

Welcoming Remarks:

Malcolm X Commemoration Committee Annual Dinner Tribute to the Families of our Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War

by Déqui Kioni-Sadiki

Saturday, January 17th, 2015--Welcome to this 19th year of fundraising and paying tribute to the Families of our political prisoners and prisoners of war. On behalf of Herman and Iyalua Ferguson especially, our founding members and our current members, we thank you for being here and for standing in the tradition of Black love, Black resistance, Black family and Black community. Some of y'all have attended this dinner from its inception; some have come and gone and come back; some are here for the first time. Whatever your category, we hope it won't be your last time and that we can count on your continued support until we have no more freedom fighters held captive behind the walls. We also thank Michael Garvey, the 1199 SEIU activists, and the MLK, Jr. Labor Center's staff here today for helping to make this day what it is.

This dinner is a labor of our love in defense of Black resistance, in defense of Sundiata Acoli, Abdul Majid, Mutulu Shakur, Robert Seth Hayes, Jalil Muntaqim, Kamau Sadiki, Mumia, and that other Herman, Herman Bell as he calls himself, for their decades-long sacrifices to the Black freedom struggle. This dinner is our acknowledgement to Mrs. LaBorde and her grandson Suliaman, Mrs. York and Paula York-Jones, Sheila Hays, Theresa and Sharon and Russell Shoatz, Sunni Middleton, Kissay and Pam Sadiki, Kamel Bell, Anochi and Muhammad Odinga and all the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of our political prisoners, so that we don't forget how—some 40-plus years after people stopped talking about Cointelpro's war on Black Liberation and on the Black Panther Party—y'all have been living its consequences and its legacy every day.

This dinner is also about us acknowledging David Gilbert, Tom Manning, Bill Dunne and all those folk who made the conscious choice to align themselves, their families, their lives and freedom with the Black Liberation Movement, as well as remembering the lives and legacies of Dr. Alan Berkman (about whom I've heard on more than one occasion that if folk could just get to him, they would be okay), Marilyn Buck, Albert Nuh Washington, Kuwasi Balagoon, Bashir Hammed, Teddy Jah Heath, Merle and most recently, Phil Africa who have joined the ancestors, what their lives meant to the Black freedom struggle. While we cannot claim to know anywhere near the generations-deep battle scars experienced by the families of our political prisoners and prisoners of war, we share in the collective loss to our community, the attacks on our humanity, and the crushing blows to our fight for justice, for self-determination and liberation, under Cointelpro's war on Black liberation.

This event happens but once a year. So we encourage each of you to support (if you don't already) our political prisoners and their families in other ways the rest of the year. You can find a list of "10 Things You Can Do" in your Program (also see below). Just know that visiting, sending commissary money, and donating funds for legal challenges are [. . .] always needed. Visiting is important because it lets the facility know that our political prisoners and prisoners of war remain connected to the outside world. Your support of this dinner, and your additional contributions for the rest of the year, make the difference between a prisoner being able to buy everything—from toothpaste to soap, toilet paper, food, clothing, sheets, footwear, stamps, paper, pens—and, in some cases, whether they are able to send money home. Someone told me recently that a toiletry costing \$1.74 in 1974 now costs \$3.21. So if we, on the outside, have a hard time making ends meet on our so-called "living wage" salaries, imagine buying the same products at the same or inflated prison-vendor prices when all you earn is the prison labor "salary" of \$.75 to \$1.50 a day.

If you consider visiting, always check with the facility first, as different regulations exist with regard to federal versus state, state to state, as well as prison to prison within a particular state.

These activities—visiting, commissary, etc.—all point to a repeated refrain expressed by Abdul Majid, that "freedom ain't free and it don't come cheap." I would add that captivity ain't cheap either. Thankfully, with this dinner we are able to demonstrate to our political prisoners/prisoners of war and their families that they do not carry the economic hardship that political imprisonment has placed on their lives all by themselves. (We ask that if at any time you plan to send Majid commissary funds that you contact us first so we can let you know the best way to support him monetarily—since the State keeps any monies sent to him through ordinary channels thanks to a lawsuit filed and won against him.)

And so this dinner is important, because it's a time when we come together to honor a particular aspect of the history/herstory of the Black Liberation Movement that is mostly dismissed/ignored/marginalized when people talk about the Black freedom struggle. It's a time when we come together and reflect on where we were, where we are, and where we are going in our work to free our political prisoners/prisoners of war in the here and now—and beyond. It's a time when we can speak the names of our political prisoners and their family members. in a space and time that recognizes our right to dare to struggle for liberation by any means necessary. It's a time—on this particular occasion—when we come together to reflect upon our hard won 2014 victories, like the pending release of Sundiata Acoli, the release of Lynne Stewart, Marshall Eddie Conway, Sekou Kambui, the Cuban 5, Norberto Gonzalez and [. . .] Sekou Odinga; just as it's a time when we consider the losses we suffered with the state-sanctioned murders of Phil Africa and Herman Wallace, the pernicious and repeated parole denials of Herman Bell, Jalil, Seth and Mutulu, and the transfer of eighty-eight year-old Momman Koti into federal custody.

Oppression breeds resistance and so they can't keep us down. We will follow MOVE's lead and stay "onamove" as we "pick up the work" to end the unjust political imprisonment of the remaining sixteen members of the Black Panther Party and all of our political prisoners.

In closing, we called this 2015 dinner "In the Tradition" because it is about our being and staying in a tradition of Black Love, Black resistance, Black family and Black community. Almost two decades ago, Iyaluua created an event that was steeped in the tradition of Black love and Black resistance. Your participation has kept it going in the tradition of Black love, Black resistance and in the tradition of Black family and Black community. We are, with this dinner, continuing to pursue a living example—of resistance as our motto, of culture as our weapon, of education for our liberation, of self-defense and self-determination as our divine right. With that said, please join me in raising a strong Black fist for three generations of radical Black womyn, Iyaluua Ferguson, Amina Baraka and Liza Jessie Peterson and for each and every one of you here today. Thank you for making this Saturday, January 17th 2015, about those captured freedom fighters who couldn't be with us here today, and about the former ones who are!!!!

As Salaam Alaikum!

Free the Land!

Free all u.s. held political prisoners and prisoners of war!

Long live Baba Herman Ferguson!

Peace!

Ten Things YOU Can Do for the Freedom of Political Prisoners

The Freedom of all PPs requires the building of a mass united Movement. To that end here are ten things you can do to contribute to the building of such a Movement:

1. Write to, and if you can, send money to the Political Prisoners. Let them know that you support and care about them. The address of all the Political Prisoners can be found at thejerichomovement.com;

2. Join Jericho &/or one of the other political prisoner support committees such as the ProLibertad, Sundiata Acoli Freedom Campaign, National Committee to Free the Cuban Five, Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition, Family & Friends of Dr. Mutulu Shakur, Sekou Odinga Defense Committee, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, Malcolm X Commemoration Committee;

3. Challenge the myth that Political Prisoners do not exist in the united states—educate your family, friends, co-workers, members of your faith-based community, if you belong to one, about the existence of the Political Prisoners and campaigns for their Freedom;
4. Organize a meeting on Political Prisoners at your home, union hall, faith-based institution, local coffee shop, bar, wherever you regularly hang out;
5. Post information about Political Prisoners on your Facebook page;
6. Send emails, Twitter messages to your friends/
followers calling for the Freedom of Political Prisoners;
7. Even if you didn't vote for them or don't vote, let your elected representatives know that the Freedom of Political Prisoners is one of the issues that you are concerned about. The addresses of all elected officials from the President to the City Council are readily available on the internet;
8. Put up a poster/picture in your home/windows of Political Prisoners;
9. Organize, support, attend rallies, pickets, demonstrations calling for the Freedom of Political Prisoners;
10. Be Creative! Be Creative!