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Anti-Politics and Revolutionary Solidarity

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There appears to be a trend in radical circles of distinguishing prisoners based on their so-called 'crimes', with the intent (conscious or not) to identify 'political prisoners' who, by virtue of their actions, are more deserving of support and solidarity. Prisoners who have been targeted by the state due to their political beliefs and/or actions are given special attention amongst radicals, while the rest of the prison population spending their days in a cage are often only an afterthought, used as a means to lend credibility to political ideology, or completely forgotten.

This privileged and moralistic practice has invaded radical circles and creates a distinction between 'political' and 'ordinary' prisoner. Political prisoners are said to have been imprisoned unjustly, unlike the rest of the prison population. This can manifest either as an insistence of their innocence (as in the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal), or, in cases in which the prisoner has obviously broken the law, they are viewed as acting only in response to unjust laws or conditions (as in the case of Walter Bond). In both cases, their innocence is maintained.

But stating that some prisoners are innocent implies that others are guilty and deserve their punishment, that some unjust laws should be broken, while others should be upheld. This distinction requires predefined ideas of what is right and wrong and the application of those ideas in all situations and to all individuals, regardless of context. This process of taking subjective ideas, reifying them as universal moral principles and claiming their objectivity is no different than the state claiming that to uphold their laws is to uphold 'justice'.

The idea of justice is also problematic in that it reduces the struggle into a political debate over whose ideas are the most morally just. In this context, all actions are mere civil disobedience, attempts to expose the injustice of certain laws and to have them replaced with new ones.

Only acknowledging political prisoners devalues the experiences of all of the exploited class who are arrested for breaking the law simply to survive. Those who steal for food, sell drugs for money, and squat or sleep on the street due to the conditions that this society

has forced them into are not sent to prison because of political consciousness, but because their lives, their very existence, has placed them in conflict with those in power.

Some anarchists have attempted to broaden the definition of political prisoner to include all prisoners. But to be political means to identify with a specific ideology and to believe that the universal application of that ideology will result in a better world. Since all political systems require institutions to uphold them, political action must involve either an attempt to reform current institutions to benefit a new system, or in the case of radical politics, the abolition of current institutions and the creation of new ones in their place.

If it is accepted that to be political is to act with the explicit goal of reforming institutions to suit a new political system, then the term cannot be applied to individuals who are harassed and arrested because of their place in the exploited class. They are not targeted because of any belief system, but because they are forced to break the law just to survive. They have no choice but to live in opposition to this society, and to reduce these lives to mere politics is an inaccurate and unfair representation.

Also, as anarchists shouldn't we be fighting against political ideologies, not creating new ones? If we are struggling against this system in its totality, we should strive for a freedom based on creating conditions of existence and relationships on our own terms, and not just more freedom than we currently have by way of institutional reform.

The term political does not include those of us who do not see the struggle against this system as separate from the rest of our lives, those of us who are consciously engaging in a project of creating ourselves in a way that completely rejects the domination of the state and capital. These struggles, along with those that the exploited class engage in everyday, are directly opposed to the authority of any political program and are therefore anti-political. Not only should the label of 'political' be undesirable because it represents the thing we should be fighting against, but it is also a misrepresentation of the struggle that many people are engaged in.

None of this is meant to imply that all prisoners deserve our unconditional support. Solidarity should not be given out of obligation

or a sense of duty. That is the foundation of liberal activism and cannot be the starting point for any radical project. Solidarity needs to start from ourselves and our own struggles, and extend to people in whose struggles we can see our own, with those who we have real affinity with. We should be pushing the actions of our imprisoned comrades forward as their accomplices. If our friends need support it should be given in the spirit of mutual aid and never as charity. We need co-conspirators and comrades, not self-sacrifice in the name of the struggle.

But while we may not agree with the thoughts and actions of all prisoners, and there are certainly some who we would despise completely, we should be clear that we oppose putting *any* person in a cage for deviating from 'acceptable' social behaviour developed to maintain the current social order.

For the destruction of all prisons, for the release of all prisoners, for total freedom.