State.

TFSR: *I like that.*

So recently, Alabama prisons had participation by a number of people from a number of different facilities in different work stoppages and strikes, because the prisons require the workers to participate in order to function. I've heard some things about the conditions at places like Donaldson. People might have a thought that prisons look a lot of different ways in the US. Sometimes they're Super Max's and really constricted, and sometimes people have more access to outdoors and programs. But can you talk about what the conditions are like at Donaldson and why people were engaging in protest?

MK: You'll see the stuff that's going on. I'll tell you that we was outside during the interview, right? One of the guys... He was what we call 'wiggin.' He was walking around, bent over, started throwing up just in the middle of nowhere.

TFSR: *Just having a bad reaction to drugs?*

MK: Yeah, yeah.

TFSR: *If you send those clips, just make sure to note if you want them shared or not, so that I know what to do.*

MK: Anything we send, you can share. It was nice talking to you.

TFSR: *Yeah, you too. And it was nice meeting Gerald. I'll definitely put his contact information in. He gave me his number and stuff like that. So I'll put that in here. We'll be in touch. Michael, take care and I'll talk to you soon, okay?*

MK: He wants some pen-pals. Okay.

TFSR: *A new issue just came out and they're sending like 50 of them to us, so we're going to try to send them out to some folks too.*

Well, it's good that you're building feelings of solidarity between folks too. Helping them out.

MK: Yeah. You got a different affiliation gangs and stuff like that, but sometimes it's like, "Man we might need to start our own god damn gang." For real. If you a gay person, whatever happens to you here... don't nobody care. They call you a fuck boy. So whatever happens to you, you deserve it. They look at gay people as lower than rats. Snitches. Yeah. This is the first time I've seen it. It's the first time I've seen prisoners working for the police. Stabbing people for the police. Beating, jumping on people for the police.

It wasn't too long ago, about three or four weeks ago, [someone] stole some stuff off a commissary truck. It ain't got nothing to do with of the guys in here. But you know these guys... They went and got these guys, and jumped on these guys and took them to the police, because these guys went and stole the stuff off the truck.

These people here got keys. The police don't open the doors. Inmates open doors. This is something they've never did. They never did this. In about 38 years, I've never seen it like in here. They don't care. They don't give a fuck what we do as long as we don't go outside that gate. Do anything you want to do inside. They be out here grilling till three o'clock in the morning sometimes.

TFSR: *So they're like a little mini State, basically, a colony.*

MK: Yeah. I want to get that picture for you to show you what is going on out here. I'm gonna get some of these clips and send them to you.

TFSR: *Yeah, please do. Please do.*

MK: Maybe a different clip. We going to just send them to the email.

TFSR: *Yeah, that sounds good.*

MK: Let me put it like this. I've been locked up 38 years. This is my third time at Donaldson. But this time here, they got me feeling like I'm coming to prison for the first time. Not just the officers, but the prisoners too. Here at Donaldson, the conditions are dire. You got all asbestos ceilings, paint, you have no security at all in the dorms. You are locked in a dorm with 118 other guys and we have no security. People are dying daily here.

Everyday there are ambulances at the back gate. We had over 30-40 deaths here within the last 15 months. Most of them due to drug overdoses, but some of them have been murders. Not just prisoner on prisoner, but guard on prisoners too. I think Gerald may want to say something about the conditions, because Gerald had been experiencing some conditions because he's diabetic. He's having a lot of problems with that. So he may want to share some of that with you.

GERALD GRIFFIN: Hi, my name is Gerald Griffin. I've got a 22 year sentence. I'm originally from New York and I've just been in the Alabama prison system for the last 13 years. Just like Mr. Kimble was saying, this is not where you want to be. It's a hopeless state of mind. We fend for ourselves. We guard, we we secure ourselves, we do everything that they supposed to be doing. I'm diabetic. They don't give us [medications at a] regular time. They might call us at three o'clock or they might call us tomorrow at eight o'clock to get your insulin shot.

Dealing with insulin, you are supposed to take it at a regular hourly time. They don't do that. Then when we fight about it, or when we say anything about it, they want to use their tactics. They spray us with mace when we're not even being violent towards them. We are just asking for our medical health. It's a lot of things that goes on in here.

It's all over the news how many people are being arrested for corruption here, but it's just like they do this and they do that but it's still the same. They stay the same. This is getting more violent and dangerous because of the hopelessness that everybody has in this prison. You don't have programs, we don't do nothing. All we do is just stay and lock the door. We fend for ourselves. We see them, they come unlock the door and count and that's it. That's the last time we see them.

If somebody to be taken out for sickness, we have to literally knock the window out or bang for them to get attention. They are so short on staff. They don't have no police, they don't have nothing. We we secure and we police ourselves.

TFSR: *Someone had told me before that because there's no enforcement of giving people the cots that they're assigned to or that they're supposed to get, that often-times weaker people or older people, people with sickness, whatever get forced outside in the winter and all the rest of the time. Can you talk about that and what you've seen with that?*

GG: Yes. You have people being kicked out of doors for whatever reason. Sleeping outside in the cold, sleeping on floors in the dorms, just unsanitary stuff. How can we say that this person can't sleep here? This happens because they let it. They let it. No matter what, nobody's supposed to be sleeping on is supposed to be everybody's assigned to a rack. [Guards] don't take time to do their job, to put somebody on the rack or anything like that. The corrupts run. Hold on.

MK: So they have these guys sleeping outside and in the cold, it's winter time. Of course, they can come back in the dorm, but if you can't house these people, you can't protect these people and give them a 'humane safe environment' as your mission statement says... you have got to release them. More people are going out of this facility in body bags than making parole. The justice department has been here for the last three or four months doing investigations.

GG: DOJ was here while a murder took place.

MK: Matter of fact, they was here while a murder took place. They had the riot team here too, at the time, and it still took place. We went on strike on September 26. We went on strike throughout the state of Alabama because we were complicit in our own incarceration and working for nothing. We say this is slavery.

[Background Commotion] Hear what they got going on right now, Bursts? Right now they are fighting now. They are fighting now and [guards] ain't finna do nothing. You see these guys with these knives here and they ain't finna do nothing.

TFSR: *So when you're talking about the DOJ that's the federal government stepping in and saying, "We've heard reports that there is unsafe situations and that something needs to be done." I think in Alabama, but at least like in Louisiana, and I think in Mississippi, the federal government stepped in at different times to say, "These are too dangerous of situations." Why do you think*

The warden and the police they just walk by like they don't even see them. People are just laid out naked. Here a guy just the day before yesterday was just standing in front of the door. Just standing in the dorm, it was the dorm that Gerald was staying in. He was there with all his drawers pulled all the way down with his butt cheeks apart. He was hallucinating. He'd get whooped for that because people feel like that's disrespectful. But see, I understand what's going on. So, I don't feel like he needs to be whooped. What needs to happen is he needs to pull his clothes up and taken somewhere and come down.

TFSR: *Yeah, drink some tea.*

MK: Yeah, but these guys get kicked down and beaten with a belt. They took his mattress and all his stuff and just threw it outside and the police they say nothing. They put them in a cot, threw all of his stuff on top of him and just brought him outside. It's brutal and cruel.

The drugs and the money... some of these guys are making some real money off these drugs. You got dudes calling real shots in here. You got people putting hits on people. The crip gang had put a hit on me, because of what I was saying about my partner at Holman. They put a hit on me.

TFSR: *That's scary.*

MK: Yeah. So you know and then you can't go to now or the cap guy came outrun Boost Mobile, AT&T and all. They had it was solid they could call in I'm not affiliated with nothing. They look at me, I'm just an old person. They don't care nothing about me, nothing about what I did, nothing about what I do. They don't care about none of that. All they care about is their pocket. Everybody wants to be a millionaire.

Anything else you want to know?

TFSR: *You writing anything these days?*

MK: Yeah. I'm still writing for Fire Ant. The only thing I have been putting out lately thought is explaining the stuff that has been going over here. That's it. I haven't been doing any other major writing or anything like that.

that can change how we relate to each other in here that make it better for us. The only thing that will make it better in here for us, is us.

So that was one of the things that I start intervening in. I started about two years ago. My partner at one time used to be a Crip, a gang member. I was Holman [prison]. What they did at the time was they would take all the ex-gang that became gay, they started kidnapping them. They started bringing them in their dorm, holding them in the dorm. This is a gang prison. It was really ran by gangs. They would prostitute themselves out, working for the gang. That's the first time I had to pay to get her up out of that dorm. That's when I started doing these types of intervention. Then I started a shoe program. Where one comrade coming out of Chicago, we had shoes, tennis shoes, and boots for people who couldn't afford them. These are the kinds of things that I'm into. Some real practical stuff.

A lot of people don't want to hear all this stuff. All these ideas floating around, these big ideas floating around. People want to be released.

TFSR: *So how do you deal with situations like paying off folks debt? How do you avoid just being held ransom, like somebody recognizing, "Oh, you have access to a source of income, we could just do this over and over again."*

MK: Matter of fact, about a month ago, I thought they were going to black bag me, but it just hasn't gotten to that point yet. I have always been able to come up and pay it off. Basically, when I say I was gonna do it by some time, it might be a week or two late they might add an extra few dollars on, but it'd be taken care of. I haven't had another problem. But the problem with that is that some of them, they go back. They get to borrowing money or go back to the drugs. Not everybody, but majority of them do. But even if just one or two want to stop, that's two lives you saved. That's two lives.

TFSR: *I can totally imagine people just having to lean on drugs just to shut the world down for a little bit. It seems like that's a way to...*

MK: You know, they use the drugs down here too because they control us with the drugs. They got drugs down in the prisons that they didn't have when I first came. They didn't even exist. You got fentanyl in here, they got all the psychotropic drugs to get high on, they got flakka, and all these other different type drugs, and the hallucinogenics. You got people just laid out.

the federal government hasn't stepped in when the local government won't? Just the same thing, just different level

MK: Well, it's really hard to say why, but when I really think about it... they got a bad federal prison system dealing with the same problems. So how can they correct anybody else's problem when they aren't correcting their own problems? It's just for show. It's because so much been going on. So many people been making noise, so they had to get involved. The city investigating the business going on since 2019. They've been investigating the State and threatening to file suit. Matter of fact, they have filed a suit on it, but still they hadn't come in to take over.

Coming in and taking over isn't going to do no good, because prisons are going to exist, and the condition of prisons are going to exist as long as they exist.

TFSR: *Yeah, because these things are so ongoing and the Alabama prison system has continued not getting people out on parole, they've continued to be really badly understaffed and with facilities that are degrading and stuff... are they just waiting for a bailout to get new buildings built and then get kickbacks from that? Or they just don't care?*

GG: That's what a lot of us feel like. They just trying to make this seem like it's just so overwhelmed that they got to have new buildings. So that's part of it. That's part of the reason why they want to build a new prison and that's the reason the governor, she don't want to say that she got a problem. She knows she has a problem but she just don't want to upset the community by saying, "I'm using this money, I'm using that money." Stuff like that.

Right now, they know they have a problem and they don't they don't care. The only thing they care about is: New prison. That's it. The money.

TFSR: *Do you want people who listen to this later to write you letters and get in touch with you or try to put money in your commissary or whatever?*

GG: Yeah! That'd be cool. My number is #247505

TFSR: *Awesome, that's super helpful.*

In the past, Michael had talked about how filling in the power vacuum, that it was mostly gangs that were taking control. Does it seem like that still, or is it less organized?

GG: It's more like cities now. The gang stuff is not really the problem no more. Because it's everybody for themselves, for real. It's like, "I get along with this person. I might get along with this person. I might get along with this group of people." It just goes like that. Then you got the outsiders that got addiction problems and people look at them like scum of the earth. But how can you look at them like that and you're selling it to them?!

Then there're the gays. You got people will jump on them and send them out and do things to them. A lot of them, that's who's sleeping outside. But like I was saying, it's behind closed doors stuff. A lot of people do stuff behind closed doors. They want to look good in front of their friends and then here you go, you take it out on the gay community or whatever like that. It's just something that... the staff don't help them. Period.

TFSR: *It seems like in some prison systems, there's pretty active collusion between social disruption in space and the guards because by creating factions and pitting them against each other, and using snitches and whatever, it means that they can stop prisoners from organizing together. In Alabama, like anywhere, people don't get along sometimes, but it has a really active history of prisoners getting together and making some noise, which is really impressive.*

Did you see much participation in the strike in September? Or was it pretty spotty?

GG: It was pretty spotty. Because you had different factions. Like people gotta use different coolers and people can't drink out of this water and stuff like that. So it's separation. That's what they want. They want us to have separation. They know that people don't follow the rules or whatever like that, and they know it. Violence comes behind that. If they would come in and step in and do their job how they supposed to do it, we wouldn't be having all these violent episodes. It's something that they could have stopped. They curate it. Look at the conditions, you know? You have hopeless thoughts.

When you see nothing changing, people escape to do drugs. That's why you have OD's, because they try to escape it another way. But we don't talk to no counselors. We don't have none of that. We are supposed to have a mental health person come be able to talk to us every time, but we don't

MK: Not many people beat these cases.

TFSR: *Yeah, right?! The fact that they were able to get a federal judge, not a prison judge, obviously, but it's just a federal judge to say, "yeah, you need to stop fucking with him." It was so obvious when they spilled coffee in his room when he wasn't even there and said a bird came in and did it.*

MK: You know, I have three of those: Assault on officers [charges] that I got more time on for that since I've been locked up. Man, I know how hard it is to beat these folks [charges]. Yeah. He was able to beat them. Even though they came with all the ridiculous stuff and they was able to beat him. I've never seen that. I've never seen that. Not here. Now when they say one of us assaulted, we always get time.

TFSR: *Yeah. Yeah, that's how it's set up for. Right?*

MK: Yeah.

TFSR: *Oh, I just got a letter from him. He's actually getting letters and I've been sending zines to him too, folks have been sending him books. So for the first time in years, he can have visits from his family. It's amazing. I'm glad of that. But he's at the ADMax in Florence. He's at the highest security prison in the country, I think.*

But yeah, we gotta get you out.

MK: Yeah. Well, I'm gonna get myself out before I get too old.

TFSR: *Yeah. Is there anything else that I didn't ask about that you want to talk about?*

MK: Yeah, what I wanted to do, is for the person that was involved in, I just want to say how grateful I am, man. For what they were able to do for us and helping out. For years, I did the law stuff, the lawsuits, and the criminal court stuff, I did all that stuff for years. Mainly because I came out of the old Black radical Marxist tradition. So when I came out of it, my thinking started to change. What I started doing is coming up with ideas of what I think

MK: Oh, well, I had just recently hired me an attorney, I had one a couple years before but he didn't do his job. What I'm trying to do now, I'm trying to get back in court on a sentence reduction. It's the most favorable thing for people who get the kind of time I got and did kind of years I had. In the county that I was sentenced under, Johnson County, has been the most favorable county for doing this. That's all I'm trying to do is just trying to get back in court on a sentence reduction. My past few years, I've been trying to keep a clean disciplinary file. I've been up for parole nine times. Well, 11 times now. I got turned down and they put me on five more years. The way that works out is that there is no particular criteria, so you can't challenge it in court. That's why we haven't been successful. There's no statute or nothing that says that, "You got to do this" and then they have to do this to let you out after so many years. They don't have none of that.

What they do have is: they have a parole board that consists of a State Trooper, a Parole Officer, the Assistant DA, they got a group called a "victim's rights group" that's speaks at everybody's parole hearing. What they're doing at the parole hearing is they're going up, regardless of if they know the person or not. It has nothing to do with their individual cases or nothing. They just speak on everybody's case.

At my last parole hearing, my attorney and a couple of my supporters told me that 40 people went up there and nobody made it. Nobody. Some people had done 30 years and hadn't had any disciplinaries, and everything was in order, and they can't understand why they refused to give them parole. There's more people going out in body bags that are making parole in Alabama. So the only thing I'm trying to do now is get back in court on this petition here for a sentence reduction. According to my attorney, I got 85% chance. That should happen this year, Bursts

TFSR: Fingers crossed. *All right. That's awesome.*

I'll find information for the show notes about where we can direct people if they want to give donations for that. Even lawyers acting for free, it costs them money to file paperwork and such. Fingers crossed on that.

MK: I wish I had Eric King's lawyer! I read their transcript from the interview. They are awesome.

TFSR: *Yeah, yeah. I'll poke the CLDC and see if they if they have the capacity.*

see nobody. I've been here at this prison for over six months, now. I haven't seen a classification officer yet. They don't care. Once they send you here, they send you here. They don't help, there is no help here.

So people like us, we gotta stay strong with each other and this is what we come up with. We are calling out for help. The people that's listening and stuff like that, just know that all of us ain't no bad people. We've made some mistakes and stuff like that, you know? We need help.

TFSR: *Besides talking about what's going on, do you have senses of what you want that help to look like from people? Should they be contacting the government? Should they be trying to get jobs at the prison to make it better? Or should they be trying to just send money into to folks? Or listening? Or what what would be helpful?*

GG: The helpful part is dealing with people that we can contact. That will make us stronger, when we got a connection with each other and we all on the same page and I'm not sending you on a wild goose chase. I know that y'all have timing in the world, just like in here. You guys have a lot of stuff going on too, but we don't want to send y'all on a wild goose chase. Contacting the prison,... keep doing it in mass. They hate publicity, they hate being on the news, they hate all that type of stuff.

So yeah, they might try to retaliate on us, but I'm in motion, I'm on a move like I don't care what they do. I want change. Sometimes we have to go through the things that we have to go through to get change. I'm one of the participants that's willing to go through whatever they get, to get some type of change. Because all we see is our friends going out in body bags. I've seen three people that I've literally had a conversation with a couple of days before they died and now they gone.

They walk past us. The officers walk past us, it ain't their fault. They understaffed too. But something got to be done. They are scared to say something. You got some officers that are willing to participate and expose some of this stuff. But they want to cover their job because they got to feed their family, too. So I don't look at them to break their neck for us and stuff like that, because this is a bigger problem. They know it's a bigger problem.

TFSR: *So has it been brought up that there aren't officers around and people aren't getting check-ins about their wellness or about their status changing. I think Michael had brought up that there was an issue with paroles, actually.*

This is the thing that I had heard in past chats with with folks inside or supporters, is that parole boards just aren't getting people out. If there's no programs, as has been mentioned, how do you get the the recognition that "you've made changes and you're a better person should be that out" or whatever?

GG: That's the answers and questions that we try to get from the commissioner, from the people that's running the ADOC. "What do we have to do? What's the criteria to make parole?" There's no criteria. Y'all get paid, y'all are getting funded for these programs, but these programs, we're not doing them. We don't even step out of our dorm.

The only time when we step out that dorm is when they call "chow." It's like a controlled movement for the past year since COVID. They got us in real controlled movement. Why you think it's so violent now? Because they have us so bunched up, there ain't nothing to do. You got people that want to get a trade, you got people stuck inside these buildings that want to do something, but we ain't able to do nothing. They only thing they feed us is, "We are short staffed." Well, that's not our problem. So how can we get to our fam? You know? We got Mike right here.

TFSR: *Right. Thank you.*

MK: Yeah, Bursts.

TFSR: *Hey, Michael, so we talked a little bit about how difficult it is to get programs or anything towards parole. How the parole setup is just an absolute joke. I know that there's discussion in a lot of states around the country, I don't want to take it out of the situation that you all are experiencing, but a lot of activists have put in a lot of energy to get changes made in different States around the definition and like taking the 'slavery clause' out of the Constitutions and making sure that that term isn't in there. That labor extraction is not in there tied to people being put in prison.*

But even if you all aren't working, you're still being fed crappy food in small portions, you're still in dangerous situations, you're still being denied medical visitation, you don't have programs, what would you like to see? What do you see as next steps for alleviating the pain that so many of y'all are going through?

MK: It's like this: I know Gerald was talking about these people, they have families to take care of out there, so they work here. Some of them, they might not be as bad at the other ones. But the slave has to take care of his family, too. My whole thing is this here: Of course, we are talking about the conditions as though we want to be living in better conditions. But they are not going to change. As long as prisons exist, it's just the nature of prisons. It's not going to change. So the only thing I know to do is to abolish prisons and to destroy prisons. That's it.

The best thing that I know that we can do here, regardless of what the constitution say, regardless of what the law say, is how we relate to each other. That's the only thing that's going to change anything is how us prisoners relate to each other. How people on the outside relate to each other, and relate to us in here, and how we relate to those out there. The only thing that's gonna change anything is our relationships. The longer we continue to discriminate against people because they are gay, queer, trans, white, Black, we are going to continue to have these problems and prisons are going to continue to exist.

So the best thing to do is find some kind of way to abolish the State, because that's the only way we can abolish prisons.

TFSR: *That's the answer I was hoping you were gonna give. [laughs]*

MK: Yeah, yeah, yeah. They took it out of the constitution in Alabama. There was like four or five states that had a slavery clause removed. Regardless if they got a slavery clause or not, it doesn't even matter. United States constitution will come right back and say that it makes sense that you can practice slavery or because of what you just said in the first clause, that it was outlawed. So it's a conundrum.

TFSR: *You're trying to get out, right? Through legal measures.*

MK: Yes.

TFSR: *Do you want to talk about that at all? I can get with other folks on your support group to see what is good for like fundraisers, but what would you like to say about that process?*