



REDMADISON

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Black Youth Remade the World in Madison's Capitol Square

By James McMaster



Published on June 4th, 2020.

You'll want to know what happened last night around the capitol building of the country's most segregated state. You won't hear this on the news.

At the end of a livestreamed political education session on defunding the police run by Freedom Inc., black leaders in Madison called for the members of their digital audience, over 900 people, to bring hot food and medic kits to the black youth who would be holding it down on the west side of the Capitol Building last night. I picked up tacos and burritos from a local restaurant with a friend and walked them to the protest. Imagine a world in which all food, water, and medical supplies are free. Or, if not free, then already paid for by people who can afford it—say, university professors. And there's enough for everyone. In fact, there is so much food and water that the people in charge instruct whomever is near them to start dis-

tributing these resources to their neighbors, who will take what they need and want and pass what they don't to another neighbor. And so it goes: from each according to their means to each according to their needs. This was the world I found myself in once I arrived at last night's demonstration, a guest of the organizers.

It was part open mic and part party. Sometimes speakers, only black speakers of course, would take turns sharing words of inspiration and leading chants of BLACK LIVES MATTER and FUCK THE POLICE. Other times the music would be blasting and the whole place would be doing the electric slide to "Before I Let Go" by Beyoncé. I saw so much pent up joy released. I saw young people meet new people, entering into new friendships and flirtations founded in the possibility of a better world. Another way to say this is that I watched as the youth, surrounded by boarded up

buildings and protest graffiti, grew a multiracial social movement for black liberation.

I chanted again, "THIS IS NOT A RIOT, ITS A REVOLUTION" and again, "DONT START NO SHIT, WON'T BE NO SHIT." And as I walked around the makeshift altar, constructed of candles and photos of black folks who've been killed by cops, I ran into someone I met while canvassing for Bernie, a south Asian guy, who told me that this was the most

hope he's felt in months.

One man at the demonstration wore a glow in the dark mask. Another danced with a traffic cone on his head. Some white people acted like clowns, of course, and so they were treated as

clowns (and not, say, as enemies) by black folks in the crowd, which I thought was generous. At 2 a.m. I saw a family roll through, babies in their arms.

It was the world as it could be, a rehearsal for the world we're all fighting for. It was an autonomous zone, a racial rapprochement on

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black terms, and a space of reparation where all sorts of usually criminalized acts were freely performed, no harm done. And it was all made possible, first, by the movement organizers whose efforts cancelled curfew, sending a clear message to the cops, and second, by the fact that every single white person in attendance, every single one, was ready and willing to link arms in a circle around people of color if the cops came for us. We practiced this formation multiple times. Every single white person in attendance was willing to stare down the barrel of a gun for their black (and poc) comrades to have a moment of silence, or just a few hours to turn up. It's notable that in Madison—maybe because there are so many white people and so few people of color, maybe because black and Asian coalition can be pretty coherent here—black organizers tend to invite non-black

“*“Next,” said one of the young women who seemed to be running shit, “we’re going to make them reopen Sandra Bland’s case.” All of this was unthinkable just a week ago.*”

poc protest comrades to share in the protection they’ve worked to build for themselves. Fellow Asians and other non-black poc, remember this: when black folks tame white supremacy, we benefit no matter what we’ve done to deserve otherwise. We are, in no abstract way, indebted to black freedom fighters. We have to act like it.

A little less than a year ago, in the exact spot of the demonstration I’m describing, I watched as an all white jazz band played to an all

white audience, which was one of the least white things to happen on the square all year. But last night, black music bounced against the sky as black youth celebrated their lives and their victories: Chauvin’s second degree murder charge and the charges filed against the other three cops involved in the death of George Floyd. “Next,” said one of the young women who seemed

to be running shit, “we’re going to make them reopen Sandra Bland’s case.” All of this was unthinkable just a week ago. It’s not just that the kids are alright. It’s that the kids might just lead us to higher ground. They might just save us all.

Oh, and anyone who tells you that pride is cancelled due to the pandemic is just wrong. It’s not cancelled, it’s being celebrated the way it would be every year if we actually honored its roots: under the radar and out in the open, with black queer and trans people at its center calling the shots. You should have seen the queers dancing in the streets of Wisconsin last night. I feel so grateful to have been one of them. Corporate pride could never. 🌸

James McMaster is a member of the Madison-Area DSA and a professor of race, gender, sexuality, and performance at the UW-Madison. Twitter and Instagram: @jmcmaster29.

Madison Area DSA Stands in Solidarity with #Justice4George

The Madison-Area chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America condemns the public execution of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis police. We stand in solidarity with protesters calling out the deeply entrenched pattern of violence, anti-Blackness, and oppression upheld by police in our country, in our state, and in our city. MADSA supports the entirety of last weekend’s demonstrations against the brutal police murders of George Floyd, Tony Robinson, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Sean Reed, and countless others.

Furthermore, MADSA calls upon elected officials who supported the Saturday afternoon march to follow through on that support by meeting the demands of its organizers, Urban Triage, Freedom, Inc., and the Party for Socialism and Liberation—Madison: defund the police, institute reparations for all Black people, release all incarcerated Black people from jail, get cops out of schools, and institute community control over the police. MADSA encourages financially supporting Urban Triage, Freedom, Inc., and the Free the 350 bail fund.



MTI Statement Fails to Meet Demands of the Movement

By Scot McCullough

BLACK LIVES MATTER AT SCHOOL

On Sunday, June 7, the Madison teachers union (Madison Teachers Inc, or MTI) released what they called their **'Anti-Racism Statement,'** prompted by the national and local protests against the police murder of George Floyd and against all police violence and all racism. While the introduction to the statement talks about the "complex systems of laws and cultural norms [that] justify [white Americans'] right to destroy, exclude, dehumanize and devalue black lives" and how "we continue to enact the hidden systems of oppression within our systems of education, policing, health-care, and so forth", their solution fails to stop or even challenge these systems.

For years, people in Madison have fought to demand the removal of cops from the public school system. This fight has been led by Freedom Inc and the Freedom Inc Youth Squad, and has included public forums, rallies and demonstrations, public comment

at school board meetings, lobbying school board members, and so much more. They have fought not just for a removal of police from schools, but for other school improvements as well, including supporting pay raises for teachers. These young activists and organizers have continued to organize in spite of harassment from police and civilians at school board meetings and endless derision by local media. That Freedom Inc has been doing this work for years means a foundation is set for all of Madison to move closer to a world free of racist violence.

The key part of MTI's statement reads "We call for the removal of all School Resource Officers from the four comprehensive high schools with the caveat that this only occurs when

all four high schools are properly staffed with counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses, and

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mental health specialists according to the national American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) recommended levels." (emphasis in original). The statement goes on to describe how some teachers support cops in schools, and then lists the total number of new positions needed to meet the ACLU levels (it is 33 new positions). They argue "if we remove police officers from our schools, but do not adequately staff those same schools with social workers, nurses, counselors, and psychologists, we are per-

petuating harm upon our most vulnerable young people. If we are serious about being anti-racist as a Madison community, we must

fully support our students, not just by subtracting one group, but significantly adding another.”

The understaffing of the schools that MTI calls out is appalling – 33 desperately needed positions, not counting additional classroom teachers to reduce class sizes. However, this statement creates a false equivalence between the roles performed by police and those other positions as well as the value of one position versus another. The statement actually gives justification to an often-unsaid reason that cops are staffing the schools instead of these other positions – cops are cheaper (even if they don't do the job). 4 cops for the cost of \$360,000/year compared to 33 other positions for \$2,970,000/year. Decades of austerity have shrunk school and government budgets as the rich have gotten richer. As money has gotten tighter, our health, poverty, and school systems have gotten replaced by the cheaper and drastically more violent criminal injustice system.

MTI's statement uses the staffing recommendations for support staff as laid out by the ACLU. However, MTI absolutely ignores the ACLU staffing recommendation for cops in schools – zero. As the ACLU says in their report Cops and No

Counselors in the section of District and School-Level Recommendations (pg 42-43), “End Routine Policing Practices Inside Schools. Police should enter schools only to address threats to physical safety.” MTI cites the ACLU's evidence-based recommendations for support staff, but ignores when the ACLU says that “there is no evidence that police in schools improve school safety – indeed, in many cases they are causing harm” (pg 4).

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MTI's statement also ignores what students and the Black-led movement are saying: cops cause harm, full stop. The Freedom Inc Youth Squad and others have not argued that cops in schools are overall good but that counselors are better (as MTI seems to be saying). They have argued that the presence of police is overall bad. MTI's conditional support of the demands of the Black freedom struggle fails to adequately support the struggle.

MTI is absolutely right to call for and fight for full staffing of our schools. It is powerful to see the stark numbers of how understaffed they are and how great the need is. They are also right to connect the dots between how funds and responsibilities have been shifted from unarmed civilians to the criminal injustice system. How-

ever, to say that they only support the anti-racist demands if... fails to actually support those anti-racist demands.

The massive rebellions across the US have demonstrated that not only do we need to make radical changes to end racism, but that it will require a monumental fight by oppressed and working people against the institutions and people who benefit from the current system. Teachers have the ability to play a central role in this fight. The Chicago Teachers Union in 2012 waged and won a city-wide strike by fighting for, as they put it, the Schools Chicago Children Deserve and centering anti-racism in that fight. They called CPS an apartheid school system for its racial inequities. This strengthened the confidence Chicagoans had in the CTU and strengthened the CTU's ability to fight for anti-racist, anti-sexist, and socially just schools.

Teachers, as workers and through union organizing, have a unique ability to make changes happen in our schools. If MTI were to fully and truly support the demands of the Black freedom struggle, the union could develop the trust and relationships needed with the community to fight and win the rest of what MTI calls for. Instead, they have placed themselves at odds with the struggle to end racism. 🌸



Social Anguish and Communal Healing

The Mental Health Crisis and the Necessity of Medicare For All

By Karl Locher



Our mental health has been falling to pieces for an awfully long time.

It takes a lot of numbers to summarize the obvious truth, which is that humans of the 21st century are increasingly isolated and distracted, living in deteriorating communities and struggling to keep touch with something akin to reality. The foundations of our mental health are being stripped away from us and the novel coronavirus pandemic is laying this problem bare. Indeed, the anxiety and isolation of the pandemic are exacerbating social dynamics that pre-date the novel coronavirus by decades. Before the pandemic, in 2018 48,344 people in America died by suicide, 67,367 died by drug overdose and

about 88,000 die annually of alcohol related illnesses. In Dane County alone, we are already experiencing an increasing number of overdoses and suicide attempts as the pandemic escalates. The aptly named “deaths of despair” make this crisis of mental health an exceptionally lethal one.

This may feel like a new crisis, certainly the statistics indicate that the collective mental health of people in the United States is deteriorating in unprecedented ways. However, it is a mistake to understand the current crisis of mental health as a singular and novel event. Both rhetorically and statistically, the phenomenon of this crisis that has drawn the most attention is white male suffering – and, inadvertently, the violence caused by white men. Indeed, the

leading indicator of “deaths of despair” is the declining life expectancy of white men in the United States since the turn of the century. This indicator is often quoted unironically, and without the important context that white male life expectancy is still longer than that of black men. Even a brief examination of the social conditions of this latest iteration of the American crisis of mental health reveals a pattern as old as our country itself.

Going back through the history of the United States, and therefore the leading edge of capitalist development, there have been a series of mental health crises. The most striking difference between those of the past, and the crisis of today, is that prior crises were put upon oppressed people by way of

race, gender, and sexuality and therefore were not crises of despair, suffering, or mental health, but of deviancy, psychopathology, and subhuman misery. Indigenous peoples were among the first to suffer from the trauma of colonialism and to witness the cruel transformations of community and body that occur through the intergenerational transmission of that trauma. Over time, three crucial elements of mental health were stolen and stolen again from indigenous peoples: a sense of safety, identity, and self-efficacy. As capitalism developed in the United States, and indigenous struggle was repeatedly purged from collective memory and history, we arrive at a present in which indigenous mental health is only recognized as a genetic pathology of alcohol use disorder, not one of intergenerational trauma.

Similar crises have played out in the bodies of black people, white women, and many people whose spirits have been under the heel of American capital. A unique feature of a capitalist crisis of mental health is the way in which original psychological suffering can be turned into abstract pathology which can then be repurposed to subjugate and commodify the individual. In the mid-19th century, Black slaves who yearned for and took steps towards their own freedom were diagnosed with “drapeomania,” an invented illness that shares eerily similar diagnostic features to the psychotic illnesses of which black men are diagnosed – but do not actually experience – at disproportionately high rates in the United States. Women who fought in their homes and in the streets for their liberation were diagnosed with hysterical personalities and banished to mental health hospitals just as black people were “treated” in facilities that were nothing more than re-branded plantations.

Each iteration of this crisis of mental health can find its genesis

in collective and intergenerational trauma^[1], bound together by the death of identities and communities, the despair of self-efficacy, and the theft of bodily autonomy. In a basic sense, each crisis has

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an origin in the dispossession of a reasonable sense of safety within society. In a more elaborate way, these traumas occurred in context of the more gradual process of depriving people of the foundations of mental health. Humans need to be heard by one another, to experience compassion and separation, to be challenged to grow and nurtured as they do, to be able to play and

encounter risk while also having a safe home to which they can return. People need to be experienced as humans by other humans, humans who have unique and meaningful experiences and imaginations. It takes little imagination to realize how the social changes of the last century deprived great numbers of people of such foundational conditions. Trends of suburbanization of communities, evisceration of public education, and decimation of unionized work, have made it such that even our opportunities to play and converse with one another are isolating and alienating. Living in a society that is actively hostile to one’s livelihood, well-being, or even fundamental existence is devastating to mental, as well as physical, health the effects of which ripple through time in insidious ways. In this framework, it should then be little surprise that the specific trauma of neoliberalism and the intergenerational trauma of toxic masculinity has finally caught up to white men.

The coronavirus pandemic has revealed a great deal of cruelty in our society and many people are now realizing that it isn’t worth returning to the “old normal.” People already oriented to socialist politics, or having already experienced the most cruel forms of oppression themselves, are unsurprised by this revelation. This dynamic

is pertinent to the exacerbation of the mental health crisis throughout the coronavirus pandemic. Clearly, the foundations of our mental health have been deteriorating for a long time, but now that the bottom has dropped out from underneath us, a sense of safety and belonging in society is even more difficult to attain than it was before the pandemic. Of course, the pandemic didn’t have to turn out this way, and only feels so inhumane on account of a society that has been structured around capitalist accumulation, rather than human flourishing.

If capitalism got us into this mess, it is clearly trying to convince us that it can get us out of it. With each new version of this crisis, the symptom is turned into a commodity that can once again fuel the cycle of exploitation. Nearly every moment I’ve spent online in the last month has been flooded with advertisements for novel mental health products. I stopped counting all of the new services and apps being marketed on Instagram a while ago when I realized the insidiously relaxing promotional videos had all blended together into a nauseatingly similar message. Just relax, everything will be fine if you just tune it all out. Whether it’s a meditation app that promises to wipe away my obviously irrational worries about our collective welfare^[2] or integrated online psychiatric services offering evidence-based solutions to my pathological isolation from other people^[3], the markets clearly agree that something is amiss with our mental health.

Don’t mistake my sarcasm for an attempt to erase the distinction between healthy, adaptive concern and pathological, life-ruining anxiety – or any other form of psychological suffering. My target isn’t those who suffer, but those exploit the suffering. To treat psychological suffering, of clinical significance or not, as somehow discrete from our social conditions is repulsive. The underlying message is that the problem is you not the world you live in and it’s a message

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that allows human suffering to be commodified.

There is a strong evidence to suggest that social inequality is a unique cause of serious psychopathology, such as borderline personality disorder, psychotic disorders, and substance use disorders. The gross inequalities of our society are the product of brutal oppression and exploitation, but also the subtler abrasion of market ideology. These qualities of our society are evident in our mental health care as well. America's largest mental health facilities are prisons and the centuries-old practice of locking up the mentally unwell is still America's favored treatment. In our broader healthcare system, the enthusiasm for evidenced-based treatments that produce no discernibly beneficial outcomes is creating a system in which neither the patient nor the therapist actually matter. Treatment systems today virtually erase the individual and are hell-bent on finding the "right" treatment for the right pathology, a philosophy that has shown virtually no clinical benefits, yet has unquestionably improved the bottom line for corporate health systems.

Still worse, an appalling number of people simply don't have access to mental health care at all. 27 million Americans went without health insurance in 2018, a number that is steadily rising. Even those with insurance often go without any or adequate mental health care. The reasons for this are numerous, ranging from insurers violating the federal mandate for parity of mental health and medical benefits, to fragmented provider and payer networks that prevent people from seeking care where it is available, to a dearth of mental health providers in rural areas (and even many urban areas). In context of the failure of commercial health insurance to provide mental health care, it is entirely unsurprising that

a market has emerged for apps and private services to exploit the void.

Commodified healthcare doesn't work. It really doesn't work for mental healthcare. Individual mental health is better when our collective mental health improves. In order for us all to do better, we need Medicare For All. To provide lasting healing, our practices of care must acknowledge and respond to the collective social conditions of a suffering individual.

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Commodified healthcare doesn't work. It really doesn't work for mental healthcare. Individual mental health is better when our collective mental health improves.”

If our current crisis of mental health illustrates the need for universal healthcare, it may also be able to illuminate how to organize a system of socialized healthcare. In particular, the pandemic has revealed the urgent need for democracy in

healthcare. The opacity of distribution of protective equipment amongst healthcare workers, staff furloughs and shortages occurring within the same community, and persistently worse health outcomes for people of color, trans and queer people, and women point to the need for a healthcare system that is responsive to both its workers and its patients. This is to say that healthcare must be deeply democratic as much as it must be socialist. Our current system of commodified health care necessarily obstructs this kind of democracy. In a very real sense, our healthcare is in the hands of our employers, not our own. Just the same, hospitals and clinics have traded the medical patriarchy of the 20th century for the data-driven tyranny of insurance companies.

To heal people from the trauma and dispossession of capitalism, we need to reorganize power within medicine. It will take a tremendous feat of organizing and democratic power in order to realize Medicare For All. In building a single-payer, national healthcare system, socialists and healthcare providers alike can change the very conditions in

which healthcare is provided. By shifting the organizing principle of health systems to the wellbeing of patients, our hospitals and clinics would demand greater input from the care workers who are present with patients. Such a system would grant all people the same economic power within the healthcare system. Shifting power within healthcare would result in a major transformation of a foundational system of social reproduction. Doing so would allow for people to build greater power for challenging other capitalist systems of exploitation and oppression. In organizing together, and by providing better healthcare for one another, we would create more empathetic capacity to care for one another, to be able to listen and respond to conflict, to alleviate isolation and exist in a shared community. These things, as much as any clinical treatment, are crucial to our shared mental health and should guide our health politics in this time of crisis and beyond. 

[1] For an outstanding illustration of the workings of intergenerational trauma, see D.A. Lupnitz's *The Family Interpreted: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Family Therapy*, specifically chapter 15.

[2] Sarcasm.

[3] Yet more sarcasm.

Layers of Burden, the Struggle of Immigrant Workers

By Mary E. Croy



While human rights abuses rage on the border, immigrants in Dane County and Wisconsin face a set of their own challenges.

“Financial stress, worries about getting relatives sick, childcare, and how they are going to teach their children, there are layers and layers of stress and worry,” said Bianca Tomasini, organizer for the Madison chapter of Voces de la Frontera, a grassroots immigration rights organization based in Milwaukee.

Immigrants here in Dane County are often low-wage workers and essential workers, and particularly for those in the undocumented community, COVID-19 has increased fear and financial distress. For example, in struggling households, having hours cut from 60

per week to 40 is a cause of crisis, as there is not enough income to pay the bills.

Tomasini described the fears of workers that Voces serves. “Workers are afraid to speak up. They are in workplaces that are not safe.” Voces is helping workers in 11 companies where employees are still being made to work without Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), in addition to a host of other abuses, such as absence of sick leave, an inability to practice social distancing, and lack of transparency as to whether co-workers have come down with the virus. In one case, a person who complained about conditions was fired. Voces started a lawsuit, and the worker got their job back.

Voces has contacted OSHA, but the federal agency is not doing inspections at this time. They also

have contacted the state department of health and other agencies to try to enforce protections for vulnerable workers.

Voces has been able to win concessions in some of the companies, but there “are at least two companies that barely give minimum PPE, and there is no social distancing and no sick leave.”

Lack of transparency and information from employers is another cause of fear for immigrant workers.

“Many live in multigenerational families and would like to know when someone has COVID,” Tomasini said.

They live in homes where there may be elderly parents or grandparents who are especially vulnerable to the virus. Yet many companies do not share information about workplace COVID-19 cases

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with their employees, adding to the stress on workers and their families.

While undocumented workers pay into the system, they are not eligible for the benefits of other workers.

“Even though they pay taxes, and they make sure they pay taxes, they cannot collect unemployment,” Tomasini said, describing additional financial distress of the undocumented community. They received no stimulus check. They are very concerned about paying bills and it is not always clear if testing is available.

Voces has been informing immigrants that testing for COVID-19 is available at the Alliant Energy Center for no cost, as well as through other clinics.

Adding to the burdens of this vulnerable community are concerns about childcare and education now that kids are home from school, especially since many in the immigrant community are essential workers and are away from home for long periods of time. “It is an awful time for everybody,” said Tomasini, “but particularly for a community that cannot access everything.”

When people are sick, immigrant families reach a different level of stress, she added, and the expensive nature of healthcare is making their situation more troubling, on top of the concern that in attempting to access healthcare they will be asked about their status.

Immigrants in the process of getting Green Cards have another fear looming. “People have lots of questions, although COVID services are not supposed to be counted against them,” Tomasini said, describing the “public charge” provisions put forward by the Trump administration. People still fear going to the doctor.

No ICE raids have been carried out in Madison since the stay at home order was announced, according to Tomasini, and there have been few deportations in Dane County. “Milwaukee has had some dubious deportations,” she noted.

Yet ICE has not stopped all activity. Some people who were in detention centers have been moved far away, so it is difficult to find them or for the detainees to get legal help. Although detention centers in Wisconsin are not as bad as those in states on the U.S.-Mexico border, individuals who remain in detention in Wisconsin are very depressed. Here in Dane County, Centro Hispano has been a good resource for assisting immigrants by directing them to clinics and helping them find financial resources. In other parts of Wisconsin, Tomasini describes assistance as “piecemeal.” The services available in Dane County are not available in other parts of the state, and Voces organizers are scrambling to get people needed help. The Sheriffs in Sheboygan and Waukesha counties have pledged to work with ICE, adding to more fear for workers in those areas of Wisconsin. “It is remarkable what Voces has done to stand up to companies and improve conditions,” Tomasini said. “But the battle is not won yet, for sure.”

Meanwhile, to the south, there are nightmarish conditions for people fleeing from violence and life-threatening poverty and oppression in Latin America. Immigrants in Northern Mexico have been turned away from seeking asylum in the United States amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Asylum hearings have been subject to long delays. Around 60,000 immigrants are waiting in Mexico, 6,500 of whom have already been forced to wait over six months.

For example, refugees in Ciudad Juarez are living in a warehouse. There is no social distancing. And these may be the “lucky” ones. Many other people awaiting asylum hearings are forced to stay in squalid tent camps near the border. There, they are not only very vulnerable to COVID-19, but are victims of rape, assault and other crimes. In a camp in Matamoros, Mexico, 2,500 people are sharing a few dozen toilets in a packed tent city.

This is the place where Oscar Alberto Martinez Ramirez and his daughter, Angie Valeria, drowned trying to get into the U.S. There are not enough hospital beds in Matamoros if there is an outbreak in the camp, and the U.S. automatically denies admission to refugees who are sick.

In addition, 37,000 people are held in immigration jails throughout the country. Many spend their days in large rooms filled with long concrete benches or bunk beds. Others are in poorly ventilated two-person cells. The detainees often do not even have soap. Sinks or showers are often inaccessible. As of 2019, there were over 4,500 complaints of sexual abuse at the border dating back to 2014. Because ICE and Border Patrol are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security, the agencies can shield information about personnel from the public, making for a lack of accountability.

Rage against immigrants is nothing new. Xenophobia and nationalism have been exploited to divide the working class since the 19th century. The Trump Administration has manipulated this issue, demonizing immigrants, who are the victims of the very crimes that the President accuses them of committing.

American imperialism also has caused desperate people to flee Central American countries in fear for their lives. The U.S.-backed coup in Honduras in 2009 led to intolerable conditions for the working class in that country.

Socialists must support refugees and speak out against the racism and imperialism of the U.S. government. ICE is an unnecessary agency, which only came into existence after 9/11 and serves as a tool of terror on immigrant communities throughout the U.S.

But we can make a difference here in Wisconsin. Voces de la Frontera is an immigrant rights group that has been on the frontlines of political action. They have a branch here in Madison, which meets monthly and coordinates activities, grassroots organizing,

and protests to support immigrants and refugees. There are many campaigns, such as restoring driver's licenses to all, without regard to immigration status. This is an overlooked issue that is vital to our undocumented worker community. Now more than ever is a time for solidarity! 🌸

How you can help

Voces de la Frontera is a dynamic, grassroots organization that helps immigrants and their families, including those who are undocumented. They are on the frontlines of fighting for our most vulnerable workers. There are several ways you can help.

You can **become a member**.

The most pressing need is financial aid. Immigrants are facing pressures paying bills, rent, food, healthcare, childcare, and other expenses. Voces has started a direct aid fund which helps undocumented families throughout Wisconsin.

In Dane County, **Centro Hispano** is a hub of assistance for Latinx families, including immigrants and undocumented workers.

Disarm the Police on the Way to Disbanding

By Trevin Geier



The public execution of George Floyd, a black American, by police officers has sparked anger and outrage, not only across the United States but throughout the entire world. After the now-infamous video showing an officer kneeling on Floyd's neck, mass protesting has erupted with major cities in every US state taking part.

Rightfully so, people are angry, upset, and heartbroken. And while much of media discourse is surrounding the validity of different forms of protesting, focusing on "riots," "looting" and the presence of "outside agitators," there is no one correct way to protest. I don't endorse violence. But I also do not condemn the destruction of property. Especially if said property was built upon, and exists solely because of the exploitation of others, which is true for most institutions in the US. The majority of protests happening around the world are

peaceful. Only one group consistently refuses to keep the peace, refuses to abide by the law, and chooses to escalate violence at seemingly every opportunity.

The police.

This militant group justifies the use of force by claiming that its role in society is to protect its citizens. The police have been the primary on-the-ground opposition to Black Lives Matter protests. Over the past few weeks, many examples of police using "riot" gear against protesters have surfaced. This military-grade weaponry has shown to be incredibly powerful and dangerous. While baton use can cause severe bruising and broken bones, deep wounds have also been afflicted by launching tear gas canisters and shooting rubber bullets. A few noteworthy cases have resulted in victims of rubber bullet shootings sustaining life-altering injuries and in one docu-

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mented case, completely losing sight in one eye.

These “less-lethal” forms of weaponry that have been disgustingly displayed and used against peaceful protesters should not be overlooked. Individuals engaging in these protests must be made aware of the dangers of these oppressive tools. But if these “less-lethal” weapons are so incredibly dangerous, that begs the question: Why have lethal weapons at all?

Why should police officers carry lethal firearms on their person in the first place? Why guarantee the ability to kill at a moment’s notice? Why sign off on issuing weapons that have the ability to end life faster than you can pull your headphones out of your ears to hear what’s going on? There is no good reason.

People may argue that as long as the Second Amendment stands and people have guns, officers should too. And yes, kinda, sorta, that makes sense. We want police officers to use force when there are crises that pose imminent threats to public safety. Crises in which the lives of American citizens are at risk. Crises that may actually justify the use of lethal force. However, every day is not a crisis. Traffic stops are not a crisis. Foot patrol in public areas is not a crisis. If we want to reduce the amount of gun-related incidents involving police officers and civilians, we must take away the police officers’ ability to escalate the situation into one of life or death.

Think about the murder of George Floyd, only this time, imagine that none of the police officers have guns. Would a bystander have intervened? Would the people be more evenly matched in confronting officers as they murdered a civilian? Maybe the police officers wouldn’t have exerted such blatantly excessive force in the first place if they couldn’t hide behind their guns. Without guns, David

McAtee and Sean Monterrosa who were both killed by police during protests these past few weeks would still be alive. Police do not need guns to effectively enforce laws and protect citizens. Just look

at our European neighbors. Fewer officers possess guns and fewer deaths are carried out by the hands of the police.

And yes, The United States is a bigger country with more crime. And you could argue that our crime rate necessitates police carrying lethal weaponry. But to me, this seems like a vicious cycle. Police executions and gun

violence lead to fear. Fear leads to buying guns. More guns in combination with fear then mean more death. While the crime rate in the US is higher than in other countries, the difference between the rate at which police in the US kill civilians and the rate at which police in other countries murder civilians is substantially greater. The United States has a rate of 4.96 intentional homicide victims per 100,000 citizens^[1] (A metric used for measuring violent crime). Compare this to the 1.20 rate in the United Kingdom and you may think that the United States has a justification for their differing policing policies. But if we look at the rate of killings by police officers we see a much more alarming discrepancy. In the United Kingdom, there are .5 police killings for every 10 million citizens^[2]. In the United States, there are 30.4^[3]. So although the United States has a violent crime rate five times greater than the UK, we have 60 times the amount of killings at the hand of law enforcement.

It’s also important to note that compared to other countries we then have many more guns. We rank #1 in the world with citizen gun possession clocking in at a whopping 120 guns per 100 citizens^[4]. The Falkland Islands, who rank second, have half that. European countries like Germany and

Sweden have around 20 guns per 100 people (Germany at 19.6 and Sweden at 23.1). It’s no surprise that with more killing machines comes more killings.

The end goal should be a complete abolition of the current police state. Completely disarming police officers of lethal and “less-lethal” weapons. If we must have an intermediary step, “less-lethal” weapons should be used only in situations in which there is an immediate threat. I expect police officers to be well-trained both in physical skills and in communications. An adept police officer should have no problem effectively subduing dangerous perpetrators with “less-lethal” force. Perhaps without their killing devices police will be forced to rely less on guns and more on communication and de-escalation techniques. Disarming the police state will be no easy task, but the power and the will of the people is strong. 🌸

[1] <https://dataunodc.un.org/crime/intentional-homicide-victims>

[2] <https://www.inquest.org.uk/fatal-police-shootings>

[3] Source: The Washington Post

[4] <http://www.smallarms-survey.org/publications/by-type/yearbook/small-arms-survey-2007.html>

Dear Commie

Dear Commie,

There must be a reason that politicians resist defunding the police, even as millions of people have turned out to protest against police brutality in the past few weeks. What role do police play in capitalist society?

*Sincerely,
Obvious Plant*

Dear Obvious,

Police forces are distinctive—modern inventions, which didn't exist before the development of capitalism. They were first created in countries like Britain and the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century as industrialization brought large numbers of workers together in huge cities characterized by huge social and economic inequalities. The role of the police was to maintain order—to break strikes, suppress urban uprising, and protect the property and safety of the rich. In the U.S. South there was a further dimension: capturing runaway slaves and preventing slave rebellions.

In general terms, the police have always served the wealthy and protected their property. That is why in Black, Latinx, and poor working-class neighborhoods, the police typically operate as an occupying force, viewing the residents with suspicion and treating them with contempt, or worse. The underlying cause of police violence and racism is not the psychology of individual cops, but the role they play in the current system. What good is maintaining “law and order” if the law discriminates against the



poor and people of color, and the social order is fundamentally unjust?

The idea that the police play a vital role in preventing or solving crime doesn't stand up to scrutiny. In the first place, the worst crimes in capitalist society are committed by the rich and powerful and they are rarely held accountable for their actions. For example, every year the amount stolen by various forms of wage theft by employers is around three times all other forms of theft (larceny, burglary, auto theft, and robbery) combined. But police target the petty criminals, not the worst offenders.

Even with respect to so-called “street crime,” the police have a poor record. More police do not mean less crime—in fact, often the opposite, with police forces in major cities routinely engaging in acts of corruption, brutality, and murder. Individual cops are rarely charged or convicted, but taxpayers end up paying hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation to victims or their families.

This is why support for de-

funding the police has begun to grow. Capitalism creates huge social problems, but there are better ways to deal with them than throwing money at police departments, which have seen their budgets grow enormously over the past 30 years. Instead, we need money to be spent on education, housing, healthcare, and social programs that deal with the roots of the problems. In many emergencies, social workers and mental health professionals are needed, not armed cops. And we need public safety agencies to be rooted in local communities and committed to social justice.

As we work to replace capitalism with socialism, we should demand that police budgets be cut and the money spent in more socially useful ways.

Sincerely,
Commie

Further reading:

David Whitehouse's blog post on the origins of policing (<https://worxintheory.wordpress.com/2014/12/07/origins-of-the-police/>)

Alex Vitale's article, “The answer to police violence is not ‘reform.’ It's defunding. Here's why.”

Alex Vitale, *The End of Policing* (Verso, 2017). (Madison Area DSA will be reading and discussing *The End of Policing* together starting June 22. Keep an eye on the MAD-SA event calendar for details). You can get the e-book for free from Verso.

Maya Schenwar et al. (eds.), *Who Do You Serve, Who Do You Protect?* (Haymarket, 2016)

DEAR COMMIE

Dear Commie,

As a socialist, I get that organized labor is very important. Union, yes! But I have to say, police unions seem unrepentantly evil and bad. What's the difference between a police union and other unions?

Sincerely,
Not Sold on their Solidarity

Dear Rightfully Suspicious,

While police unions and labor unions are both unions in name, they couldn't be more different.

First let's look at labor unions,

which are an organized group of workers who unite to make decisions about their working environment and conditions. Labor unions allow workers to protect themselves against bosses and other company authorities who seek to extract as much profit as possible from workers, which inevitably leads to the mistreatment and exploitation of laborers.

Next, let's look at police unions, which serve the following purposes: Police unions aggressively fight reform efforts, bust union organizing, and defend officer misconduct. See: Philly officer Joseph Bologna who is facing assault charges for beating a student at an anti-racism protest, who's union issued a statement saying they "will not stand-by and watch Inspector Bologna get railroaded." This is a prime example of the way in which police unions will band together to defend police

brutality, reinforcing a precedent for police to commit future acts of violence with impunity. Police unions aren't for protecting cops against the bosses the way labor unions do. Cops ARE the bosses in the sense that they act out the violent will of the state, busting unions, oppressing the oppressed, and funneling bodies into the carceral system.

In short, cop unions aren't actually unions, they're state-sanctioned mafia masquerading as unions. As socialists, we demand the abolition of the police and of the carceral system, which includes the immediate disbanding of all police unions.

Sincerely,
Commie

REDMADISON

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