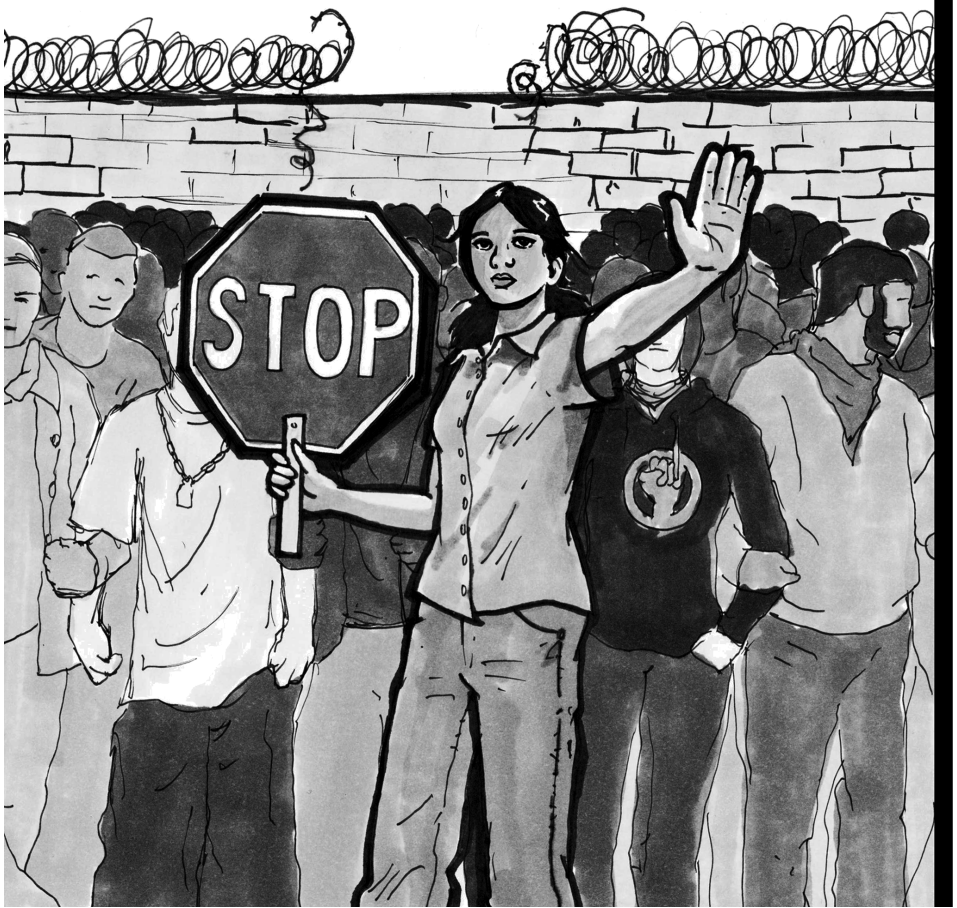


Some thoughts about Prisoner's Justice
Day 2012 in Kingston.



And some ideas and questions
about how we could do better.

By some members of End The Prison Industrial
Complex – Kingston, ON

This is a reflection on an action that folks from End The Prison Industrial Complex in Kingston planned in the summer of 2012. It's hard to talk about, but we think it's important to reflect on our projects and have conversations about them with other people who might be interested, even if they seem like epic failures.

Not everyone in EPIC collaborated on this and we didn't talk to everybody who was there with us in August. If you have other ideas about this event in particular, or about organizing in small cities like Kingston in general, we want to talk to you. This is about continuing conversations that we've been having amongst ourselves and asking for help from other anarchists who we maybe haven't talked to about this yet.

The first part of this is a kind of report-back. At the back there's a couple of things that we wrote in the lead-up to PJD, to give folks who weren't there some idea of what we were going for.

If you want to get in touch with EPIC, you can email epic@riseup.net. If you want to get in touch with the people who wrote this reflection, just say so in the subject line, and we'll get it.

Thanks for reading.

- Some anarchists who helped organize PJD 2012 with EPIC.

February, 2013.

**The image on the cover is a piece that a very talented friend of ours did for the poster for PJD. Thanks again to him for that. :)

REPORT-BACK ON PJD

-by some members of EPIC.

This report-back is half a year late partly because it's not particularly fun to write. A bunch of us here in Kingston put a lot of time into an action that turned out mostly depressing for most of us, and in many ways it would be easier to just not talk about it, try to forget it, try something new. It's important though, to reflect on what exactly what was so demoralizing about August 10th, what could have been different, what we want to change and what we won't bother trying again. Most of us still want to live and agitate in this small city, and we have to find ways to organize here in ways that feel satisfying and productive. We can't do that without taking some time to talk about what doesn't work here as well as what does. We're also hoping that others living in small cities will read this, share their own successes and failures with us, and maybe even learn from our mistakes a bit.

The idea of a large-scale action in Kingston to mark Prisoners' Justice Day had been floating around for a few years. We knew it would be hard to get people to come out for a public action at one of the prisons, but we'd been organizing against prison construction in town for quite a while, we'd planned some fun and fairly successful smaller actions with locals, and we were encouraged by some out-of-town friends.

There was also a precedent in Kingston with the "Save our Prison Farms" campaign. In February 2009, governmentt announced they were closing all prison farms in Canada. This angered local farmer and social justice organizations in Kingston who organized a mass campaign of public education and direct actions to fight the closures. Anarchists and radicals held tactical direct action workshops and participated in a series of escalating actions that culminated in a two-day

blockade of Collins Bay and Frontenac Institutions by hundreds of people in August 2010. While the first day of the blockade was largely successful, the second day was a failure after some of the prison farms coalition leadership agreed with Kingston Police to take the blockade down overnight. The next morning, protesters were met with a massive Kingston and provincial police presence. Concrete barricades lined the entrance and anyone attempting to sit-down or lock-down at the intersection, the key tactic of this campaign, were violently arrested as an example to others. Police easily controlled the intersection and the cattle were successfully sent to auction. Many were angry at the negotiations with police, and given that PJD was to fall two years to the day after the blockade, we thought we might attract some of the same people by pointing out it was the two-year anniversary of the action.

From the beginning, we decided to organize PJD openly and publicly. We wanted to test and build our capacity for bringing a wide range of people out to an anti-prison action, especially locals. We were confident that we could get our close friends to show up by word of mouth, but we wanted something bigger and we wanted to see who else might come through.

We wanted other people to come out to our event, but we still wanted to host an action that reflected our (anarchist) politics. We didn't want to put energy into organizing a large "day of action" that we would find boring or ineffective. We didn't want to work in a coalition with other more liberal, reform-oriented or authoritarian folks who might also oppose prison construction. Instead, we posted a call-out for a construction "shut down," circulated it widely in and out of Kingston, and did our own outreach with other groups in town, explaining ourselves and asking for their support. We

stopped cars of construction workers driving into Collins Bay a week before, and gave them a flyer strongly encouraging them to not show up for work on PJD. Reception was broadly positive but we intentionally didn't include anybody else in the organizing process or get any commitment other than a verbal promise to show up to the action.

A week before the action, Ann Hansen – a high-profile local anarchist – was arrested, had her parole suspended and was sent to prison for 'unauthorized associations and political activity.' Her 'crime' was showing a video about PJD at a direct action workshop at the library. It is now clear from her public statement on her arrest (posted online) that CSC intelligence officials were irrationally paranoid about potential 'bombings and arsons' at the Collins Bay action. Despite these claims being completely baseless, word of her arrest quickly spread and had somewhat of a chilling effect around town – which was likely intentional. Some questioned whether we should call off the action; in the end we decided to carry on.

The day of the action, there were a few silver linings to an otherwise disappointing day. Out of town friends, mostly people who we probably could have reached by word of mouth, really came through for us. A speaking event the night before the planned construction shut-down was fun and heartening – lots of locals, some of them unexpected, showed up, listened to the speakers, and hung out sharing food with the non-locals and chatting. The next morning was a totally different experience, though. A small crowd, almost entirely from out of town, showed up at our planned 5am meeting point. They stuck with us through the day but almost no locals came (with a few notable exceptions, thank you!). Even a few friends who we'd assumed would be there for us were conspicuously absent.

The other encouraging aspect of the day was how well the collective that organized PJD held together despite it being

apparent that our hard work leading up to the action turned out to be a failure. There was no catastrophic infighting, finger-pointing or social meltdowns. EPIC didn't fall apart over PJD; neither did the web of social relations that make up and surround the loose collective.

We can only really guess why people who obviously knew about our event and claim to support anarchist projects in Kingston didn't come. Through conversations among ourselves and with friends and allies, we've come up with a few different reasons.

Perceived risk.

We promoted a total shut-down of prison construction and publicly declared our intentions. This was a strategic decision; we hoped that acting as if this was going to happen would contribute to it actually happening. But the spell we tried to cast didn't take. People have a wide range of thresholds when it comes to risk and interactions with police, and we knew that the police would be there. This definitely kept some people with personal reasons for avoiding arrest, and some people who were simply afraid, away.

Social and political tensions among anarchists.

Some people stayed away because they don't like some or all of the organizers. Some divisions among local anarchists represent real political difference, while others are purely interpersonal. In either case, we all need to work harder to build a culture of support and solidarity. We want a community where, as much as possible, anarchists show up for and support each others' work even if it isn't exactly the project they would choose to focus on, and even if they don't want to be friends with the people involved with an action, event or group.

Lack of commitment.

Our meeting time was at 5am because we wanted to stop workers from entering the site before construction began. Some people aren't committed enough to bother showing up for things at the best of times, let alone for a scary, suburban action before it gets light. How do we build a seriousness and commitment into our social circles? How can we communicate those expectations to one another?

We didn't want to do the kind of outreach it would take to build a broad-based action with potential non-anarchist allies.

We chose not to build a coalition or to share the planning with anyone with whom we don't share broad political affinity. People aren't going to show up for something unless it speaks to them, and we didn't want to moderate our language or tactical choices to speak to activists with different politics from ours. A truly anarchist event, planned by anarchists and promoted in honest terms, will not attract most active liberals, social democrats or moderates. This is a basic contradiction that we should have fully taken into account.

We don't have good enough links with prisoners or communities most affected by prisons.

We tried to reach out to non-anarchist activists anyway, even though we didn't want to give them any control. We spent a lot of time and energy talking to people who identify themselves as activists or have been involved in previous prison-related actions in town, and not a lot of time talking to people who might be inclined to hate prisons in their entirety as much as we do. We've done very little outreach, for example, with prisoners' families, or solid networking with anti-poverty groups in town who might be closer to people

who already know that they hate cops and prisons. This is hard work to do because we know that our politics sound scary, and especially scary for people who don't want or need the extra police attention that we might bring,, but we must find ways to get around that stuff. One of the coolest things about flyerng workers was chatting with folks on day parole who were super receptive to our flyer. It shouldn't be surprising that those people were more into our politics than somebody who has already decided that they want to reform (but maintain) the existing prison system.

In the future, some improvements that we could make include:

- When organizing explicitly anarchist actions, organize them through word of mouth with other anarchists. Build stronger anarchist ties locally and regionally that increase this capacity. We have done this a bunch in the year leading up to PJD and it was relatively successful.
- Organize fun, low-risk public events where we can discuss our politics with broader social networks. This is a better way to meet new people than giving someone a flyer inviting them to an illegal blockade at a prison and hoping they'll show up
- It would be good if there was a broad-based anti-prison and/or prison reform coalition in town that we could participate in, but we're not it. This is the constant problem in Kingston – the 'left' is too weak to organize mass actions more than once every few years. If this existed we would likely try to find ways to popularize direct action and radicalize more people from inside an 'activist' crowd. Since these kinds of events rarely happen in Kingston, sometimes we try to organize the very same actions that we would like to radicalize or escalate, which simply doesn't work.

One principle we hold to is that it is almost always better to do something than nothing. We don't regret organizing Prisoners' Justice Day even if it was by all accounts a failure. It gave us a sense of what our capacity was at that moment, for better and for worse. We've used this experience as an opportunity to sharpen our analysis, start some hard conversations, strengthen our internal bonds and even attract some new co-conspirators. We're going to keep trying things, and some of them will fail. We are committed to Kingston and committed to struggling against prisons, police and the state that requires them.

The next few pages are an article that appeared in The Peak before August 2012 promoting PJD and explaining why we wanted to organize it. At the very back, there are images of some of the flyers that we circulated leading up to the event.

If you want to know what EPIC is up to now, check out the website at epic.noblogs.org.

Summer, 2012.

End The Prison Industrial Complex (EPIC) is a group of prison abolitionists based in Kingston, Ontario. Right now, a lot of our energy is focused on opposing new prisons that are being built in our region. The Kingston area is already home to nine prisons, and construction is underway on new buildings for three of those sites. We know that stopping even one of those prisons from being constructed would be a major victory, and it might well be beyond our strength right now. At the same time, stopping a construction project still would not be the victory we really want – one less new building would not mean a world with no prisons.

Fighting prison construction might seem too big for our capacity and too small for our vision, but construction is a material, visible and local process that we might slow, disrupt or even stop. While the prisonless world we want to build can seem depressingly far-off and abstract, the physical prisons are right here in our city and right now people from Kingston and other places in Ontario are working on making them even bigger.

At the same time, this project, like a lot of the work that we do as anarchists and abolitionists, is about getting bigger and closer even if it seems impossible to get all the way there. It is building our capacity to mount strategic and effective resistance to all kinds of development projects, and it is deepening the social relationships of affinity that are the foundation of all our struggles.

We believe that prison expansion is part of a tough-on-crime agenda that is bad for prisoners and all those who might one day become prisoners.

A lot of the work that anarchists and abolitionists do on the outside is about supporting those currently inside – writing letters, sending in books, lobbying for freedom for comrades facing particularly unjust sentences, and supporting prisoners' demands for material improvements and access to services. Some people might see prison expansion as separate from this kind of direct support work. Prisons are overcrowded and governments want us to believe that expansion will give those inside more space to breathe. They are lying. This prison expansion is part of a government project to put more people inside for longer with less access to services. For us, opposing it is one part of opposing this specific crime agenda as well as all prisons and the society that needs them.

Rather than framing prison construction as a policy problem to be taken on by voting or lobbying “the government,” EPIC focuses on the fact that real people with faces, names and addresses are responsible for these projects. This means some government officials as well as private companies and individuals who are cashing in on new prisons. We want to find ways to target these people that feel rewarding for us and help us to grow our social networks and strengthen resistance both locally and regionally. This year, that has meant

- compiling a list of private companies who have been awarded prison construction contracts and publicizing their names and addresses in a flyer and on our website.
- disseminating materials and staging demonstrations against NORR Ltd., an architectural firm behind many of the new projects that has an office in downtown Kingston.
- networking with others in the region through materials and workshops, spreading information about prison profiteers in other cities and neighbourhoods, encouraging others to target local businesses that are profiting from prisons.

- a fun noise demonstration with fireworks and lots of yelling at Collins Bay on May Day.
- sharing our vision and strategy and looking for others who might share it by planning speaking events and workshops about prison expansion and how we want to stop it.

This summer, we will mark Prisoners' Justice Day, a day of strikes and actions inside many prisons in North America, by shutting down construction at Collins Bay Penitentiary. While the sight of cranes, trucks and workers flowing in and out of Collins Bay is always disgusting to us as prison abolitionists, it would be particularly offensive on August 10th, a day meant to remember those who have died inside. We'll be hosting a day-long event at Collins Bay and people who are working on any of the construction or improvement projects on that site should either join in or stay home that Friday.

If you have suggestions about Prisoners' Justice Day or our strategy in general, want to come and join us in Kingston on August 10th, are planning an action against a local prison profiteer, or just want to find out more about what's going on, please get in touch with us by email or regular mail. We're also asking anybody who has any information about **subcontractors involved in any current construction projects** who aren't already on our list, or prisoners or staff with **information about actions going on inside Collins Bay on August 10th** to please write or email us and share what you know.

EPIC

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PRISONERS JUSTICE DAY 2012 IN KINGSTON

August 10th is Prisoners' Justice Day, a day in remembrance of everyone who has died at the hands of the prison system. Prisoners fast and refuse work, while outside organizations and individuals demonstrate in solidarity.



Kingston is Canada's prison capital and a massive expansion is underway. *End the Prison-Industrial Complex is marking Prisoners' Justice Day by shutting down all construction at Collins Bay and Frontenac Institutions.* We invite you to join us!

AUGUST 10TH: ALL WORK STOPS AT COLLINS BAY!

MORE INFORMATION: WWW.ENDTHEPIC.WORDPRESS.COM/PJD

NO CONSTRUCTION WORK AT COLLINS BAY NEXT FRIDAY, AUGUST 10TH!

August 10th is internationally known as Prisoners' Justice Day, which started in 1975 at Millhaven to commemorate those who have died at the hands of the prison system. Out of respect for this day of mourning, prisoners inside refuse work and food.

This year, anti-prison activists intend to *shut down all construction work* on the grounds of Collins Bay and Frontenac Institutions in solidarity with prisoners on strike inside.

DON'T WORK HERE WHILE PRISONERS ALL OVER ARE ON STRIKE!

Prisons and prison expansion affect us all. Under the guise of global economic crisis, we see governments responding with austerity, "tough on crime" measures and increased repression of dissent. As more people lose hope in a decent future under this current system, crime will increase and more people – particularly those most marginalized by the system – will be put in jail.

Prisoners are exploited by government and corporations as cheap labour. They will go on strike August 10. We consider crossing lines on August 10 to be scabbing.

Trying to cross a hard picket with a vehicle is unsafe for everyone. It could injure protesters or provoke unpredictable confrontations. Police also tend to escalate tensions if they choose to intervene, which can become dangerous. You have the right to refuse unsafe work under the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS: Stay home from work on Friday, August 10th or – better yet – join us on the lines.

We know some union workers at this site have four nine-hour shifts, Monday-Thursday. If this is the case for you, working Friday is entirely optional and you cannot be punished for not working.

If you are in a position to do so, speak with your co-workers about collectively refusing to work on Friday, August 10. There is strength in numbers and solidarity. Whether you refuse to work because it's voluntary, unsafe, or you're feeling sick, find a way not to come in.

If you can't see a way to get out of working at Collins Bay August 10, email us at epic@riseup.net and we will do whatever we can to help.

GUARDS AND OTHER NON-CONSTRUCTION WORKERS WHO PLAN TO WORK HERE ON AUGUST 10TH: park elsewhere! There will be no vehicle access in or out of Collins Bay or Frontenac that morning.

We are also looking for information about how construction is going and who is doing it, and about events going on to mark Prisoners' Justice Day inside this institution. If you know about this, or want to know more about what we're doing, contact us:

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February 2013
Kingston, ON