

Anti-State STL

A clearinghouse for anti-capitalist news & analyses in metro St. Louis

Noise Demonstration in Solidarity with Hunger Strike at Menard Correctional in Illinois

by ANTI-STATE STL on 2015/09/28



On September 23rd, prisoners in the administrative detention unit at Menard Correctional Center in Chester, Illinois declared a hunger strike in response to the administration's continued unwillingness to respond to their demands for relief from their conditions of long-term solitary confinement. See below for their list of demands and description of their conditions. This strike is a continuation of a series of hunger strikes by the prisoners there, [which began in January 2014](#).

On the first day of the hunger strike, about 25 of us converged on Menard Correctional Center in Chester, Illinois from multiple cities with music and drums, yelling and banging pots and pans to make noise for

those inside to hear us standing with them. In response, prisoners banged on the walls of their cages and screamed back through shuttered windows "Freedom," "We hear you," "No More A-D" [Administrative Detention] and "Hunger Strike." With our voices hoarse, we returned home with our networks on the outside stronger and, we hope, our connection to those inside stronger as well.

The separation between prison and the outside must blur more and more, especially if there are some of us who might someday find ourselves inside such cages. The noise demonstration—a tactic that is employed by anarchists and radicals all across the world—is a direct form of communication that helps to slightly break the physical barriers of prison down in the way that allows us to actually hear and sometimes see each other. For anyone who has ever been locked up in prison or jail and all the confusion it entails, just to see a face or a hear a friendly voice to break through the isolation is enough to boost spirits.

This tactic does not just need to be employed in prisons in rural areas like Menard, but also be taken to the jails in our towns and cities; often a worse experience for those of us who have no money for bail, are either forced to plea out or have to wait years to even be tried. Making contact and hearing the hunger strikers voices was a powerful thing, but we cannot delude ourselves on the back to think it's enough. Such events must become more common, as well as some creative and innovative explorations of other more direct communication methods inside prisons, in addition to making contact through writing to prisoners or calling-in to prison authorities.

We do not yet have updated information about the hunger strike at Menard, but when we do we will post an update. In the meantime we encourage everyone to take action in solidarity with the comrades locked down in horrible conditions and doing all they can to resist.

The following information is drawn from letters received in September 2015 from prisoners in Administrative Detention at Menard:

Here in A.D., everything is still the same. No one is being released and we are still not getting meaningful hearings. We are still not getting any written reasons or any new info[r]mation] relied on for the basis of the Committee's decision for our continued placement in A.D. We are still getting the same vague memos.

We now only get 1 day a week of out-of-cell exercise (yard). We are in our cells 24 hrs. a day, 6 days a week. We are being excessively confined in our cells. We are still not allowed to participate in any educational programs. Our mail is not being picked up or passed out 5 days a week, as they are supposed to.

Our core demands are:

- We demand an end to long term solitary confinement.
- We demand minimum due process at Administrative Detention Review Hearings by providing inmates with written reasons, including new information relied upon, for Committee's decision for our continued placement in A.D. and be allowed to grieve all adverse decisions. As it stands, the basis of the Committee's votes are kept secret.
- We demand more access to outside recreation for the sake of our physical and mental health. As it stands, we are confined indefinitely to these cages for 6 days out of the week, with the exception of one 5-hour day. This is unbearable.
- We demand that meaningful educational programs be implemented to encourage our mental stability, rehabilitation, and social development for the sake of ourselves and our communities that we will one day return to.
- We demand access to more visiting privileges. For most of our families traveling to Menard is like traveling to another state. Considering the distance, 2-hour visits behind plexiglass is insufficient. We should be allowed 5 or 6 hours. Moreover, our family members, including inmates, should be provided the human dignity and decency to purchase food items and refreshments from vending machines after traveling such great distances. This would benefit one's social development, as well as benefit prison staff environment.

We ask the public's help by calling the warden, the Director of the Illinois Department of Corrections, and the Governor on September 23, 2015, and so forth, to check on our welfare.

Warden Kimberly Butler, 618-826-5071
Menard Correctional Center
711 Kaskaskia Street
Menard, IL 62259

Director John Baldwin, 217-558-2200
Illinois Department of Corrections
1301 Concordia Court
P. O. Box 19277
Springfield, IL 62794-9277

Governor Bruce Rauner, 217-782-0244
Office of the Governor
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

We will stay on [hunger strike] as long as possible in order to hopefully bring some change to our conditions. We thank you for any kind of support you can give us.

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