

# TACTIC

## JAIL SOLIDARITY

Putting pressure on authorities after activists are arrested can create a strong community of resistance, and help deter state violence and the persecution of activists.

### CONTRIBUTED BY

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## "WHILE REVOLUTIONARIES CAN BE IMPRISONED, THE REVOLUTION CAN NOT."

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"If you want to know who your friends are, get yourself a jail sentence."

—Charles Bukowski

"I have the people behind me and the people are my strength."

—Huey Newton

Political imprisonment has long been a standard repressive response from state authorities, particularly tyrannical regimes and authoritarian governments, to criminalize dissent, spread fear, break rebellions, and stop the growth of social movements.

Jail solidarity is a tactic for putting pressure on authorities after activists are arrested. By pushing for activists' release, or, failing that, for decent treatment and protection from psychological and physical abuse, it seeks to create a strong community of resistance, based on mutual support and unity of purpose, that can act against harassment, false accusations, selective prosecutions, strategies of isolation and victimization, and other forms of persecution.

The tactic can be applied in two interconnected ways: one, within the prison walls among arrested activists, and two, spanning those walls to connect prisoners with those on the outside who support them. The aim in the first case is to agitate for fair and equal treatment for all activists arrested, protect those who cannot afford to pay their way out of jail, and prevent abuses of the justice system, particularly those targeting the poor, youth, and minorities.

### POTENTIAL RISKS

To work, jail solidarity requires, well, solidarity. Differences of strategy can pull a group of arrestees apart; for instance, when some people want to keep resisting inside the jails while others think it's most important to get out and make a stand on the streets. Within a group of arrestees, different individual circumstances, especially different levels of privilege and risk tolerance, can work against solidarity. Some arrestees cannot handle the precarious and unhealthy conditions in the jails; others cannot afford the time jail solidarity demands, as it often takes a long time to force the authorities' hands.

Without jail solidarity among those arrested, however, the power to make decisions is transferred to the judicial system

Withholding names and other forms of identification, and collectively refusing any plea unless it helps to negotiate the dismissal or reduction of charges for everyone, are key components for this tactic to be effective.

In the second case, there are many ways people outside the jail can support prisoners, but visiting with care packages is often the most crucial. Care packages supply food and water for arrested activists, but also create a moment of interaction that often helps to facilitate legal, medical, psychological, social, and spiritual support. These visits have the additional purpose of ensuring the activists are being treated with dignity and are not being abused or tortured. It shows both the jailed and the jailers that there are people on the outside looking out for them, and that they will raise the alarm if they detect any abusive practices.

This public support is important because, if it's organized, it can put massive pressure on the state to release the prisoners. During visiting hours, people can organize to show up all at the same time. By flooding the jail with visitors, organizers show the authorities that arresting activists will not stop them fighting for their causes. While revolutionaries can be arrested, the revolution can never be.

Jail solidarity breaks the fear barrier created by isolation, creates a community of support, and amplifies the message behind the original arrest, helping to raise issues that were invisible prior to the activist's imprisonment. It undermines the state's effort to silence dissent and transforms an otherwise unbearable incarceration into something bearable, even powerful.

## LEARN MORE

The Global Justice Movement's Use of "Jail Solidarity" as a Response to Police Repression and Arrest: An Ethnographic Study  
Beverly Yuen Thompson, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2007

[https://www.academia.edu/775919/The\\_Global\\_Justice\\_Movement\\_s\\_Use\\_of\\_Jail\\_Solidarity\\_As\\_a\\_Response\\_to\\_Police\\_Repression\\_and\\_Arrest\\_An\\_Ethnographic\\_Study](https://www.academia.edu/775919/The_Global_Justice_Movement_s_Use_of_Jail_Solidarity_As_a_Response_to_Police_Repression_and_Arrest_An_Ethnographic_Study)

Jail Support and Solidarity

Midnight Special and Katya Komisaruk, *Organizing for Power*

<http://organizingforpower.org/jail-support-solidarity/>

Jail Solidarity

Civil Disobedience Training, ACT UP

<http://www.actupny.org/documents/CDdocuments/Jailsolid.html>

Creating a Rapid Response System

Mobilisation Lab

<https://mobilisationlab.org/resources/creating-a-rapid-response-system/>

in a way that is risky for activists — both individually, and for future collective engagements. When an arrested activist decides to break jail solidarity and make a deal to get released, the key question is: How will this decision impact those who stay behind? Once outside, that individual can continue to support those inside by speaking to the media and carrying messages to families and other supporters, but that requires a conscious and often long-term commitment. A final risk: In some countries, jails are legally defined as protected areas, so any protests organized on the inside are considered illegal and can lead to further arrests.

## RELATED TOOLS

### Stories

- Angola 15+2
- Bidder 70 (Tim DeChristopher)
- Fees Must Fall
- The Teddy Bear Catapult
- #ThisFlag

### Tactics

- Cacerolazo (noise-making protest)
- Civil disobedience
- Creative disruption
- Hunger strike
- Mass street action
- Phone banking

### Principles

- Activate international mechanisms
- Follow the lead of the most impacted
- Foster safer spaces
- If protest is made illegal, make daily life a protest
- Maintain nonviolent discipline
- Make the invisible visible

- Seek safety in support networks
- Take risks, but take care

### **Theories**

- Action logic
- Direct action
- Dunbar's number
- Strategic nonviolence

### **Methodologies**

- Pillars of power

### **TAGS**

Democracy, Dictatorship, Direct action, Human rights, Immigration, International solidarity, Racial justice, State violence