

INTRODUCTION FROM THE ISSUE EDITORS

Resistance at the Carceral Precipice

Justin Piché and Kevin Walby

Shortly after we first got involved in the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (JPP) two decades ago as Book Review Editor and Prisoners' Struggles Editor respectively, publication co-founder and then Editor-in-Chief Bob Gaucher (2007) published his last issue – Volume 16, Number 2 – that featured an introduction entitled “Carceral Universals”. In the opening paragraph of his piece, which reflected on trends observed during his involvement with prisons in various capacities then amounting 45 years and over the course of the life of the journal, founded in 1988, Gaucher made note of the expansion and proliferation of carceral control within and beyond the punitive injustice system, which he termed “the universal carceral” (Gaucher, 2007, p. 1). For him, this development was characterized by “coercive powers of western democratic states... invading private spheres of family and everyday social life” and “[t]he coercive management of political dissent and class struggle, exemplified in mass imprisonment”, which “has been further legitimated by heightened rhetoric on national security and immigration” (ibid). A “global phenomenon, reflecting the fragility of social order and the authority of ruling elites in the 21st century”, Gaucher argued that “the universal carceral is represented in the displaced, brutalized and interned populations produced by civil wars, foreign occupations, and natural disasters”, with one example being the emergence of “new forms of carceral control” used “in the confinement of the Palestinian People” (ibid).

While the words above were written in the form of a diagnosis of a plague of carceral control that characterized much of the first decade of this century amid a global ‘war on terror’ led by the United States following the events of 11 September 2001 (see Piché & Larsen, 2010), today they read as prophetic descriptors of events in the recent past and those that continue to unfold at present amid burgeoning authoritarian rule. In contemporary times, cruel and inhumane, yet increasingly usual and normalized forms of carceral violence are openly deployed and unapologetically unleashed by fascist leaders that, unlike their so-called liberal counterparts, are unconcerned with manufacturing consent through mystification that casts the expansion of their internal and external acts of war as something else.

Nowhere is this more evident right now than in the United States where, in his pursuit to “Make America Great Again”, Republican President

Donald Trump is making a full fascist turn toward centralizing power and government administration (Carpenter, forthcoming). Like past self-styled strongmen in office, President Trump's fascism relies domestically on the further entrenchment of surveillance, policing, containment and disposability. For instance, under President Trump the capacity of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has grown exponentially, expanding its capability to terrorize, detain, and deport racialized and working class people from the Global South. Those protesting and organizing against mass detention and deportation in American cities, ones that are usually represented by Democrats, have also been attacked by ICE, who are often supported by National Guard troops.

Facilitated by a version of Israel's Pegasus software that was developed to track Palestinians before and during the genocidal assault on Gaza, ICE regularly hacks phones and computers to geolocate the precise whereabouts of their targets (Kirchgaessner, 2025). Rounded up by ICE amid this racialized war on immigrants and their supporters, thousands of people have been sent to detention centres dotting the American landscape such as the newly built "Alligator Alcatraz" situated on Florida swampland that has been the subject of multiple civil rights and human rights lawsuits seeking its closure (Schneider, 2025). Others have been disappeared through deportation to sites located elsewhere in the world like Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo (CECOT) – known in English as the "Terrorism Confinement Center" – in El Salvador. CECOT is a site that blends 'war on terror' inspired indefinite detention with forced labour. Perhaps the most intimidating and iconic example of this rise of authoritarian rule, CECOT is a site of confinement where torture occurs (Human Rights Watch, 2025). Similar to the darkest practices of 19th and 20th century carceral institutions, purveyors of authoritarian rule are instituting regimes of confinement reminiscent of a time and space without rights, without liberties, of elite domination and supremacy, which El Salvador President Nayib Bukele seeks to export elsewhere in Central and South America (Ioanes, 2024; Freeman, 2023). Indicative of the fascist moment in which we live, 60 Minutes – celebrated by its broadcaster CBS (2026) for "its hard-hitting investigative reports, newsmaker interview, and in-depth profiles" that have made it "the most successful broadcast in television history, marking 51 consecutive years as America's #1 news program" – recently 'postponed' a planned segment on CECOT and its entanglements with the Trump administration. CBS news chief Bari Weiss

justified the decision noting that further efforts were needed to get American government officials on record before airing the segment even though they had previously declined the opportunity to comment on the story (see PBS, 2025). Following public backlash, the episode eventually aired weeks later.

Although authoritarian rule is much more pronounced and openly on display in the United States, as we write from Canada it is clear that our country is not immune to these trends. For instance, amid President Trump making claims that Canada was a central vector of fentanyl exportation to the United States amid repeated calls for our country to become “the 51st state”, the Canadian government expanded its bordering and policing capacity through the acquisition of new equipment, as well as committing to hire 1,000 more border agents and 1,000 more federal police officers, in the name of drug interdiction and border security to placate the current American administration (see Government of Canada, 2025).

With this said, the current Government of Canada under Prime Minister Mark Carney has not needed foreign pressure to enact repressive measures. For instance, in a context where already more than three-quarters of people held in provincial and territorial prisons are presumed innocent and awaiting their day in court (Statistics Canada, 2025) and with the leaders of the provinces and territories calling for more restrictions on bail (see, for example, Prime Minister of Canada, 2025) in the wake of horrific acts of violence in which the accused were under some form of community supervision, it has tabled the *Bail and Sentencing Reform Act*. Justice Minister Sean Fraser has tabled the legislation in a stated effort to “make bail harder to get while also toughening sentencing laws for repeat and violent offenders” (Justice Canada, 2025), constitutional rights to the presumption of innocence and a lack of supporting evidence for the new bill be damned. Meanwhile, the provinces and territories have earmarked billions to expand their capacity to jail people by thousands of beds in the coming years (see Kyne & Piché, forthcoming).

Another way that this authoritarian tendency is deepening is through the erection of new sites of human caging in the name of providing compassionate care and addressing public unease associated with an increase in the number of people who use drugs and/or are living with mental health conditions while unhoused on the streets or in encampments amid a housing crisis. For instance, the Government of Manitoba led by Premier Wab Kinew from the supposedly leftist New Democratic Party (NDP) has moved away from

harm reduction and embraced punishment masquerading as care through the introduction of the *Protective Detention and Care of Intoxicated Persons Act*, which will allow authorities to involuntarily detain people suspected of being intoxicated for up to 72 hours. Another NDP provincial government in British Columbia, led by Premier David Eby, has also been involved in the business of “involuntary care”, creating spaces within existing jails like the “10 beds... available now in the segregation unit” of the Surrey Pretrial Centre in the Vancouver suburb of Surrey (BC Gov News, 2025a) and adjacent to them such as 18 beds at Alouette Homes, a mental health facility located next to the Alouette Correctional Centre for Women in Maple Ridge.

Pierre Poilievre, the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada and the official opposition in the Parliament of Canada, has advocated for all these regressive measures and has promised to go even further if his party were to form government and he were to become Prime Minister of Canada down the road. To score political points and appease his conservative base, Poilievre has argued that the Liberals are causing a “crime wave” across the country (CPAC, 2024) that requires ‘tougher’ laws and punishments. To this end, Poilievre has called for “jail, not bail” (CTV News 2023), mandatory minimum sentences for all kinds of transgressions (Perrin, 2024), and coerced drug treatment (Canadian Press, 2024). Speaking to his authoritarian impulses, Poilievre has also said that if in power he would use the notwithstanding clause to override the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* when passing ‘tough on crime’ legislation to prevent new laws from being struck down by the courts for violating constitutional rights (Major & Parry, 2024).

With the carceralization of various spheres of social life becoming further entrenched, corporate involvement in carceral control continues to grow, including through the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in the categorization and targeting of so-called threats by intelligence, policing, and military agencies from the streets of US and Canadian cities to those in Gaza and beyond. It is claimed that these systems are scientific, but research is finding that these processes and technologies are full of biases, leading to a new paradigm of profiling (Miller, 2024; Nicoletti & Bass, 2023). Companies like Axon have transitioned from selling weapons to state authorities toward selling the information systems that facilitate the exercise of carceral power (Gates, 2025). Technology corporations are also engaging in a new enclosure movement to obtain not land but water, because the data centres required to fuel our AI boom consume vast amounts of

water and lead to ecological disaster wherever they appear (Gorey, 2025; Montpetit & Brend, 2025). If this trend continues whereby water necessary to sustain life is increasingly diverted to fuel technological advancement, it would not be difficult to envision a surge in uprisings. Not to worry though as oligarch and Silicon Valley techbro Elon Musk has a solution: “Give everyone a Tesla Optimus robot—not to help fold laundry, but to quietly shadow you and make sure you don’t commit crimes. That’s it. No prison bars, just persistent, AI-powered accountability” (Mancini, 2025).

Today, more and more people are experiencing “carceral universals” (Gaucher, 2007, p. 3), that is common experiences of being subject to imprisonment such as isolation, domination, dehumanization, degradation and destruction. Yet there are also the carceral universals of resistance and “survival in extreme situations” (ibid, p. 2). As such, while many have reached the carceral precipice, whether we collectively go over the cliff and fall into the abyss remains to be seen and will depend on struggle. At this moment where the universal carceral is becoming more entrenched, it is critical to read and learn from with the insights of the criminalized and otherwise illegalized people who are imprisoned that are often the first to be subject to and resist the latest carceral control trends before they are either exported beyond cages in support of ruling elites or sabotaged and destroyed to our collective benefit. If they can “find the strength to continue to struggle and engage the world that has cast them into perdition” (ibid, p. 5), those of us presently beyond the walls must organize in solidarity with them to work towards our shared liberation or we lose our own humanity and run the risk of being next.

THIS ISSUE

This issue of the *JPP* features dispatches from the universal carceral. In “Tough on Crime: What is the Reality of New Zealand’s ‘Crime Problem’ and Life Behind the Wire”, Joseph Tupou draws on his own experience and interviews with imprisoned people to explore how prison policies and practices enacted in the name of community safety foster social harm. He critiques the ‘tough on crime’ policies of New Zealand and argues that these will cause more harm in the long term. Writing from the United States, Eric Elliott’s piece “Mandatory Transfer + Life Without Parole = Death by Incarceration” examines the brutality of serving a life sentence beginning in childhood and

what alternatives could be pursued to holding young people accountable for their actions in ways that do not extinguish their futures. He looks at restorative justice and alternatives to incarceration as possible pathways forward. In “BOP Officers Higher ‘Degrees’”, Randall Morris describes how imprisoned people in Texas encounter barriers to acquiring educational degrees, including lack of funding, yet are subject to “higher degrees” nonetheless through doing time in crowded prisons in deadly summer heat. In contrast, Lindamarie Olson, David Hubbard, J.D. Williams, Bailey Wester, Noah Fuller, D’Niya Fleming and Amy McLean explore how education initiatives can provide opportunities for healing even in prison in their piece “The Creation of a Collaborative, Mutually Informed Trauma and Mental Health Course for Incarcerated Populations”. They focus on the importance of addressing trauma and providing access to mental health supports. In a similar vein, the *Response* by Matthew Feeney entitled “Why Not?” explores how educational pursuits – from reading a book to pursuing university degrees – offer a hope and a reason to live in settings erected to extinguish life.

The back end of this journal issue features a “Dialogue on Argentinian Prisons”, featuring the insights of current and former prisoners involved in *Tumbergencia*, a publication which documents the socio-politics and experiences of incarceration, as well as struggles for human rights within the prisons of Argentina. In the *Prisoners’ Struggles* section, Myles Frederick McClellan outlines the work of Miscarriage of Justice Canada in supporting those who have been wrongly convicted. Following *Book Reviews* by David Dorson, Christopher Santiago and Lucas Ridgeway, this issue of the *JPP* concludes with descriptions of “Cyclone” and “Criminology Mixology”, which are the two pieces of artwork that bookend this volume that captures the pathways into and the chaos that characterize contemporary life behind and beyond prison walls.

As we conclude this piece some twenty years into our journey with the *JPP*, we express our sincere hope that the journal will not have to exist twenty years from now. May the fascists and the so-called centrist proponents and operatives of various forms of carceral control, including imprisonment, lose. May the obsolete institution and practice of imprisonment (Davis, 2003) become a painful memory, not a contemporary fixture of social life. But until that day, we will continue to facilitate prison writing as resistance (Gaucher, 2002; also see Piché et al., 2014).

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