



WHY I AM FACING 75 YEARS

By threatening anti-Trump protesters with decades in prison, the state is attempting to criminalise civil disobedience.

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“The state is perfectly willing to permit thousands of people to wear safety pins and pussyhats, march along well-policed parade routes, and powerlessly petition their authorities for change - **so long as they do not shatter the illusion of everyday politics or disrupt the constant flow of capital.**

But what Standing Rock and Black Lives Matter have taught us all is that **if a community’s resistance is perceived as effective, then the full measure of state violence will be used to neutralise it.**

The events of January 20 represented a similar disruption: The march shut down the roads of DC, and the magnitude of the MPD’s violent response shattered the fragile spectacle of the inauguration. **Business-as-usual was put on hold, and the consequence is that everyone rounded-up and arrested must now be made an example of.”**



trials in a round of status hearings this month. A growing number of defendants have committed to rejecting pleas that aren't universally offered to all co-defendants, and over 100 have agreed to reject any cooperation with the state. Fundraisers have been organised by defendants and defence committees to gather the funds for legal and travel costs. A new campaign, #DropJ20 (<http://dropj20.org>), has been organized to demand that the US Attorney's Office and Channing Phillips drop the charges and end the persecution.

When repression strikes our communities, solidarity becomes our strongest defence. While this process has been traumatic, it has produced countless beautiful relationships of support among co-defendants, supporters, and our communities. Those relationships and bonds of trust have the power to resist this political persecution, and we will continue to organise a collective defence together.

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On January 20th, during the inauguration of Donald Trump, the DC Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) violently and indiscriminately attacked scores of protesters, journalists, legal observers, medics, and bystanders in the vicinity of an anti-fascist/anti-capitalist march. The MPD trapped, or "kettled", more than 200 people, arresting them on a single felony riot charge with a boilerplate affidavit.

The march was an act of resistance against both Trump and the system that gives him power. As a part of this march, I was also kettled and arrested alongside scores of others. Nearly six months later, I and more than 200 other people have been re-indicted on eight felonies each. We all currently face the potential of 75 years in federal prison.

Certain memories from the day of my arrest stand most vividly in my mind: zip-ties cutting into my wrist and the taste of pepper spray; losing count of the roaches that crawled over me in my sleep; the constant horror of not knowing where my partner was.

According to a report issued in February by the DC Office of Police Complaints, the MPD unleashed a variety of "less-than-lethal" weapons against protesters - without warning or direct provocation - as a general crowd control tactic. "Less-than-lethal" is a very broad euphemism. Thinking about the violence of the police that day, I remember the footage of an

elderly woman brutalised by a river of pepper spray and saved from a phalanx of riot police by a black-clad protester. I recall a fellow arrestee in my cell unit with an eye bulging out of its socket like a tomato - the offspring of pepper spray and contact lenses - and how we had to demand they receive medical attention.

Watching the footage from the arrest made me relive the concussion grenades that exploded around me in the streets. I am reminded of the mutilation of Sophia Wilansky's arm at Standing Rock by a similar "stinger", while the police doused hundreds of water protectors with water cannon in below freezing temperatures. I remember the blood-soaked pavement outside the Omni Hotel when the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department murdered Justin Carr with a rubber bullet to the head during the Charlotte Uprising last September.

The severity of the threat is intended to extract as many guilty pleas as possible, while sending a clear message to potential protesters that the consequences for opposition will be grave.

These tactics are not new in Washington, DC. In 2002, then Assistant Police Chief Peter Newsham ordered the mass arrest of over 400 people in Pershing Park during protests against the World Bank. The mass arrest ultimately cost the city more than \$8M in a civil suit that ruled it an unlawful act of police misconduct.

prevented the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline for months before its eviction by legions of police. The executions of Mike Brown and Freddie Gray produced demonstrations of such tremendous pain and outcry that they seized Ferguson and Baltimore, and were stomped out by the National Guard.

The events of January 20 represented a similar disruption: **The march shut down the roads of DC, and the magnitude of the MPD's violent response shattered the fragile spectacle of the inauguration.** Business-as-usual was put on hold, and the consequence is that everyone rounded-up and arrested must now be made an example of. The superseding indictment and its additional felony charges are a means to coerce defendants into accepting plea deals against their will.

The goal is not to convict people to 75 years in prison. The severity of the threat is intended to extract as many guilty pleas as possible, while sending a clear message to potential protesters that the consequences of opposition will be grave. These pleas are needed to vindicate the state's narrative and legitimise their repression. The intention is to set a legal precedent for mass arrests in the era of constant crisis, so that future social movements can be smothered in the cradle.

Regardless, we're six months into this case and hundreds of defendants have committed to pursuing



As acting Police Chief, Newsham also issued the order for the inauguration day mass arrest. Despite the spectre of yet another brutal mass arrest, Newsham was appointed police chief by DC Mayor Muriel E Bowser and the DC Council in May.

With a pending lawsuit challenging Newsham's abusive practices, it remains to be seen what he will cost the working people of DC this time. A civil suit has already been initiated by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and the current investigation into police conduct will cost approximately \$150,000, which is \$50,000 more than the estimated damage of the alleged events on Inauguration Day.

To understand the extremity of the charges brought against us in this case, the arrests need to be viewed through the lens of political repression. **Across the country, thousands of people are engaged in resistance against the daily operations of capital and the state, fighting to survive the crises that this system constantly produces.** Almost immediately after our arrests, thousands of people occupied and shut down airports to reject what has become known as the Muslim Ban. Camps have formed in Florida and Pennsylvania to blockade the development of the Sabal Trail Pipeline and Mariner 2 Pipeline. An encampment has formed outside of the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, WA, to support undocumented immigrants that have been resisting forced prison labour through hunger strikes. Thousands of people in Flint, MI are resisting the

threat of evictions, after being poisoned for two years by the city government with lead in their water. In major towns across the country, from Portland to Olympia to Houston, marginalised communities have disrupted fascist/white-nationalist rallies in self-defence amid an astronomical spike in hate crimes and right-wing violence.

None of this resistance can be tolerated. The state's main social function is specifically to suppress public outrage, either by redirecting it into preconfigured campaigns that will produce no results, or through political repression.

The prosecutor would like to depoliticise the charges we are facing, but the reality is that this case is not about so-called "criminal behaviour": This case is about turning protesters into felons, and the criminalisation of resistance. It is about the state defining what methods of resistance are "legitimate" - hint, it's the kind that doesn't work. The state is perfectly willing to permit thousands of people to wear safety pins and pussyhats, march along well-policed parade routes, and powerlessly petition their authorities for change - so long as they do not shatter the illusion of everyday politics or disrupt the constant flow of capital and commodities.

But what Standing Rock and Black Lives Matter have taught us all is that if a community's resistance is perceived as effective, then the full measure of state violence will be used to neutralise it. Standing Rock

