

Seven Years Against Prison

**Notes on the Practice of New Year's Prison Demos in South-western Ontario
2008–2015**

The Hamilton Institute

2015

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Seven Years Against Prison

Notes on the practice of prison noise demos in South-western Ontario 2008–2015

“The prison door opens, and now he knows what to do; keep the memory alive, leave no space for oblivion, never forget the comrades left behind, pick up the thread of insurgency from where it was interrupted, pour the poison of insubordination into the reproduction networks of the capitalist society”

From “For a new combat position of anarchist insurgency – For a Black December”; by imprisoned anarchists Nikos Romanos and Panagiotous Argirou

For the past seven years, anarchist and other radicals in South-western Ontario have celebrated New Year’s Eve with noise demos outside of the areas many prisons. We love to party and celebrate on New Year’s and this tradition has allowed us to do so in a spirit of antagonism and solidarity. We can have fun in a way that actually inspires us and that brings some joy to people who are locked up.

Connecting through the walls with prisoners is a direct action against the alienation and separation that prison creates and it transforms the urban space, bringing in to focus the prisons that dot the landscape and making vivid the coercive violence of the state that controls our lives. Prison impacts us every day, whether or not we’re locked up, and the New Year’s Noise Demos make this conflict tangible.

One of the initial intentions of the noise demos in Hamilton was to participate in an international practice of anarchist solidarity with prisoners. In 2009, it was a direct response to a call to support an international hunger strike campaign by anarchist prisoners, launched by Gabriel Pombo Da Silva from a prison in Germany.

The following year, several of our comrades were still locked up from the G20 mobilizations and there had been demos earlier in the year at Vanier/Maplehurst and The Don Jail in support of anarchist and other prisoners held there. This marked a time when, for many of us, the reality of prison intruded more starkly into our lives and the combative anger of the demos that year showed an escalation in hostility still anchored in the spirit of international solidarity, particularly with prisoners in the US state of Georgia who were on hunger strike and with an international call for new year’s noise demos (the exact same text has been re-released this year as a fresh call for demos).

This year, let’s show our solidarity with the international call for a Black December released by anarchist prisoners in Greece, Nikos Romanos and Panagiotis Argirou. They called for insurrectionary actions around the world which they hope “will be the detonator for the restart of anarchist insurgency, inside and outside the prisons”. Their call has already been answered by more than fifty actions around the world, including in Canada, where an attack on a police vehicle and a confrontational march in Montreal have been claimed as part of Black December. (There is a timeline of actions at rabble.org.uk).

From 2011, the demos expanded – to support prisoners in struggle at the Grand Valley Prison in Kitchener, to visit anarchist prisoners in West Toronto and in Penetanguishene, the Syl Apps youth prison in Oakville – while continuing to anchor themselves with a stop at Hamilton’s Barton Jail. This prison, described as a monument to human misery, that looms over one of Canada’s poorest urban areas, remains very overcrowded and kills several of its prisoners every year.

The shit-eating screws of the OPSEU union use the Barton Jail as a centre-piece in their disputes with the province, allowing conditions there to degenerate to deadly levels to improve their negotiating position. In 2012, a so-called “strike” action by the guards only ended after a prisoner died following a month of lockdown. (But can they really be thought of as workers when their job is to manage the misery of others? Would not such an action more accurately be called hostage-taking or extortion?)

This year, we’re stopping at the new Toronto South, or Mimico, prison on the Toronto-Mississauga border. This new maximum security nightmare, which, when full, will be among the largest prisons in Canada, has already seen at least two prisoners die in the year it’s been open. Prisoners there describe being locked down three or four days a week and being persistently denied needed medical care. There is no yard in this jail – they meet their requirement for outdoor time by putting prisoners in a concrete room with windows. There are no real visits either – although friends and family still have to travel to the jail, they can only see their loved one by video screen.

The Mimico prison is an escalation of the cruelty and cynicism of the system against us all and it deserves to be vigorously opposed. The intensive management and surveillance of the lives of those locked inside it mirrors the increasing social control we experience outside. The prisoners there have been courageously organizing to demand better conditions, using hunger strikes, press releases, and collective demands, and they definitely deserve our support and participation in a shared struggle.

It’s beautiful that we’ve kept the tradition of New Year’s noise demos alive for so many years – as a chance for collective joy, for collective rage, a chance to dramatize the violence of the capitalist system, to remember its many victims, a chance to participate in an international mobilization against prisons and the world that needs them. Happy fucking New Years.

“Prison is not a domain reserved for specialists such as those who have done time themselves or have a particular rapport with individual prisoners, it is the underlying reality of everyday life, each and every discourse of capital taken to its logical conclusion.”

—Alfredo M Bonanno, in *Locked Up*.

Past Texts on Southern Ontario Prison Demos

Barton Street Noise – Jan 2013

Published in the 2013 zine “The Noise on Barton Street”

This New Year’s eve, for the fourth year in a row, a band of freedom-loving hooligans gathered outside of the Barton Street jail to bang drums, set off fireworks, and show support to the six-hundred people locked up there during the holidays. This is part of an international tradition of noise demos that seeks to celebrate the new year by breaking down the alienation created by prison walls, the injustice system, and the police state. As someone who has been both waving and shooting off fireworks outside the jail and banging on the glass from inside, I can tell you these demos are deeply inspiring for everyone involved.

This is the second noise demo at Barton in the past few months. In September, the prison guards at Barton, in a self-serving display of cowardice and contempt for those locked up, walked off the job for 27 days. This led to prisoners inside being on lock-down for a month. To draw

attention to this abuse of power, a large festive demonstration marched to the jail from Beasley park.

The demo included friends and family of a dozen different prisoners at Barton who were able to tell us more about the deteriorating conditions inside the jail as the lock down dragged on. Imagine being three people locked in a room, the size of your bathroom, only getting out for a half-hour every two days to take a shower and maybe make a phone call. For weeks.

While promoting the demo, we heard from a medical worker at the jail, who declined to give their name for fear of reprisals by management, who described the conditions inside as “way, way worse than people have been talking about so far. Not getting showers or clean clothes is just the tip of the iceberg. I wouldn’t be surprised if something bad happened here soon.”

Sure enough, by the end of the week, a man had died. Police never released his name (*He was since identified as William Acheson*). The fucking screws went back to work the next day, and our local newspaper, The Spectator, dutifully set about covering up the death. Their headline focused on the possibility that the man had died from drug use. No tests had been done on the deceased, but The Spectator chose to emphasize an off-the-cuff theory from the police rather than look critically at how the prolonged lock-down made a tragedy inevitable.

Holding prison demos on Barton Street is an important way for us to raise awareness about the reality of prison. It’s also important for validating the experiences of many, many, many people in the downtown whose lives are impacted by prison. The realities of prison are seldom talked about, and this silence contributes to the isolation of those whom it affects. When we break the silence, we break down some of that alienation. When we break the silence, we reject the logic that blames a man for his own death after 27 days of lockdown.

The level of ignorance about prison in Canadian society at large is pretty shocking. During a prison demo a couple of years ago, I had a conversation with a man who accused me of supporting “rapists and murderers” when we confront the prison system. This view is based on the sensationalistic reporting of mainstream journalism, who love to hold up an accused murderer for everyone to condemn.

But who is actually in the Barton Jail? The Barton Jail is a detention centre, so without exaggeration, every single person incarcerated there is either waiting for trial – meaning they are still supposedly presumed innocent, even though they are being held in a squalid maximum security prison – or they have been sentenced to less than two months. Anyone sentenced to more than two months would have been sent to one of Corrections Ontario’s correctional centres, in Penetanguishene for instance, or if they’d been sentenced to more than two years, to one of Corrections Canada’s penitentiaries. There are no convicted murderers in the Barton Jail.

In fact, fully two-thirds of incarcerated people in Canada have not been found guilty of any crime. They are simply being held waiting for trial because they were denied bail. That’s who is in the Barton Jail.

How can someone condemn our support of prisoners without even knowing who prisoners are? How can someone advocate for sending others to jail when they have no idea what jail is like? How can anyone trust the police, the courts, and prison to fundamentally mould our society when no one wants to talk honestly about them?

Walking along Barton Street, it’s hard to tell that more than 600 people are trapped behind those brick walls. We can’t see them, we can’t hear their voices, and most people wouldn’t listen even if they could.

When we're making noise at Barton or at any jail, we're not asking for a kinder, gentler prison system – we are against prison and the society that requires it. We are in support of all prisoners because they are all victims of the state's violence and impunity. We are breaking the silence that the prison creates, the silence that could so easily kill a man in our neighbourhood just this fall.

Solidarity with Prisoners, not OPSEU 248

From Linchpin.ca

The Hamilton Wentworth Detention Centre or Barton Jail as it is more commonly known, has been on lock-down for over week now due to a “labour dispute” between guards and upper management. The guards, members of OPSEU local 248, are alleging health and safety concerns, and have refused to search cells after a piece of metal fixture went missing in the jail on Monday August 13th. The guard's refusal to work has lead to a lock-down situation with management taking over operations of the jail.

While news coming out of the jail has been sparse, disturbing details have emerged concerning the situation. Several inmates managed to contact the Hamilton Spectator, which on August 15th reported that they had not had access to clean sheets or clothing for a week. Stories have been leaked of inmates being given a choice between “a shower or a phone call”, lawyers have been denied access to their clients, and visitors have been barred from the facility. One family held an impromptu protest, holding signs that read “Time to Judge our System” and “They are not animals” outside the jail in support of their loved ones locked up.

With the lock-down now well into its second week, the scene at the prison is what one might expect at any workplace experiencing a strike: union members have gathered outside the workplace day after day, drinking coffee, and heckling management as they enter the facility. But, the differences between the situation now unfolding at Barton Jail and a standard strike or work refusal are immense – because prison guards are not workers.

If we understand prisons as a workplace, it is inmates themselves who are either doing actual productive labour (textiles, manufacturing, printing, etc) or work required to run the facility (laundry, janitorial, etc). Prison guards on the other hand, are a primary factor determining the working conditions and enforcing disciplinary measures. In any other workplace, these factors would define a relationship between workers and management.

Why then are jail guards represented by the Ontario Public Sector Employees Union? Unions are meant to be organizations for the defense and advancement of our interests as a class. Allowing jail guards into our labour organizations is in immediate contradiction to this purpose and a long-term liability for our movements.

As austerity measures continue to intensify and our prison system expand, this question becomes particularly pressing for workers, students and the unemployed. The Omnibus Crime Bill C-10 became law earlier this year, making sweeping changes to legal landscape and is projected to increase the prison population at a provincial level by up to 32% a year. The state has prepared to accommodate this increase by pouring an estimated \$4 billion into the proliferation of the Prison Industrial Complex by building new prisons and expanding existing facilities.

These provisions are especially heinous as they are imposed parallel to the ongoing gutting of job opportunities, benefits, education, social services and welfare. Austerity will inevitably lead to deepening social conflict within our communities, and have the most severe impact on the vulnerable among us who will provide the bodies to fill the new prison beds.

Increased precarity, incarceration, general social conflict and insecurity will potentially see the rise of numerous mass movements in the coming years. The nature of these movements however, is yet to be determined. If we hope for militant labour and community organizations that are built to fight for our interests as a class, we need to clearly define what those interests are and how they will inform the composition of said movements.

If we intend for our movements to fight for anti-racist and feminist ideals, an equal standard of living for all, and an end to exploitation, opposing the Prison Industrial Complex is absolutely integral to these goals. The potential for building true class-wide solidarity is realized in isolating and rejecting the unionized functionaries of the prison system from labour or community solidarity, while also supporting the prisoners who are on lock-down, organizing work stoppages, or on hunger strike

Communiques from Previous Years

First Noise demo

Posted on 325.org¹

Hamilton, Ontario, Canada – New Years Eve Noise Soli Demo On December 31, 2009, about 30 anarchists took to the streets in Hamilton, Ontario surrounding the Barton St. Jail (or the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Center). Our intention was to show solidarity with prisoners locked behind those walls, and also as an act of solidarity with the revolutionary prisoners on hunger strike throughout the world.

This action was an attempt to break the isolation between inside and outside the prison walls. We used our voices, drums, fireworks, whistles, and other noise-makers to disrupt the day-to-day normalcy of the prison. We chanted: “The passion for freedom is stronger than their prisons!”, “No prisons, no borders, fuck law and order!”, “They might take our lives away, but not our dignity. Our hearts will pound against their walls until we are all free!”

Prisoners waved and banged on the windows while we were outside. We wished them a Happy New Year. There was also a banner that said “ESCAPE” attached to helium balloons that was freed next to the prison and floated into the sky. It was originally intended to say “escape into rebellion” but our 120 latex helium balloons weren’t enough to lift it into the sky. We decided to cut it down to roughly 6 x 3 feet because we wanted a flying banner.

A speech was read on two sides of the prison through a megaphone. Here is the speech:

I’m standing here today because I refuse to accept the leash of submission that this society hopes to tie around my neck. With every one of its laws, courts, cops, prisons and networks of surveillance, it’s made very clear that the “life” we’re supposed to accept is nothing more than a life sentence in an open prison.

I’m here to stand in solidarity with the fifteen social rebels who’ve been on hunger strike in prisons around the world because they continue to refuse the meek existence that the state and capital tries to impose on them with every weapon that it has available.

¹ Librarian’s Note: As of July 20, 2026, this url does not appear to be functional, and there does not seem to be an archive of this post that I could find.

I'm also here in solidarity with the man who escaped from the [custody of] Barton jail a little while ago, as well as his accomplices, and anyone on the inside who yearns for freedom and will do what it takes to take their lives back.

Because with every act of solidarity and with every individual who attacks this prison world, alone or with others, the walls that stand between us begin to look a hell of a lot thinner. For an end to prisons and the world that needs them!

Let's escape into rebellion!

This prison is located close to downtown Hamilton in a working-class neighborhood. For many of us who have spent time or live in Hamilton, Barton Jail is not an abstract or seemingly invisible place – it is a constant threat and reminder of the reality of prison. People who live here have spent time in it, know people who have, or are well aware that they may one day find themselves kidnapped behind its walls. These might be some of the reasons why people getting groceries at the supermarket next to the jail and people walking by, who checked us out, took the time to express their solidarity. Some people stood with us and cheered, while others took part in the noise demo by honking their car horns in the supermarket parking lot. One woman used the megaphone to wish her own happy new year to the prisoners. Also, a child took a picture of the flying banner. The excitement both on the inside and the outside revealed possibilities of and will only push us further in, the struggle against prison and its world.

FREEDOM FOR THE IMPRISONED REVOLUTIONARIES ON HUNGER STRIKE AROUND THE WORLD!

SOLIDARITY WITH COMRADES FIGHTING AGAINST PRISON INSIDE AND OUT!

Second demo

Posted on 325.org

On December 31st 2010, a few dozen people gathered for the second annual New Years Eve noise demo outside Barton Jail in Hamilton, Ontario. Among the fierce chanting, there were fireworks set off for the prisoners on both east and west sides of the jail. A banner with a mailing address painted on it was held to invite prisoners to correspond with us. The wall of the jail was spray-painted with "TEAR THIS SHIT DOWN". A speech was read on both sides of the jail, expressing solidarity with prisoners and explaining reasons for struggling against prison. Solidarity was expressed to the prisoners who were on strike in Georgia (USA), Roger Clement, G20 defendants in custody, and non-status migrants being held at Barton Jail.

Here is a part of that speech:

This has been a year of increased criminalization, and the beginning of a prison restructuring by the Federal government in an attempt to keep us silent, in constant fear, and even more of us locked away. From these continued attacks on our lives, we will gather strength to fight together. Whether the prison system is reforming to be more cruel, or disguising itself as humane, we will struggle against it. Whether it's the police and cameras in the streets, the judges in the courtrooms, the screws in jail, we will struggle against them. We strive for freedom.

Solidarity with everyone who fights for freedom, and all prisoners, around the world,
who refuse to accept forced confinement, isolation and abuse, who dream of the day
that we together destroy these walls.

The Passion for Freedom is Stronger than all Prisons!
Cops, Screws, Murderers!

Noise demo 2012

Posted on anarchistnews.org

For the second year in a row, anarchists and our friends in Southern Ontario went on New Year's Eve anti-prison road trip. Starting off at Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener, about 60 of us set off fireworks and called out greetings to the women inside, many of whom happened to be out in the yard or were able to open their windows and send some noise back our way. Despite what screws at this prison have said at past noise demos, it very much seemed like the women appreciated the visit, with those outside dancing to the beats that were being pumped out by our portable sound system and drum squad, and those inside screaming out kind wishes and whoops. Grand Valley is the same prison where guards were found exchanging drugs for sex with inmates and where Ashley Smith was killed.

We then hit the road and arrived in Hamilton for the fifth annual noise demonstration outside Barton Jail. About 30 of us set off the remainder of our fireworks stash, spraypainted the walls, and threw snow and paintballs at the prison's vehicles. As has become commonplace at demonstrations outside Barton, the sound of prisoners banging on their windows reverberated through the neighbourhood, filling this participant with both joy – that we could provide a break in the daily misery of prison – and rage – that those windows and walls exist in the first place.

After embarrassing a sad cadre of police officers who “just wanted to talk” after the demonstration had ended, we returned to the warmth of home and each other, dancing until sunrise.

To the undercovers who were apparently waiting for us in Milton – not to worry, we'll be seeing you soon.

—Southern Ontario Anarchist Roadwarriors

(SOAR, for Southern Ontario Anarchist Resistance, was an acronym used by many anarchists in mobilizing against the G20)

Demo 2014

Posted on anarchistnews.org

For the sixth year in a row, anarchists in Southern Ontario held noise demos outside prisons in the area, to show our hatred of prisons and the world that creates them, to show solidarity with folks locked up, and to build our collective strength with a tradition of fun, rowdy demos. This year, we visited the Syl Apps Youth Detention Centre in Oakville and made the usual stop at the Barton Jail in Hamilton.

The Syl Apps Detention Centre, like all youth jails in Ontario, is run by a private corporation that specializes in managing and controlling the lives of young people. This jail is run by Kinark, which also runs school programs and summer camps. This jail, like the psychiatric prison recently built on the Hamilton mountain, is on the cutting edge of the blending of mental health hospitals

and prisons, criminalizing and incarcerating people on the basis of who they are rather than what they have done. The youth in this jail responded enthusiastically to the fireworks, the drum band, and the solidarity, dancing, banging on their windows, and flicking their lights.

The Barton jail is a notorious monument to human misery and cruelty in Hamilton's Beasley neighbourhood. It's filthy, overcrowded conditions contribute to frequent deaths, which the guards seize on opportunistically for their own political ends – the expansion of the prison system. The guards in this jail represent a vanguard within the prison guards' union, supporting the disgusting and deadly conditions of imprisonment while leading the charge for a more advanced system of incarceration. Four people have died in the jail in the past year, and hundreds more suffer disastrous health consequences or violence as a result of their imprisonment.

The prisoners at Barton have come to expect the noise demo and always respond with lots of yelling and banging from inside; unfortunately, this year the police also seem to have expected it more than in the past. A couple of cops arrived quickly and began attacking the people they believed were setting off fire works, and the skirmish quickly escalated with the arrival of more cops, including, oddly, Hamilton's chief of police.

Two people were beaten and arrested, but, in a strange new year's gift from the cops, were released without charge. Many others were de arrested by the more than fifty people at the demo who attacked the jail with paint and continued setting off fireworks. We're glad to put on a good show of collective rage and resistance for folks on the inside, who pounded louder as the confrontation heated up.

The New Year's prison demos are an important tradition in this area. The experience of collective resistance makes the partying that comes after into a celebration of strength and solidarity in the face of the systems of control and domination.

Other relevant texts

2010 call for international noise demos

Printed in Fire to the Prisons, Spring 2011

Re-released in 2015 on facebook as a call for demos this New Year's

Noise demos outside of prisons in some countries are a continuing tradition. A way of expressing solidarity for people imprisoned during the New Year, remembering those held captive by the state. A noise demo breaks the isolation and alienation of the cells our enemies create, but it does not have to stop at that.

Prison has a long history within capital, being one of the most archaic forms of prolonged torture and punishment. It has been used to kill some slowly and torture those unwanted – delinquents to the reigning order – who have no need of fitting within the predetermined mold of society. Prison is used not only as an institution, but a whole apparatus, constructed externally from outside of the prison walls. Which our enemies by way of defining our everyday life as a prison, manifest themselves in many places, with banks that finance prison development (like Wells Fargo, Bank of America, BNP Paribas, Bank of the West, and Barclays), companies that are contracted for the development of prisons (like Bergelectric Corporation, SASCO Electric, Engineered Control Systems, MacDonald Miller Facility SLTNS and Kane MFG Corp.), investors in prison development (like Barclays Intl. and Merrill Lynch) to the police and guards who hide behind their badges and the power of the state.

Solidarity is not only an expression by way of our own revolutionary poetry which is defined by a developing anarchist analysis, but as an expression of actions put into practice within the social war daily. That is why we propose to others who have a certain reciprocal understanding of the prison world and the conditions it creates to remember this day, to mark it on their calendars. To locate points of attack. To not limit ourselves to just a noise demo, but proliferating actions autonomously from one another. That break the mundane positions we lock ourselves into by our own internalization.

To all our comrades known and we have yet to know. Just because we have not met, does not mean we do not act in affinity with one another. Our struggle continues not only on the outside, but on the inside as well. Prison is not an end, but a continuation. Through individual and collective moments of revolt, by the methods one finds possible.

Like fire our rage must spread.

Against prison, and the world that maintains them.

For the social war.

An excerpt from: *For a new combat position of anarchist insurgency-For a Black December*

from contrainfo.espiv.net

There is much more to be said about December '08 and its insurrectionary heritage, as manifested through the dozens of direct action groups which proliferated explosively across the country, creating a front of internal threat. A period when anarchist direct action undermined the social normalcy almost on a daily basis. But what we want above all is to remember...

To remember what December '08 was and how anarchy, having a leading role, contributed to the manifestation of dynamic situations, which gained resonance in the international anarchist movement.

To remember the time when anarchy overcame the fear of arrest, captivity and violent repression, and therefore acquired a tremendous self-confidence, moving on to actions and gestures that, until then, seemed impossible; a self-confidence which was manifested in the whole range of anarchist polymorphous action, from simple public interventions to all kinds of occupations, and from spontaneous confrontational practices to more organised offensive actions.

We want to remember our young comrade who was guilty of his spontaneity, which he paid with his life. Under other circumstances it might have been us in his place, as the same insurrectionary enthusiasm pervades us since then, and besides, EVERYONE should remember their origins instead of exorcising them.

We want to remember the beauty of paralysing the social space-time through smaller or larger social short circuits.

We want to remember how dangerous anarchy may become, when anarchy wants to...

Our proposal to place the wager of setting up a multifaceted insurrectionary anarchist front is simple; an action campaign by the name 'Black December' which will be the detonator for the restart of anarchist insurgency, inside and outside the prisons.

A month of coordinated actions in order to know each other, take to the streets and smash the displays of department stores, occupy schools, universities and city halls, distribute texts that will spread the message of rebellion, place incendiary devices against fascists and bosses, hang banners on air-bridges and main avenues, flood the cities with posters and flyers, blow up

houses of politicians, throw Molotov cocktails at the cops, tag the walls with slogans, sabotage the smooth flow of merchandise amid Christmas, loot the displays of abundance, carry out public activities, and exchange experiences and rationales around various topics of struggle.

Black December does not seek merely to become some days of rioting instead, what we want is to create – through multiform and multilevel anarchist action – an informal coordination platform on the basis of which the subversive impulse will be brought together; a primary attempt for an informal coordination of anarchy, beyond the predetermined frameworks, which aspires to build on this particular experience of struggle so as to set both subversive proposals and fighting strategies in motion.

And in the spectator...

Printed March 15, 2014

This past New Year's Eve, Hamilton native James Ireland was in jail serving 101 days for assault and theft — not a lot to celebrate. But as a pleasant surprise, a group gathered outside that night, setting off fireworks for the inmates. The crowd started out on Ferguson Street, and then went around to the other side, off Elgin Street next to a grocery store parking lot, where Ireland could see the bursts of colour from his cell.

There had to be at least 50 people out there, he says, and it made his night as he and the others banged on the windows, cheering in celebration. "It was so awesome. We just kept banging on the windows, and they just kept dancing and lighting fireworks for us ... the whole jail was going crazy," he says.

"And then the cops came and shut it down and made them all leave."

He posted to the local Facebook page Only in Hamilton in early January, to thank the folks who thought of them. "I really wanted these guys to hear that we really, really loved that they did this," he said. "It's so hard to cope in there, but on New Year's Eve it was the worst... I been in for three (New Years Eves) now and that was the best thing anyone could of done." "For people to come out and spend their time, it's just unbelievable."

Connor Poynter, 20, was one of those people. He says he took part because after having many friends go through the system, he knows how much jail "sucks" for people on both sides of the fence. Lighting off fireworks, he says, is a symbolic tradition that dates back to prisoner rights movements decades ago. "It is really effective at showing folks locked up that they haven't been forgotten," Poynter says.

"And it is enjoyed by people on both sides of the walls. It is a small symbolic way of breaking down the walls."

Now back on the free side of the fence, Ireland is hoping to stay out so he can head down there this New Year's Eve to make it special for the guys inside.



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