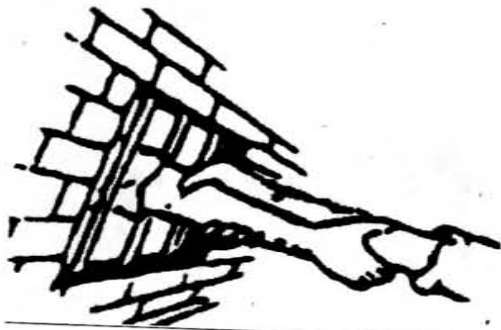


# California Anarchist Prisoner Solidarity



*Information and Resources*

## California Anarchist Prisoner Solidarity



California Anarchist Prisoner Solidarity (CAPS) has formed to support those who face incarceration as a direct response to their beliefs or actions which

challenge the oppressive nature of the state, the injustices that exist due to class, racism, sexism, and homophobia, or the destruction of the earth and the species that inhabit it. We recognize that the plight of political prisoners is only a small part of the sprawling injustice of the global Prison Industrial Complex. We seek the abolition of prisons as part of a dismantling of all repressive state apparatus and also extend our solidarity to those imprisoned around the world. However, we have chosen to focus the majority of our limited resources on political prisoners in California with the idea that if we do not fight locally for those who suffer as a result of our common struggle then our beliefs themselves become meaningless. Through corresponding with prisoners, fundraising on their behalf, and building public awareness by circulating information on their situations, we hope to remind those on the inside that they are not alone, while helping to break down the bars that separate us and inspiring those on the outside to continue their battle.

Contact CAPS at [caps@riseup.net](mailto:caps@riseup.net) or

CAPS  
P.O. Box 22449  
Oakland, CA 94609

## WRITING LETTERS

One of the easiest and most direct ways individuals can show their solidarity with those in prison is through letter writing. Letters quite simply help bridge the gap between the "inside" and "outside" worlds. They help inform the prisoner of what is going on in their movements, the world and even their community. The penal system exerts a massive strain on prisoners to break ties with the outside world. Communicating with prisoners helps work against that strain and ensures that they do not feel completely isolated. Often times, people say "what would I write to someone in prison? I wouldn't know what to say." It's simple. Remember: they are human. They have needs and interests like anyone on the outside. Share something about your life with them. Ask about what life is like on the inside and what they plan to do when they get out. Offer some assistance. An unexpected letter from a supporter can be a welcome break from the daily monotony of prison life. Don't feel intimidated by the person you are writing—they are not a superhero; just someone that had the courage to act for what they believe in.

Consistency is paramount when communicating with prisoners. Commit to writing to one prisoner and do it well. They will appreciate it more than a short hastily written letter. The examples of people attempting valiantly to keep up with writing to 10 prisoners and then having to scale down to 1 or 2 are innumerable. Consistent support is always better than short-lived "flash in the pan" support. That being said, people should not feel the responsibility to commit to writing to prisoners for the length of their sentence. Prisoners will generally appreciate a letter with some kind thoughts and may not even have the time to keep a steady correspondence with everyone who writes them.

Keep in mind that there is a very good chance that what you write will be read by any or all of the above: prison guards, wardens, other prisoners, FBI, CSIS (Canada), the new Office of Homeland security (US cabinet position) ... You should assume that what you write can be used against the prisoner, yourself and your community so be careful and have discretion.

Many prisoners are targeted by prisoncrats for being political, receiving large amounts of mail or for the "subversive" content of the mail they receive. It is important to know the guidelines concerning prisoner mail. First, ask the prisoner what they may or may not receive. Usually, they have a fairly good idea of what is appropriate to send and what will not make it past the censors. Prisons are known for having strict regulations for what a prisoner can receive e.g. new books only, first-class mail only. If that does not work, write to the warden of the prison requesting a list of regulations. A tool commonly used to disrupt prisoner support is the "Mail Violation Notice." They can (and sometimes do) reject mail for any reason they want including the presence of a "circle A" on a zine or the use of the word "Anarchy" in a letter. Don't be discouraged by these tricks-either file an appeal (which you have little chance of winning), modify the package to appease them (easiest and most likely to work), or send it again (hoping a different mail censor sees it). Whatever you do, do not give up and allow them to further alienate the person inside.

### **FIRST THINGS FIRST**

Some prisons restrict the number of letters a prisoner can write or receive, and they may have to buy stamps and envelopes: and prisoners aren't millionaires. So don't necessarily expect a reply to a card or letter. A lot of prisons allow stamps or and s.a.e to be included with a card or letter, but some don't. Letters do also get stopped, read, delayed, 'diverted'. If you suspect has been or will be nicked by the screws, you can send it Recorded delivery, which unfortunately costs a lot but then they have to

open it in the prisoner's presence. Also you should put a return address, not just so the prisoner can reply (!), but also because some prisons don't allow letters without a return address. Of course it doesn't have to be your address, but be careful using PO Box numbers as some prisons don't allow these either!

### **WRITING FOR THE FIRST TIME**

Say who you are, and if it's relevant that you're from such and such a group. Some people reckon it's better to be upfront about your politics as well, to give prisoners the choice to stay in contact with you or not. Say where you heard about them and their case.

The first letter can be reasonably short, maybe only a postcard. Obviously when you get to know people better you'll have more to talk about.

If you are writing to a "framed" prisoner, and you believe them to be innocent, it helps to say so, as it gives people confidence to know that you believe them.

Some people when they write to prisoners, are afraid to talking about their lives, what they are up to, thinking this may depress people banged up, especially prisoners with long sentences, or that they are not interested in your life. Although in some cases this may be true, on the whole a letter is the highpoint of the day for most prisoners. Prison life is dead boring, and any news that livens it up, whether it's about people they know or not, is generally welcome. specially if you didn't know them before they went to prison, they want to know about you, what your life is like etc. Use your sense, don't write about anything that is likely to get a prisoner in shit with the screws, or get you or anyone else in trouble with the cops.

## THEY'RE IN THERE FOR US, WE'RE OUT HERE FOR THEM

For people imprisoned from our movements and struggles it's vital to keep them involved in the ongoing resistance - telling them about actions, sending them magazines if they want them, discussing ideas and strategies with them. Use your head though. Some people will just want to keep their head down till they get out.

A few dos and don'ts on writing prisoners whose backgrounds politics you may not know.

### · **Dos**

**Do use common sense.** Use a "neutral" address, such as a Post Office Box, for correspondence. Do not divulge sensitive personal information (i.e. your home address, phone number, credit card and bank details, people's full names, etc.) to a prisoner, particularly one you have never dealt with before. *This is for your security and that of the prisoner.* Be aware that authorities often read these letters and sensitive information can get into the wrong hands. Occasionally, prisoners have misused this information as well. Do not send money or honor immediate requests for money.

**Do think ahead.** Research local prison regulations. Learn about the prisoner before writing. Make sure to put a return address on your envelope. When first writing to an incarcerated person make sure you ask them specifically what the rules are for writing letters, and make a careful note of them. *No one under eighteen years of age should be writing a prisoner* -- again, this is for the prisoner's security as well as the writer's.

**Do be forward and clear in your letter as well as your intentions.** Say who you are, and if it's relevant that you're with an organization. Be upfront about your politics and say where you heard about the prisoners and her his case. If you

are interested in starting a pen-pal relationship and that is all, say so. Ask if they would like to correspond and if they'd like to discuss any topics, as well as what topics they don't wish to discuss. Keep your first letter reasonably short and to the point.

**Do be patient.** Prisoners may not write back or may take awhile. They may occasionally sound cynical, angry or disinterested in their words -- keep in mind many "supporters" or people who've written before may have stopped writing them, made promises lied to them, or they just had a rough day and they're venting that on paper. Responding to an angry letter with more anger is not helpful.

**Do deal with the right channels.** If a prisoner wants you to send a book, ask what channels their institution requires for that, or refer them to a Book-to-Prisoners project near their unit. If a prisoner is getting out in the next few weeks, do not offer your place to stay (no matter how desperate they sound) unless you have corresponded for a significant amount of time and are in contact with both a parole officer and a prison intermediary (e.g. prison chaplain). Even in cases like this, it is far more helpful to a prisoner to help them secure employment and develop a support base (whether that is through her/his church/mosque, family, friends, etc.) than to. Chances are, there's a legal process to be dealt with in cases like this and they need to be followed by both you and the prisoner. However, use your head and don't land in a bad situation or one that will land the prisoner back in jail.

### **Don'ts**

**Do not make promises.** Many well-meaning people write letters offering support to a prisoner, or make offers for help out of good will. Unfortunately, most never follow through and build false hope in a prisoner. This is not fair to them. If you're writing, don't make promises. Don't offer to do a support campaign if you can't make that time. Don't offer to send items

when you can't afford it. *Be honest.* It's best to start writing and keep it that way, at least until a relationship is established.

**Do not romanticize prisons or prisoners.** Many activists have ideas about who prisoners are, why they're locked up, the system, etc. While it's correct to have political clarity about incarceration and the nature of the criminal justice system, it is not correct to romanticize a prisoner, anything they might be locked up for (especially a "social crime") and their lives. They're people just like you, and have strengths and weaknesses. It is dangerous to assume that anyone (free or jailed) is able to overcome all their personal weaknesses, or be completely truthful, or is not dealing with the stressful situation they're in in negative ways. Some are estranged from their families as a direct result of their own actions. Some may have learned manipulative behaviors over the years. Prisoners are people like you.

**Do not discuss potentially illegal political action with a prisoner.** Again, this is for your security and theirs. Prisoners have and can be implicated for outside action that violates the law and you should be mindful that, if authorities even find such information in the hands of prisoners, prisoners can face added time and harsh treatment.

**Do not attempt to place political judgments on prisoners' experiences.** Some prisoners, out of desperation, write publications to get pen pals and may not agree completely with the views of the paper, but read it for information. Some prisoners have been converted to Christianity or are Muslims. Some have views that may be somewhat backward. Rather than attack a prisoner, it's best to be polite, but firm, if there's something you'd rather not discuss or find objectionable. Do not attack or insult a prisoner because of their religions, preferences or experiences. If the prisoner declares her/himself a white supremacist, you are well within your rights to explain your disagreements, encourage them to reconsider their views and discontinue the relationship; please be aware that several white

supremacist gangs have ties to the outside from prison and it is smart not to get into insults or threats against such prisoners. Don't send literature unless requested and be aware you don't have to go with every request.

Good luck!

## Prisoners:

### Bill Dunne

Bill Dunne  
#10916-086  
Box 019001  
Atwater, CA 95301



Bill Dunne is serving a 90 year sentence after being apprehended for allegedly plotting the escape of a friend from a Seattle prison in 1979. In addition to a conspiracy count, he faced further charges alleging that the operation was financed by bank expropriation and materially facilitated by illegal acquisition of weapons, explosives, vehicles, ID and other equipment. Four years later in 1983, he was given an additional 15 years for attempted self-emancipation. According to a self-written statement from 1998, "I am happily atheist, anti-sexist, anti-racist, globalist, anti-authoritarian, environmentalist, anti-imperialist, democratic (little d). However, none

of those sufficiently characterizes my politics over the others that I can define myself by any of them alone. Rather than a gaggle of competitive identities, my vision of the road to revolution encompasses all of them as

necessarily synergistic strands we must weave into a new social fabric."

## Hugo Pinell

Hugo Pinell  
# A88401  
POB 7500 SHU-D-214  
Crescent City CA 95531

Hugo Pinell has been in California prisons since he was 19 years old. He is now 60. His original case (an assault charge for which he turned himself in) would have cost the average citizen a few years in prison. Hugo became politicized by revolutionary prisoners like W.L. Nolen, George L. Jackson, et al., who were attempting to promote a revolutionary mentality amongst prisoners and organize resistance to the racist, brutal attacks against them. They sought to unite all prisoners to demand better conditions and opportunities for growth so that when they hit the streets they could contribute to their communities productively and advance the domestic and international liberation struggles of all oppressed peoples. On August 21, 1971, Jackson was murdered on the yard at San Quentin in what prison officials described as an escape attempt. We believe it was a setup since many earlier attempts on Jackson's life had been unsuccessful. Six prisoners were put on trial for the murders and assaults of three guards and two inmate trustees during that incident. Hugo is the only one of the six who remains in prison. He is now in his 40th year of continuous custody, 34 of those years have been in solitary confinement.

## Richard Williams

Richard Williams  
10377-016  
3901 Klein Blvd  
Lompoc, CA 93436

Richard Williams has spent a large chunk of his life in prison. After being caught with marijuana at the age of twenty, he was later convicted of robbery and received a 7-15 year sentence, 5 years of which he served before he was released. During his time in prison incidents such as the Attica uprising and George Jackson's murder occurred, which helped to rapidly politicize Richard. Upon his release he became involved with a radical printing coop. He was also part of a "security force" in 1979, helping to protect people who were facing racist attacks at their homes and providing security for benefit shows and protests. In 1981, he went underground and became a member of the United Freedom Front, who enacted a campaign of anti-government/corporation/capitalism bombings and robberies. He was captured three years later on his 37th birthday and was convicted for 5 UFF bombings and the killing of a New Jersey state trooper. He faces 45 years for the UFF actions when he finishes the NJ sentence of 35 years to life.



## **Carlos Arroyo**

Carlos Arroyo was arrested in May 2001 in Mexico City, framed by police for an alleged robbery. He was beaten and tortured by police at the time of his arrest and faced an unfair trial that involved an extensive fabrication of false evidence against him. His original sentence was 15 years, though it was subsequently reduced to 12. Prior to his arrest Carlos was involved in the anarchist community in Mexico City; he also participated in the university student strikes. It is likely that he was set-up by the state as retaliation for his political activities. He was 22 at the time of his arrest. Carlos' family is extremely poor and has been unable to shoulder the burden of legal expenses. They were scammed by two lawyers, which not only resulted in a loss of money, but also squandered all of Carlos' chances for appeals. They have depended on the support of friends and are still greatly in need of financial assistance. Several benefit compilation tapes/cds have been made on Carlos' behalf. Recently his sentence was reduced to 6 years based on his "good behavior." There is a slim possibility that a new law in Mexico City could result in a further reduction of his sentence, but at this point he is scheduled for release in May 2006. In the meantime, Carlos is greatly in need of funds to provide resources for his family to continue visiting him, as well as to buy food in prison and bribe prison guards to avoid physical abuse. If you can contribute financially in any way, please contact [caps@riseup.net](mailto:caps@riseup.net) for further information.