

Towards Abolition: Building a Future of Freedom

(Adapted from “Abolish Police and Prisons” by DSA Praxis)

As the movement against capitalism grows, we will confront state repression in new ways. Prisons, the police, and semi-private security contractors are all repressive. They are clear existential threats to any movement for socialism and justice. Therefore, **the abolition of incarceration is an explicit goal for DSA.**

Violent state repression in the form of the police and prison system is an issue we must take seriously. If we are to continue moving for universal healthcare, or pushing for democratic and militant worker activity, then the growing movement to outlaw dissent is a major barrier to organizing. Within days of taking office, Donald Trump declared “this will be a law and order administration.” In the same statement, President Trump made a direct threat against Black Lives Matter, saying, “The dangerous anti police atmosphere in America is wrong. The Trump Administration will end it.” In addition to street protest, Black Lives Matter has called for “divestment from exploitative forces including prison.”

Democratic socialism will be impossible so long as investments are funneled into the police and prison system. We must explicitly support the divestment and reinvestment initiatives laid out by Black Lives Matter and Black Youth Project 100, while also incorporating these demands into our struggles. As they are targeted by Jeff Sessions, Donald Trump, and police officials across the country, DSA stands firm in our anti-racist commitment to solidarity with their struggles.

After his statement threatening BLM and emboldening police abuse, Donald Trump wasted no time in ratcheting up the repression. During his inauguration, protesters—and some members of the press—were charged with felonies carrying ten year prison sentences. A mere month into Trump’s presidency, Republicans in 18 states introduced legislation aggressively criminalizing protest. The abolition of police and prisons is a material necessity for socialism, and thus the future of DSA and the left more broadly.

Members of DSA across the country are taking on police and prison. In Chicago, where the largest portion of the operating budget is spent on police, the anti-racist working group is moving in coalition with local racial justice groups to push for a Civilian Police Accountability Council. In New York, members are working for police accountability and to close Rikers Island jail—the infamous prison where Kalief Browder was held and brutalized over three years for allegedly stealing a backpack. He later committed suicide. We stand in solidarity with these and other efforts occurring within our organization. It is the police who will break up our protests and picket lines. It is the police who evict us from our homes. It is the police who enforce Trump’s detainer policy, deporting undocumented people and terrorize immigrant communities.





It is the police who brutalize and kill with impunity — particularly victimizing Black people, natives, queer people, people with mental problems, and the poor.

It is the prison system that uses a cash bail system which preys on those who cannot pay, especially people of color, forcing them to stay in prison for months on end while awaiting trial. **It is the U.S. prison system which incarcerates over two million people, more than 20% of the world's total prison population.** It is the prison system which super-exploits incarcerated workers, allowing corporations to pay them pennies per hour without any possibility of unionization.

We are firm in our conviction that the police and the prison system have no place in a socialist world.

Strong, well-resourced communities don't require repression to keep order. There is nothing democratic, nor socialist about police and prisons. The abolition of the police and prison system may seem impossible, but if abolition is unworkable, then so too is socialism. We believe very much that socialism is possible, probable even, and we know many of you are with us.

We believe that abolition is the best socialist answer to police and prison repression. In order to get there, we must begin by using the base-building model to develop strong community engagement and committed long-term organizing relationships that carry from campaign to campaign. As our campaigns escalate on our path to victory, state repression is assured. We will need trust — and a national organization that takes opposition to police and prison seriously — to see our mission to completion.

Additionally, we must build a coalition to explore nationally-backed local campaigns for:

- Unarmed mediation and intervention training for street harassment, partner violence, gang violence, and mental health crises—potentially modeled after groups like Cure Violence and Ceasefire
- Decriminalization of most nonviolent crime. It is often petty offenses, such as traffic violations or other low risk infractions that pull poor people into the orbit of the prison system. Criminalizing these types of petty offenses is also a significant source of revenue for some cities, particularly those with strong Black populations such as Ferguson. Decriminalization is the only surefire way to stop this exploitation and racism.
- Restorative justice models rather than prison sentences
- Community patrol and copwatch trainings



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 instagram.com/miamidsa

 twitter.com/miamidsa

 info@miamidsa.org

 miamidsa.org