

The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world. Since 2010, we've been broadcasting from occupied Tsalagi land in Southern Appalachia (Asheville, NC). We also frequently feature commentary (serious and humors) by anarchist prisoner, Sean Swain.



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SHUT EM' DOWN

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THE FINAL STRAW RADIO - Aired On March 28, 2021

TFSR: First up, can you please introduce yourself for the audience with whatever name, affiliation, preferred gender pronouns, location, or other information that you think is useful for the audience?

Chux: For sure. My name is comrade Chux, the pronouns you can use is they/them. I'm a Member of Jailhouse Lawyers Speak (JLS). I guess I just want to say I'm in the carceral state.

TFSR: For those who don't know, who is JLS? What are its goals and what are its inspirations and aspirations?

Chux: So, JLS is an autonomous, anonymous group of prisoners that are also organizers and jailhouse lawyers, actually. You know, a little bit of the history is JLS started as jail house lawyers. And then one thing led to another and through these network connections, we actually started create this inside Federation almost, right? So JLS has become the movement. You know, it's not just you know now when people hear JLS, it's tied to so many things like the 2016 inside nationwide protests, followed by the 2018 protests, followed by now the special rapporteur that's going on in the UN. And there's a lot of other initiatives like the Ammend The 13th initiative that JLS signed on and is supporting to get released to all political prisoners. The idea of JLS is also these 10 demands. The 10 demands that you can find on any JLS platform, whether it's Instagram, or Twitter, or Facebook. And these are what JLS stands for. Every state is also autonomous and has their own needs of that state. However, here, in the broad scale of northern Turtle Island, this is what we demand, this is what we stand for and this is why we protest. So JLS has always gotten inspirations from the comrade George Jackson, from Fred Hampton from even nowadays, different autonomous groups, these autonomous organizations. Every person, every revolutionary, every organizer that has resisted, and moves for decolonization in moving to amplify the prisoner's voice is who inspire us. So this is something we are constantly growing, it's constantly moving and it is a constant struggle from the inside having to fight, having to be this voice. Because we now have a platform, we have a voice. And you can hear it.

TFSR: One thing that I think is really awesome that I've been hearing more and more in the last few years that I've been paying attention to. Prisoners organizing has been, like even folks who are not in immigration facilities, who are in state or federal facilities who are in county jails, making sure to vocally include ICE facilities and the people that are being detained in ICE facilities as comrades and as people similarly suffering under the carceral state. And I think you're references to like decolonization and like naming that some people call this land Turtle Island is an interesting, like, expansion on the idea of abolition, the recognition that this is stolen land, and that the borders are bullshit. So I just wanted to name that right there.

Chux: I think it's super important. I think that's extremely important to talk about the idea of what abolition is. Like the idea that abolition is more than just the state or federal facility. Right? When we think abolition for a long time, we've always thought about just the prisons, but we have to

Chux: The strategic release ideas and parole is so very important but for all those people that say "I heard you want to abolish parole" and okay yeah in the end when we abolish the system we'll be abolishing parole too, but man we need parole right now we need the opportunity to release any prisoner any way we can! So I think that we need people to make these calls we need people to go to these state we need people to learn on how arbitrary that their parole systems are because every state is different, every state that even has them are different. So I think that this is important to fight for those that are parole eligible. I think it's important for those that have family on the inside or just have any type of idea or want to be part of this abolition movement to find out about these parole systems and trying to find out any way to release as many prisoners as we can.

TFSR: Besides how people can continue following and supporting the work of you and other comrades with Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, do you have any other topics that I didn't ask about that you specifically want people in the audience (whether they're behind bars or in the "free world" or whatever) that you want to share with them?

Chux: Well I just want everyone to know that the fight is coming and it's constant. It is a long fight. It's something that is not pretty, but it's something you have to work towards. Every single one of us have to work towards this because the carceral state affects our community. These pipeline's that are sending black and brown folks inside is something that has only increased. Yeah, sometimes you hear the liberal media talking about that "it's changing or getting better" but from the inside we're telling you it's not. It's not getting better. It's getting worse as they're creating more of these types of lockdown institutions and lockdown programs and they're trying to find the comrades on the inside with these contraband phones. So I think that it's super important to find your local abolitionist network and build with them. Because we can't do this alone. Abolition is a communal thing. This idea of inter-communalism is abolition and we need to stick together we need to build with each other we need to find our organizations. We need to find both those communities that are close to us. Then if there's none that are close to you just contact and call the Fight Toxic Prisons called the Oakland **** call just the comrades everywhere to find out how to create these autonomous networks these federations, these groups in your own area. If there is none contact the IWOC. Contact everything you can to be part of this movement because this is a community thing and we need to build with each other.

TFSR: Comrade Chux, so much respect to you and the work that you do and thank you so much for taking the time to have this conversation. Yeah, solidarity.

Chux: For sure comrade, and y'all be safe

TFSR: Yeah you too, take care.

argue and say well some of these ideas or are kind of reformist, right? Some of these ideas are... the idea to create a humane living environment. Some people say that investing in the prison industrial slave complex... and you know the argument is that it might be. It might be for the moment. However, we know this fight for abolition is going to be a long fight. We need to be able to live in here. We need to be able to grow in here. We need to be able to educate ourselves. We need to be able to get the opportunity to build and to create. One thing I'd like to point out is purely what abolition is: it is the goal. No matter what road it takes to get there, abolition is the dismantling of the prison industrial slave complex. Shutting down every single prison, shutting down the carceral state that's what abolition is.

TFSR: Abolition, like the demands towards abolition and understanding these things... there is no one who knows better what is needed to ameliorate the situations than the people who are in those situations. So like while there's some of those demands that if I was writing a list with my experience and whatever else, I might not prioritize. I'm not going to question that that people that are on the inside and living it day to day feel that these are important things for people on the outside to stand in solidarity as accomplices and to push for.

Chux: Always. That's for sure and that's what we look for that's what we appreciate. We appreciate things like Final Straw we appreciate the comrades out there that understand that our voices are important our voices are out there. It's not like we don't have a voice. We do have a voice and just because some people have contraband phones or some people are able to have more of a voice does not mean the voices that are not actually heard are not important either. That's why I think letter writing and writing to political prisoners and creating networks inside/outside networks are so very important we need more words of prisoners out there. Even if it just comes like this on a collect phone. This is what we need.

TFSR: So there is.... I guess similarly, and this is not a JLS call out.. but so listeners know there's a very good Millennials Are Killing Capitalism interview with some other organizers from JLS and the host brought this up I think or maybe one of the guests... but the National Freedom Movement is calling for 1 Million Families for Parole Rally on April 3. This is for places all around the country. Participation from wherever you can as I understand because parole is a national issue that affiliates of the National Freedom Movement all around the country are are experiencing a lack of access to it and in particular like worsened by the state's response to the pandemic by shutting things down by pulling back on access to educational opportunities that would allow people to score the points basically so that they can actually earn their freedom through the system. It's fucked up, but it's the existing system that the prisons have set up.

begin to think outside of that. Right now. The prisons are ground zero. This is where to start. This is what became of the plantation. But we have to remember there are so many different stripe and so many different types of institutionalization that also has to be included in the fight. We talked about these ICE detention centers, and these black sites almost right. That's what these ICE detention centers remind me of: black sites. That they just snatch people up, and body snatch them and throw them inside. But another thing that is important that I think folks have to remember, and that is not included enough in the idea of abolition, or even the carceral state is the so called mental institution. These mental institutions have to be included in abolition, because it was the colonizers, and it was the powers that be that just choose how people's minds work. And so the idea of able-ism is such an important thing that that we have to include when it comes to fighting in the fight and then abolition. Because there's so many arbitrary laws and rules that can take somebody out of society and cancel them and throw them instantly either into the carceral state or start building an environment where they will eventually end up in one of these institutions, whether it's an ICE institution, whether it's mental institution, or whether it's actually prison.

TFSR: I'd like to explore the idea of abolition a little more. But first, I was wondering if you could talk about the Jailhouse Lawyers Speak statement that was released on the nationwide prison strike for this year. Can you tell us about it and what y'all are calling for and hoping for and who from?

Chux: This initiative is "Shut Em' Down." So you can find it on the JLS WordPress site, as well as on Twitter and on Instagram to find the link. What's going on is it's time to reignite the flame with abolition. Right now, we are making a call to any outside organizers and outside abolitionists to show solidarity with the inside comrades. And just inside folks in general, the idea that it's time to shut them down needs to be an inside/outside work. Abolition doesn't just work one-way it doesn't just work from outside-in, nor does it work from the inside-out. This is something that we have to work together on and build community ties with each other. The idea of community is so important right now, especially because of how our community, how our terms, how our abolition has been co-opted by this liberal democrat idea or movement that's going on these both lose no matter what movement has co-opted all these ideas that means abolition. So I think that this call right now is to reignite the fire abolition, we need to remember what abolition is we need to not fall into the liberal traps that are going on that are taking our terms like "defund" "decarcerate" "divest." Right?! because those terms are starting to mean nothing. Defund has never just meant to take money a little bit from the police, it's always meant to shut down the fascist police system. Divest has always meant to take all of your money out of the prison industrial slave complex. Decarcerate means that to decarcerate not just nonviolent folks, not just some people, but ALL people, everyone that is inside. And to get the idea, you take this prison industrial slave complex and dismantle it. And so what we're calling for we're calling for an action an outside action

on August 21 and September 9.

This action can really just be however you want it to be, you abolitionists want it to be that show that jails or prisons and the protests. You could throw up tables.. zine tables in our neighborhoods to create spaces to talk about abolition, because I'm sure there's so many people in the hood that are abolitionists that don't even know because they don't even know the term. So these are things that we have to create, to create the spaces to have the conversation. So throwing up zines, throwing up spaces, throwing up tables to panels, panels at institutions, panels at colleges, panels at small city colleges or big universities, I think are important. And if you can get any prisoners on I'm sure that would be able to happen through JLS through these different people that are inside. I think having prisoners on these panels are very important. I think that we need to make noise, make the noise we used to make. Right? COVID has separated us. COVID has pulled us apart. But COVID has also showed us that so much of these ideas of the so called American dream or this American experiment is fake, it's false. I really think that right now, as everyone is getting vaccines, and everyone is feeling a little better about moving around about finding their communities again, I think right now is the time to do this. I think these two days, everyone that's on Twitter that has been talking about abolition can finally meet each other. And we can start building and working toward this community to shut down this prison industrial slave complex to free all of the political prisoners. To rise from the ashes of the carceral fucking state. And I think it's important, it is important to have just anything you can do. Anything to do, drop banner do a banner drop. Now banner drops are beautiful, right? But also for folks that don't want to or don't feel they're ready enough to go outside, creating virtual spaces that we now know that are possible grab you and 20 of your comrades or 20 of your friends and do some little writing, do some letter writing to some political prisoners and some letter writing to prisoners that are in your neighborhoods or communities, hold each other accountable, hold each other accountable to create the spaces to fight and to shut them down. To build this community. One thing that is very important is to build this network from the inside and outside. And I think that's what we need to do. That's what we're calling for. We're calling for the abolitionists to be abolitionists and to step back away from the idea of voting or the idea of reform-y type of attitude that the liberal media and the liberal democrats have. So i think just showing up is important, showing up and doing whatever you can. And there's so many ideas what I just said was just a small thing. Though the a small things are very important. You look in your areas for the different IWOC the Incarcerated Workers Committees. You can look up the different ABC's the different RAM's. If you are out west the Oakland Abolitionist Solidarity crew is amazing in New York you know IWOC in Philly... and these days are so important these days are so important it's a day that we need to relight this match of abolition.

TFSR: Yeah I feel like there was there was so much energy this summer when everything felt like it was literally on fire around us and we lit some of those fires. But

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mean, this professor actually had classes on the JLS 10 demands, right? So it's like the anything that pushes the idea of abolition in the institutions in the "higher education" facilities are not actually trying to further these dangerous ideas or these ideas to shut down the state. Because the state still perpetuate, and still grows inside of the higher education facilities. Right? Inside of these institutions. Inside of these colleges and prisons, right? I mean, there's only so much of a radical education that someone can get in there. And then it starts turning into a liberal education. I use the word liberal as this big Democrat, watered down idea of what it means to be radical.

TFSR: The demands for 2018 which I think besides a modification of adding the focus on on political prisoners:

1. Immediate improvements to the conditions of prisons and prison policies that recognize the humanity of imprisoned men and women
2. An immediate end to prison slavery. All persons imprisoned in any place of detention under United States jurisdiction must be paid the prevailing wage in their state or territory for their labor
3. The Prison Litigation Reform Act must be rescinded, allowing imprisoned humans a proper channel to address grievances and violations of their rights
4. The Truth in Sentencing Act and the Sentencing Reform Act must be rescinded so that imprisoned humans have a possibility of rehabilitation and parole. No human shall be sentenced to Death by Incarceration or serve any sentence without the possibility of parole
5. An immediate end to the racial overcharging, over-sentencing, and parole denials of Black and brown humans. Black humans shall no longer be denied parole because the victim of the crime was white, which is a particular problem in southern states
6. An immediate end to racist gang enhancement laws targeting Black and brown humans
7. No imprisoned human shall be denied access to rehabilitation programs at their place of detention because of their label as a violent offend
8. State prisons must be funded specifically to offer more rehabilitation services
9. Pell grants must be reinstated in all US states and territories
10. The voting rights of all confined citizens serving prison sentences, pretrial detainees, and so-called "ex-felons" must be counted. Representation is demanded. All voices count.

Chux: So the only thing that's been changed is number 9. 9 has been revised to "Free all political prisoners." Because you know for some, and for a lot of people the pell grants were reinstated. I'm not so clear on the rules a number i read at the beginning that it was under a certain amount of time that people can apply for pell grants and maybe it's extended... I don't know, but the revision has been to number nine that explicitly called to free all political prisoners. I think what's important, I think what's very important is to remember that everything right there is what abolition is. Every single thing that we quoted and you know some people like to

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the ability to move denied the access to safety, people in cages. It's also notable that there have been an incredible number of uprisings, escapes, and other resistances because people have the fight in them, basically. Can you talk about what you've heard from other comrades about the pandemic, and how folks are making it through?

Chux: Sure. I think it's important to point out that right now, prisoners have been in prison 5, 10, 15, 20, 25 years that have been experiencing the state violence, this colonial violence, this ghetto violence, constantly. I think that it's important to note that one of the common threads is right now this last year has been one of the most deadly years for so many of us. It's easy for us to see our enemy when he has a knife in his hand, or when he has a spray can or when he has hand cuffs. But when we are now fighting against an enemy that we can't see... COVID... that we know is coming in from the outside. It's scary. And there's so many more people that are talking about needing to create these safe spaces and needing to get the fuck out of here because they don't want to die in here. So they'll have to wait and fight to appeal and all that stuff. But now it's so much more urgent. And everybody is just worried. Everybody's worried that somebody they know is going to die in here that might lead to them. So this enemy, this biochemical enemy that is being reeked upon us. It's scary. They're not doing things to save us in here. They are making environments more volatile, more dangerous, more scary! So that's why you're seeing more stuff this year. That's why stuff is popping off. That's what people are hitting the fences. That's why you're seeing, you're seeing prisons on fire. You're seeing the Midwest on fire, you're seeing St. Louis on fire, you're seeing Georgia on fire, you're seeing people, 15 prisoners rushing the gate at one time in South Carolina, you're seeing these things because people want to live! These uprisings are us wanting to live and nothing more.

TFSR: You've already listed a bunch of ways that people can engage in their communities: Get together, talk about abolition, make some noise & educate folks. And I guess points where that can especially be noted are these invisibilized spaces of terror that are in all of our communities. ICE detention facilities, jails, prisons, juvenile facilities, mental health facilities, as you said. There's also a reference to higher education in terms of I guess, like, universities or colleges that work with prisoners, I reckon. Is that is that right? Why? Why JLS has pointed out higher education facilities?

Chux: Well, there's so many prisons, I mean, there's so many institutions, there's so many colleges that actually invest still in the prison industrial slave complex, why there's so many of them that create these things that the small things that prison need. And I'm not talking about, you know, one that comes to educate the prisoners. Now, there's some places like different universities that will create great stuff for the state to help the state run the prison. And even if it's little things, and that's why it's important to have these areas, right. One thing about the institution, these ivory towers, is that we have to remember that it is part of and at the end of the day, you know, and it's blatant! When you see these radical professors like the comrade Garrett Ferber getting kicked out of Ole Miss because of his political views. He was one of the most brilliant historians of the recent times. And all the stuff that the comrades would do for... I

it feels like it's a recurring theme that i've noticed throughout my life is that people on the left were left to center or even just centrists or whatever get so.... can get so aggravated when it's a republican in office and that's why the democrats get away with so much more once they get into office they push through. Maybe something that's not so brazenly and outspokenly racist, carceral, whatever but you know the machinery that gets operated no matter which party happens to be in power in the US. It's the same machinery, it's the same bureaucrats, it's the same three letter institutions. And all of that energy from this last summer I don't know if it's just the pandemic tiring everyone out or everyone just sort of let out their breath after January 6 or what.. But I know that there's a lot of folks out there who know that just because brunch can start up again and just because people are getting their vaccines and there's not some orange idiot in the White House that everything's not okay that there's still growing numbers of... I mean it's not in a vacuum but there's like still growing numbers of children that are being put into cages on the border as more people come towards the border to seek safety from situations in Central America but yeah I really appreciate you pointing that out I think it's really important that people don't forget who is in office and while they may be more acceptable to some of our palates you got a top cop and you got one of the constructors of mass incarceration in the United States right?

Chux: Yeah I think that's super important to point out. Right? It's easy to point out the orange devil. It's easy to say who the orange devil is, right? Because he wears the color red or because he's a republican or because of the crazy nonsense and racist statements and hate that he spews. However that's easy to do. The difficult thing is when you have somebody that is taking these dangerous ideas like most happened in this liberal left or with this liberal democrat idea... they have this way to take these dangerous ideas that we are trying to cultivate and make them less dangerous and when they do that when they co-opt these things then it's very, very... i don't know... but it might be more dangerous than going against a threatening enemy. Right? So I think it's important to remember who these people are.

Who is Joe Biden?! Man, who is he? Man.. he is the writer he is the architect of mass incarceration of this 1994 crime bill. Right? He was the one that started this 85% that started these three strikes that started black and brown... like the war on the black and brown. Right okay yeah, the war on drugs and one thing, but this guy is who made it blatant. "Super predators" who was he talking about? he wasn't talking about "Amy" or "Landon" right? Nah man.. he was talking about the black and brown kids man that's what they were talking about. Kids. When they started bringing up the idea of these "super predators" and then we have Kamala Harris, right? Like you said a blatant cop. She's a cop. She was a district attorney. She was somebody that sent children to prison. She was somebody that sent people to prison constantly, constantly, constantly. So, yeah this is who we accepted. This is who (not me) we wanted. You wanted the devil in the mask instead of the devil that's just blatant.

TFSR: The phrase abolition obviously has a deep historical weight. And it signifies a lot, as do the dates that were chosen and have been repeated through these last few years of nationwide strikes and protests around incarceration. Would you remind us about the significance of the dates of JLS has chosen to propose and the meaning of Black August to revolutionaries behind bars.

Chux: Sure. I think it's very important, because I want to mention that most revolutionaries, I want to say all revolutionaries, but I don't want to just put that blanket out there and be wrong. But most revolutionaries, do not celebrate Black History Month or heritage month. Nah, we celebrate Black August. Black August was one of the most volatile months that has happened in the revolution or in the spirit of the revolution. And on this month, during the daytime we fast, during the daytime we study, during the daytime we feel to each other, and we try to create and grab on to the extent of our ancestors, fallen revolutionaries. And one of the probably the greatest JLS inspirations and they're pretty revolutionary inspiration is George Jackson. Comrade George Jackson, who was assassinated on August 21. And I guess, I mean, I can talk for hours about George Jackson and Soledad Brother and Blood In My Eye. But anyone that does not know the history or who George Jackson was... I urge you to pick up his book. I urge you to find everything you can about the comrade, because for most of us, he started it all. So then skipping forward to the second day which is just as important to so many of us as September 9. September 9 is a memory that most of us still remember, most of us still recognize as a day of mourning for us. But that was the day that the prisoners in Attica in upstate New York took over. And one thing I want to say about this, and one thing I want you to remember is when this happened, it was because of the volatile and the extreme circumstances that were happening in New York at that time. It wasn't a planned thing. Right? This was not something that was planned. This is something that organically.. that the revolutionaries that was there because there was revolutionaries there, with Black Panthers there, there was Young Lords there, there were Weather Underground there, there was Black Liberation Army there, there was comrades that were there that feed this organic autonomous movement, and they needed to take hold of it. Because if not, they would have never had those three days, they wouldn't have had a voice, they would have died instantly. And there's a brilliant book, called Blood In My Eye, that everyone needs to get that is about September 9. And what happened after September 9. The three days of the takeover of the uprising, followed by the years and years and years of covering. The state covering and the state of New York covering everything that happened that day.

TFSR: I think it's worth noting also that this is the 50th anniversary of both of those events. The massacres, Governor Rockefeller, massacres of prisoners and guards and staff that were being held hostage inside of Attica, as well as the assassination of George Jackson. So that that significance definitely, definitely is there and it weighs heavy. So the the protests called for this year also explicitly mentioned political prisoners, and the need for them to be free. Over the years, it feels like there's been distinctions drawn in a lot of prison movements around social versus politicized versus political prisoners. Can you talk about the demand to free our aging political prisoners, in particular, like amidst this pandemic, and so many of them being in their 70s and 80s.

Chux: There's so many comrades that are inside that have been buried

alive in here that we need to fight for their strategic release. I urge people to follow amend 13. Amend 13 has a vast list of the prisoners inside of the political prisoners inside. And I really want to remind people, these ideas of politicized prisoners or political prisoners or prisoners of war, once we all come inside, we're all prisoners of war. Once they declared a war on the street, once they declared a war on the drug, the war on black and brown, the war on poor people. We all became prisoners of war. Once these Jim Crow laws started locking up black and brown people, and started creating the policies to lock up poor folks. That's when we all became political prisoners.

Now yes, there are some prisoners that are actually inside because of their work on the outside. And those prisoners, Mumia. Maroon. and I can keep naming them all, but these prisoners are our inspiration as well. These are who we look up to. But not only them, there are so many prisoners like.. I'll talk about George Jackson. George Jackson was not a political prisoner when he came in first day, when it comes to the terms "political prisoners" but no one would ever deny that he was a political prisoner today. And I need people to remember that.. Man, that just because there are certain ideas or politics on who should be released, who shouldn't be released. Nah, everyone should be released, and especially the political prisoners and people that are suffering from repression constantly because of their ideas, because of their views, because of who they are. Because their skin color, because of the politics, these comrades are taking it next level. Taking the pain next level. There's not any days that Mumia has that is an OK day in here. There's not any days that Maroon is chilling. Right? So I need people to remember that these comrades. These political prisoners are the ones that are and have been extremely repressed and extremely tortured by the system.

I mean, look, with they have done to Mumia. Look. They have given them hepatitis C. They're giving Maroon and him COVID! Dude! I mean, he's not around anybody, you know, he's in the SHU. How is he getting COVID? Like, how is this stuff happening to him? If it's not the prison, it is not the prison crisis is not the system killing him? You know, so I think this is very important, I think it's so important to push for the release of the people that should never have been inside. The people that if anything, should have went for some type of Geneva Convention, because that's the war that will always be tore upon them. So there are so many people in here, so many people we have to remember. And I want people to see who Joy Powell is. Right? There's one thing that is forgotten a lot here too, is the radical black feminists that are inside, the queer folks that are inside, that get forgotten about. Because of, you know, the numbers, the numbers. There's not that many women prisons. So the women revolutionaries get lost. However, I know a few, that are suffering just as bad or even worse than the male comrades. So I just want people to go and look up, the radical black feminists that are inside and support them as well. Hear the voices we don't hear a lot. Joy Powell is who we are hearing from a lot lately. However, we need more.

TFSR: So this last year has been really hard, especially for folks who are being denied