

STRIKING BACK AGAINST PRISON SLAVERY



***Reflections On The September 2016 Prison Work Strikes:
An Interview With Comrade Rashid By James K. Anderson***

STRIKING BACK AGAINST PRISON SLAVERY

**REFLECTIONS ON THE SEPTEMBER 2016
PRISON WORK STRIKES: AN INTERVIEW WITH
COMRADE RASHID BY JAMES K. ANDERSON***

Striking Back Against Prison Slavery: Reflections on the September 2016
Prison Work Strikes: An Interview With Comrade Rashid By James K. Anderson

ISBN 978-1-989701-44-7

First printing

Kersplebedeb can be contacted at:

Kersplebedeb
CP 63560
CCCP Van Horne
Montreal, Quebec
Canada
H3W 3H8

or email info@kersplebedeb.com

Visit the Kersplebedeb website at <http://www.kersplebedeb.com>

For more writings by Kevin “Rashid” Johnson,
check out his website at www.rashidmod.com

FOREWORD

The following is an interview conducted by James K. Anderson, a member of the IWW Freelance Journalist Union.

In this discussion, I make various critiques of the abolitionist movement and certain unsavory people who now identify as abolitionists, like co-founders and national leaders of the national (as opposed to the grassroots) Black Lives Matter movement, such as Melina Abdullah, Patrice Cullors, and Alicia Garza. Also of the role of certain abolitionists in changing the purpose and tactical direction of the prisoner-led work strike and movement to abolish prison slavery and amend the 13th Amendment into an amorphous and ultimately aimless movement of “abolitionism.” I also explain that I am not an abolitionist and why. My critique of abolitionism and distinguishing myself as not an abolitionist is not to denounce the general sentiment of abolitionism or most abolitionists. I have many comrades and allies and know many sincere revolutionaries that are abolitionists. And many of the multitudinous aims of the abolitionist movement are compatible and the same as my own as a Black / New Afrikan who is a Revolutionary Intercommunalist and Communist (Maoist).

Kevin “Rashid” Johnson

June 2025

STRIKING BACK AGAINST PRISON SLAVERY, PART ONE

JAMES ANDERSON: When did you first learn about the plan for the Sept. 9, 2016 prison strike?

RASHID: I knew about it from its inception. I helped to organize and publicize it.

The strike was against prison slave labor. Sept. 9th was chosen to commemorate the Sept. 9, 1971 peaceful uprising at Attica State Prison, where prisoners of all races united in protest of the murder of George Jackson by guards in San Quentin the month before, and the inhumane conditions in Attica. Officials suppressed the Attica protest by murdering 29 prisoners and 10 civilians, then torturing hundreds more, sparking international outrage and exposure of the inhumane conditions in Amerikan prisons.

JAMES ANDERSON: What did you think then and what do you think now about the focus on prison labor/slavery and the emphasis on a prison work stoppage?

RASHID: Focusing on prison slave labor is a key part of the struggle against this global capitalist imperialist system that the U.S. empire presides over. Amerika was built by slave labor which continues. In fact the world's industrial system was built on it. The Industrial Revolution was fueled by the cotton production based on Amerindian land theft and Black slave labor.

Slave labor continues inside U.S. prisons, which grew out of the old chattel slave system. When chattel slavery was abolished after the U.S. Civil War (1865), the prisons became the new plantations and the new site of racialized slavery. It was then that the U.S. saw its first wave of mass imprisonment and criminalization of Blackness.

The 13th Amendment was enacted at the war's end which abolished slavery except for those convicted of crimes. The 13th Amendment was actually a compromise with the old slaveowners of the South, allowing slavery to continue but with the state taking ownership of the slaves

instead of private individuals. This was done through criminalizing the newly freed Blacks.

Criminal laws were passed across the South to put Blacks back in servitude. Those laws, called the Black Codes, criminalized vagrancy, lack of employment, and such other conditions that the newly emancipated Blacks found themselves in, having been turned out from the plantations illiterate, poor, without land and resources, and created special racially separate courts. While at the same time white supremacists and vigilante groups, like the Ku Klux Klan and White Knights of Camellia, who desired to reclaim white dominance across the South, sabotaged Black political and economic achievements and lynched and murdered Blacks seen to be “successful,” and who persisted in trying to exercise any level of actual freedom.

Almost overnight the prisons were overflowing with Blacks, who were then contracted out by the state prison systems as free labor to private corporations and back to the old plantations. These work forces and chain gangs were seen across the South building and rebuilding everything.

The conditions of this new bondage were often much worse than when the slaves were privately owned, because with the Blacks no longer being private property and easily replaced from the endless pool of Blacks being imprisoned, those who exploited their labor didn’t care about their upkeep. So, they weren’t cared for, they were often not fed, many were literally worked to death. A condition that literally continues to exist in today’s prisons, in Texas prisons in particular.

In the Texas prison system today, **all** prisoners are forced to work without any pay at all. Many work in private and state-owned industries. They also produce most all the food eaten by Texas prisoners and staff. There are huge prison plantations of crops of various types of vegetables they grow, also cotton which they also use to make the guards’ and prisoners’ uniforms. There’s an egg plant. Also hog, cow, and chicken farms where the prisoners raise these animals for food.

In this agricultural work they are given no modern tools or machinery. But are made to plant, tend, and harvest the crops using nothing but handheld hoes. These work groups are derisively called, “Hoe squads.”

This reflects conditions that exist to a lesser or greater degree in prisons across the U.S., where prisoners are made to work for no pay at all or for only pennies, performing labor that sustains the prisons and enriches various corporations. This is labor that officials would otherwise have to employ people from society at minimum wage to do. So, the U.S. prison system is largely sustained and prison corporations reap trillions in profits from exploiting prison slave labor. This is what is known as the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC).

In this regard, prisoners are a large sector of the U.S. workforce, but enjoy none of the benefits and wages that workers in society receive, as inadequate as they are for even those workers. This is why they play an important role in the struggle against this capitalist imperialist system that exists upon the exploitation of workers in general.

JAMES ANDERSON: When did you start organizing/mobilizing for the 2016 strike, and what did that work look like?

RASHID: My involvement in organizing around the Sept. 9th strike began after members of my Party, then the New Afrikan Black Panther Party (now the Revolutionary Intercommunal Black Panther Party), led a prison work strike in April 2016 at seven Texas prisons. This took place after an uprising in Alabama's Holman prison, where the warden, Carter Davenport, who was notorious for physically abusing prisoners, ended up on the receiving end of violence.

These two protest actions in early 2016 inspired the call across the U.S. for a countrywide prisoner strike beginning on Sept. 9th. With the April 2016 strike in the Texas prisons, I became involved in agitating and uniting with the Alabama prisoners or the Free Alabama Movement (FAM) through IWOC, to stage the countrywide strike later that year.

I wrote articles and through media contacts and correspondence got other prisoners, my entire Party, and other allied groups involved. I was closely involved with IWOC Comrades in this effort, the late Karen Smith with the Florida IWOC and Fight Toxic Prisons (FTP) chapters in particular.

JAMES ANDERSON: Did you get involved with the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC) prior to the buildup to the 2016 strike?

RASHID: Yes, I did. I had actually joined the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) several years before, then, during mid-2015, led and formally announced an alliance between the NABPP and the IWW/IWOC. I wrote about it in my article, “Black Cats Bond: The Industrial Workers of the World and the New Afrikan Black Panther Party-Prison Chapter,” posted at <http://rashidmod.com/?p=1251>.

JAMES ANDERSON: Can you describe your work with/in IWOC prior to the buildup to the 2016 strike?

RASHID: I was involved in developing a strategy for the NABPP’s involvement in the IWW/IWOC and other workers’ groups and organizing workers’ strikes, and developing links between imprisoned workers and those in society.

I wrote position papers and corresponded with various people and Comrades on the inside and outside and media folks to help build awareness around, and support for and unity of prisoners and outside people and groups in, the strike.

JAMES ANDERSON: Where were you incarcerated in 2016?

RASHID: I was right there in Texas, confined at the Clements Unit in Amarillo.

JAMES ANDERSON: What sort of buildup and organizing took place inside the prison where you were incarcerated leading up to Sept. 9, 2016?

RASHID: We communicated throughout the prison across the races and tribes to stage a work stoppage and to boycott the commissary.

JAMES ANDERSON: What happened on Sept. 9th inside the prison where you were held, and what did you do specifically? What did other prisoners do? How many withheld labor or participated in other ways? What other forms of protest or disruption took place? Any details you can recall would be helpful.

RASHID: We actually didn't do anything besides boycott the commissary, because officials locked the entire prison down on Labor Day, Sept. 6, 2016, the day before the strike was to begin. I wrote about it in my article, "Texas Locks Down Prison on Labor Day to Avert Work Stoppage." Which can be read at, <http://rashidmod.com/?p=2219>.

JAMES ANDERSON: Did guards/administrators at the prison where you were incarcerated know about the plans for the strike/disruption (and if so what did it entail)?

RASHID: Yes, they did. That's why and how they were able to head off the work stoppage by locking everyone down starting the day before the strike was set to begin.

JAMES ANDERSON: How did guards and administrators inside the prison where you were held respond to the actions on Sept. 9, 2016? Can you recount any details regarding retaliation?

RASHID: As said they locked the prison down, which meant they didn't use prisoners in any work positions at all. Everyone was confined to their cells, and guards distributed the meals which consisted primarily of a disgusting PBJ and oil mixture on cornbread and prunes.

JAMES ANDERSON: What worked well in terms of preparing for and trying nationally to coordinate the strike in 2016?

RASHID: Having a wide unification of different outside groups and political tendencies support and help spread word throughout the prisons about the strike. Karen Smith proved in my opinion to be one of the most effective outside supporters and collaborators. She almost organically was able to accept prisoners in leading positions of the strike, she built large media support and involvement, she worked with every political tendency out there despite most having different views from her own Anarchist persuasion.

She was always humble and open to facilitate and follow prisoners' ideas in a democratic manner, and was never inclined to the tendency I

observed with many white leftists over the years of their trying to control the struggles and organizations of people of color and prisoners.

JAMES ANDERSON: What did not work well?

RASHID: The involvement of certain white leftists who **did** act to coopt and divert the strike into what they wanted it to be. Namely, instead of a movement aimed to contest the 13th Amendment's pro-slavery clause and prison slave labor, they converted its slogan and purpose into one of abolishing prisons. This was the trend that became the "Abolition Movement," which was/is something different from the prisoner-led movement to abolish prison slave labor and the 13th Amendment.

The newly injected slogan of "Abolish prisons" came from the general Anarchist idea of "Abolish the state." It was outside Anarchists who inserted this slogan into the movement in place of our slogan to "Abolish prison slavery," that actually began in the early 2000s among prisoners on Texas's death row. The NABPP took up this call shortly after we were founded in 2005. In fact it was introduced into our party by our first recruit, Hasan Shakur, a Texas death row prisoner, who we recruited that year, and who was executed in August 2006. I wrote an article (and drew art) promoting this theme of abolishing prison slavery back in 2006, "A Modest Proposal for Abolishing Prison Slavery in Amerika in the 21st Century." Which can be read at <http://rashidmod.com/?p=478>.

The idea and slogan of abolishing prison slavery became widely adopted by prisoners across the U.S. largely through our Party's newsletters, RIGHT ON!, SERVE THE PEOPLE, and others, which were widely popular across U.S. prisons, where we continually promoted the idea and slogan for years leading up to 2016.

JAMES ANDERSON: What did you and others who participated learn from the Sept. 9, 2016 efforts and the response?

RASHID: We learned that we had immense power in unity and the ability to unite in huge numbers around commonly shared oppressed conditions. Also that such struggles broke down the false stigma that

officials projected against us that we are less than human and unworthy of equal consideration to those in society. That through principled struggle we can win broad public support and unity with our struggles against inhumane conditions and treatments.

JAMES ANDERSON: What did you make of the coverage of the Sept. 9, 2016 strike – both corporate media, local/regular media and alternative media outlets?

RASHID: It was huge and extraordinary.

JAMES ANDERSON: What did you make of the social movement/radical media (and use of social media) in relation to the strike?

RASHID: That it was also huge and extraordinary. But it was also used by some outside white leftists to coopt our prisoner-led movement to abolish prisoner slave labor and to amend the 13th Amendment and convert it into a vague and amorphous “Abolitionist” movement.

JAMES ANDERSON: What did you make of the broader public response?

RASHID: It verified my prior belief that prisoners can build the huge public support against our oppression and exploitation by engaging in principled struggles.

JAMES ANDERSON: What did you think was the biggest impact of the Sept. 9, 2016 strike?

RASHID: It humanized us and showed that we are people with whom outside workers must unite to advance their own struggle against wage slavery and economic exploitation by the capitalist bosses.

It also set a precedent for greater struggles that continued after 2016, which I and our Party were able to help organize and participate in, including the 2017 Florida statewide prison strike called Operation PUSH and the 2018 countrywide prison strike.

STRIKING BACK AGAINST PRISON SLAVERY, PART TWO

JAMES ANDERSON: In the first part of this interview you mentioned that the New Afrikan Black Panther Party (NABPP) is now known as the Revolutionary Intercommunal Black Panther Party (RIBPP). Can you explain the reason behind the name change? And how significant is the “Intercommunal” that’s in the new name? Is it inspired by the Intercommunalism Huey P. Newton wrote about? What does Intercommunal(ism) mean to you, and how does it relate to prison organizing?

RASHID: Yes, in December 2020 there was a democratically decided upon separation in what was then the New Afrikan Black Panther Party (NABPP). Those who left the NABPP, and I was among them, reconstituted as the Revolutionary Intercommunal Black Panther Party (RIBPP). I was the co-founder and theoretical leader of both Parties.

The NABPP, which was founded in 2005, and received the blessings of many veterans of the original Black Panther Party (OBPP) as continuing the work and line of the original Party, went through a similar ideological development as did the OBPP. Like the OBPP, we began as revolutionary nationalists, became revolutionary internationalists, then, in 2015, we formally embraced Revolutionary Intercommunalism (RI). This was indeed the same RI that Huey P. Newton, the OBPP’s co-founder and theoretical leader, first articulated in his November 18, 1970 speech at Boston College, but with some advances.

In 2015 I wrote an article, “In Search of the Right Theory for Today’s Struggle: Revisiting Huey P. Newton’s Theory of Revolutionary Intercommunalism,” which can be read at <http://rashidmod.com/?p=1282>.

In that article I demonstrated the fundamental correctness of Huey’s theory of RI as a guide to revolutionary struggle in today’s world, but I also pointed out where I believed his analysis came up short and corrected those points and brought the theory up to date. That article also established our formally adopting RI as the leading theory of the NABPP and later the RIBPP.

In an Interview I did in 2018 with JR Valrey, titled “On Pan Afrikanism” (<http://rashidmod.com/?p=2525>), I discussed the need and role of a Panther Party of global reach, a RI Panther Party, as an advance on the merely New Afrikan Panther Party, which in name and function confined itself to only the nation of Black People in Amerika (namely New Afrikans). As a “Revolutionary Intercommunal” Panther Party we would become a global party in name and function, and embrace all oppressed peoples everywhere, Black and otherwise. This is the very basis of the theory of RI, to unite all marginalized peoples as communities and link them into a global intercommunal struggle, “Think locally organize globally.”

This is the significance in the change in the name of our Party from the New Afrikan BPP to the Revolutionary Intercommunal BPP.

And yes the prison struggle factors largely in the theory of RI.

As Huey correctly pointed out in laying out his theory of RI, the advances in automation and technology and shifting of production to the underdeveloped world that he saw developing in the early 1970s, was driving multitudes of people out of jobs. As was the continued growth and greed of imperialist expansion that was gobbling up productive land in the underdeveloped world and driving massive numbers of rural farmers and peasants into concentrations of urbanized areas, such as shantytowns, favellas, refugee camps and so on. These massive concentrations of poor largely unemployed people were compelled to survive by any means necessary, often through hustling and criminal pursuits. A condition that produces huge sectors, often entire communities, of lumpen or “broken” proletarians (proletarians are simply workers).

Consequently, a culture of criminality becomes deeply ingrained in these people, and it is promoted by the ruling class, who feeds the people a culture that glorified criminality and their own predatory practices of violently exploiting the people and their labor for power and wealth. We see this glorification of graft, corruption and predatory violent criminality all day in the entertainment media, in music oriented to urban youth and so on. Poverty accompanied by the glorification of predation induces a culture of criminality that predictably justifies feeding bodies into the imperialist prison industrial complex; a system which in turn generates huge profits for prison-oriented corporations and politicians.

Only RI predicted and grasps the basis of the massive development of urban lumpenized communities, the uses of prisons to dispose of large numbers of these people who serve little profit value to the ruling class on the streets but become a source of huge profit when imprisoned, and the massive growth of the prison population as a result. Only RI provides an answer to revolutionizing them. As George Jackson termed it, “Transforming the criminal mentality into a revolutionary mentality.” Recall George Jackson developed the OBPP’s first prison chapter.

The very orientation of the OBPP and its particular approach to organizing, unifying and politicizing poor urban Black communities was around Serve The People programs and an independent revolutionary media, and linking these communities together around a Party that was developing a global reach. Huey’s method proved most effective in answering the challenge of transforming people (namely the lumpen) that traditional Marxists wrote off as incorrigible dregs of society into a huge revolutionary force. This also answered the dilemma of traditional Marxists who, while writing them off, also recognized that the lumpen had to be somehow won over to the revolutionary struggle or they would be manipulated and used by the enemy ruling class as a force of violent opposition against the revolutionary movement. Only Huey and the OBPP predicted, understood and developed an effective organizational leadership and answer to this situation. This was the “genius” that set Huey’s theory apart from the mechanical and stale theories of the day and still has relevance today. And it is this line that we in the RIBPP seek to build upon and advance.

JAMES ANDERSON: Was Intercommunalism a factor in the 2016 strike?

RASHID: It certainly was. It formed the basis of our role in promoting the unification of prisoners across the U.S. in a tactical struggle against a form of oppression that we all suffered and could identify.

JAMES ANDERSON: You mention your Party’s collaboration with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the IWW-affiliated Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC). Can you share more about how you helped facilitate the collaboration with preparing

for the 2016 prison strike, how you found common ground, and how you worked through any ideological or political differences between the organizations?

RASHID: In 2012 I was interstate transferred from my home state of Virginia to Oregon in response to my involvement in exposing and resisting abusive conditions in Virginia's prisons. I was also involved, with Ed Mead and others, in building support for the three historical hunger strikes in the California prison system in 2011 and 2013 that involved 6000, 12,000 then 30,000 Cali prisoners, which many prisoners in other states, including Va, joined with. I drew the logo for those strikes which were staged in protest of the abuses of indefinite solitary confinement in Cali's prisons. I was able to enlist prisoners in Oregon to join the Cali strikes and was then interstate transferred to the Texas prison system in 2013.

I was already involved in working with and had joined the IWW before I left Va and was in correspondence with Brianna Peril who had a leading position in the union. It was through this contact that, when I was moved to Texas, I met and began corresponding and organizing with Azzurra Crispino, an Anarchist who was also a professor in a Texas university. Azzurra was also a member of the IWW and the elected media co-chair of IWOC, and as such she was instrumental, alongside Karen Smith, in building outside support and media attention to the September 2016 prison strike and communicating and coordinating with prisoners across Texas and the U.S. prison system related to the strike.

We were able to develop links to key people in prisons all over so a tally could be kept once the strike began on how many facilities joined and in what states, and what were the responses of officials. We devised clever ways to bypass the prison censors to get word into the prisons about the strike and develop ongoing communication lines with participants and leaders so tabs could be kept on developments around the strike in various places. She and Karen also kept me and Comrades in Alabama with the Free Alabama Movement (FAM) in contact. It was FAM that following two prison work strikes in Alabama in 2013 and 2014, joined with the IWW to create IWOC.

I have always emphasized the need and have been able to work with people who have different ideological and political views from me. The distinction that must be made from the outset is who is the real enemy or aligned with them and who are the people. Revolutionaries don't treat the enemy and their agents like we treat the people. We actively struggle to practice unity with the people on grounds where we do agree and have shared interests, and educate them in areas where they don't share our views. Our contradiction with the people is not an antagonistic one, so we do not stand in hostile opposition to them nor seek to repress them. The case is the opposite with respect to the enemy.

It's interesting that you question political contradictions that I may have had with people in the IWW/IWOC and how I worked around them, because I actually ended in struggling within the IWW with the IWOC steering committee (which was composed on Anarchists) over their position to expel Azzurra as media cochair without any hearing, although she has been elected to the position by the overall IWW membership. Like most contradictions I experienced with people with different political tendencies from mines, we were able to resolve them through discussion and debate.

JAMES ANDERSON: Do you see potential for the RIBPP and the IWW/IWOC to collaborate going forward? If so, what lessons from 2016 strike organizing might make the collaboration work more powerful?

RASHID: Of course I do. This is stated in my article mentioned in the first part of this interview where a formal alliance was announced between my Party and the IWW/IWOC, "Black Cats Bond: The Industrial Workers of the World and the New Afrikan Black Panther Party – Prison Chapter" (<http://rashidmod.com/?p=1251>).

What I think the 2016 experience taught us that might make future collaborations between the IWOC and my Party stronger, is the need for leadership to come from prisoners themselves but with sound ideological and political grounding. If our strategy of abolishing prison slavery and the pro-slavery clause in the 13th Amendment had been maintained and not substituted with the vague call for "abolition," I believe we

would have achieved our objective. Much as the three historical hunger strikes in Cali won the struggle against indefinite solitary confinement there and went further to inspire the Cali prison tribes (or so-called gangs) to enter into an agreement in 2012 to end the deadly wars that the pigs kept raging between them for decades.

JAMES ANDERSON: Previously in this Q&A, you criticize certain white leftists who in your view shifted the focus of the 2016 strike away from abolishing prison slave labor to the abolition of prisons. You also differentiated the Abolition movement from the prisoner-led movement to abolish prison slave labor and the 13th Amendment. The IWOC of the IWW played a role in making the 2016 prison strike happen, as you noted, the IWOC has explicitly endorsed prison abolition, which can refer to different views and different types of praxis depending on who is using the term. As highlighted in the previous Q&A, you were an IWW/IWOC member in 2016, and, from what I understand, you retain membership. With that in mind, can you expound upon how you understand the relationship between the 2016 prison strike and prison abolition?

RASHID: I don't see any relationship between the 2016 strike and prison abolition. The strike was a concrete struggle using concrete tactics with a concrete objective. It also played a direct role in the class war between workers and the capitalist imperialist ruling class. Prison abolition or the "Abolition movement" can and has come to mean and embrace **anything** that anyone calls anti-Establishment or against prisons, including some purely opportunist and ultimately pro-Establishment and pro-prison agendas.

One example I can offer is the representation of Black Lives Matter (BLM) co-founders and their agendas as Abolitionists and abolition. I have multitudes of similar examples, but I want to use this one because it came to me as a result of a Comrade, Victor Wallis, recently asking me a similar question about connecting the struggle to abolish prison slavery with Abolitionism, and in support of this idea he sent me a newly published book by Sonali Kolhatkar, titled *Talking About Abolition: A Police Free World Is Possible*.

The book consisted of exchanges between the author and various people who **call** themselves and their work abolitionist, including BLM co-founders Melina Abdullah – who recently ran alongside Cornell West for vice-president and president of the U.S. – and Alicia Garza. Just consider the blatant absurdity and contradiction between running for the highest executive office in Amerika, while claiming to want to abolish prisons and police. The U.S. president and vice-president not only preside over the most oppressive, destructive and war-mongering imperialist empire in history, but they are the commanders-in-chief of the U.S. military, Bureau of Prisons, and every vile federal police agency including the FBI, CIA, Department of Homeland Security, NSA, ICE and Border Control, and so on. Abdullah’s orientation is as much about abolishing prisons and police as someone running for the presidency of the Confederacy during the Civil War could have been about abolishing chattel slavery. But, this aside, both Abdullah and Garza and their national BLM work have won particular notoriety as opportunist profiteers and traitors of the very people and movement against police violence and murder of Black people that they pretended to champion. And now they and their agendas are being promoted as Abolitionists?

This speaks volumes about how vague and essentially meaningless abolitionism is, and how easily it presents itself as an umbrella and platform under which any and every trend that pretends to be against the Establishment can be given validity. But let me be more specific about Abdullah and Garza who have now taken on the mantle of Abolition.

My Party was actually involved in struggling against the deviant agendas of these two, about which I wrote in 2020 in, “Stolen Money From Stolen Lives: The Black Lives Matter Scandal” (<http://rashidmod.com/?p=2837>). There I specified several prominent cases of families whose loved ones had been murdered by cops that these vile elements exploited for profit, including the families of Mike Brown murdered in 2014 in Ferguson, Mo; Richard Fisher murdered in LA, Cali in 2016; Alton Sterling, murdered in Baton Rouge, La in 2016, etc.

We specifically took up Richard Risher’s case with Abdullah, who ran a fundraising scam in his name, promising to give the proceeds to Fisher’s grieving mother, Lisa Simpson, for funeral expenses. Abdullah never gave Lisa a dime and after raising the money avoided Lisa and her

and our inquiries. Our Party and I addressed Abdullah numerous times about this scam, she avoided us and erased our questions and comments on her Facebook page.

The same was done by BLM to Vida Washington, the aunt of Alton Sterling, and we confronted the BLM leadership over it. In fact the NABPP built and led a counter-movement based in these and other families who had been exploited by BLM, called the Stolen Lives Movement. We took these and numerous other families to let them lead protests in Minneapolis, Mn during the anti-racist uprisings there sparked by the police lynching of George Floyd. During those rallies which were live streamed these families spoke about being exploited by and denounced BLM and its founders and national leaders Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi and Melina Abdullah who was the head of BLM Los Angeles, the first chapter of the BLM global operation.

Since then, these scam artists have been exposed and widely denounced for receiving huge sums from billionaire donors for BLM and misappropriating those funds to finance lavish lifestyles and purchase mansions for themselves. **Now**, they are embraced as Abolitionists??!!

JAMES ANDERSON: Did you consider yourself a prison abolitionist in 2016, and do you consider yourself one now?

RASHID: No, I was not an abolitionist then nor now.

In fact, I wrote an article specifically addressed to the question whether I or the RIBPP are Abolitionists and explaining why we are not and the whole concept of abolishing prisons and police is unachievable absent the global destruction of the state and class society. See, “Are We Abolitionists? (A Response to Bob Avakian’s Abolition – Real and Illusory).” [<http://rashidmod.com/?p=3133>]. In that article I explained:

“[O]ne cannot abolish prisons without abolishing the state itself. As V.I. Lenin aptly explained in ‘The State and Revolution,’ the state is an instrument of class rule, which enforces that rule through special bodies of armed people, namely the military, police and prisons. To abolish the military, police or prisons

means abolishing the state, which is impossible short of achieving world communism.

“Wresting power from the exploitative and murderous capitalist class will demand armed struggle, and it will demand maintaining specialized bodies of the people to defend against and ward off the capitalists’ relentless efforts to regain power.

“Revolutionaries understand that even under socialism, where the capitalist class has been overthrown, there must be an armed socialist state to carry forward and defend the achievements and interests of the working class. Maoists in particular understand under socialism, class struggle continues and even sharpens.

“The difference is that under socialism the body of armed people who enforce working class rule (namely, the new military, police and prisons), will consist of the workers themselves alongside others who were previously oppressed and exploited under capitalist state power; with the distinction that prisons, and the military and police for that matter, will look and operate very differently under worker’s control than it has and does under capitalists imperialist rule.

“I think that most prisoners will agree that there are some people who present a real danger to society whom society needs to keep under some control. Who among the people in society doesn’t agree with this? During revolutionary struggle, there are some people on the street whom the revolutionaries should arrest and confine for the good of society. These are not new questions. In 2007 I wrote:

” ‘Enslavement does not teach one how to be free. Abuse does not promote good citizenship or emotional stability. A criminal justice system will still be needed under socialism – to deal with antisocial

criminal behavior. But our model must be a 'school of liberation.' The principles of a genuine correctional system must be articulated and struggled for, as part of the overall revolutionary struggle. The question is how should these prisons be run and what rights should the prisoners have that are inalienable and will promote rehabilitation and good citizenship.' "

JAMES ANDERSON: How, if at all, do you think the sort of prison abolition envisioned and practiced by IWOC differed (and perhaps still differs) from the movement to abolish prisons that you suggested in part displaced the focus on abolishing prison slavery in 2016.

RASHID: It derailed a movement that had a specific purpose, set of tactics and objectives, that was developed by the victims of those conditions to strike down specific conditions we suffered under, and replaced it with an amorphous thing that calls itself abolition that means anything that anybody who calls themselves and their agenda anti-Establishment promotes.

Even now tons of books are coming out authored by academics, intellectuals, petty bourgeois and white Leftists, and even traitors to the struggles of the oppressed which continue to define, refashion and add new ideas and subjects and recycled leftists theories attempting to define what Abolitionism is. The movement embraces any and every trend and person who claims to oppose the status quo, including those opportunists who aspire to become part of the status quo, as I gave in the example of vice-presidential candidate Melina Abdullah and the whole BLM circle of scammers of Black tragedy.

JAMES ANDERSON: You suggested outside Anarchists were responsible for inserting the Abolish prisons slogan derived (as you assert) from the general Anarchist idea of Abolishing the state in place of the call to Abolish prison slavery put forward by prisoners. In your responses, you also referred to the late IWOC organizer Karen Smith as one of the most effective outside supporters and collaborators, and you added that she worked with every political tendency out there despite most

having different views from her own Anarchist persuasion. How did the anarchism of Karen Smith differ from the anarchism of those you were critical of for shifting the framing/focus of the 2016 prison strike and what (in your view) made Smith's anarchism more effective?

RASHID: As I explained in the first part of this interview, Karen Smith always remained willing to accept leadership from prisoners and the revolutionary politics of people of color. She was **very** different in this respect from some white Leftists and Anarchists, who often try to use us as a pretend and token constituency of their politics just as the establishment parties do.

I vividly remember her facilitating meetings between and with prisoners and sitting and listening to our debates and demands and accepting our decided upon courses of action; then moving with all sincerity to enable and actualize our struggle. She accepted what **we** promoted as important to us and went to work mobilizing resources, public support and media attention to our issues and struggles.

JAMES ANDERSON: There were incarcerated individuals who participated in 2016 prison strike efforts. And part of the inspiration for IWOC came from the late Martin Sostre, who embraced a kind of anarchism while engaging in various struggles inside prison. Sostre also influenced Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, a former Black Panther Party member who authored the book *Anarchism and the Black Revolution* while incarcerated. Ervin advocated an organized anarchist-socialism in his book. He also encouraged IWW members outside prison to actively open membership to incarcerated workers, and he was a big influence on some of those who helped start IWOC. With all that taken into consideration, how do you think Anarchists and Anarchism (as theory and practice) influenced and contributed to the 2016 prison strike?

RASHID: Anarchists come in all shades and varieties but as a theory it has a particular appeal to the petty bourgeois and lumpen. I began my political life embracing a version of Anarchism. As did Mao Zedong. Anarchism appeals to most who are inclined to rebel against the status quo and desire to exist outside of the dominant system, but co-exist

with it as well. But it ultimately proves inadequate to those who go further than mere rebellion and search for the means and methods of genuinely overthrowing the status quo and uniting with others to end all oppression, and who are willing to suffer all the sacrifices and accept the discipline that comes with that sort of struggle.

This is the difference between the politics of Anarchism and the politics that I embrace as a Communist and Revolutionary Intercommunalist. But I tactically unite with many Anarchists in struggles and work where we have shared objectives and have many Anarchists Comrades, which I talk about in two interviews I did with an Anarchist Comrade that can be read online and in my book *Panther Vision*: “On the Vanguard Party, Once Again” (<http://rashidmod.com/?p=353>) and “Interview With Comrade Rashid: On the Present State of New Afrikan/Black Crisis in Amerika; Revolutionary Art; the United Panther Movement; and Communism Versus Anarchism” (<http://rashidmod.com/?p=639>).

So, that Anarchists joined and inspired the 2016 strikes and the founding of IWOC is not inconsistent with their opposition to the system of oppression. But as the struggle to abolish prison slavery showed, their ability to keep to a protracted struggle led by the oppressed is easily derailed and they will in fact move to coopt and inject their own ideas into others’ struggles.

As noted Anarchism in many cases is a reaction to oppression or awareness of it, but without embracing the necessary protracted mass struggle and self sacrifices that come with genuinely fighting to overthrow it.

A woman Comrade Annabelle Parker, who is a white Anarchist, whom I have corresponded for many years, and who was involved in supporting all of the above mentioned prison struggles from 2011-2018 (including the 2016 strike), recently wrote me expressing much of what I’m critiquing here. After years in this work she had burned out, feeling her politics as an Anarchist didn’t give her the practical basis for protracted organizing nor how to cope in the real world while opposing the oppressive system. She also lives abroad. She wrote:

“In many states I have seen movements come and go, but they will rise again, if like minded volunteers get together. Or one or two will inspire others.

“I have done a lot from the distance. I just got burned out from it all, a bit like prisoners themselves probably get burned out. Plus cooperating with each other on this side of the fence is also challenging. Plus good people passed away.

“Also, not everyone has the same political viewpoints. I’m not a Marxist-Leninist, but I’ve also questioned my own anarchist ideas. Because they are most often beautiful, but not applicable in real life. And that limits us. So, I base myself more on my feelings of justice as I feel them. But I’ve got to work and still make a living in this cruel world. And I live abroad, and am tired of trying to get people working together or of working with people.”

This is the frustration and demoralization that comes with embracing a political line that isn’t willing to subordinate itself to the needs of struggle, the masses, and organizing people to carry out that struggle against existing conditions and in service to the people, instead of acting upon one’s own subjective feelings. But Annabelle was among the few outside Anarchists who embraced the leadership of prisoners and she remains committed to our original struggle to abolish prison slavery and didn’t muddle it with Abolitionism.

But let it be clear, IWOC didn’t initiate the 2016 strike nor did Anarchists. We prisoners did, and it was the NABPP (which began as a prison-based organization) that brought the struggle against prison slavery and the 13th Amendment to the forefront of prisoners’ consciousness as an object of united struggle from our very founding in 2005.

It was the Free Alabama Movement (FAM) and its leading Comrade, Kinetic Justice, who issued the statement of the purpose of the 2016 strike, which was to end prison slavery **not** abolition. The statement set out in relevant part:

“On September 9th of 1971 prisoners took over and shut down Attica, New York State’s most notorious prison. On September 9th of 2016, we will begin an action to shut down prisons all across this country. We will not only demand the end to prison slavery, we will end it ourselves by ceasing to be slaves.

“To achieve this goal, we need support from people on the outside. A prison is an easy-lockdown environment, a place of control and confinement where repression is built into every stone wall and chain link, every gesture and routine. When we stand up to these authorities, they will come down on us, and the only protection we have is solidarity from the outside.... When we stand up and refuse on September 9th, 2016, we need to know our friends, families and allies on the outside will have our back. This spring and summer will be seasons of organizing, spreading the word, building the networks of solidarity and showing that we’re serious and what we’re capable of.”

JAMES ANDERSON: Is it safe to suggest that there were different politics, different values, different visions and different forms of praxis involved in the amalgam of 2016 prison strike efforts. What difficulties and/or tensions proved productive, in your view, and which were harmful and deleterious?

RASHID: There were definitely different interests involved and contending with each other in the 2016 strikes. As said, there was conflict within the IWW/IWOC itself and with other political prisoners that I ended in struggling to resolve. You can read about some of that in my articles, “The Revolutionary Response to Racism: Reply to A Communiqué By Azzurra Crispino” (<http://rashidmod.com/?=2376>) and “Remolding Racist Brainwash: A Guide to Revolutionary Practice or Revolutionary Theory as Dogma (A Response to Comrade Xinachtli)” [<http://rashidmod.com/?p=2547>].

All the contradictions had positive and negative aspects. Whether they benefitted or harmed the strikes in certain areas and ways was largely determined by who was reacting to them, when and where, and what role they had power to play. There were more situations and nuances than I can briefly and readily address here, but I've spoken already about some of them.

JAMES ANDERSON: What can organizers learn from how those with different politics, values, visions and forms of praxis might have conveyed, challenged, undermined, complemented, and/or mutually shaped one another during the 2016 strike efforts?

RASHID: One thing is when people presume to take on roles of supporting the oppressed, white folks in particular, they must be able and willing to allow the oppressed to guide them and not try to impose their own views and will on the oppressed and speak for us. We know what we suffer from and what the most important things are to us in the immediate sense. They can struggle to educate and enlighten us but they cannot move to take over our struggles and substitute their own interests and ideas in place of ours. Nor condition their support on our willingness to do their bidding or accept their direction and control.

Another important thing is something I've learned from my over 20 years now of involvement in political struggle. People on the Left tend to support those who don't challenge them or who are passive and uncritical in the face of their errors or misguided agendas. I put the well being of the oppressed before the feelings of folks on the outside or with agendas different from ours, so I tend to critique their errors and stand firm on my ideological and political lines. As a result I have alienated and lost the support of quite a few erstwhile Comrades, loved ones, supporters and so on. Which I accept because I place the interests of the masses before my own self interests and I accept whatever personal sacrifices are necessary to move this struggle for the people forward. But I do know, that many people come into the movement with their own class and racial agendas and desires to control and exploit our struggles, and they will jump ship and sabotage and undermine our work when they are exposed and resisted. It takes a particular type of

commitment and tenacity and adherence to the correct line and class orientations to remain true and stay the course in genuine revolutionary struggle.

JAMES ANDERSON: Many prisoners who did not have jobs inside carceral facilities in 2016 found ways to participate in the actions surrounding the prison strike. Some went on hunger strikes. Some refused commissary, while others refused to leave their cells. If I'm not mistaken, prisoners engaged in sit-ins, walkouts and short marches. Other indignant incarcerated persons participated in outright rebellion, denouncing and defying not only conditions of confinement but the prisons as such. What in your view was the significance of the other forms of protest and disruption that were enacted simultaneously and/or solidarity with the nationally coordinated effort focused on withholding prison labor? How should they be understood in relation to the September 2016 coordinated efforts?

RASHID: The resistance took various forms as you noted across the country. Tens of thousands of prisoners were involved, and our protests took the form of everything from uprisings to hunger strikes to work strikes to refusals to leave our cells to sit downs to boycotts of commissary. It terrified the prisoncrats. In fact the strikes prompted guards in Alabama's Holman Correctional Facility to support the strike and themselves also walk off their jobs.

FAM issued a press release about this on September 26, 2016 titled, "F.A.M. Leads Work Strike in Alabama Prisons, Now Officers Stage Historic Work Strike at Holman Prison." The statement set out in part:

"Last night at Holman prison an emergency situation developed as ALL of the officers assigned to the second shift waged a historic work strike for the first time in the history of the Alabama Department of Corrections.

"Assistant Commissioner Grant Culliver was dispatched to the prison, where he then had to order supervisors from another prison, Atmore CF,

to report to Holman prison just to be able to serve meals. The officers at Holman, who have been defying ADOC policy and speaking publicly to the media, had communicated their plans to F.A.M. members, and expressed their support for nonviolent and peaceful demonstrations against the human rights conditions existent at Holman.”

It all melded to show our unified purpose and cause, all directed at opposition to prison slave labor. We moved as one across the empire, and in Alabama guards even supported and joined in the strike.

JAMES ANDERSON: From the perspective of encouraging the participation of as many incarcerated persons inside prisons as possible, and from the perspective of generating interest and garnering attention on the outside, what were the advantages of focusing on a coordinated prison labor strike to end prison slavery? Were there disadvantages to that focus?

RASHID: The advantages were massive. With the precedent of the 2010 work strike of prisoners in six Georgia prisons protesting slave labor there, and the three hunger strikes of thousands of Cali prisoners in 2011 and 2013, the nationwide 2016 strike followed, which was followed by yet another nationwide strike from August 21–September 9, 2018 and one across the entire Florida prison system in early 2018 while I was then imprisoned in Florida, which we were also involved in, we showed the ability to unite prisoners across the U.S. prison system and the power of that unity.

The 2016 strike didn’t achieve its objectives again because the focus and tactics directed at the objectives of the struggle was derailed into a movement of abolition that had no specific tactics nor conceivably achievable objective.

KEVIN "RASHID" JOHNSON:
A REVOLUTIONARY IN PROGRESS (2025)

My life began in rebellion and in a broken home. My parents separated while I was an infant. Although my father took custody of my sibling and me, he was almost never in the home because of his commitment, bordering on obsession, with rising from poverty into Amerika's Black middle class. My primary care thus fell to my dear paternal grandmother, who was powerless to rein in my rebelliousness - especially that against my absentee father. When he did find his way home it was usually to repress my behavior with violence, to no avail. In turn I'd act out my own limited violence against increasingly larger opponents outside the home, which became a tendency to challenge bullies.

My father accomplished his career goals and tried to steer me in the same direction, but I had no interest in 'success' and the empty trappings that came with it. Despite my father's years of sacrifice, including absence from his family's life, none of the people I loved outside our immediate household reaped the benefits from our rise in status, and wealth brought no happiness to our household. I wanted no part of it.

Though routinely praised as being particularly bright and talented, I never made much of a career of school. I was repeatedly suspended and expelled, leading to a lengthy incarceration at age 11, 'arranged' by my father. Shortly after my return to his home, he and I fell out completely and irreparably in what nearly became a fatal situation - we parted ways over the barrel of a gun. At that point I vowed to never again tolerate anyone's attempts to control me with violence.

From then on my life was marked by living on the streets, resisting the Establishment, and learning the ways of the world. After living what seemed several lifetimes of experience, I found myself in prison for life at age 18. In prison, I relentlessly warred with guards in response to their organized oppression, terror tactics, and abuses targeted at me and my peers. My resistance consisted of counter-violence and ultimately litigation. I quickly learned the futility of seeking a savior in the Establishment's institutions (the courts).

In 2001, my journey towards redemption began through exposure to and studying socialist revolutionary theory and history, beginning with

the writings of George Jackson. I developed, refined, and contextualized my learning by applying it to the realities of my day-to-day life and experiences. I found my calling in the people's struggle against capitalist imperialism and all its attendant oppressive features. I began compiling art and essays reflecting my ideological and political development, hoping to make what contributions I could from within these walls of confinement.

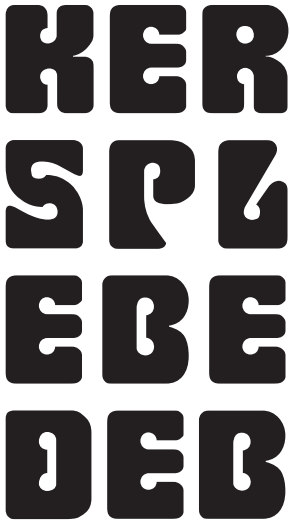
I co-founded several political organizations, wrote a few books (1) and many articles, and met with many advances and setbacks in this work.

I continue to grow and develop an understanding encompassing methods of struggle towards building a world free of exploitation and division along lines of wealth, race, gender, age, sexuality, etc. A world where all life can co-exist as a community and interdependent whole. It's my heartfelt desire to contribute all I can to help bring this world about. This new order can and must happen if we expect to exist even a few generations from now.

Dare to Struggle Dare to Win!
All Power to the People!

Note:

1. As I write this I am writing my full autobiography, *Dying To Live For The People*, in three volumes.



Since 1998 Kersplebedeb has been an important source of radical literature and agit prop materials.

The project has a non-exclusive focus on anti-patriarchal and anti-imperialist politics, framed within an anticapitalist perspective. A special priority is given to writings regarding armed struggle in the metropole, the continuing struggles of political prisoners and prisoners of war, and the political economy of imperialism.

The Kersplebedeb website presents historical and contemporary writings by revolutionary thinkers from the anarchist and communist traditions.

Kersplebedeb can be contacted at:

Kersplebedeb
CP 63560
CCCP Van Horne
Montreal, Quebec
Canada
H3W 3H8

email: info@kersplebedeb.com

web: www.kersplebedeb.com
www.leftwingbooks.net

Kersplebedeb

“From Behind the Walls: Rashid Johnson on the 2016 Prison Strike”

This searing interview with Kevin “Rashid” Johnson—prisoner, revolutionary theorist, and cofounder of the Revolutionary Intercommunal Black Panther Party—offers a firsthand account of the lead-up, politics, and legacy of the September 9, 2016, prison strike. Speaking with freelance journalist James K. Anderson of the IWW, Rashid reflects on the strike’s roots in the long struggle against prison slavery, its coordination across racial and ideological lines, and the tensions between prisoner-led organizing and outside political currents.

More than a retrospective, this dialogue is a trenchant critique of “abolitionism” as it’s come to be defined in the mainstream and a passionate defense of revolutionary intercommunal struggle from inside the belly of the beast. Rashid’s analysis unflinchingly connects the modern prison system to slavery, capitalism, and imperialism—and calls for solidarity grounded not in tokenism, but in shared struggle and political clarity.

A vital document of resistance from within.

Kersplebedeb
CP 63560
CCCP Van Horne
Montreal, Quebec
Canada
H3W 3H8

info@kersplebedeb.com
store: leftwingbooks.net
blog: kersplebedeb.com



ISBN 978-1-989701-44-7



9 781989 701447 >