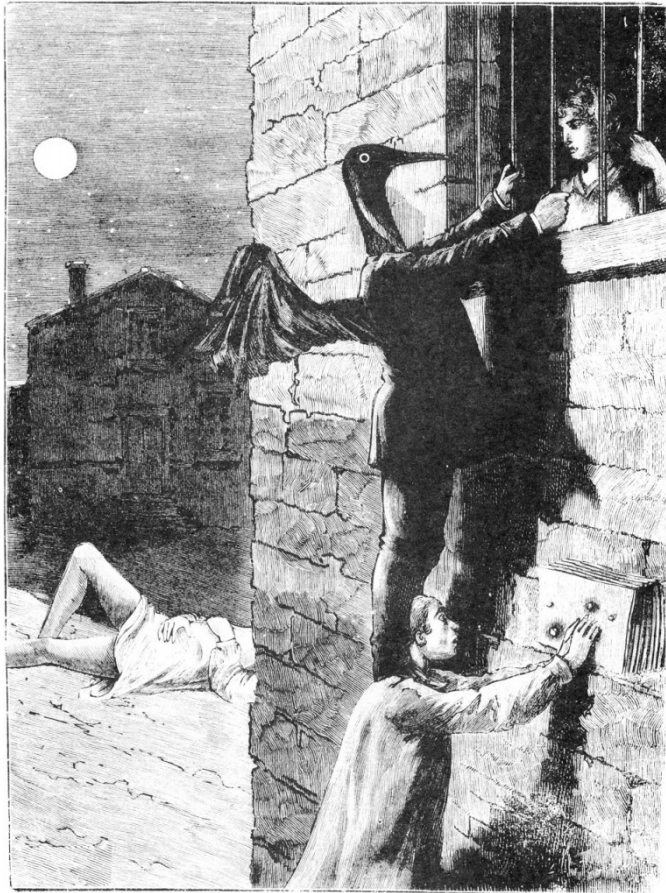


Anti-State STL

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

Update from Menard Hunger Strikers

by ANTI-STATE STL on 2015/10/07



front of the prison. . . . Even though we can't see them due to the covers that were placed on our windows, we were able to hear them. We were threatened by the major, lieutenant and staff members that if we said or yelled out anything to them they were going to write us tickets and 'give us something to yell about.' Officers were outside hollering to our supporters, telling them that it was all lies and we were not on hunger strike. Some of us yelled out and told our supporters that we are on strike and we started making noise to assure our supporters we were here and on hunger strike."

"I do thank all of you for your unwavering and continued support throughout all of our challenges. Hearing the drums and chants lifted my spirits immensely! I sincerely cannot thank you all enough!"

"We heard and saw the rebel protesters bringing the noise! That was love and most definitely an affirmation of our humanity and may have even helped the warden to see us more clearer – as human beings."

Repression: "They hate it when our humanity is affirmed in any way."

"They (officers) came and searched a cell to just make a mess and try to intimidate us."

"The hunger strike wasn't official until we denied our food. So once that was made official, they sent . . . [correctional officers] to intimidate and search our cell and remove all food item and toothpaste. . . . They were throwing away other things that had nothing to do

The hunger strike at Menard Correctional Center lasted 6 days, from September 23-September 28. Twenty-one prisoners participated. It seems like the administration has begun to cave to some of the strikers' demands. The disciplinary reports filed during the strike have all been cleared from the prisoners' records. However, they are still facing some amount of repression for their act, and a lot of their demands were ignored. The following is a compilation of letters that people have received from the hunger strikers inside of the Menard. Thanks to all those whose work to maintain lines of communication with these prison rebels made this update possible.

Support From the Outside: "We heard them loud and clear!"

Day 1 began at 8:00 am when protesters from St. Louis and Chicago "came beating and banging instruments . . . chanting 'End Administrative Detention'; 'Our Passion For Freedom Is Stronger Than Their Prison!!' And at around 4:00 pm, the protesters returned, 'bringing more noise and love!'"

"We heard them loud and clear. We hope they heard us too. We didn't yell as much as we wanted because they sent [correctional officers] to the wings and catch guys yelling and write them up, trying to silence us. But that did not stop anything, and won't."

"Our supporters from our last hunger strike showed up in

Two guys were moved to segregation. The officers found a sheet that the prisoners were using as a clothes line to hang wet clothes on and to exercise with as a jump rope. "Now in retaliation to us doing what we're doing, they are saying that the 2 prisoners in that cell were trying to use this line to escape! They . . . placed them in an escapee cell, which is completely sealed up with steel, no windows or any opening to look out . . . They took all their belongings. They have nothing with them, not even hygiene items. . . Officers came back to the empty cell (where the 2 guys were housed) with screwdrivers and were messing with the outside window, as if trying to cause damage to this window. When walking out the cell they said, 'I bet they'll never go on hunger strike again!' and laughing. They are now most likely going to charge these 2 prisoners with attempt to escape. . ."

"No medical examinations are being done, as if they are not trying to document our hunger strike. I believe they are trying to hide the fact that we are on strike. On our last strike, we were evaluated on our first day of declaration and every day after that."

"My mail was not picked up . . ."

"You better believe it that there will be officers that will have a deep resentment toward prisoners over the warden's decision to make these changes – as small as they are. They hate it when our humanity is affirmed in any way. It disturbs their superiority complexes."

Wardens Response: "Our refusal to submit forced her to see us."

"21 prisoners were issued disciplinary reports for 'dangerous disturbance.' I was taken from my cage to speak to the warden and her warden of programs. I expected an authoritarian type of personality, but she actually had a calm and approachable disposition. She said she wanted to speak to someone with 'influence.' I assured her that I wasn't who she thought I was, but that I'd still convey what she wanted to convey to the hunger strikers. She began by acknowledging that changes for the better needed to be made. In exchange for calling off the hunger strike, she conceded to some of the issues: She agreed to give us due process at AD review hearings, to give us more access to outside recreation, fix the collection and distribution of the mail problems and make the 21 disciplinary reports go away. She gave her word that conditions would change for the better, a better communication line to her would be established and she also agreed to accept proposals for education programming. I took the olive branch back to the hostages and the consensus was to give her a chance to stand on her word. This is not the same warden from last year. Her message was that the hunger strike got her attention and that things would get better. So the strikers accepted the hand dealt to them and called off the strike. The real victory is in the affirmation of our humanity. Our refusal to submit forced her to see us. For whatever reason, she chose not to deal with us with a heavy hand. It's a small chance no one will get shipped out of state."

"She would raise commissary spending limits to \$100 and she would give only phase 3 access to the big yard twice a week. Also to be more descriptive in AD hearings. My objection is this does nothing for individuals in disciplinary segregation, especially long term. Me personally, I don't feel like [the hunger strike] got us anything. Fuck their commissary limits. Phase 3 is the only ones with yard privileges, which they gave and took away before with no reasonable explanation. And more descriptive reasons on AD placement is not going to change them holding individuals in AD!! Still no educational programs, no real mental health, no transparency when it comes to grievances. There's so much left to be desired. Yet I know it's not the end. As always, I'll continue to fight. As that's what I know best. The struggle does not stop!"

"Hopefully they don't follow through with their threats about shipping some of us out [of] state as they did last year."

"I ended up coming off Sunday night. (The warden wanted everyone off by Monday for the tickets to be expunged.) We hope [the promises] are not empty. But nothing . . . will benefit the overall situation, except if the hearings actually become meaningful."

"The Wardens made their rounds and spoke to everyone and reiterated the agreement. [Warden Butler] began by taking care of all 21 disciplinary reports. In addition to the said changes, the Warden told us that she would now be a part of the review hearings. . . We're told that they're trying to start letting more people out of A.D."

"Although our main goal is to end solitary confinement, we hope that we could work with Ms. Butler. I think by us affirming our own humanity she was forced to see us and acknowledge us."

As always, the future remains unseen in regards to the inmates' situation. For now, we remain hopeful that some of their demands will be met. We're staying in consistent communication with a few of them in order to keep tabs on their treatment and to hear from them about how they will continue their fight inside the prison walls. We will continue to fight with our comrades on the inside in an effort to build solidarity, rise up against the oppressive rulers in our society (correctional officers, wardens, cops, bosses, landlords...), and ultimately, to bring an end to all prisons.

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