

Political Prisoners in the North American Homeland

By [J. B. Gerald](#)

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The legal systems of Canada and the U.S. make no separate recognition of “political prisoners.” This encourages police malfeasance and a bending of the legal system to cope with political protest in the same manner as crimes of self-interest. Confused by the difference, society prefers to sort its members into “good” and “bad”. As totalitarian controls by government increase, more people will probably assert their humanity and the numbers of political prisoners will grow, but in the process criminalize entire groups of people who have strong convictions, integrity, loyalty to community, and care deeply about what happens to their country, society, humanity.

In Canada the concept of what is a political prisoner, varies by community. Native people have been political prisoners for generations, as have the poor, confined by prison or circumstance. Due to the Canadian government’s Middle East policies which involve strong interface with Israel, media focus on political prisoners for the past ten years concerns Muslims as suspects in the ‘war on terrorism.’ The high profile political prisoners were arrested on Canadian Security Certificates which according to Canada’s Supreme Court , ignored the victims’ human rights and needed adjustment. The Conservative government’s compliance was minimal and inadequate. Held on a Security Certificate for 12 years in detention and house arrest, without charge or knowing his accusers, Mohammad Mahjoub was released from several limitations of his freedom, February 3rd, by Federal Court in Toronto which found the intrusive surveillance unreasonable. Mahjoub had previously chosen to return to prison rather than inflict the government’s surveillance on his family.

With current trials of G20 protestors and an “Occupy” movement which may last, Canada begins to field the edge of its conscience. June 2010 in Toronto, thousands of Canadians protested the G20 conference of global leaders and were met with illegal police tactics, massive pre-planned detention, threats, and abuse of the peoples’ human rights. With occasional possibly ‘staged’ exceptions, the protests were non-violent. According to The Dominion, of the more than eleven hundred arrested, 66 remain in legal battles while some still face charges. Seven are serving sentences for their participation: Ryan Rainville, Mandy Hiscocks, Alex Hundert, Leah Henderson, Peter Hopperton, Erik Lankin (released Jan. 26th), Adam Lewis, and Greg Noltie-Rowley.

Mandy Hiscocks, convicted of “Counseling to Commit Mischief and Counseling to Obstruct Police,” faced the judge before her sentencing and objected to his comparison of G20 protest tactics to the illegal and racist tactics of the Ku Klux Klan. She noted there’s no comparison between G20 protest tactics and the K.K.K.’s, and that it was tactics the judge objected to rather than the Klan’s insistence on White Supremacy. She is a credit to Canadians and was sentenced to from 20 months to 2 years.

A historical note about the Klan: a White Supremacist group in the U.S. South the Ku Klux

Klan was one result of the U.S. Civil War and Northern Occupation. While the K.K.K. claimed to protect Southern values its insistence on White Supremacy betrayed the people's tradition. In the old South insurrections of black slaves and poor whites joined forces and were an ongoing primary resistance to enslavement. This brought extreme control mechanisms to keep the groups apart. White Supremacy always serves the machinery of controls. The K.K.K. relied on lynching effected by mobs within a hierarchy of authority. By the 1960's the murders became more clandestine with overt burning of crosses and gatherings as symbolic shows of assent. During the 1960's the U.S. K.K.K. increasingly included FBI, Tobacco and Firearms, local law enforcement and other covert informants. These were implicated in the murders of civil rights workers and Blacks. The Klan's effect on white communities through its code of silence, the fact that it denied its victims the chance to answer any accusations against them (familiar in current U.S. law on detentions and Canadian Security Certificates), and exclusion of non-white enterprises, provides an unspoken more polished interface with contemporary neo-conservatives in the U.S. and Canada. In Canada the subliminal strain of White Supremacy is rarely addressed directly, in a culture increasingly formed by intellectual management.

On the U.S. rolls of political prisoners the culture's areas of intolerance remain constant. In this century so far Muslim suspects in a "war on terrorism" have been primary targets within a framework that has brutally suppressed Blacks and all dissidents, an ongoing oppression with repeating patterns of targeting, entrapment, or selective application of the law in crimes unrelated to the moral crime the dissident is addressing. Revolutionaries whose crimes are a result of being trapped into direct confrontations with police could be considered prisoners of war and granted nominal rights at least under Geneva Conventions.

Increasingly at risk are community leaders, "Occupy" activists, veterans, and any who subscribe to an internationally recognized code of human rights. Application of international laws, including the Geneva Conventions, is discouraged in the U.S., if permitted at all. Because application threatens the fabric of U.S. law, government targets are 'processed' with whatever grey area of crime can discredit them most effectively.

On Feb. 3rd U.S. Federal Court in Syracuse forfeited a chance to correct its injustice, and Dr. Rafil Dhafir was re-sentenced to his original term of 22 years in prison, with close to a million dollars restitution required. Dr. Dhafir had supplied Iraqi children with medicines and food in an attempt to save those he could. His actions affirmed Islamic religious law and Judeo-Christianity . His efforts were effectively stopped by prosecution and imprisonment. He was charged and convicted on 59 counts for breaking "Sanctions," fraud, tax evasion, etc.. The thorough vetting of the case by all U.S. agencies involved, left out of the equation a genocide of the Iraqi people.

Community leaders are taken out of community by charges intended to disgrace them, rather than by confronting the necessity of their moral stands. It's such a customary practice that in Boston, the incarceration of Charles Turner passed unnoticed by national media. A Harvard graduate in the days when Harvard accepted token people of colour, Turner was unpretentious, easy going but very careful. Years later, as a community leader in Boston representing Blacks and the poor he was elected to the Boston City Council. An effective outspoken Councillor he was provably targeted for disgrace by an FBI operation, then charged with extortion for accepting a campaign contribution from an informant applying for a liquor license, and then not telling FBI agents 'the truth.' Without guile and loyal to his constituency, Turner tried to explain the framing in court. He's serving a three

year sentence in West Virginia and Boston is left with the message: if they can do that to Charles Turner they can to anyone.

Mumia Abu-Jamal as a journalist was known as a “voice of the voiceless” covering the dispossessed of Philadelphia. He was taken out of paid work by a murder charge. After a corrupt trial and years on death row international pressure, community outrage, the U.S. court system and Philadelphia’s D.A., managed to grant him a reprieve. No longer subject to the death penalty and freed from death row Abu-Jamal was transferred to Mahanoy State Correctional Institution’s “Restrictive housing unit,” ie. solitary confinement, with no access to the media. Finally on January 27th Prison Radio [access:<
<http://prisonradio.wordpress.com/> >] could report his release into the general prison population.

Long-time political prisoner Dave Gilbert’s *Love and Struggle: My Life in the SDS, The Weather Underground, and Beyond* was published by PM Press, 2011 and is currently being launched at ‘alternative’ venues throughout North America. Gilbert grew out of Boston and New York student anti-war resistance in the Sixties, worked the Weather Underground during the Seventies, was arrested in 1981 with a unit of the Black Liberation Army. He’s serving a 75 year minimum sentence for involvement in the deaths of 2 police and a guard during a Brinks robbery to raise operating costs. His other published works include: *AIDS Conspiracy?*

Tracking Down the Real Genocide. Gilbert was one of a few North-eastern U.S. whites who could work with a Black American resistance that lacked the option of non-violence.

Marilyn Buck died August 3, 2010 in Brooklyn New York, shortly after her release on July 15, 2010, from federal prison. She was serving eighty years of sentences (accused of supplying arms to the Black Liberation Army, of complicity in Assata Shakur’s escape from prison, of bombings in the U.S. and internationally). With most of her co-defendants released (Susan Rosenberg received pardon from President Clinton), Bush’s Justice Department granted her an early release on presumptive parole. On Jan. 21, 2010 she wrote “...been battling since Oct. to be treated medically. Found out I have a sarcoma, just got out of hospit. post-surgery...” It was the last letter I received. She was transferred to a hospital prison, and dead less than seven months later. She was an American poet.

Lynne Stewart, the U.S. court appointed attorney for Islamic Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, is over 71 and fighting cancer as well as diabetes in a U.S. prison. Her appeal challenging the length of her sentence goes to court February 29th in Manhattan: the government extended her prison time from 28 months to 10 years after she bravely joked about the initial sentence on the courthouse steps. Her conviction: communicating on behalf of her blind and imprisoned client. She never should have been sentenced to jail. Known through her life’s work as an uncompromising lawyer for the disadvantaged of varying political beliefs, her case represents a clear public attempt to intimidate attorneys representing fundamental human rights.

There are other political prisoners who were/are thinking of the people, and without self-interest. There are a lot of them. There will be more, of all ages. The paradox is that many are in no way “criminal” but simply the articulate and deeply caring people of their communities.

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