

Wildfires will begin

An interview with Toby Shone

Toby Shone, Elizabeth Vasileva

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The former political prisoner talks about his anarchism, the 325 project and resisting the physical and mental jails that surround us all.

~ Interviewed by Elizabeth Vasileva ~

You recently spoke about the importance of solidarity and connections, between prisoners and with their supporters on the outside. Can you give us any examples of this kind of mutual or collective empowerment in the pushback against prison's continuous repression?

Shortly before I was released in 2024, violent cell searches by a tactical unit of prison guards known as the National Search Team took place on C-wing of HMP Garth in Leyland, where I was being held. The NST took over the wing with dogs and riot gear. Cell by cell the raid took place with a lot of pointlessly brutal drama. In ones and twos we were handcuffed and placed in a locked wet room. Some prisoners were beaten, abused and a lot of our things were trashed. Some of the guys fought back, flooded their cells, banged their doors or played music really loud as a protest. The next day the whole wing refused to go back into their cells after the early morning unlock hour. As a cacophonous and unruly mob we demanded the immediate return of seized items, the replacement of damaged items and denounced the violence. This led to the screws backing off. There was nothing at that moment that the screws could do because we all acted together, and without any leader. At the end of the lunch period, the stop-out ended.

Similar things happened in my experience when one of the prisoners was killed by depression or hopelessness. Demonstrations outside the prisons where I was held also were a strong experience that had an impact upon the guards and us. Especially when the fireworks exploded across the night sky and the comrades outside were militant. I found other prisoners to be generally supportive of each other in the roughly anti-system and criminal environment. Whenever I was transferred or moved to a different cell, the local guys usually would come to check if I was okay and if I needed anything. I helped other guys with their legal cases or prison admin, and tried to find common points of interest and subversion. We'd try to back each other, and if I had some problem, the guys would be voicing their demands too. There's refusals and kick-offs being made in most of the prisons around the country each day about conditions and treatment. I lost track of the number of prison labour refusals and walkouts I heard about when I was inside, they are

very common, as is getting on the netting that separates the landings to protest about treatment and poor conditions.

When I heard that comrades outside were carrying out revolutionary solidarity, that is when I felt our power inside the prison, I can say. From hearing about the direct actions with the Adream case in Chile, France, Italy, Indonesia and around the world, to the phone-call interventions that I was able to make from inside prison to meetings of comrades on the outside, I could feel the warmth from the comrades. Also knowing about the censored letters and books, the solidarity funds and benefit events, it was great.

For readers who don't know 325, what can you tell us about the project and its content?

325 is an anarchist network of counter-information and direct action. In November 2020, Dutch counter-terrorist police took down the nostate.net server which held the 325 website, upon request from their German and English colleagues. The website was a long-running information clearing house of general news, reports, communiques, publications, event listings, etc. Mostly the website covered Europe, Latin America and South East Asia. 325 is also a hard-copy magazine which comes out on an intermittent basis, and dozens of publications have been published by the collective, including the newsletter Dark Nights, which has its own website.

Over the years, 325 has participated in an evolving participatory international network based on direct action and the support of prisoners, as well as providing space for various tendencies of anarchist, anti-capitalist and anti-civilisation groups. In recent issues of the magazine the analysis has shifted slightly to the profound new industrial changes in production and technology, such as artificial intelligence, life sciences and automation. The archive of the 325 site is an important document of social and armed revolutionary struggle over a number of years in Europe and internationally. The project started in 2003 and continues.

I first saw the term 'anti-psychiatry' in 325. There is a lot to say about the intersections of this agenda with anarchism, but you could also just tell us about why at the time you thought it was important to bring it forward.

It was a collective decision that was formed from different influences on the early group in Brighton. I can mention our experience of altered states of consciousness and the shattering of imposed social conditioning. Some of our original group had experience of psychiatric/psychological controls and secure units, and we were all interested in the use of psychoanalysis for political repression, the work of Wilhelm Reich, R D Laing, the Socialist Patients Collective (Sozialistisches Patientenkollektiv – SPK), and anarchist analysis of the relationship of the individual to post-industrial society.

Our comrade from Switzerland, who took part in an early anti-civilisation network in Europe in the 2000s, wrote the anti-psychiatry manifesto *Reclaim Your Mind: An Urgent Message for all those who have or are in danger of being labelled mentally ill*, which features in the first 325 magazine. Whilst there have been some different perspectives on this manifesto in the collective over the years, overall the position taken is that society drives pathology, medicalisation is ultimately harmful, as is incarceration. At the Anti-repression gathering organised by the Anarchist Black Cross at the Cowley Club in Brighton last March, a comrade from Sweden described how comrades are being placed into psychiatric care rather than prison by the authorities, thereby trying to de-politicise their cases in the spotlight of the public arena and forcing them into medical 'treatment' for their anarchist ideas.

It was a tactic that the National Security Team and the Counter-Terrorist Police tried to apply to me during my incarceration and when I was released under controls. It is very important to bring this forward as these kinds of controls are being used routinely by these agencies, and they will seek to apply this to anarchists and the radical left where they can.

Legislation is continuously narrowing the scope for non-violent expression of discontent, with harsher sentences for mass- or even small-group disruption, and police powers to disperse non-violent crowds. While Climate Camp organisers were pre-emptively raided, the far right attacks last summer were not foiled. How come the British state is so obsessed with the crumbs of resistance from below in the middle of a global fascist takeover?

Well, we can never underestimate the smallest expression of dissent and rebellion, they all have power. If the regime doesn't suppress the sparks, the wildfires will begin. Even if I disagree with the positions of the bureaucratic part of most of these groups, it gives me pleasure to see their successes and I want to see it escalate into a revolutionary movement. Any protests that are effective will meet repression. From prison I saw on TV the escalation of property destruction against arms companies dealing to Israel during the ongoing Gaza genocide, the shutdowns of the motorways and destruction of Barclays Banks. The radical left, ecologists and anarchists are basically the only opposition in the UK.

Since it was wrong-footed by June 18th Global Day of Action in 1999, when the London Met were surprised by multi-million pound damage anti-capitalist riots, the state has made it its goal to manipulate and dead-end the social movement. The question of tactics and energy inside the movement, of small group actions and of mass protests that could have the capacity to pose a real danger to national security through creating situations that are out of the control of anyone—that requires our willingness to organise and link our struggles, that's our challenge. If we want a revolution, that will require continuous subversion and insurrection. This system is invested in war, murder and genocide, it's not going to be stopped by voting or protests alone. The British state has always been part of the global fascist takeover, the regime is constantly preparing for urban riots, acts of terror, individual and mass revolts. The comrades who often form part of the underground groups, they usually come through the social movement, and so the state will invest a lot of time and energy into looking into who forms part of these movements and which directions these movements are taking.

The British left seems so divided over internal issues, accelerating burnout and further fragmentation. How do you think we can build solidarity effectively and support each other, inside or outside the criminal penal system?

I don't consider myself part of the British left, nor do the comrades in our circle. Leftism is part of the electioneering circus, and has capitulated to the mass media and corporations, to militarism, high-technologies, trans-humanism, nuclear energy, statism. That being said, I don't think you're speaking about this. Our group withdrew from the social movement in 2011 and took a nihilistic position, we are only active in our groups and not in the social centres or the activist campaigns.

That's another conversation, but from what we have been through, essentially; stop pointlessly fighting with each other over toxic issues and excluding each other. Understand how the system constantly recuperates and infiltrates our anarchism. Learn to communicate with each other. Learn from your interactions with each other. Learn to value your time and that of others. Share skills, time, energy and money, if you can, with real projects that need support. Learn to

give criticism and to receive it. Learn to sever ties and forge them. If you cannot work well with others, work alone. Put your ideas into practice. This will strengthen our space. If you are part of a group or not, you can write to prisoners, support their campaigns and maintain an interest in the anti-prison topic. Meet face-to-face and do things in the streets if you are able. Make links in the local area and if you are active on other issues, remember those who end up behind bars, it could be you. If you have the capabilities, help do admin or organise demos, cooking, putting people up, flyposting, graffiti, leaflets, zines, stickers, night time excursions. Don't think that other people are going to do it for you, do it yourself.

If you can't do any of those things, live your life in the most beautiful and free way you can, and don't give up on your dreams. Let's take part in and build a real culture of resistance and mutual aid.

What is the most effective way to show solidarity and support people who are in prison or have recently come out of it? What did you find most helpful?

The revolutionary action, this is the most important way to support people inside. This is the first principle. Directly freeing the prisoners and carrying out the anti-state and anti-capitalist struggle.

Second are the material conditions of imprisonment. It costs money to fight legal cases, pay for food and provisions, pay for visits, travel to the prison, arrange the situation of the life left behind outside etc. This can't be done by the prisoner at all. It needs a collective effort. When prisoners are released they continue to need support with housing, money, travel, food and so on. Police, probation and the parole board have more power over an individual if they do not have support from their close ones or the movement. On release I was helped a great deal by my comrades who provided me with money, a vehicle, housing, clothes etc.

Third is the solidarity campaign and raising awareness to large numbers of people. This campaigning must include also making sure that the imprisoned know about what is happening on the outside and putting pressure on the prison administration, or any private companies involved. When I was locked up, I was not able to receive much news, due to the censorship I was imposed with, but whenever I heard about a demo or a solidarity action it always provided me with a lot of strength, and to be able to speak about it with the other guys enabled me to show practically that the anarchists exist.

We have to prepare for larger numbers of us going to prison, I read that currently there are dozens of prisoners from the social movement—climate change and Palestinian solidarity. They are facing the same or similar conditions I was imposed with, through the terrorism schedules and Counter Terror Police investigations. In my case I was not even sentenced for any terror charges but I was still held under an anti-terrorist regime and there was nothing really that either the lawyers or the movement could do about that. This situation is not going to get better unless we are active and create a stronger tendency of struggle. Currently the anarchist movement in the UK is not able to provide adequate support to its prisoners. The solidarity action groups are almost non-existent. There needs to be a real effort to connect the struggles of all of us who are targeted by the prison and criminal-justice system.

You spoke about abolishing prisons in your talk and the horrendous living conditions inside. Do you think that is one of the main areas anarchists should be focusing on? What are the important battles for our movement in the next few years?

Everyone will have different areas they want to concentrate on, but yes, I think that the anti-prison topic is an important intermediate struggle that has the capacity to not only create

significant damage to bourgeois society, national security and the police-state, but create experience in confronting very difficult issues and finding allies in working class communities. Prison has a clear racial and class basis and at the moment the prison system is breaking, the situation is not going to be resolved any time soon either. A start could be the fight against prison labour and the construction of new prisons. As anarchists, we don't want to simply abolish prisons, but destroy the state itself, in this case an old decaying post-Imperial regime that is determined to never relinquish its power. So, I'm in favour of any actions and campaigns from the radical left and the anarchists that strike it.

The social movement has been largely active on the same issues for years with little success, most of the battles we face now, we will still face in the future, but it is made more bitter by the neo-fascist atmosphere and the new technologies. The important social battles I see coming all pertain to poverty and exploitation, and are the results of the new asymmetric state of war, technocratic capital, rising artificial intelligence and the ecological collapse. I think that nothing should be taken for granted. We live in a changing world and the resurgence of internationalist struggle and the next generation of social war is what I am placing a bet on.

Thank you for your time.

Strength to everyone. For a black international.

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<https://freedomnews.org.uk/2025/06/01/wildfires-will-begin-an-interview-with-toby-shone/>

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