

Police and prisons are violent and racist institutions, straight out of the colonial legacy whose sole contribution is to reproduce the inequities of the capitalist system. Everyday, even when they uphold a so-called social peace, cops often assault, harass and incarcerate the most vulnerable and oppressed among us. And when people rise up against these injustices, once again the state uses the police and prisons to stifle the masses. The problem is not only the violent blunders of the police, but the police institution in itself that is a form of violence just like courts, laws, jails and prisons. Can we really talk about bad apples when the whole institution only exists to repress and oppress?

This zine is the edited transcript of an episode of "The Whole Orchard" (Le verger au complet), a series of podcasts in the form of interviews that addresses different themes linked to the police, prisons and the justice system, created by CLAC, the Anti-Capitalist Convergence (Convergence des luttes anti-capitalistes), a group based in Tiohtià:ke or so-called Montreal on unceded indigeneous land, inhabited amongst others by the Kanienkeha:ka nation.

The idea behind this project is to share knowledge, experiences and radical imagination, to better understand who our enemies are and how they operate. It can be hard to see clearly through the supposed neutrality of the legal system and discourse that legitimize policing. How can we differentiate between individual cruelty and institutionalized discrimination? How to explain the over-representation of certain groups in prisons? How do policing bodies harm us while pretending to protect and serve us? How is the category of "criminal" constructed? Is its only purpose to scare us of each other? Why is defunding the police

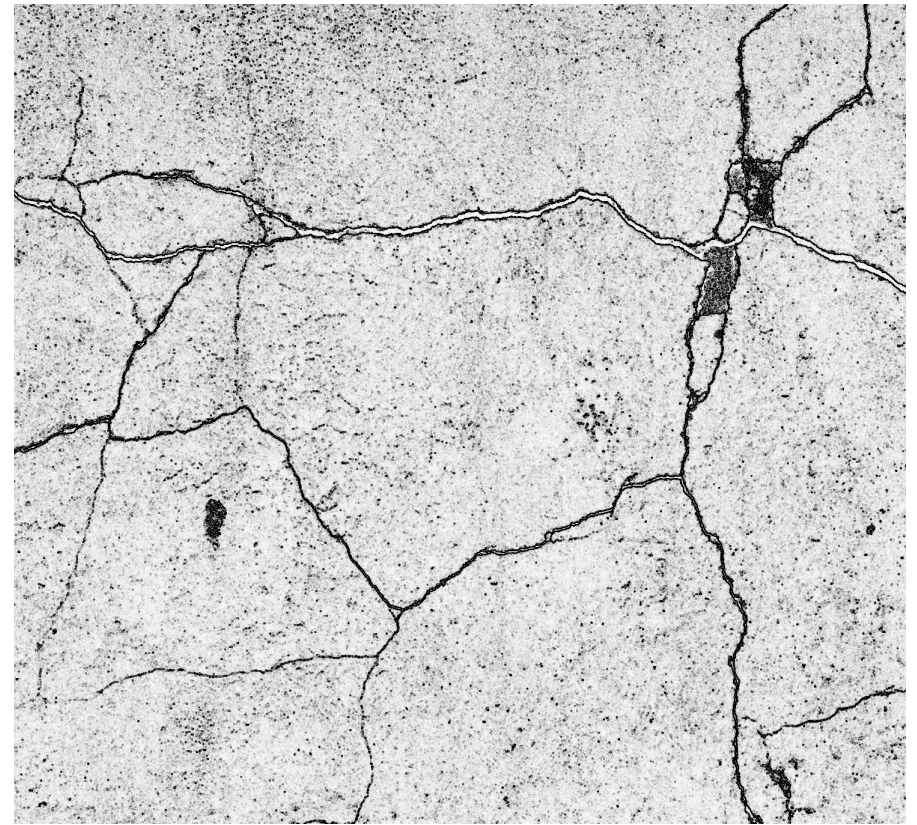
not sufficient and abolition necessary? How to rethink justice under a state that perpetuates the genocide of Indigenous peoples? What kind of alternative justice could replace the current punitive and repressive system? What form can transformative justice take in a post-revolution society? And what about right now? These are some of the ideas we've discussed over different episodes. We propose a critical analysis opposed to the liberal vision of policing, which prefers considering bad apples instead of targeting systems of oppression as a whole.

In this zine, we present an interview with two members of the Termite Collective in order to deepen our understanding of issues related to prison abolition. The Termite collective is a group based in so-called Montreal that supports incarcerated individuals and aims to share a critical analysis of the carceral system by spreading information via workshops, theater plays and other events. It's important to note that this is an interview from 2020 in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, it may in some ways be specific to this context and some collectives mentioned may or may not be still active, exist or be available right now to get in touch with.

Prisons, and the restriction of spatial mobility as a mode of punishment have only become normalized recently in the West. Before those, we often think about corporeal punishment devices such as the torture wheel, guillotine or the pyre, symbols of the excesses of royalty and feudalism. However up until recently, many rural communities functioned without any intervention from the State: economic dynamics imposed large agricultural production and as long as the producers stood in line with it, there was no reason to intervene. That's why there is a much

larger police presence in the cities than there is in rural regions, even though crime rates are higher outside of metropolitan areas. Therefore, it's not surprising that in so-called Quebec, prisons would only appear in the 19th century and establish themselves through the introduction of police services.

However, it's important to remember that other solutions have and will continue to exist to replace the punitive justice system and rampant sequestration of peoples. With the aim to abolish the carceral system, drawing inspiration from those alternative approaches to justice seems essential.

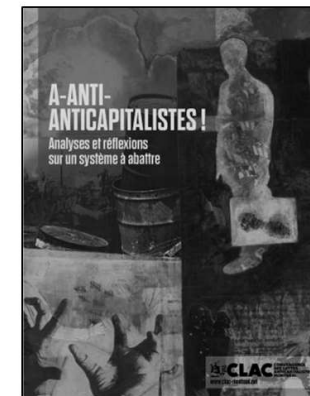
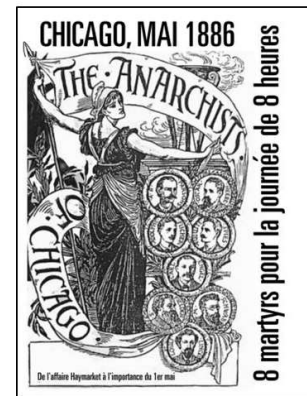
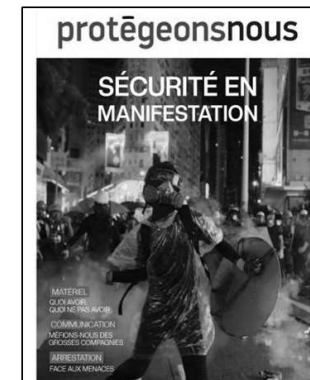


Please tell us about the work you do with the Termite Collective?

Termine Collective: So the Termite collective is a group of people who are very determined to abolish prisons and we are a group of people some of whom have a lot of experience in prisons and some of whom don't, and we collaborate together on various different kinds of projects. Most publicly we recorded and performed some plays, years ago, and we were very interested in cabaret and play writing and performance as a way to educate people about what happens in the prison system and to help people understand why abolition is so necessary.

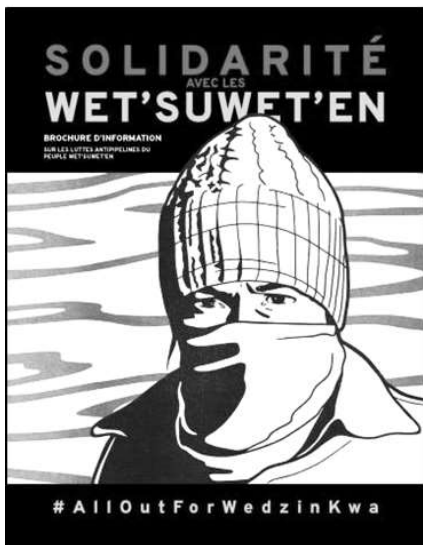
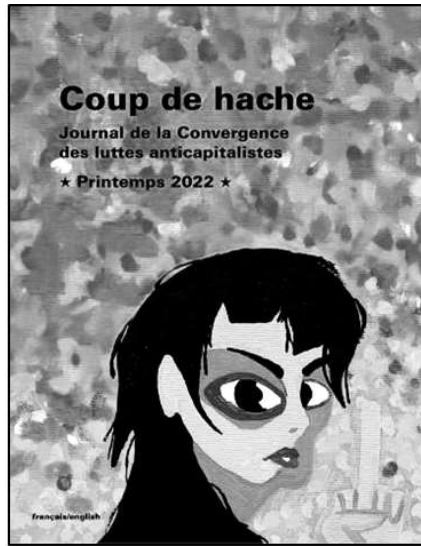
Briefly, could you expand on why we would want a world without prisons?

TC: I think one of the reasons why we would want a world without prisons is because we've realized what a bad experiment that has been, and the links to a system that is actually ultimately very oppressive and how it's the (well, one of the) ends of a strategy, or one of the last point of a strategy, that continuously and systematically targets certain populations. A strategy that has as its goal to ensure the stability and good working order of a system that actually causes a lot of harm, rather than any good. Without going into more details with that, I think is one of the goals why we would like a world without prisons. Another goal that I think most people could relate to is the harm that long term institutionalization does to people. I think most people would agree that being caged for an extended period of time is not a good thing to do to each other. So even at the most basic level of human understanding I think we could all agree on that.



*Our texts, zines, stickers and posters are all **free** and can be downloaded on our website : clac-montreal.net. Physical copies can also be found at the DIRA anarchist library, Centre social Anarchiste l'Achoppe, in the offices of many student unions (AFESH-UQAM, AGECEVM, SOGEECOM, etc.) or in the offices of QPIRG Concordia, and are often distributed during political events such as the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair and smaller zine fairs.*

Autres publications de la CLAC :



I would add two things: one is prison abolition is deeply connected to wanting to live in world where people have what they need and they are not harmed by our way of interacting with each other. And prisons are deeply connected to histories of colonialism in this context, to histories of slavery in the United States, and here. Some of the first people to be held in prisons in Canada were indigenous leaders that were leading uprising against the expansion of the Canadian state. You know, if you look at the history of federal prisons like Stony Mountain, some of the first people in this prison were people that fought against the Canadian state during the North-West rebellion and some of the first wardens and people working in that prison were soldiers who were shipped out west in order to fight that rebellion.

So, there is a very deep history of prisons interacting with colonialism and when we are talking about prison abolition, we're thinking about a world in which colonialism does not exist either. And just seeing prison as one aspect of the oppressive power structures that you mentioned, that really stopped people from being able to access the things they need, and have the kind of relationship that they want to have both to the land and to each other. And then another thing I would add is that that kind of gives you what we mean when we say something like the prison industrial complex, which is a big term that a lot of people and a lot of prison abolitionists use to convey the sense that we are not just talking about the buildings of the prisons themselves. Buildings could close and we would still have an issue with the system.

The prison industrial complex is actually deeply connected to capitalism, it's about the corporations that are making money off of housing people in prison, it's about all the social services that

make a lot of money off of "supporting" people on parole, helping people follow the rules of the IR ankle bracelet program or things like that. Those things are all counted as part of the prison industrial complex, so when we talk about prison abolition we're not just talking about getting rid of the buildings with the walls themselves, we're talking about this much more giant system that make it much more harder to fight in some ways, but also points towards the world that we want to live in and the more positive that we are fighting for.

I could probably add to that, in terms of the way it is thought about, it's not necessarily just "prison abolition" even though the term is enough to start off a conversation. The way you've spoken about it obviously makes us think of a broader penal abolition or punishment abolition as a goal of justice, and of reducing harm and focusing on reparation.



As long as a segment of population have disproportionate power over the rest of us and over resources we need to survive, police will exist to regulate, discipline, and maintain this control. Police violence is no accident, it's a daily threat that cannot be separated from the socio-political context in which it exists.

Austerity measures increase, mechanisms of neo-colonial exploitation become more modernized, surveillance technology are normalized in our constantly gentrifying neighborhoods; it's police that allows it all. It's therefore very important to deepen our understanding of the repression apparatus, its mechanisms, and tools. But it's also important to build alternative methods of dealing with our social problems that don't rely on authority and violence.

We go into all of this in other episodes of The Whole Orchard (Le verger au complet) podcast. You can find it anywhere you listen to your favorite podcasts or directly on <https://www.clac-montreal.net/en/orchard>. We also invite you to share our zines and check out the "Publications" section of our website!

is a group called Opendoor Books which sends books to people in prison. And there is the Black Indigenous Harm Reduction Alliance which last time I checked was doing a fundraising drive to send carepackages in to women who are currently incarcerated in Leclerc provincial prison which is one of a number of prisons that are on the same bloc out in Laval, which is a suburb of Montreal. So yeah, those are the projects I would mention that people could checkout if they are looking to get involved in abolitionist politics in Montreal. Obviously due to the pandemic a lot of groups are on hold or might not get back to you as fast as they normally would, but hopefully things will be able to get going again at some point in the future.

The existence of police, of prisons and the entire carceral system is doing more harm than good to our communities; protecting the rich and the capitalist system while punishing poor and racialized people trying to survive within these confines. If we work together to create alternatives to prisons, we could build stronger and more egalitarian communities that focus on justice and equity rather than revenge and punishment.

The existence of police, of prisons, and of the entire carceral system is doing more harm than good to our communities; protecting the rich and the capitalist system while punishing poor and racialized people trying to survive within these confines. If we work together to create alternatives to prisons, we could build stronger and more egalitarian communities that focus on justice and equity rather than revenge and punishment. Many texts propose ways to deal with harm and conflict via transformative justice and alternatives to calling the police already exist (some of these in so-called Montreal can be found here: <https://cobp.resist.ca/node/22666>).

So if we didn't have prisons, how would we deal with crime?

TC: First of all let's start it this way; we've always been dealing with crime (if we're gonna call it crime), but let's call it harm, because that's more reflective of what we would like to see. We have always been dealing with harm done against us, on us, within our communities, we have many strategies and even in the most gruesome situations we are left to grieve and to move on on our own regardless. And I am not just talking about personal harm, I'm talking about harm from colonialism, work related issues, in every context we have been dealing with harm, so we have the means to deal with harm even though they are not ideal we have been dealing with it. So we could learn from that on how we dealt with the harm that has been done to us and that has never been addressed as a crime or even as something worth rectifying to any real degree. The other thing is that there are ways to figure this out when there is harm being done to each other on an interpersonal level. The way things are done as they stand is that there is one person responsible for the harm and it's punitive and the person needs to be put away for that harm to be addressed and of course, I don't think anybody even on that level is satisfied. Again, I'm gonna go to the basic level of all of us who have gone through the system as victims don't see it as satisfying or reparative in other real ways either.

I would just say that what counts as crime in our society today is telling in terms of what people in power think needs to be addressed in terms of harm. So people who run giant factories where people get injured are often not going to face criminal charges for those actions, even if they knew that the machines that were operating in their factories were unsafe. The corporations that spill oil into the ocean and onto the land they

often don't face any consequences for having done that. Most police officers who are involved in killing people don't face any charges for that. Just to say that a lot of things that we could think of as harm don't count as crimes so there is a big disconnect between the way the legal system defines what counts as a crime versus something that grassroots and people in different communities could define as a harm. And being able to see those differences, see that distinction, can kind of lead you in the direction of what we would do if we did not have prisons, which I think has been less of a conversation in the last six months that what we would do if we did not have police.

I think George Floyd's murder in the United States really brought to the forefront a conversation about what would we do if we didn't have police, and there are a lot of amazing organizations that have been working on giving people answers to that question. Some of the ones that come to mind for me are groups like Critical Resistance, which has also dealt a lot with penal abolition. And a lot of different groups that have operated in different neighborhoods where people haven't been able to call the cops for whatever reason, and if they did, the cops wouldn't come, or in communities where people know that cops are not going to solve their problems. And so they have more grassroots ways for dealing with issues that come up in communities, whether it's around conflict or whether it's about harm.

Yeah, so I think having that distinction is really useful - distinctions between crime and harm is really useful. I think there are many pretty inspiring examples around the world of ways that people have dealt with harm without using punitive measures like prisons. The one we were talking about this mythic example the other day while preparing for this interview, has

obviously and that was inherited from the colonial state that came in from England, since the inception of it although it was brought about as an alternative and a more humane form of punishment in their context, it was consistently opposed by many members of the communities but they were quashed. Their voices has been silenced. And it's a history that has been silenced as well, as if it's a natural thing to want to punish if we're going to be seeking justice in some way. Even in our own minds we don't have to go that far back or that far away to consider a world without prisons, it is close to what was around previous to its existence actually. Not to say that we should bring back torture or those means, but the fact that it has constantly been what the state has distributed as its form of justice and it has always been resisted against. It has never been part of a people's movement to build prisons. It has never been part of what people have wanted in their communities. It has been an imposed state of affairs with very real goals.

So, how to get involved in abolitionist projects?

TC: There are lots of different ways for people to get involved in abolitionists projects in Montreal. I'm sure you are going to talk to a lot of other people for this podcast so people will get a lot of different ideas. Just to name a few different options, there is the Prisoner Correspondence Project which is a pen-pal project, and resource project for queer and trans prisoners and puts them in touch with similar communities on the outside. There's the Anticarceral Group. There is the Certain Days calendar project. If people are looking for educational material and resources, Kersplebedeb Publishing is based in Montreal and has a ton of books both written by prisoners and written about the prison system that people could get to understand things better. There

I will briefly mention a few more abolitionist organizations: there's the Revolutionary abolitionist movement which is currently based in the US that people should check out. There is Critical Resistance which I already mentioned. There's a website called Everyday Abolition that people can check out, it has a lot of strategies people can think about. There is the group Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective, who have popularized the idea of podding which people could look into in terms of practices within friend groups for dealing with conflict and for dealing with harm. Those are some of the organizations and some of the strategies that come to mind when thinking about how we get to a world without prisons and to a world without police.

One last thing I wanted to mention is that I feel like it is very important for people to do prisoner support; that's a really important part of prison abolitionist politics is being in touch with people on the inside. It both shows people who don't have any experience with the prison system how necessary and urgent it is to abolish the prison system. It shows you the depth of what the system actually is, it is not just the walls, it's the social workers on the outside and the halfway houses and the programs that the people get forced into and all kinds of different things like that. I would say that the conversations I've had with people who have done lots of time have very seriously shaped my politics around abolition. Obviously not every single person you are going to be in touch with is going to be into abolition but I certainly think that abolitionist politics necessitate being in touch with people on the inside.

I just wanted to mention that since the inception of prisons as the way we know them there has constantly been resistance to them both from people who work very closely to prisons and prisoners

been told to me as a story about the Zapatistas. I have never been able to find the source of where it comes from so I feel unclear and whether it is actually about the Zapatistas or whether it is about another community that have achieved a high level of autonomy from state structures and is able to experiment with how they deal with harm in their own way. But the story is that there is a community in which someone murdered someone else possibly in the context of a conflict that they were having. And the decision that the community made in terms of what should happen for that person in terms of consequences is that this person ended up living with the family of the person he had killed. Part of that is because, the way the story goes, is that it was a very rural community where people were really dependent on farming for getting their food and access to food for the community and things like that. And The family that had lost a family member needed help with the farming and needed help with getting their food and so the consequence for the person was to live with the family of the person he had killed for a year. I think that gets brought up, we were talking about it as this mythic story as an example of something that can happen, that isn't prison, that isn't punitive, that isn't about punishment, and is about reparation, and is about trying to directly deal with a harm in a way that includes the people who have been harmed in that decision process and in that conversation.

I'm convinced! So now, how do we get there?

TC: I've been thinking about this and I think one thing is to use imagination to look at examples of praxis that has worked, and has not relied on State structures to both define and address harm. I think there is a giant spectrum of things that people are

trying in order to get there and some of them are more collective organizational strategies. There are groups like Critical resistance, which I mentioned who have a lot of things that they've written about non-reformist reforms, which is something they talk about, which looks like refusing to lobby for prisons that aren't double bunked, because that often leads to more prisons getting built, and instead being clear that when you are talking to the government about what you want to see happen, you have to make sure that the end result is resources being pulled away from the prison system as much as possible.

But then there is also things that fall into the category of transformative justice that sometimes look like circle processes, sometime they look like conflict mediation. That whole genre of thing that I think of like communities sitting down and trying to figure out how to deal with conflict and harm themselves, different facilitation strategies people have come up with around that, and different structured processes that people have come up with around that. There are a lot of groups that have done that over the years. Some of the ones I have read the most about that come to mind are Philly Stands Up and Philly's Pissed. I don't think they exist anymore but there are a lot of writing online from them about both supporting people who have caused harm, and what kinds of transformative change you can encourage people to bring about in their own lives when they're willing and they have the right support system. But also about supporting people who have been harmed and what that looks like. There are a lot of black feminist organizations that have done that kind of work in the past. In Montreal, there is the Third Eye collective that has in the last five or ten years done a lot of work around that.

And then there is grassroots conflict mediation stuff which has looked all kinds of ways. There are lots of little groups around the city who are trying to do that kind of things. There is a lot grassroots facilitators who are willing to step in and help with those kind of things with the goals of not involving the police. I will briefly mention more strategies that I think are moving in the direction of abolition: things like public shaming which the #MeToo movement has popularized in the last five years or so. And another is material reparations, which in the United States usually gets talked about as material reparation for people who's ancestors were enslaved, but in Canada I think we can also talk about it as "landback" which is a slogan that has become very popular on the internet in the last few years but has always been a slogan of the anti-colonial movement and indigenous sovereignty movements who are pushing for literally land back, that I would think of as material reparation in the context of the harm caused by colonialism.

