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INVASIVE

The fight against incarceration and policing is an ecological battle.

A government is an ecosystem. Like all ecosystems on earth, our systems of governance have been decimated by the cancerous nature of colonial capitalism. Any government project rooted in capitalist, colonial history and ideology will behave like an invasive species. It will replicate itself as quickly and broadly as possible, replacing diversity with hegemony, depleting vital resources and worsening material conditions for all other beings in the ecosystem.

Policing and incarceration are the most harmful and pervasive examples of this phenomenon. They expand year after year, condensing a vast range of incidents under one type of response, sucking the well of public funding dry and encroaching on other departments.

Alternatives to policing and incarceration are like native species. They must be given space to grow and flourish before they can realize their full potential. Any ecologist worth their salt will tell you restoring a native ecosystem without managing invasive populations is a fools errand. Yet this is the approach taken time and again by our public officials.

To invest in alternatives at their infancy while simultaneously increasing investments in well-established colonial-capitalist institutions is absurd. It's akin to planting prairie next to tree of heaven and putting fertilizer on the tree. It's placation from public officials to distract from their refusal to do what's necessary.

For the prairie to flourish, the tree of heaven must be aggressively and strategically destroyed on all fronts, at every stage. For alternative institutions to flourish, carceral institutions must be similarly targeted: aggressively, strategically, on all fronts and at every stage. Anything less is ecocide.

–BEDWARD ERNAYS

Governance: the framework of processes, functions, structures, rules, laws and norms born out of the relationships, interactions, power dynamics and communication within an organized group of individuals.

Invasive: an introduced species that harms its new environment.

COMMUNITY CONTROL OF THE POLICE

> Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded.
>
> – KARL MARX, CAPITAL VOL. I, CH. 10

Why are we here?

If asked which country you would assume had the highest total number of prisoners, which would you pick? The first thought for many would be countries with the highest total population, like, China, or India. They both have over a billion people in each of their countries, why not? Others may think of the right-wing military dictatorship of Nayib Bukele, current president of El Salvador. Any of those assumptions would be incorrect. The answer is a country with only a quarter of China's 1.4 billion population currently topping the chart with 1.8 million prisoners: the United States of America. There isn't a clearer sign than this statistic that the legacy of settler-colonialism and slavery was never smashed, nor has it withered away. A civil war "ended" slavery in the legal sense, but not within the hearts and minds of the former slave owning south, proven by the betrayal of Reconstruction and the immediate implementation of the Black Codes after Lincoln was assassinated. The failures to adequately deal with the issue of racism once and for all has allowed its legacy to rot our society from the core until today. This manifests no more egregiously than as policing as an institution and the conditions of daily life as a prisoner.

So, when our county leaders are asking for over a hundred million dollars in taxes (through bonds and interest, entirely debt) to build a new jail, then, we must begin to ask ourselves questions: What public safety problems are we trying to solve? What outcomes are we trying to achieve? What combination of prevention, crisis response, behavioral-health services, diversion, treatment, reentry, and alternative confinement will best achieve those goals? Those who have been asking these very questions for over a year now know how little the county has answered. This has led the community to come together and wonder about the motives of the sheriff's department. What happens if there are cost overruns? What actions led to the condition of the current jail? Does the Sheriff plan to rent out the extra jail space and to whom? How much will this facility cost to operate? Why wasn't there public engagement until now? Why won't we have a final design until next year?

I am voting "no" to spending over $100,000,000 for a new jail on Nov. 3 because Johnson County deserves better.

For almost two years under the pedophile-fascist Trump administration, U.S. residents—especially anyone that "appears" to be a migrant or person of color—have been living in fear that at a moments notice their window will be smashed by the modern-day slave catchers (ICE), only to be swiftly taken away to a concentration camp run by a private company (of course capitalists can't miss an opportunity for profit!) Some may think that this kind of state violence is unique to Trump or the Republican Party. On the contrary, this type of violence exists in the daily lives of poor and minority communities, no matter who is in federal office. During my life I can't remember a time when there wasn't a story in the news of a police officer murdering an unarmed Black man. At a young age the excuses for needing to murder may have worked, but the cracks show with life after life taken by the very people who are supposed to "protect and serve." Inconsistencies in preconceived notions about the institution start to show and the nagging itch of contradictions becomes as undeniable as the march of climate change.

I will be discussing the communist view on the community control of the police, but before that I find it important to highlight the history and origins of policing in this country. My intentions are to pierce any naive bias that the passage of time equals progress. We are not unconnected from the past but are tethered to it by a continual string, one that we can follow. Understanding how each and every one of us is connected to this string will help us see that struggle is part of life.

A Short History Lesson on Policing in the United States

Every analysis needs a historical view to ground how the subject has changed since its inception. The passage of time, the record of history itself, is made up of many different threads that we can follow back and forth from any time to the present. The history of policing in the U.S. has hardly been altered or reformed in any structural way to combat its contradictions or to end its violence in communities.

The Beginning

Policing measures have always targeted racially and nationally oppressed peoples, from Manifest Destiny and the genocide of the native population that continues today to the capture of Africans to be used as chattel slaves. The U.S. ruling capitalist class has always been white supremacist. Some of the first forms of policing they created were slave patrols and overseers to break rebellions and stop slaves from escaping North. Slave catching became federal law in 1850, when the pro-slavery U.S. Congress updated the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, making policing to maintain the slave system a national priority. Up until the 19th century, modern local police forces didn't exist. As they came to be, they were used by colonists as a colonial force. The most famous example of this is the Texas Rangers, illegally created to protect white settlers after the separatist republic became a U.S. territory. They targeted Native people in what historians have termed "nothing short of an extermination campaign," and they hunted down enslaved people as well.

Post Civil War

After the legal end of chattel slavery, the disempowerment of the slave-owning class spelled the end of the slave policing system. Many Reconstruction governments enacted new policing systems that included sheriffs, marshals, national guards, etc. In Mississippi November 1865, white-capitalists and middle-class reactionaries started enacting Jim Crow apartheid throughout the South, through forced segregation, poll taxes, literacy tests, and more. African Americans, still dispossessed of their promised reparations, became tenant farmers and sharecroppers for their former owners. "Criminality" was now used to reimpose slave-like conditions on the Black population through provisions in the 13th Amendment that allowed slave labor for prisoners, an exception that still exists today. The former slave patrols ran klan terror campaigns, murdering Black people and plundering their property. False accusations of sexual abuse and rape were targeted at Black men while other forms of super-exploitation of Black workers and tenants were employed to maintain white supremacy. Black people were imprisoned for petty crimes and forced into debt bondage to landlords and corporations, a system of convict leasing that lasted from the late 19th century until well into the 20th century.

In this era that also included the revolution of industry and work moving into the factories, owners requested government-provided forces to intimidate workers from striking against their conditions. This set the stage for a kind of policing we recognize today, protecting property of the wealthy while criminalizing actions like giving food to homeless people "without permit." During the early to mid-20th century, the U.S. government and ruling class also policed people for their political beliefs. The imprisonment of socialist leader Eugene V. Debs for speaking out against World War I and later the Palmer Raids of 1919 led to deportations, imprisonment, and death sentences for Communists, Socialists, and other political radicals. A second Red Scare during the 1950s targeted the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) and others, leading to job loss, harassment, and imprisonment. The 1960s gave birth to the Civil Rights movement, resulting in a Second Reconstruction with passage of the Voting Rights and Fair Housing Acts, but police repression continued apace. Domestic violence perpetrated by the state also increased, including assassinations and harassment from the FBI's infamous COINTELPRO program. National Guard units were deployed to put down African American uprisings across the country. This fervency of state violence to quell anti-racist and socialist thought doesn't end here, but becomes more inconspicuous as we get closer to today.

Modern Day

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the "War on Drugs,"

CONTROL, cont'd on back



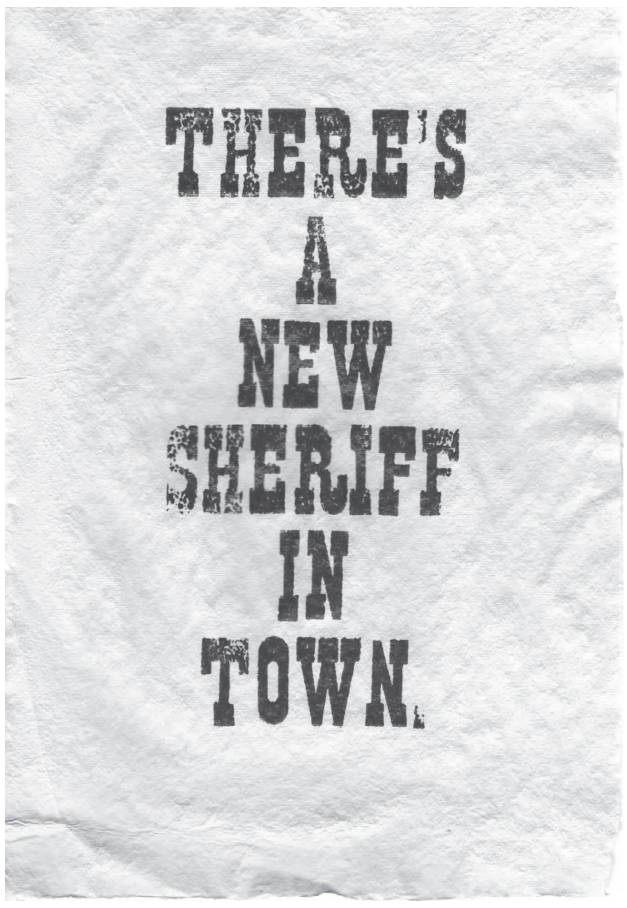


CONTROL, cont'd

marked the beginning of the crack cocaine epidemic. The US government aided in the massive influx of narcotics into Black and Brown communities. Reactionary drug policies implemented by the U.S. government, militarized policing, and mass incarceration became commonplace. By the early 1990s, every state in the country had created a "mandatory minimum sentencing" law. The election of an extreme-right GOP majority in the House of Representatives under the banner of Newt Gingrich's "Contract With America" hastened this process. In 1994, the passage of the Crime Bill, spearheaded by Democratic Party President Bill Clinton and Democratic Senator Joe Biden, worsened the trend. The law, according to the ACLU, "encouraged even more punitive laws and harsher practices on the ground, including by prosecutors and police, to lock up more people and for longer periods of time." The forces pushing for passage of the law drew on and exploited racist rhetoric about "super-predators," gang-bangers, and drugs to specifically target Black and Brown communities.

Today the U.S. hosts the largest prison population on the planet, disproportionately incarcerating African Americans, Native people and Latinos. A prison industrial complex extends from coast to coast, composed of both state-run and private prisons, where many prisoners are serving long sentences for drug-related and non-violent offenses. In many cities, police employ "Broken Window" policies and similar draconian tactics to round up and shakedown youth of color, to feed the prison and related industries. Young Black people are regular victims of police killings. Despite the huge public outcry after the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, the number of police shootings has increased. I highly encourage picking up two books for a deeper look at the subject: the prison memoir by George Jackson, *Soledad Brother*; and the collection of essays by Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*. Unless you understand what reality is truly like for victims of capitalist state violence, you will often find yourself defending the exploiter and their right to use violence on the exploited.

The police have evolved from the murderous captors of runaway slaves to the occupying force in our communities deployed to enforce a racial and economic hierarchy. We have followed the thread of history showing how the unaltered nature of policing as an institution has led us to the circumstances of today, where the demand for community control of the police has arisen.



Community Control of the Police

"Community control" is the ability of all working and oppressed peoples to have control over every aspect of their lives. This has been a central demand of the African American freedom movement, from the fight for control over the promised 40 acres and a mule in the late 19th century to the 1940s struggles in Harlem led by CPUSA members Maude White Katz and Doxey Wilkerson for control over schools. Today's demand for elected bodies that would control police activity, budgets, and practices would give regular people the ability to transform their communities into places of prevention, care, and rehabilitation; instead of violence, punishment, and repeating cycles of trauma. Community control of police is a primary demand that centers all working-class communities. Civilian review boards, which were enacted as a reformist reaction to the Black Panther Party's (BPP) campaigns for community control in the 1970s, are not community control. They have very little authority and few resources to enact any change. Most were designed to provide a pressure valve to dissipate community anger at police violence. They were intended more to improve community-police relations than to punish and root out police misconduct. As Communists (especially at Communist Party USA), we view the demand for community control of police as central to the struggle for all oppressed peoples, to change the political landscape and tilt the balance of forces toward democratic movements. It is a demand for power both to and from the people, to radically reconfigure the very functioning of government at the city, neighborhood, and community level, and to stop the killing of racially and nationally oppressed people in the United States by the police and federal slave-catchers (ICE). Community control, instead of protecting big capital, demands the implementation of directly elected civilian control boards that have the full and unconditional power to determine:

- Final authority over police policy, oversight policy, and budget, including writing and reviewing;
- Full authority on disciplinary measures and legal recourse, including subpoena power and the convening of grand juries;
- Hiring and firing power over the police chief or superintendent, all officers on the force, the head of any existing oversight or review boards and offices, and its members;
- Full access to all investigations by the oversight or review institutions;
- Broaden the scope of investigations to include all allegations of misconduct, including sexual assault;
- Negotiation of police union contracts;
- Exclude all current and former law enforcement agents from serving on the board.

Addressing the Elephant

In May 2025, Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds signed Senate File 311 that prohibits cities from establishing "a board or other entity for the purpose of citizen review of the conduct of police officers." It required at the time six different cities to shut down their review boards. We already established why review boards are a fake solution, but the bill's goal is also about any civilian control over the conduct of police departments. One aspect of this senate file to highlight is that Democratic State Senators voted along with the Republicans, who in the same legislature session eliminated civil rights for trans people. Now why would a party who claims to be for working people collaborate with fascists to remove working people's ability to control their lives? The rhetorical trap of "the state banned it" is an excuse we are all too familiar with in Johnson County. The senate file may be a blow but is not the end of struggle, and it doesn't mean we should abandon our positions or principles.

Conclusion

The thread of history shows clearly the unaltered institution of policing that started with catching runaway slaves. This thread has also shattered any naive bias that the progress of time is correlated to democratic, economic, or social progress. There are other dimensions of community control—school boards, city councils, zoning commissions, and county commissions—but policing, because of its immediate daily presence in nearly all aspects of a community's life, is vital. Racially opressed people have been systematically denied access to control over these institutions. Indeed, their historic oppression has rested on this denial, designing systems of inequality that ripple throughout all aspects of economic, social, and political life. These systems must be dismantled.

The position of a Communist is that racially and nationally oppressed people are entitled to immediate and unconditional political, social, and economic equality. The fight against mass incarceration and police terrorism is the struggle for freedom from racial oppression in this country. This is a political struggle that is in harmony with the effort of the working class and all oppressed peoples. It is at once a democratic struggle and a class struggle. By also uniting with our natural allies in labor, women's organizations, LGBTQ movements, and youth in our demand for community control, an important step can be taken on the road to a government of people's power and working-class leadership.

– MICHAEL POWERS, COMMUNIST PARTY USA

DECLASSIFIEDS

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Take what you need. Leave what you can.

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prairielands freedom fund

Donate!

Prairielands Freedom Fund is an all-volunteer organization based in Iowa City but working across the Midwest to free immigrants in ICE detention.

Prairielands has been operating for a decade, paying more than $4,000,000 to bond our immigrant neighbors out of ICE detention so they can return home to their families and their communities across the Midwest.

AUTONOMY IOWA CITY

Supporting bodily autonomy, right here in Iowa.

Assistance getting abortion pills for a self-managed abortion or miscarriage

Assistance with out of state travel for abortion related medical care

Support and education for people choosing self-managed abortion

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