

Jail Support: MOC Spain Experience

Movement of Conscientious Objection in the Basque Country (KEM-MOC)

The experience of MOC (Movimiento de Objeción de Conciencia) in helping people in prison is based on the civil disobedience campaign against obligatory military service (the campaign of insumisión, 1971-2002) in which thousands of insumisos were jailed. During this period, various ways of supporting prisoners were suggested and tried. One of the most valued, without a doubt, were the 'support groups'.

Let's imagine a concrete case to illustrate how these groups function. Bixente Desobediente is an insumiso who will have to serve a sentence of 2 years, 4 months, and 1 day. He needs to convene a meeting with people close to him (family, friends) plus someone from the movement. The first meeting is attended by his girlfriend, his sister, three friends from the neighbourhood, a university pal, a cousin, a guy he met

at an anti-militarism discussion group, and a neighbour. This group reviews his decision to be an insumiso, discussing his motives and the consequences it could bring. As not all of those attending understand concepts like civil disobedience, nonviolence, direct action, and antimilitarism, the group looks at these too. In the following meetings, they establish goals. After much brainstorming and discussion, they come up with the following objectives:

Emotional Support

Supporting Bixente emotionally is important during his time before his trial, in court itself, and in prison. One suggestion is hiring a bus so that everybody who wants can go to court and witness the trial. Other suggestions are visiting Bixente in prison and encouraging others to write letters. The idea is that he should not feel alone and should have continual contact with supportive friends. This support should also extend to those close to him, such as his parents.



SYMBOLIC JAIL ESCAPE. PHOTO: SIMO HELLSTEN

Logistical Support

Both before his trial and in prison, Bixente will need material support. Before his trial, he goes into hiding to avoid arrest and pre-trial detention, so people need to bring his things from his previous residence to his current location so that he is not caught. In prison, he needs books and paper to continue his studies. This is also work of the support group.

Political Work

The MOC, the movement to which Bixente belongs, is in charge of the political work. However, the support group can collaborate with this work, joining in protest actions organised by MOC, especially those connected with his trial and imprisonment. At the same time, the support group can reach out politically in the places that Bixente is known (such as his neighbourhood and university) to maximise the benefit provided by the disobedience of Bixente and other prisoners. The support group can also put together an email list to inform people about his case and a Website with information about Bixente's case, antimilitarism, war tax resistance to military spending, peace education, and related links. Every now and then, Bixente can write a letter that can be circulated. The support group should coordinate with the MOC (for instance, having a member attend MOC meetings) and check that its actions are in line with the MOC's overall campaign.

Support groups are a great help, not only for the prisoner, but also for the MOC. They share the work and serve as entry points for people to join the movement. Coordination between the political group, the support group, and with the prisoner is essential. Stable, frequent communication is important. The political criteria come from the political movement, not from the prison; however, visits to the prison by members of both groups is important for developing and coordinating the political work.

Action Evaluation

Evaluation allows us to learn from our experiences. Usually people informally evaluate an event, be it through personal reflections, talking with friends, or meeting with a group of core organisers ('leaders'). What we propose here, however, is a structure for feeding back lessons from an event. Rather than leaving evaluation to chance or confining it to an elite, it should be set up as a planned and collective activity that values the input of people who have played different roles, who bring different kinds of experience, and who have different levels of commitment. Preferably everyone who participated in an action or in organising an event should be encouraged to take part in evaluating it.

When evaluations are a regular part of our work, we have a chance for honest feedback on the process and content of the work and a way to improve in