

organizing support and solidarity for arrestees

by starhawk from <http://healingtrauma.pscap.org/active-jailsol.html>

when we take action against an unjust system, we often find ourselves facing the possibility of arrest. at times, risking arrest may be a planned part of our action: in other situations we may deeply desire to avoid it. nevertheless, activists get arrested. planning, preparation, support and solidarity can help us protect each other and continue to build our movement.

have a solidarity strategy:

- solidarity is how we act together in the face of oppression to strengthen and build our movement.
- some jail solidarity strategies and court solidarity strategies involve using the strength of our numbers to pressure the system into assuring equal treatment for all, and into accepting demands that they reduce or drop charges. we might employ a variety of tactics to ensure that the police keep us in jail, where we cost the system the most money and trouble. we might all plead not guilty, and demand jury trials to clog the court system. these strategies require planning, preparation, and the commitment that arises from the group's democratic decision making. they work well in situations where there is some social restraint on police brutality, and when people's differing needs and life circumstances are respected. guilt free solidarity can empower the people who take part in it: but it is also exercised at a cost. even in the us and canada, political prisoners have been brutalized, tortured and even killed. regular prisoners face these dangers every day. solidarity strategies must always be flexible.
- in countries and situations where there is less restraint on the police, where people are being severely beaten, brutalized, or potentially murdered in jail, solidarity may best be exercised by putting pressure on the system from outside.

plan for the possibility of arrests:

- ideally, have a legal team in place, with lawyers trained to understand the principles of solidarity. at the very least, know some lawyers you can call on for emergency help.
- inform people. trainings and preparations should include basic legal and jail information. legal briefings can be offered before the action. handouts with basic information and phone numbers can be available at the action.
- know what your solidarity strategy is, and include information about it in trainings and preparations.
- know who your political allies are that you can call on for support. unions, ngos, sympathetic politicians, green party members, religious groups and reformists may or may not be willing to go out on the streets with you, but are often willing

to help get people out of jail, or to pressure authorities to provide decent treatment.

practical support structure:

- before going to an action where arrest is a possibility, each person, or each affinity group, should arrange a home support person who expects a call at an agreed time. if that call is not made, they will assume their action buddy has been arrested, and will begin to mobilize support. they should have full information on each person they're supporting, including passport numbers or driver's license numbers, social security numbers, health issues, legal issues, etc. this is a great way to involve people who cannot do an action due to home commitments, age, physical challenges, or simply fear. have that number memorized. it might also be good to have a second, fallback number.
- have a general support number that people can call to report information about who has been arrested, how people are being treated, etc. ideally, have two. make them separate from the number for the lawyers themselves--this phone is for collecting information and needs to be kept free as much as possible in case people call from jail. memorize that number or write it on your arm in indelible ink before the action. (don't worry, the authorities will already know this one.)
- ideally, have another number that friends and relatives outside of jail can call for information. make sure support people have it and are also in contact with each other.
- as soon as you are arrested, begin to extend your network of support to those who did not plan on arrest. on the bus, in holding cells, in jail itself offer moral support, practical support, and basic information on legal rights and on strategy.
- in jail, collect as much information as you can about who has been arrested. if you are allowed to make phone calls, the first person who calls should convey as much of that information to those outside as they possibly can. remember, calls can be cut off at any time. and expect all calls to be monitored by the authorities.
- it's generally easiest to reach your personal support people from jail and give them the information to pass on to the general support number, which may be busy or even blocked. but have both.

what support people can do:

- make the authorities aware that they are being scrutinized! call or appear in person to demand information about specific prisoners. knowing that someone will do this for you will help you avoid panic and despair.
- mobilize political support: this is your best protection in jail! supporters can:
- call, write letters, send faxes and emails to jail authorities, police authorities, politicians, etc.
- mobilize others to do the same. start close to home, with the politicians' own constituencies.
- through the internet, it's easy to mobilize international pressure. be sure the phone numbers, fax numbers and emails you provide work internationally!

- vigil at the jail itself.
- inform the media. call a press conference, give interviews, talk on the radio, arrange interviews of released prisoners, write letters to the editor. if the general media wont cover the issue, contact indymedia. (www.indymedia.org).
- organize support demonstrations at home, at embassies abroad, at government offices, etc.
- contact people who might have influence with the authorities. is your aunt's second cousin a government minister?
- call on your political allies and enlist their help and support.
- contact international organizations such as amnesty international.
- mount legal challenges to the system.

support provides for the needs of prisoners:

- arrange legal defense and raise money!
- call their family, friends, job, school, etc.
- feed cats, walk dogs, care for children, pay overdue bills, etc.
- arrange for visits by chaplains or for religious services. (believe me, in jail even the most hard core atheist will welcome these as a diversion!)
- if prisoners are in for a long time, supporters may visit, write letters, post money prisoners' jail accounts so they can buy supplies at the commissary, etc. as the situation allows.
- be there to pick you up, greet you, feed you and provide comfort when you get out.
- arrange medical care if needed.
- provide emotional support, counseling, and help in debriefing afterwards.
- ask your support people to also provide for the needs of those who were unexpectedly arrested.