

What is the #OperationPUSH FL prisoner strike?

ON JANUARY 15, MLK DAY, A NETWORK OF PRISONERS AND THEIR ALLIES spread across the state announced the start of Operation PUSH, a “laydown” strike, meaning they would generally refuse to cooperate with the system that is exploiting them based on their criminal convictions. **This effort was aimed at creating pressure on the state prison system that has been denying the basic human dignity of its 97,000 prisoners.**

In short, **prisoners are still subjected to slavery** under the 13th Amendment. Prisoners working full time to run the prison or engage in contracts with county and state agencies are *paid nothing*. Those who work for private contractors *make pennies an hour*. Despite this, **they are price-gouged for goods and services**, often paying 4 - 5 times the amount we pay for basic items on the outside, like ramen noodle soup. On top of that, **they no longer have prospects for release via parole**. So prisoners, many of whom end up there in their youth, spend decades being enslaved and ripped off, and leave with nothing but a \$50 check.

In creating the plan, several prisoners articulated their position in written statements and interviews explaining the goals and intentions of Operation PUSH. **In addition to the above concerns, the Operation PUSH statement included positions on the death penalty, voting rights and pollution from the proposed phosphate mine next to the Lake Butler prison.**

As word spread about Operation PUSH on the outside, activists across the entire country mobilized to support them. Over 160 groups signed on to a statement of support, thousands of leaflets were distributed at MLK events around the state, and hundreds of people joined 1/15 demonstrations in North and South Florida, as well as a 1/16 demonstration at the FDC building in Tallahassee, where the lobby was occupied for 5 hours before police forced people out and arrested a student activist.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Thurs. 2/8 Demo at Gainesville Work (Slave) Camp, 8 - 9 a.m. 700 NE 55th Blvd. Bring drums, banners, bullhorns, etc.

Sat. 2/10 Community Activist Expo, noon - 4 p.m. at the Civic Media Center (CMC), 433 S. Main Street, Gainesville. Community organizations will show case the services they provide and invite volunteers to join.

Tues. 2/13 Tell Alachua County Commissioners to stop using slaves, 9 a.m., 12 SE 1st St, Gainesville. This is a regular meeting to make comment on the County's use of state prison slave labor (public comment is at 9:30 time certain.)

Sat. 2/17 Outreach against Phosphate Mine at Haile Plantation farmer's market. Tell Pritchett family members residing in Haile Plantation that their mining project will poison our watershed and impact prisoners at RMC Lake Butler.

Sun. 2/18 Demo at FL State Prison, 2 - 4 p.m., PUSH solidarity rally against the state's abuse of “strip cells” for torturing activist prisoners. 23916 NW 83rd Avenue, Raiford, FL. Meet at the CMC for caravan, *leaving 1p.m. sharp!*

Mon. 2/19 FAITH (Families Against Injustices That Hurt) rally at Clay County Courthouse against corruption and racism in the justice system, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m., 825 North Orange Avenue, Green Cove Spgs

Fri. 2/23 Dan Berger (scholar, author, activist) speaks on prison, slavery and abolition at CMC, 6 - 8 p.m.

Sat. 2/24 Teach-In on Prisons and Phosphate Mining, at CMC 4 - 6 p.m.

Tues. 2/27 Prisoner Letter Writing Night w/ Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC), 6 - 8 p.m. at CMC

Thurs. 3/1 Humanizing the Incarcerated panel discussion, 12-1 p.m. at UF Law School in Room HOL 285B

Fri. 3/2 Screening of the documentary “The Prison in Twelve Landscapes” 12 - 2 p.m. followed by discussion in Room HOL 285B.

Thurs. 3/8 Back to Tallahassee! Rally at the DOC, march to the State Capitol's Legislative Session, 12 noon.

Gainesville Books to Prisoners pack/ship free books every 2nd, 3rd, 4th Monday at the Pride Center, 3131 NW 13th St, Gainesville. They will also be collecting books in the UF Law School courtyard Feb. 26th & 27th 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. both days.

“We need to shine a light from the outside in on the system.”

— ANONYMOUS OPERATION PUSH PRISONER IN THE PANHANDLE OF FLORIDA

But in the weeks leading up to Jan 15, the FL Dept. of Corrections (DOC, or FDC) began a widespread witchhunt to break up the growing solidarity. By censoring correspondence and shaking down whole units for independent communication (“contraband” cellphones), they sought to slow momentum of the strike. They also began rounding up outspoken prisoners and sending them to other facilities or “close management” units (solitary confinement), where communication access is limited.

Detailed information is only beginning to trickle out, and it has included details of the repression, retaliation and even torture, where prisoners have been placed in “strip cells” (intended by policy for use in prevention of self-harm, but abused widely by FDC). In one example, prisoner-journalist Kevin “Rashid” Johnson was punished for writing an article about PUSH by being placed in a cell with windows jammed open on nights that went below freezing and a toilet that didn't work. In numerous cases, prison organizing was labeled as gang activity, and “Security Threat Investigations” were opened on prisoners, solely based on receiving mail from solidarity groups on the outside.

But we are also hearing from other prisoners, that “90% of their units are continuing to refuse work assignments and commissary spending.” Other prisoners who were not involved in PUSH initially are hearing about all the support they have on the outside and getting active.

The original Operation PUSH statement called on prisoners to stay down for “a month or more.” While we don't know what's to come on the inside, we know it's not over yet. *Join us in keeping the pressure on!*

For More Background, Updates and Details on Upcoming Events:

FIGHTTOXICPRISONS.ORG and SPARC on Facebook



Top right, San Francisco, CA; Above Gainesville, MLK Day; Right, Miami; Below, occupying the FDC office in Tallahassee, FL; Excerpt from a FL prisoner's letter

