

## Interview with FTP – BigSibling, Podcast Episode 2

V: Ok. So, I'm based in Vienna, in Austria. And I'm part of the BigSibling Collective which is a small collective that formed about a year and a half ago. And we're mainly working against racist police violence. So, we're a group of white people and Persons of Colour, a mixed-racial group. And we're doing workshops, sort of educational programmes that we're starting off right now. We've done the first one I think two weeks ago. And now we're trying to expand that also to sort of work with younger people and work with different target groups. And then also we've started these interviews or sort of these podcasts that I'd like to do with you today where we talk to all kinds of people around topics of racism, racist police violence, racial profiling, empowerment. All kinds of topics that come into play with what we're doing. And then we usually we have a recording that we put on our website and now we're about to register also for I don't know Audible some podcast platform. We haven't figured that out quite. And then we transcribe it and then also translate it. So, there's always a German and English version.

Jordan: Nice.

V: That's some of the main things that we've started off doing.

Richard: All that sounds really cool.

V: Thanks to the two of you for being here with me today. You both are organised with the Campaign to Fight Toxic Prisons in the United States, right?

J: FTP.

V: FTP. Also short for

J: Free the people. Fire to Prisons.

V: Fuck the Police.

R: all of those.

V: A very useful abbreviation. Maybe you can tell me something a little bit about yourselves, what you do and about the Campaign to Fight Toxic Prisons. That would be nice to start with.

J: You wanna start, Richard?

R: Sure. Oh, actually Jordan it's better if you start, because you can give the history better than me. And I can say some of the more recent stuff.

J: Yeah, my name is Jordan Mazurek, they/them. I'm one of the co-founders of Fight Toxic Prisons. We've been organising since about 2015, 2016 or so. Working at the intersections of environmental justice and abolition. Our organising work got started from a history of you know radical environmental organising, coming out of Earth First, the Earth Liberation Front, Animal Liberation Front in the early 2000s right after 9/11, the Patriot Act got passed, the FBI was handed massive extensions of powers to criminalize activists and organisers and they decided to focus this energy and these new-found powers on the radical environmental

movement. So, a lot of folks that were doing non-violent direct action and stuff like that started getting terrorist-enhancements on top of their sentences at what's called the FBI's "green scare". And so a ton of radical environmental activists started going to prison and as such also started analysing environmentally the state of prisons, right? And so our organising comes out of that, comes out of and was inspired by communications between Earth First support organisers and stuff like that with the folks inside the prisons. And so the first ideas came directly from letters and so we realized that there's a massive gap a lot of times movements become siloed for various reasons and the environmental movements within itself has multiple different silos between you know mainstream environmentalism, radical environmentalism, environmental justice work. And because of those silos we're really missing a massive opportunity to organise and build lines of solidarity between movements. And so that's really been the focus of our work over the past number of years really since we got started. Was being like ok the prison is a very powerful nexus around which we can gather to fight. Because it intersects so many different lines of struggle. And from the criminalization of Black, Brown, Indigenous, poor folks to the criminalization of our organisers and activists on the front lines fighting in various different struggles the state uses the cops, uses the prison systems to criminalize dissent and criminalize our communities. And so we're like ok let's start bringing folks together around this nexus between environmental activism and organising and struggles for the abolition of the prison industrial complex. And out of that you know it's been pretty exciting because we have gotten to break down those silos between a number of different struggles and have collaboration around learning the tactics, learning the strategies, learning so much from each of these different movements and allowing the creation of space for folks to come together organically, naturally to really begin to build like I was saying those lines of solidarity.

V: So, would you say that sort of this intersection between environmental justice and prison abolition came as a reaction to police strategies? As a lot of people were incarcerated that you were reacting to that and sort of out of that built something new and broke down those silos?

J: I would say it definitely came as sort of an outcropping of the repression in the early 2000s against the radical environmental movement. The problem is you know there's a number of different silos like I was saying within environmentalism in the US. The mainstream environmentalism historically you know very liberal, very middle-class, upper-class, white mostly focussed around you know arguably mundane things – recycling, preservation of nature – divorced from a political analysis around racial or class struggle. It's just like oh we need to save the planet and that's the extent of my analysis. Versus radical environmentalism in the environmental justice movement right. So, radical environmentalism also for a long part of it's history in the US has been extremely white, but coming from a political analysis that is critiquing of capitalism, critiquing of white supremacy and pursuing actions and tactics that are more in a line with different anarcho, anarcho-communist struggles et cetera. That being said, there's been a concerted effort within the radical environmental movement over the past two decades to really start rooting out the sort of white supremacy, the misogyny within the movement itself. And developing an analysis of settler colonialism and the movement as a result now is much less white, much more widespread and engaged in various frontline struggles from deportation flights to

running support work for BLM [Black Lives Matter] activists on the ground. A lot of the direct-action tactics and trainings we've seen across the country and being utilized in various movements has come from the radical environmental movement. And its sort of internal commitment to address the white supremacy, the misogyny et cetera within that movement. The environmental justice movement – the third sort of siloed big group – is really a bunch of different thousands of grassroots campaigns that crop up mostly in Black, Brown, Indigenous communities. A comrade, David Pellow out of UC [University of California] Santa Barbara is one of the good activists, good scholar and we sort of resonate with a lot of his critique of the environmental justice movement in that yes it is that a lot of these struggles are being organised by frontline communities, but they're being organised within capitalism, within the existing status quo – they are not challenging it. They're seeing for the existing structures in place to stop the toxic waste. They're not to stop a factory coming in or something like that. It's capitulation to the status quo and hopes the status quo will stop poisoning people. So, there's not necessarily as deep rooted and analysis of capitalism and white supremacy and as such the politics tend to be a bit liberal and reformist. Our work of the past number of years has been to really bridge the gaps between the radical environmental, the environmental justice movements along with the broader abolition movement. And one begin developing those lines of analysis but also two begin to develop comradery, the ability to work together, to organise together, to learn from each other and to build I keep saying lines of solidarity, I keep repeating myself, across geographic space, across community spaces, across people that because of capitalism, settler colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy are it's all designed to keep us divided. To keep us from learning from each other. Because when we learn from each other, that's when we're truly dangerous to the system as it exists.

V: And Richard can I ask you if you'd like to sort of introduce yourself briefly and how you started organising with FTP?

R: Yes, sure. I'm Richard, he/him pronouns. I've been organising with Fight Toxic Prisons for the past couple of years. Jordan's the person who got me into actually organising with Fight Toxic Prisons. Mainly out of deep, as I talk to folks about it now it's out of an intensified understanding of the interconnectedness of liberation struggles, specifically Black liberation struggles with other like with the environmental movement and with other things like that. Because one thing that I really try and connect with folks now about is that the abolitionist struggles in terms of prisons is not a new movement. And that it's literally the continuation of abolitionist struggles that have been ongoing through the past 300 to 400 years. And as we continue to work and organise around abolition we do it with the respect to those previous organisers and those previous folks who were part of the movement. But also knowing and understanding as Jordan was articulating the interconnectedness between white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism all those different things help to merely transform what it means to be an abolitionist in the current context. And that's a major part of what Fight Toxic Prison's work is. It's just to kind of deconstruct the heteropatriarchal structures and ideologies that tend to separate abolitions movements as strictly about the abolition of prisons. As Fight Toxic Prisons as we've continued to develop our campaign work over the past couple of years we tried to develop deep solidarity between incarcerated folks but also with those communities. And a part of that is creating a strong sense of accountability within

all those spaces. And that kind of helps us propel the work that we're doing. So that's kind of a brief introduction to me and how I see what we're doing with Fight Toxic Prisons.

V: Thank you for that. One of the words that you've quite often both said right now is abolition or prison abolition. And it would be really cool for me if you could define what that means for you. Because in the Austrian context, that's a work that's I think not as often used as maybe in the US context. There are some groups like the Anarchist Black Cross that talk a lot about abolition but in general it's not that widely known and I don't think it has sort of the same historical context. So, if you could say something about that, what it means and why you refer to that so much.

R: Abolition specifically in the United States context – one of the things that a lot of people are aware of is the problem of mass incarceration. That doesn't necessarily happen globally but that's kind of been a lot of people's introduction into what the prison systems mean. The fact that we incarcerate so many people. As Fight Toxic Prisons and we start to define abolition it goes beyond mass incarceration or the private prison industrial complex. Our understanding of abolition is the entire system that creates the need for incarceration to begin with. So, it would be the policing, it would be prisons themselves, it would be detention centres, it would be laws and policies that regulate policing. So it encompasses a much wider range of things than just prisons themselves. Although we do explicitly work at abolishing prisons themselves under the idea and Jordan did their PhD research in this area and they continue to like outgrow an analysis of abolishing prisons under the idea of their toxicity and harmfulness of the environment. And so when we think about the environment we try and create a much more nuanced understanding of what all those things mean. Now Jordan I'll let you have your. You can say about that way better than me.

J: Yeah I don't know I'm just thinking about abolition and like what you were saying. I think a big part of it is like Richard was saying earlier we're situating ourselves as abolitionists within a 400-year struggle, right? Against slavery and you know against the punitive aspects of the state – courts, policing, prisons, jails. All these forms of control weaponized against our communities and our people that's what we're fighting as abolitionists. I think when you really get down to it it's also and when you take away the punitive components of the state I don't think the state exists anymore. So, we're also fighting the state. And in so doing abolition there's the dynamic of destruction and creation that we're constantly going back and forth with. So, one we do want to destroy the system as it exists but the abolitionist vision is not complete with just destruction. The whole point of abolition echoing Angela Davis the whole point of abolition is not destruction but the creation of a society in which we don't need to rely on police, we don't need to rely on prisons. In which we can solve harm and solve the problems within our community by our community. And so what would the world, a world, an abolitionist world look like? It would look like having access to food, having access to housing, having access to health care, therapy. Like all the things we know that reduce harm is what we need to be working on building in the here and now outside of the carceral-punitive components of the state within our communities itself. That will make us more resilient, more vibrant in the long run. And then Richard was telling me to talk about the environmental toxicity aspects, right? Just coming from an environmental angle from FTP we can consider the prisons and the carceral state as multiple types of toxic to our

communities. It's socially toxic on the one hand, it's criminalizing Black, Brown, poor, Indigenous folks and treating folks as disposable populations. This is sort of my own analysis and people feel free to agree or disagree with me. But, if we're looking at how late-stage neoliberal capitalism functions it functions based off of the designation of entire populations as disposable and so if we're disposable to capital, capital what are they gonna do with you? They're either gonna kill you or they're gonna incarcerate you because you don't really serve a function to capital. And so we can see the growth of the prison industrial complex in the US as a structural response by capital to the creation of these disposable populations under late-stage neoliberal capitalism. And if you're disposable and we can see this in the mapping of environmental justice issues, if your community is disposable nobody is gonna care if your school is built next to a toxic waste dump, nobody is gonna care if people are dumping trash in your neighbourhoods. You aren't seen as human. You're reduced to a raw material within this ever-grinding system. And if you're deducted to a raw material then your community is gonna get warehoused, your community is gonna get everything, the life and soul extracted from it as a means of population control essentially. So, this is also the reason that we seen prisons literally built on toxic lands. Where do you put disposable people? In disposable places. Where do you put people you label as toxic? With the rest of the toxic stuff. So, it's really defining people, entire communities as sub-human and treating them as such. So, that's the socially toxic component which leads to the environmentally toxic consequences. Like our comrade Brian Derollo, he's locked up in Pennsylvania. There was an attempt to build a concrete factory right next to his prison. Literally next door to the prison he is locked up at. And in the planning permit process the permit said that no people lived in that entire area because the folks in the prison aren't considered people. And he was able to successfully organise his entire prison from inside to intervene in that public planning process and eventually forced that entire concrete was never built because he was able to get the city council or whatever to deny the permit. But this sort of illustrates the prison industrial complex, carceral state it's literally just destructive to life anywhere.

V: Maybe you could tell me something a little bit about the organisational structure of the Campaign to Fight Toxic Prisons, because now you said that you also organise with folks inside the prisons which is kind of hard for me to imagine unfortunately how you can put this into practice. It would be good to know how you organise, how the structure is and maybe some examples of campaigns that you're doing right now.

J: Yeah, I'll go first Richie and then you can fill in. FTP we organise from a place of solidarity not charity. We're not here to save anybody, we're here to struggle alongside folks. In particular those most directly impacted, the people currently inside prisons and jails are who we are accountable to. Because if we're not in communication and we're not accountable to them we're screwing up, you know? We're not doing our due diligence to the movement. And so structurally FTP is a collective. We have 8 core crewmembers spread across 7 states in the US, west coast to east coast and each of us is sort of involved in whatever campaigns that we wanna get involved in, whatever local organisers we wanna get involved in. We have an agreement that we can do it under the banner of FTP, we don't really need to check in because we developed that trust with each other. We know if one of us is gonna throw down, put FTP's name on it that they're throwing down for a good reason. And so as a result of that we are actively involved in a number of ongoing campaigns. And

because we're so spread out and have so much information available to us we can really begin connecting people across the country to each other without even needing our involvement if they wanna work on building something. And we can come back to each other for that support. I'm having trouble with this, I need to talk through this? Can we get your perspective? Do y'all have any resources over there that we can use? And part of that is long-term development of relationships within prisons with folks inside. Starting through letter writing, if you're lucky phone calls, emails. It's the 21<sup>st</sup> century – it's pretty easy to get in communication with folks inside in real time. At our Fight Toxic Prisons convergences we have almost on every panel in real time somebody inside on the panel with us. You can get them on a call, you can link the cell phone up to a speaker. The barriers between the inside and outside are massive but not insurmountable. And because of that we're able to check back in with out folks inside on the work that we're doing outside and get that feedback loop. Are we screwing up somewhere? Oh, we got one more FTP member joining. Are we screwing up somewhere? Is there a better strategy that we could use? Is there a more specific place we could focus pressure? We can get on the phone, get letter writing with folks inside to really phone in and develop the strategies. Richard, you wanna talk about any of the campaign work going on in Texas or how you do that?

R: Sure. I'll briefly talk about that and I'll briefly talk about the hurricane work and then I want BP to kind of introduce themselves and give some idea and their entry way into what we do at Fight Toxic Prisons. So, first in Texas one of the things that we've mentioned several times is building group solidarity and empowering not only folks on the inside but other grassroots movements to [] because abolitionist work it's really hard for one and for two especially in the United States but more specifically in a place like Texas there's not many of us and there's a ginormous system that we're fighting against. What I do in terms of organising in Texas is that I've got a root in terms of what are the things that we focus on. And some of those things include improving the material conditions of currently incarcerated folks. And to that we work on stuff like getting air conditioning at all the Texas prisons. Because there's 136 prisons in Texas. 106 of them currently don't have any form of air conditioning at all. That would be one way of improving the material conditions. We also work directly with incarcerated folks to as Jordan mentioned letter writing. Even phone calls, because we've set up a phone line to get information on prison conditions through either loved ones who call in and if we're lucky we may have incarcerated folks calling as well to kind of give us detailed information on what's happening in different facilities. Because one of the groups that we're in constant contact with is Jailhouse Lawyers. Jailhouse Lawyers is a group of incarcerated folks who advocate for themselves. And one of the things they always tell us and one thing that we repeatedly tell to all of our comrades is never trust anything that you hear from prison officials and prison administrators. Because they're going to, as Jordan was mentioning, they're mainly concerned with profit for one and two it's literally written in most of the words that they do that incarcerated folks are not human. They're not concerned with the human existence of incarcerated folks. And then very briefly I'll say one of the as an example of campaign work that Jordan's been involved with that kind of exemplifies some of the work we do with directly incarcerated folks is our work with disaster response to hurricanes and things like that and other natural but not so natural disasters. Some of the things that we do with that is we engage in pressure campaigns and phone zaps

based on the recommendations on what we get from currently incarcerated folks. It's a whole different conversation to talk about the impact of COVID-19 on that but generally our communication with incarcerated folks guides the list of demands that we pressure prison officials and prison administrators into pursuing. It might be a material need such as access to clean water and the evacuation procedures. That's probably the biggest thing that we tackle during hurricane season. Because often times those things aren't accounted for. Jordan can give some real deep tells about how disasters and those things have gone in certain areas but just be gone in certain areas but just briefly I would say that like our direct contact with incarcerated folks in those situations directly informed not only our strategy and actions but also how we organise with other folks around those same exact issues.

BP: My name is BP, [] I got started to be involved because. I'm an artist and an organiser. I got involved after we started doing this block the juvie action in Seattle, because what we're doing is we're fighting against this juvie they're trying to build. [] as well as being able to [] inside the juvie. And then I got invited to the FTP convergence. And from there we kind of ended up building because I came to give a talk basically as both a priorly incarcerated person but also as an organiser. And we started getting involved you know together I think I did a show as well where I rapped a little bit. And then I was like we need to build together. This is wild, that is one of the wildest things I've seen. People talk about prison abolition but this is like about it about it. And I'm with it. And so from that point I just kind of got on with FTP. I did a lot of work. I know that's really quick but I guess I could drag it out a little longer. But that's kind of you know how I've been. Is there anything else I should touch on? Maybe the work we're doing now I guess? Also including work we've done is like there was definitely a part of things like being a part of bail-outs and also helping to do fundraisers and stuff like that. Which is also awesome as an artist to be able to use your voice as well as your body. As an organiser and an artist my pretty much whole free adult life it's always amazing to be able to piece them together especially when we make really big impacts from the bail outs to like FTP shutting down actual prisons to a long list of things that I think I saw more productive than a lot of things – there's a lot of talk a lot of times. And then FTP was one of the first places that I saw action. Not to mention bringing people together with the convergence that wouldn't be able to be brought together. They all have this shared experience for the shared mission.

J: We get shit done!

R: Yeah! Jordan, did we wanna talk about the solidarity tour?

BP: Yeah, we can. So, solidarity tour was a bunch of us going on a tour. [] Basically we were going down doing workshops from city to city, state to state. Breaking down what FTP did but also what our goals are. I also was able to bring little pieces where we had this part about the history of slavery to prison. How prison is just slavery and how it came from slavery and never really was. It was like a smooth transition. This is a separate thing that was made after. It was like no, this is part of the slavery. As well as we went into like what the basis of prison abolition and then what one of the comrades from London, Chelsea they went into the cross-sections of how the carceral state does not help women specifically. I don't wanna speak to that, they get harmed with that and I can't take their space. Do you wanna say more, Jordan?

J: To give context. This was a tour we did last summer, 2019 QTPOC [Queer, Trans, Person of Colour] FTP Southern Solidarity Tour. Coming at you! This was a tour we did directly after our convergence. So, I realized we haven't really discussed our convergences. Every year we do a convergence of 400 people or so all from massively different grassroots frontline struggles – Black liberation, animal liberation, Indigenous liberation, abolitionists, radical environmental. We get everybody and their mother together sharing space in a way that you know there aren't really that many spaces where you just see so many different grassroots movements coming together to collaborate. And so we were like ok we get together to literally just create this space and bring people together in community for 4,5 days to really swap strategy, swap tactics, build relationships. Because at the end of the day liberation is going to require us building those relationships and those deep-rooted trust. Right after the convergence going from this perspective that liberation is gonna require building those networks of trust we did a 12-city tour throughout the entire south, the entire southern US from Georgia, Florida to Texas because we like to go where the fight is. And we have an organisational commitment to building in the south. We really treated it as like a first point of contact to really start building the relationships that now are growing even further into actual campaign work. Like right now we're helping fight the construction of three new mega prisons in Alabama for example. We're doing hurricane support work throughout the entire south which is typically the most hard hit by hurricanes. We're building across Florida. Starting from that initial point of contact we're really building long-term trust and movement work. I think we forgot one of our biggest campaign victories and what really got us started was a 5-year campaign that we coordinated with folks in Letcher County, Kentucky. The Letcher governance project as well as a network of organisations across the country that we were able to get together to shut down – spoiler alert – we won! Shut down what would have been the most expensive federal prison in the US history. A 510-million-dollar maximum-security prison that the federal government wanted to build on top of a mountain-top-removal site. Which is where they blow up the mountain to get the coal underneath, resulting in widespread environmental destructions as well as hyper-concentrations of heavy metals, arsenic, lead, poisonous materials into the land, into the water waste. They wanted to build a prison on top of this. A mile away from the last three old-growth forests in the state. After waging a 5-year campaign which included a federal lawsuit with 21 federal prisoners we were able to defeat it. And then we just kept going on and we're fighting all the others (laughing). So, that's a big part of what we do as well is fighting new prison constructions and existing prisons. Working to get them shut down.

V: Congratulations on that! That sounds like a long campaign, a lot of work and a great victory! Maybe one thing that I think we haven't talked about so much is police. Sort of police as an institution. If you could tell me a little bit about sort of your analysis of police? What it means? Maybe also taking the Black Lives Matter movement now into account. That would be super interesting for us in Austria.

BP: So, basically the analysis around police. I'll start with what I think is a shared analysis, but I'll start with where I'm coming from specifically. We know that the police foundation where it fundamentally came from was slave catchers. They were like literal militias that were running around the south and snatching up runaway slaves to bring them back to plantations. They evolved into well maintaining the slave catcher role but also into []. You

work for corporations and so on and so forth [] and then crack strikes. But it seems to me even with that element added to it the fundamental thing has stayed the same which is like slave catching. Because if we travel through time we see how the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment just gave them a new way to justify slavery, because we know that laws that were made around specifically affected Black folks, specifically Black or even Indigenous folks – not even, AND Indigenous folks. Specifically, was targeting them, it wasn't laws that were like fundamentally there before but as a target. So, it was a way to continue slavery and finally the justification. If we go into like the Black coats I've been going to all those things, they were doing the maintain and transition. But when we see police, the whole fundamental thing is to protect one the image of the state and it's investment in slavery and two big money and its investments in slavery. Those are the two things that really set up whole. And we think a lot of times people try to express that people are here to protect us, but we even know from supreme court being like no they are not obligated to protect you. So, then when you look at their interests – what is their interests? It's clearly the fundamental beginning is still their interest today, even the tactics they use are the same ones they took from slave patrols – patty wagons were used in slave patrols. Their star, the gold star was slave patrol badges and I think when we see that we gotta understand that it wasn't that it used to be but it still is just slave catchers. It still is an investment in the prison system, but the prison system is the slave system. So, it's still an investment in slavery.

R: I think though one thing that I would add to that conversation about policing specifically is that, actually two things. First, the idea of policing I think we've tried to get at is that when we're talking about policing it's the policing state – not individual police officers or not local state, federal police. It's the policing state, so that includes all the inventions of the state as well. Policing is much larger and much more encompassing than most people typically think of. And then if you wanted to mention specifically police officers as BP well stated it's not that what policing does it's never meant to protect people. It's never meant to keep people safe. Policing has always been about one thing and one thing only. Its it's intricate connection with capitalism and it's connection with the dehumanizing and devaluing of human bodies and life. And for me the greatest example of that or not even the greatest just the most apparent and recent example of that is the Breonna Taylor case that I think has probably gone pretty global. The failure to prosecute, and this isn't about what accountability or what should happen in terms of the court process. But just the stark example that rather than prosecuting some officers who kill somebody the only actual charge was about the destruction of property, which gets at what policing really does. It protects property and more specifically it protects the state. So, it's never been about people.

BP: I would also add that like what you were saying about dehumanization it's more like turning us into a commodity. When you see Breonna Taylor you see how they talk to us as they talked about her as a commodity. Oh, she's done. Like it's a broken, like a person that broke a toaster or something. And I mean like it's like what the fuck?! But it's really fundamental within the system and that's why we're also saying there's no such thing as a good cop. You can't have a good slave catcher. It doesn't make any sense. You know what I mean? It's because it's not the individual feeling, it's not the individual goodness, but what the collective role is and what that means about them as individual persons, but going into

that collective role is like if I say to me it's a good cop is saying like it's - if there's a good Nazi. It doesn't make sense. They might have done all these nice things, they were like also during the Nürnberg Trials, all those nice things that will [] people. But I think the same thing comes with the police. I get that police don't realize how bad they are but it's not our problem to sympathise with their ignorance.

J: The police are literally the bleeding edge of the carceral state, judge, jury and executioner. With no accountability, no reprimands et cetera. And I think at least in the US context a lot of movement energy, this is sort of a critique of the movement more broadly. A lot of movement energy gets sucked up in ok police officer kills a Black person and then all the movement energy goes into we gotta get this police officer fired, we gotta get them prosecuted. It's entirely focussed on the individual officer and guess what? Much more rarely ever gets prosecuted. We got the case of Breonna Taylor. They only prosecuted the dude for shooting for the bullets that missed Breonna, for the bullets that went into the neighbouring apartments. That's the only thing they prosecuted. So, if we come from this individual analysis of oh it's not all police, it's just a few bad apples you're completely missing how the entire roots of the system are rotted and need to be torn out. It's not just the police, it's also the fucking prosecutor. It's also the prisons.

R: The courts.

J: The courts. We can waste our time trying to get "justice" by getting an officer fired, getting an officer prosecuted. One, it's a waste of energy because we just know that's not gonna happen in the vast majority of cases. But two that's not justice. Justice is if there was never a police there to shoot her in the first place. Justice is the complete dismantlement of the carceral state, the prisons, the police, the courts and the transitioning of those resources into our own communities. So, we can one day live in a world in which we don't have to worry about our Black, our Indigenous, our poor comrades being gunned down in the street by this bleeding edge of the state. So, yes. That's my little rant.

BP: I actually wanna add something on that. When we talk about I'd like to see a prosecution of police, because it's really interesting how the dynamics in the streets played out. People act like we need to be more non-property destructive, non like oh that type of shit. They say non-violent but it's kind of ridiculous. What's crazy to me is like all the prosecuted cops that only came and came to burning down precincts and cars. And we're fighting back, then they wanna prosecute every cop to hold them accountable for all the []. Because it was like all these cops were coming up on charges right where that was happening. But it's funny, as soon as that started slowing down how alle the charges started again to drop. You know what I mean? And it's like we need to lose these illusions of that they have some type of moral. They understand I think Malcom said that a long time ago: the only language they speak is violence. The only language they speak is the language of [] and if we act like if we wanna peacefully march it out of them, they don't have a conscious to win over. They don't care. They don't give a damn. And I think when we see that we see the really nature of them. I actually want to add that on there, because I feel like that was the only thing I noticed with what happened now with the uprisings and noticed how the dynamics were in the streets when I was out there. How that played out versus what people were saying after the abysmal initiation of that we will be like more peaceful and more like just protest was

actually counter to what we needed to be doing. The high intensity resistance that was happening in the beginning is what caused them to wanna actually act. But the thing is that's clearly the only thing that causes them to want to act. When they start losing capital, when they start feeling like their interests are about to, their whole [] is about to burn. Then they start to be like whoa shit.

J: Riots get results.

V: Ideas of transformative justice and community accountability – is that something that you work with and relate to? As alternatives to the current carceral state?

J: I've been thinking a lot about the idea of accountability over the past couple of months. And we currently exist within political and social-economic contexts in which there is no accountability. Accountability that we might have and this idea of community that we might be accountable to doesn't really exist under the conditions of neoliberal capitalism, because our communities are actively destroyed. And so for me when I'm thinking about accountability I think we quite often use it in almost sort of a punitive sense or a scary sense. It's like oh I fucked up, I need to be accountable for it. And I think that's sort of the wrong approach to begin thinking about accountability. I think we need to begin crafting an idea of accountability that situated us within a few different things. And coming at it from sort of sets of grace, sets of gratitude et cetera it's like oh these are the folks I am accountable to and I'm gonna measure my work against that and measure my behaviour against that so I can be the best organiser, the best activist, the best person that I can possibly be within this. And I think for me it comes back to sort of five different metrics of accountability. Is one, we're accountable to our ancestors. We need to situate ourselves within the historical struggles in which they existed, in which they fought or if your ancestors did some fucked up shit you need to be accountable to that shit and really work through and process it. We need to be accountable to our ancestors. We need to be accountable to – in the organising context – those most directly impacted. We can't go beyond some saviourism bullshit and be like oh hey all these incarcerated folks we're here to save you, we're just not gonna talk to you though. Like no, no. That's no. Don't do that. That's bad. You gotta actually build relationships with folks that are most directly impacted in the struggles that you're doing and struggle alongside them, not for them. Accountable to ancestors, accountable to those most directly impacted, accountable to the movement more broadly. Who are the folks you're in contemporary struggle with? And what does it mean to be in struggle with each other? And not only accountable to movement more broadly, accountable to the crew you're working with locally, directly. Who are your comrades on the ground that you throw down with day in and day out? And how do you know you're being accountable to each other? How do you know you're supporting each other? How do you know you're building an organisation that operates outside of the normal way that capital, white supremacy, patriarchy tells us we have to operate with each other. We're not here to build extractive organisations. We're here to build liberatory organisations. And if our organisation is destroying our soul and causing us harm how the fuck can we build a world that isn't gonna do that? When the very organisations we're in trying to do that can't support ourselves? And I'm drawing a little bit from Adrienne Marie Brown's talk and work around liberatory relationships in that. And the small the part reflects the whole. And then five we got this

from our comrade Kyle, Black Future's Collective when we were talking through this in a workshop a while ago. Accountable to the earth itself. How is our organising how is our work accountable to beyond just humanity but to the trees and the grass and the sky and the plants and the animals? How is it accountable to the very ecosystem that keeps us alive and breaks down the barriers we built between us and the natural world. And so I think if you begin approaching accountability from those sort of five interrelated metrics you can then begin to really see oh I'm accountable to a lot of people I can't just go do some fuck shit. Like I gotta really situate and think through how is it I'm approaching movement work and if I mess up like here's the people here's how I can check in and be like ok I need somebody to hold me down, I need maybe it's the local crew that can hold me down actually discussing and developing that support network around accountability if you mess up or something. Because we all mess up. The point of abolition isn't this fairy-tale world where there's no harm, where there's no nothing bad will happen. No, we're humans, we're gonna screw up. The point is knowing we're gonna screw up and figuring out plans to address that harm in the long run in the short-term without the state, without police, without prisons. And then you know also working on healing that intergenerational trauma that is a result of these hundreds of years of death and genocide brought on by capitalism, by settler colonialism, imperialism et cetera. That was a long one (laughing) Anybody else wanna say anything?

R: I come from a little different side about the question Valerie was asking. I think one of the things is when we're trying to build a world without prisons for example. A lot of people think we want, we need an answer. But I just completely disagree with that. Because not an answer for any specific thing, because in my mind I think it's empowering individual communities, collectively empowering each other really in our individual community but also how these broader communities surround us. But to be able to have their own space and answers. Because the context is important. The context of communities can be very different. To think about accountability has to be within a context. I think it gets harder and harder as time goes on right now because we have to rebuild a community because of gentrification for example is one weapon destroying communities. Whilst then when you get communities now our thoughts ought to be together people from all these different backgrounds, all these communities don't have shared context. I think that's where also comes to the ancestors, but not as ancestors like individually but ancestors also collectively where you're from and the community you had when you were growing up. Those type of things and the context you come from is really important on that. Which I think a lot of times now we have to rebuild from scratch because I think my life, my communities throw into the which you know what I mean? All across the world – whether they are in prison, whether on drugs while it is a way from that. And I think we have to think all how those communities exist now or what can we try to build. I think a lot of times we're out there building communities I think community is essential to being able to abolish prisons in a successful way and have a safe world. Because the individual society is not gonna produce that. The individual society is the society that produced prisons and the society that produced policing. The society that produced those divisions in the first place. So, we gotta pull away from that. But we're gonna have to be intentional but also aware. Because I think common backgrounds still does matter. And where there is a common background a lot more understanding, especially aiming downwards is really crucial in building a new world where

we can actually. And when I mean aiming downwards is like the more pressure people face materially, the more people should we should put more empathy and patience aiming downwards. [] more grace. More privileged people carry the less they should have that because the more they share it like no. you just have to had to deal with some shit and that's why it's like [] tons of trauma, have hell of trauma to deal with and there's lots of reasons why they navigate. So, I think it's that everything that's where accountability comes in I think. We gotta move away from the punitive understanding of accountability. But also really keep the ability to actually hold people accountable and I don't wanna []. And also like there's a lot of lines there. So it's like a big thing and it's really individual I think, not individual but it's like - What's the word I'm looking for? It's localized. It's specific of those communities around because we're not gonna have an universal answer. I think a universal answer is part of how we came under this problem. A universal answer is only generally serves those people who are in power.

V: I was just looking at the clock and noticed that we've already nearly been talking about an hour. Not nearly. So I don't think that I'm gonna ask all the questions that I still have left. Maybe I pick two that I'd be really interested in. The first one is that you've now given some examples of the campaigns that you work on right now. Is reformism and abolition for you a dualism? Is it a contrast for you to do campaigns right now that directly support folks inside of prisons or do you always situate the reforms that you do in an abolitionist bigger framework? That's the first question. And then the second one which you've already sort of answered right now would be an ending question of what are you visions or your alternatives, if you reach abolition. I don't know if that's a great way to pose the question but I think you get the idea.

Jordan. I'll go with the first one real quick. Is it a dualism reformist campaign versus abolitionist campaigns? Critical resistance has sort of developed and pioneered this helpful distinction between "reformist reforms" and "non-reformist reforms". Reformist reforms being reforms that inevitably strengthen the carceral state, body-cameras for police that puts more money in police budgets, puts more tech on them that's a reformist reform. What are some other examples, Richard?

R: We have body cameras, more police-training. Just ending cash-bail by itself, although that can be complicated for sure. Electronic monitoring, reforming probation systems. Go ahead.

J: This campaign in Alabama right now. The governor is trying to build three new mega-prisons as a "reformist reform" for a federal investigation that showed the entire Alabama prison system is corrupt as hell and horribly traumatic and destructive for the folks inside it. Instead of addressing any of those things, the governor was like lets build three new mega-prisons. So I can line the pockets of my friends. My campaign donor is Core Civic. And these are campaigns of shit we don't fuck with.

R: Anything that. It really BP mentioned something in their discussion like accountability being localized. The same thing kind of or like the process and how that can go through is localized. The same thing kind of happened based on like the type of reforms like versus abolition work that we do. That's also very localized too in terms of what are the strategies, the tactics or things that we support that gets us closer to what we want in our abolitionist

vision versus those things that don't. So, for like me in Texas I probably support stuff like the air conditioning stuff is probably a good example of something that's an abolitionist reform or that isn't necessarily going to be a major point in another area. Like, BP might say nah F all that. We're going to go strictly with abolishing every part and aspect of the prison system. So, that might be the organising that they do in Seattle because they progressed the points where they're able to fight that battle at that level. But in a state like Texas we, and in some other states too, I'm involved in things, any reforms that I'm involved with have to not enhance the system and they can't reify the system of repression. And the things that we do chose to work for have to improve the material conditions of incarcerated folks. So, if it's a reform something like I personally with Fight Toxic Prisons in Texas we work with certain ministry groups and things like that, that provide material aid for incarcerated folks. And just different organisations that are more concerned on that level. But at the same time, those are the things that, if a collective of folks think that whatever is happening isn't improving the lives of incarcerated folks. And anything getting us closer to abolition, there are definitely a lot more groups that we don't support on that level.

J: I think this gets towards sort of the distinction is, is what you're working on – the distinction between reformist reform, non-reformist reform – is what you are working on going to expand or contract the punitive ability of the carceral state? Is it going to create more prison beds? Is it going to create more power with which guards, COs et cetera, police can yield? And so like the air conditioning thing is an interesting example, because 75% of prisons in Texas don't have air conditioning. These are brick and concrete buildings and we're from Texas. I'm from Texas, Richard's lived in Texas a long time. It gets very very very hot in the summer. Over 100 degrees Fahrenheit [note: 37°C], I think 32 Celsius – I'm not sure, y'all need to help me with the conversions that might be low 32 Celsius. This is gonna cost a shitton of money, right? In order for the state to actually provide air conditioning for prisoners. And part of the aspects of that that we're working on is air conditioning can be used as a weapon against prisoners. Guards can, if they want to, crank that down super low and freeze people out, so you have the opposite problem. So, part of engaging with that nuance between reformist reform and non-reformist reform is ok our folks need air conditioning, it's fucked up to, like in the here and now not provide support for folks inside. We're not gonna abolish the 136 prisons in Texas tomorrow and we've got tens of thousands of people suffering and dozens dying from heat strokes every day without this air conditioning. How do we go about getting the air conditioning without turning it into just one more weapon?

R: The one thing I wanted to add to that really quick, Jordan, just on the air conditioning. Some of the folks that we've been working with part of what is written into legislation or what they're getting to do in terms of getting the bill passed about it is to actually reduce the number of prisons, so that they have more money to pay for conditioning in other facilities. So, this process in order to get air conditioning to certain facilities, it's a step-by-step process so it won't happen all over night. So, our proposal is they do it in stages. So, the stages would be first by targeting specific facilities where there are many complaints and getting the air conditioning. But in that same space closing down other prisons, so that it's more financially feasible to provide other facilities with air conditioning. And that's what's been written into the bill that they wanna present towards Texas legislators.

J: I think a big thing real quick that needs to be fought, this is especially across Europe as well is the idea you know building newer, greener, more environmentally friendly “rehabilitative” prisons, right? And we’re fundamentally opposed to that. We don’t need new prisons. We don’t need shinier prisons. We don’t need greener prisons. We need less people in the prisons. We need less prisons. The solution to bad conditions to all this stuff isn’t to build more cages which typically have new prisons typically have many more beds that can fit people in them than the old prisons, just across the board right. But also if you build it, it will get filled. There’s also a lot of arguments in the US about overcrowding. If you build the prison it’s going to get filled and quite often they’re not gonna close the old ones that was the arguments for the new one in the first place. They’re just gonna use that as more overcrowding and overflow space.

BP: Yep, that means more law and order bills.

V: I was just reading that Richard has to go. Thank you so much for talking to us. Then I think we’re maybe trying to come to an end as well. Maybe the last question about your vision or your alternatives to the current carceral state.

J: Do you wanna go BP?

BP: It’ll go back to what I was saying a little bit earlier. But it happens to be individual to each community, because you gotta know the people in reality to have actual accountability, the people have to know each other. They have to understand each others history and their root. It gets complicated and there never would be a perfect answer, because it’s not a perfect world. But I think at the end of the day it’s one of the things it is the prison is the worst answer. It is gonna have the worst results. It leads to, well first off it is a form of violence. And then it does lead to more violence, traumatizing people that are already traumatized more so. Putting them in cages and abusing them does not solve the situation in any way. I think individually I think it’ll all change between communities. Because I think communities have different expectations and different like boundaries and they are gonna have to work within their context. So that’s when I was talking about earlier but I have like one answer. The answer is building communities and having one of the big answers if we talk about what’s happening right right now and how to deal with it right now is if people have the resources they need? Because most crimes are over resources. That’s just off the top. And so if we started handling like poverty and if everyone got food or housing, crime will start to just in itself disappear. If we decriminalize things like drugs and the drug war, crime will start disappearing. There won’t be crime. And I’m not saying there will never be things that happen that will have to be dealt with, but it won’t be anything that’s justified []. And I think as far as those things that need to be dealt with regardless I think all those things that like I said are individualistic within the communities to figure out how they’re gonna address it. I think supporting communities to be able to have their resources to do those things is much more effective than enslaving and traumatizing people.

J: I think when we really get down to it an abolitionist is we need to develop an abolitionist imagination. The things that exist in there here and now feel like they’ve always existed but they haven’t. Nation states, empires they’ve all fallen and historically have fallen. Every single last one of them. And so there here and how feels very permanent but in reality it’s

not and in reality we need to reshape reality, we need to reshape what is possible. How do we build a world in which we can meet our needs and protect and build up our communities without the police, without prisons? I think in order to do that, in order to like really get to sort of an abolitionist imagination about what the world could be it's gonna require the ending of capitalism, the ending of white supremacy and whiteness as a concept, the ending of settler colonial states. All these institutions of deep-rooted violence, genocide that are actively destroying our communities like BP was saying we gotta end those things. We gotta actually build up communities again and re-create those deep-seated trust and bonds that you know at a grassroots level. If we're gonna have any hope of being able to overcome all of this and create sort of an abolitionist world. Just a little long-term struggle that we need to engage in. (laughing)

BP: I just wanna add that I think it's really important to realize, that it's gonna be experimental. We're gonna have to try, fail and try. Because we can like theorize and I can come up with a million possible answers to a million possible problems. But you don't know how that's actually gonna turn out until you actually deal with those problems. And I think we can I don't wanna pretend like we got some miracle answers, because there isn't miracle answers. We just know that to get to the point where we're gonna have answers that are in any way actually productive and good for people and communities that we're gonna have to change what we're doing. And we're gonna have to try and fail and try again. And we see it happen all the time with restorative circles. We see it all the time now whether they work our good or not that's an open debate right now, but when it comes down to what I think one of the reasons that a lot of times they don't because I think it is gonna be a first. We're gonna have to intentionally build it in ways that make sense and build communities in a way that makes sense. At least in the United States in Seattle for example, what I've seen of this country I think because they've been so taken away we're gonna have to intentionally rebuild those. Build to have a space. We're gonna have a world where we can hope to be accountable in real ways. I think that's part of the long journey to. How do we rebuild community from pretty much from scratch? From being scattered everywhere?

J: And that's what I keep coming back to is one of the biggest things that we need to be doing is shifting our movement work towards is you know what I call revolutionary infrastructure. How do we develop and carve our own spaces outside of capital, outside of the state in which we can imagine and experiment with all of these new possibilities of community? We can figure out how to feed our folks, house our folks, provide healthcare et cetera outside the state, outside capital, outside of these punitive measures that are used to just control and destroy us in the interest of capital. Think of all the worlds that we could begin creating in the here now?

V: Thank you so much. Thanks for the interview, for talking to me, for us. It was really great.