



ABOLITION

REAL JUSTICE: AN END TO POLICING & PRISONS



THE ORIGINS OF POLICING

The concept of policing in Britain can be traced back to medieval times, when "watchmen" or "constables" were organised to maintain social order on behalf of the monarchy. From the very beginning, these groups existed to protect the powerful and quell popular uprisings: in 1736, the historic Porteous Riots occurred after the captain of the Edinburgh Town Guard ordered the murder of civilians who were protesting a hanging.

Less than a century later, in 1822, the first modern British police force — the Irish Constabulary — was established for the purpose of suppressing rebellion in occupied Ireland. Over the course of the 19th century, the British state mandated the creation of similar police forces nationwide to maintain ruling class control of private property. By the mid-20th century, policing had been fully adapted to use modern technologies for surveillance and capture.

The function of the police is no different today than it was in 1736 or 1822. Cops serve to break up strikes, protests, and other forms of political resistance from the working class. They protect the oppressive status quo from anything that challenges it. They deliberately carry out racist and gendered violence and discrimination in order to maintain white supremacy and patriarchy — that is, the systems of social division that privilege those classed as white and male.

Just within the past year, the police have shown more clearly than ever that their job is to terrorise and oppress certain populations. Patrolling the streets during lockdown to

arrest people for sitting outside, trampling people with horses at Black Lives Matter protests, manhandling women at a vigil for a woman who was murdered by a cop — the "law and order" that the police protect is the law and order of patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism.



THE BRITISH PRISON SYSTEM

The British prison system is expanding rapidly: the prison population has risen by 82% over the last 30 years (1988–2018). England and Wales now have the highest imprisonment rate in western Europe, while Scotland takes third place. British prisons are also increasingly dangerous: from 2016 to 2017, there were 40,000 incidents of self-harm, 300 deaths (25% of which were suicides), 325 reported sexual assaults, and 70 deaths a month in or around release from custody. Medical neglect and solitary confinement are also routine.

Oppressed groups — those who face the highest rates of discrimination, violence and poverty outside of prisons — are heavily targeted by the carceral state and are therefore over-represented within prisons. 26% of prisoners are Black or other people of colour, 29% have learning difficulties or disabilities, and LGBT people are also over-represented.

The violence and cruelty of the prison system is often blamed solely on the private corporations who directly profit from criminalising and incarcerating marginalised people, and prisons are indeed built into corporate supply chains. However, it is the state which has the exclusive power to criminalise and imprison people, and it is the state which commissions and collaborates with private investors.

*CorporateWatch "Prison Island" report (2018)

THE RADICAL ALTERNATIVE

The only viable solution to systems as harmful as policing and prisons is their total abolition. There is no way to reform an institution which was created for the sole purpose of racial capitalist oppression.

Besides, reforms often involve *increasing* resources and funding for the police in order to provide things like diversity trainings and body cameras — strengthening, not weakening, the police. Police violence, institutional racism, and the harms of incarceration are not anomalies or mistakes: they are proof of the system working just as intended.

Prisons are the sites of horrific violence, and their regular functioning leaves thousands of people impoverished, traumatised, ill, and more disconnected from society and their communities than ever — which is why 48% of prisoners end up re-offending within a year of being released.* **Only a revolution can smash the current system of prisons and police. Revolution is the basis for achieving abolition and building a just society.**

*CorporateWatch "Prison Island" report (2018)

BUT WHAT ABOUT...?

When people first learn about the concept of abolition, they often respond with a specific concern: *what about violent offenders, those who commit murder or sexual assault?*

The most important thing to understand is that **most such people already walk free, often among the ranks of police and prison guards themselves.**

Sexual violence in particular is rarely addressed through the state justice system – on the contrary, it is a daily occurrence in prisons and police operations.

Another important fact is that over half of prisoners in Britain (54% as of 2020)* are imprisoned for nonviolent and nonsexual offenses, such as drug possession, fraud, theft, or other "miscellaneous crimes." Incarceration permanently traumatises and disadvantages them – as well as the families and communities they are ripped away from – totally disproportionately to the harm they may have caused.

*House of Commons Library UK Prison Population Statistics (2020)

It *is* absolutely vital to keep our communities safe from all forms of violence, but police and prisons are *not* doing that. More often, they perpetrate violence and perpetuate cycles of generational harm and disenfranchisement in already-vulnerable communities.

“What is, so to speak, the object of abolition? Not so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society.”

— Fred Moten & Stefano Harney

We need to build our own radical alternatives to policing: community programmes that prevent crime by providing resources and support, survivor-centred methods of restorative and transformative justice, and grassroots structures to combat the collective and individual trauma caused by policing and incarceration. **We need to end the tyranny of police and prisons once and for all, as part of building a revolutionary future for Britain.**

ABOUT RED FIGHTBACK

Red Fightback is an intersectional Marxist-Leninist party working toward socialist revolution in Britain, and we organise our communities to resist the brutal and fascistic system of police and prisons. As Britain slides further into economic crisis, the state will intensify its use of these tools to repress the working and oppressed classes — but the power we build collectively is one that cannot be contained.

**To get in touch or get involved,
here's where you can find us:**



redfightback.org



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