THE

Final Straw

A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW

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MWALIMU SHAKUR ON ABOLITION, ORGANIZING AND EDUCATION

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works for CCWP, California Coalition for Women Prisoners. And Lisa is remarkable with the work that she does. And we'll be collaborating on projects once I get free as well.

TFSR: That's awesome. I look forward to learning more about her and finding some of her work out there. Thank you so much for having this conversation and for your efforts. And I'm excited for your release.

MS: I really appreciate all the help. You've been there for me Bursts. And the work that you do and the work that I look forward to doing with you when I get out there. Can't wait to get out into society and continue this good work. It's always a pleasure.

TFSR: That's really beautiful to point to the elders. And you continue that legacy by bringing in younger folks and sharing the knowledge and the experiences that you have, which is great.

I was wondering, there's some pretty good news about your release getting closer. Can you tell the audience a bit about when you're due out and what your plans are for when you get out?

MS: Well, I am due out, according to this Prop 57, which is a board that they have in absentia to you. But it acts just like the regular parole board for those who have a life sentence for them to be considered released back into society. And for us who have a non-violent sentence, it allows us to go to the board before our actual release date to get out early. And in my case, they waited till the last minute. My release date is in December, a month before my parole board hearing, which is in November. So even though it's only 30 days, I would still like it to pass. And I'm thankful for it if it does. If not, I'm still thankful that I'll be getting out here soon.

Within the next few months, my plans are to reenter society and get into the workforce. I am a paralegal by trade, and as well as I am practicing journalism. Finding work is not going to be too hard for me. I have other fields that I can utilize. And I know a few people who can help me navigate through the job market and whatnot. But I'm planning on working with community organizations and bringing transformative programs to the inner city communities. Of course, I'll be in Los Angeles, my hometown, for at least a year till I get off parole. And I'm hoping that once I do, I'll be able to travel to other states, to these other cities, and see what problems exist and try to help those who are doing something about fixing those problems, working with them in solidarity.

TFSR: That's awesome. You mentioned that you're a journalist, and I'm sure as a paralegal and with your experience, I'm sure you'll be able to find a lot of opportunities. You have been publishing writing recently with a Los Angeles-based online publication. Can you talk about that? Maybe name where people can find your writing.

MS: Oh, yeah. Knock LA. I got some comrades over there, my boy Chris, my boy Joey. I've been working with them. I think the first time I told somebody I was paroling was Kite Line, my friend Mia over there. Working with them has been a pleasure. People want to know about how we made it in the SHU for so long, how the transition has been since we've gotten out the SHU. So that was the last piece of work that I did.

TFSR: How can people follow your writing on social media? Some folks are running pages for you, right?

MS: Yeah, I have Instagram. It's at **@newafrikanrevolutionary.** You can find me there, you can find me at Revolutionary Internationalism. And my fiance has a Facebook page, Freedom Looks Good On Us. She's also a brilliant person. She's a strong woman. She's been rebuilding her life since she's been out of prison. She

This zine contains *most of* a conversation with imprisoned New Afrikan revolutionary socialist, Mwalimu Shakur currently incarcerated in Corcoran Prison in CA, about abolition, political education and the hunger strikes of 2013 in which he participated. There are links on the episode page to a previous interview with Mwalimu and some of his other writings.

You can get in touch with Mwalimu:

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TFSR:Yeah, so we've spoken before, but I wonder if you wouldn't mind reminding listeners of your name, your location, and any information about you that would set the stage for this chat?

Mwalimu Shakur: Well, my name is Mwalimu Shakur. And I'm in the belly of the beast, known as Corcoran State Prison, home of the first secure housing unit, SHU. And being back in the general population, having to rebuild and restructure, things going on in this camp has not been easy. But it's a challenge welcome. Being the freedom fighter that I am, and understanding what needs to be done, me and other comrades of like mind, we welcome it. So that's what I'm doing until they unleash these gates and allow me to walk out of here and reenter society where I can help with the movement that is going on out there.

TFSR: The last time we spoke, you talked about how a lot of the work that you're doing in there is study and discussion and sharpening those tools. And I know, over the last two years, there's been a lot of chatter at various levels, even in mainstream society, around the concept of abolition. And people have been talking about abolitionism for a very long time with different definitions of what that movement is and what that phrase means. I wonder if you could bust into what the term abolition means to you.

MS: Well, for me and others like me on the inside, abolition means destroying this system from the inside out, as well as an outside in, which you have to wake up the minds of those in society, so they can understand how to do that, or they'll fall into the gap of reform. They'll try to make the system better by coming up with laws to change it and wanting to follow certain rules in order to get those laws to change. And you can't do that, you have to tear the system down and rebuild another one that works for the people. Because when people are oppressed, they're not just oppressed by one front, like an economic front.

In this system, they oppress us on all fronts: political fronts, they use their military apparatus to keep us in control, they oppress us with this prison system, where it teaches you have to be a slave to it because your labor they exploit in here economically and politically, just like they're doing in society. You have to understand that. And that's the importance of us providing these reeducation classes, which teaches you how to abolish the system by challenging the conditions and having a new system in place once you do that. So that's the bulk of what we do on a daily basis. Because if you teach the people how to understand what's going on, they can come up with their own unique strategies and tactics to reach that objective. So it's a challenge in and of itself. But yeah, that's what abolition means to me. And that's one of the ways in which we can accomplish that, through our reeducation.

TFSR: I wonder if you can say some words about the historical context of... As a new Afrikan revolutionary, if you could speak about the context of abolition and the legacy of abolition and where the movement, using that phrase now, stands in terms of that, the continuation from abolition of

like wildfire, and the state of California could not deal with it. It's spread outside of the state. It spread up the coast, and it spread to places in Canada. But I wonder if you could speak about the potential of that thing both inside or outside of the prison system.

MS: Well, that's what we need. Once you recognize you have a common enemy, everybody can come together in solidarity and challenge their conditions. That was just the way we chose to do so. Hunger strike, and then put out a mandate saying we agreed to end all our hostilities because he know what started all hostilities, like what the elder spoke of in the book. In those days it was a racial time in society, COINTELPRO was in full effect, and the FBI was attacking revolutionaries in our class struggle, all social classes. And on the inside, you have the white supremacist ideology groups, where they also put those types of COs in the prison. They weren't hiring Blacks and Mexican prison guards, so you have the white supremacist ideology prison guards in here. So now, when you put blacks in here, which was second to the white, and they became a majority, were faced with all types of racial oppression. As [the author of Chronicles of Prison Dirty War], clearly, was talking about.

They had to come together in unity to challenge that. What was intriguing is that a lot of people didn't know that the FBI created these institutional structures as well that are government agencies: the SSU and the IGI and the ISU. Those are federal agencies that work inside the prison, and they only target the social classes of inmates. Once you go to war, there's no time to stop and ask questions about why, what happened. It's just awful about war. And in order to curb that war, they were putting everybody in solitary confinement, killing the head thinking that the body would die. So that way the wars continued to happen in the general population. And after so long of that they create the SHU and start putting people, buried alive in there for generations on generations. And when you understand the conditions, you have to let others know: "Look, this is what we face. This is why we face it. Here's the solution. What do you have?" And then somebody'll pitched their solution, and somebody'll pitch their solution, and then here com a strategy. The next thing you know here goes some other tactic you can use to complement their strategy. And it works when you keep the objective at the core part of your mind because we cannot stop until we achieve this. And that's what made it so enjoyable.

We was able to see a way out, and we was able to make them understand why it was important for us to achieve this. And we kept doing what we needed to do to get there. I wasn't one of the leaders in that movement, I just followed suit. I can't take the credit for none of that. But my elders, they're very sharp and talented individuals. They have strong minds. And I thank them for instilling such strong disciplinary principles inside myself. Because without them, I don't know where I would be. My education came from them. Them long hours of studying and reading and continuing to read and study and writing essays about what I learned and how to show it in my practice, and going through ideological struggle so that I can transform my mind and become the new man that I am. It's only because my elders had the foresight to see what kind of beauty we could have at the end if we continue with this fight.

ger strike, and said we're not eating. And if they try to pop the doors like they did it, and people are gonna attack each other, we stand on it, linked up. We're not going to be violent. So that was a way of taking the power out of their hands. And not letting them interfere in our business allows us to take the power back from them, creating our own, as I said, communities on the inside. We got our own economic system, which is socialism. So that way, if you give a brother a disciplinary write-up for not locking it up on time, or you want to ransack a cell and not put it back in a respectful manner in which you left, and he filed a 602 on you for that, and you want to try to retaliate by always searching his cell. You got to stop that because before he gets violent and attacks you, we're going to come together and have a sit-down and we're not going to lock it up until the sergeant comes over here. We're going to address that issue, and then we're going to put another 602 on that officer, get him removed from the building for that type of disrespect.

Anytime you take from us something that we hold dear, which like our little bit program that we get, we're going to retaliate in a meaningful way, not in a violent way, but in a meaningful way, where we can talk about it in dialogue and have a discussion about what's going on because now you're hindering an infringement on our time when you get to go home. We don't. For some of us, this is our home for a long period. So we know how to neutralize situations and come together. And that takes the power out of their hand because if they can't move you and cause you to violence so they can retaliate in a more violent way, which causes them to place you in solitary confinement, give you new charges, and things of that nature, then they lose the battle.

TFSR: Yeah. You and I had spoken about this book, Chronicles of A Prison Dirty War. It goes through the experiences of a black political revolutionary prisoner. I don't know if the author identifies as a new Afrikan. Does he? Should I correct that?

MS: Yeah, he's a New Afrikan freedom fighter, he's an elder.

TFSR: Okay. But talking about both the bolstering of white gangs and the further racialization of those white gangs inside of the California prison system coming up through the 60s and 70s, and then the vying through the creation of the prison economy by administration and by the guards of different sets and different communities against each other within the California system, and it feels like the hunger strike that you participated in falls into this long line of instances where what was called by the folks during the Lucasville uprising as "the prison class," the unification of a common understanding of a shared situation, that even though some groups had an immediate leg up over the other groups, everyone was still locked into the same cages at the end of the day.

And one of the strengths of those hunger strikes that you participated in were that it was people from so many different communities as well as different sets, if they engaged in that, unifying basically against the common circumstances that they were experiencing in a way that spread

slavery through the abolition of Jim Crow, or any of these systems that have popped up.

As Michelle Alexander talked about in her book, that one thing after another, an oppressive system comes up, a change occurs that causes a shift that makes it impossible for it to function in the same way that it had before, and there being the resumption of those oppressions under a new name and under a slightly different framework. Is that the reform that you're talking about?

MS: Yes. And you see it clearly. Because like you just made mention of, from slavery, they went from to Jim Crow. From Jim Crow, they went to the system you see now, the prison industrial slave complex. They practice the same things within the systems, but they change things around so that people will be led to believe that they've given you the change that you've desired. And as you noted, no, that's not the case. Because when you let the clauses in the amendments, the 13th and 14th amendments, you could continue to utilize these same practices. It's smoke and mirrors. By changing the name, you also change the face of it. And nothing has changed. But people sometimes believe that it has, so they have hope. And they go along with certain things, while other things on the other side are getting worse. Take for example, when you so-called freed the slaves. Well, if that was true, then why were slavery practices still being done in Texas and then a couple years later, people recognize they're now free. You kept the same system in place, you just changed the names of certain things. You let slaves free in the South, but if you caught them with no place to go, then you put them into jail with a make-believe court system. You establish the police department, which justifies your way of doing that. And you call it the convict lease program, which puts them back into the plantation on whoever owns it, to practice the same thing legally.

You see what I'm saying? There was no change in the system. So getting people to understand that is the hard part because people will become complacent. The 1% class that oppresses us throws other things out there to distract you so that you don't see what they're doing behind closed doors. How they got people distracted now with this materialism. They got you thinking that if you do the thing that they want you to do, like go into the avenues of entertainment games or sports, that you will be successful, when in actuality all you're doing is giving the money right back to them by buying their houses, buying the cars, buying the clothes. You don't see that they're still oppressing you and they're still controlling you, by way of the system. So that's the whole concept of getting people to see that nothing's changed.

TFSR: So in the last couple of years within the framework of discussing abolition versus reform, I've heard a lot of people talk about non-reformist reforms, as in things that can be done through the legal system to mitigate the harm that people are suffering in the immediate in hopes that releasing that chokehold will allow people the space and capacity to be able to resist further.

As one of the organizers and resistors from the widespread hunger

strikes a little over a decade ago in the California system, following that people challenged through courts, and some of that's still going through the courts, but some of the circumstances that kept people in solitary confinement for such long times without the ability to challenge that, in your mind, is there a thing such as a non-reformist reform? Or does it all get fed back into the system? And if you wouldn't mind talking a little bit about that experience of the direct action, hunger strikes that you all were taking, and court battles afterward, and how those relate.

MS: Well, because the struggle continues, it's not over, you do have to find little ways within the system to work. And there's strategies and techniques that you use to reach an objective, but you use it, and you don't stop, you got to keep going. So we found ways within a system to cause a stir by the hunger strike, but we knew we weren't gonna settle for that. We're going to also attack the courts. We were also going to mobilize people in society to form organizations around these same needs to challenge these conditions that we're facing. And waking them up to see what's really going on by educating them, they've seen it.

So you do find those ways to make things happen. But you can't settle for that. And that's where people go wrong because they believe... If they look at reform as a good thing, they'll settle for doing things that way. And then when the enemy comes with a counterattack, they won't be prepared to fend that off. Because they'll start thinking about abolition, and only focus on that reform that you were talking about. So what we are continuing to do is practice what Ho Chi Minh talked about, win the war of the flea. When he goes against the enemies, it's like a flea attacking a tiger. It bites him in all different places and worries him, so the tiger can't recover, and it has to run in the forest to try to find some type of a tree to rub against, or some type of relief by jumping in the water or something, to stop the fleas from attacking them. Well, that's what the people have to do to the system in order to get complete abolition. You have to attack all the fronts: economic, political, the justice system, coming together culturally, socially. And by doing this, you're able to get more relief in those areas you didn't think you could get relief in, and it caused you to not settle and not be complacent.

So the hunger strike, the momentum that it gained, we just went with that, and it allowed some people to get their freedoms back into society where they can do some work in the community, create self-sufficiency programs, join some of those organizations, and work in the legal field, or in other cultural ways, create businesses that help people, get into the public school system and push the literature in there that we was reading a study that helps you overcome the certain types of things. And just continue to rebuild and use that momentum to cause you to keep fighting and keep going. So that you don't become complacent. So you do use those avenues, and they work to a certain extent, but you got to keep going because you can't get abolition if you don't. And that's the main objective.

TFSR: So in terms of abolition, understanding that people harm each other and that people have safety concerns, some people are a bit frightened by the concept of abolition or think it's naive to think of a world without police, maybe because they think of police as serving the purpose of keeping communities safe. But I wonder if

you had thoughts about how we imagine and develop an abolitionist approach to community safety, minus cops and prisons, and without just reproducing the same methods and institutions under a different name, that would have the same result.

MS: Well, first of all, the people would have to realize that creating your own organizations, they're self-governing, and they have rules that people have to subordinate themselves to. And within doing so, you develop the discipline that you need in order to carry out the organization's work, which could be self-sufficiency programs, and other types of talents that you bring out of people so that they'll feel more appreciative and forthcoming to what's going on in a new society. And there won't be a crime or malicious intent from people because you're holding them accountable for those rules and those regulations. So in a way, you are policing yourselves because you can also create a people's police department that holds people accountable for breaking any type of those rules, and then you hand out disciplinary punishments for that type of thing.

If people had more programs, you'd have help for whatever type of chemical imbalances they may have. You will provide the right types of medication. And you wouldn't have crime. Crime is usually produced by people who are considered the underclass because the rich holds all the power. And even if you watch TV shows, like the cartoon Robin Hood, you see that the rich get all the power, and the poor people were stealing from the rich in order to have basic necessities. So when you have those things that happen, then you have to recreate things in order to have a complete society.

TFSR: This is the line of thought that we're moving on, both of us, but whether you're at Corcoran or in North Carolina, or wherever, the systems of power that exist that use the language of justice and safety, while they're getting their paychecks and while they're driving around our communities, there is a degree to which a lot of people in our communities invest trust in those words, or say, "It's like the best that we've got." I wonder if there are any examples you can talk about where you've seen people shift the ground and choose the rules that they follow, communicate about that directly, and take the power to some degree out of the hands of the so-called authorities and build community power.

MS: Well, yeah, we're doing that now. When people come together, like us New Afrikans, we study our history, and practice our culture. Mexicans are doing the same thing. And when you have the whites who believe in this Aryan way of living, they're not portraying their hate on us, and they're not disrespecting us verbally, they're practicing their way of life. And some of them are Odinists and go to those types of services where they're worshipping, I guess, Satan or some type of being other than the God of all creation. And that's their way of life, that's their thing. People stay in their own little groups. If there is any type of form of disrespect, no matter how it is, we're going to try to neutralize that situation before it gets out of hand, before it goes to all out violence.

So we do that amongst ourselves. Now, let's say we're all being mistreated and disrespected by staff. We're all going to come together, like we did in our hun-