



USA: No to Prison Slavery

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In April of this year, inmates at the Lee Correctional Center in South Carolina took strike action in protest at the brutal conditions in the prison. As if to prove their point, seven men died as a result of the authorities' actions to break the strike. In response, prisoners have called a nationwide strike from August 21 to September 9. At its General Meeting in July, the Mid Tennessee Chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America, DSA, adopted a resolution supporting the strike which sets out the prisoners' demands.

As shown by the list of demands, nothing that they are asking for is out of the realm of basic humanity. Inmates are routinely put to work on "jobs", at times dangerous jobs like fighting the California wildfires, that pay next to nothing, but enforce the idea that prison life is a "gravy train" for inmates and that they need to "pay for" the costs of their incarceration as well as their crimes.

The truth is that most of the inmates are incarcerated for drug crimes, mostly non-violent ones that represent no large threat to society. At least, no more of a threat than any kid who ever sold drugs and was lucky enough not to get caught at it. Now, under Trump, following the same policy as under Obama, a large proportion of undocumented immigrants are being held in prison, too, until their deportation.

Private prison corporations like CoreCivic headquartered in Nashville, also home of the Mid TN DSA, make massive profits that they disburse to their officers, their shareholders, and as campaign contributions to chosen politicians. They make these profits by cutting costs on inmate care as often as possible and especially on inmate health care.

For-profit prisons are a bane on the existence of any sort of just society and should be abolished forthwith. No one should profit from another human being's misery. This is why Workers' Power USA and the League for the Fifth International support the strike and we reproduce the resolution as an act of solidarity.

Resolution of the Mid Tennessee Chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America

The Middle Tennessee chapter of Democratic Socialists of America endorses the upcoming National Prison Strike called by incarcerated men and women. This strike, which begins on August 21 and extends through September 9, 2018, is a response to the April 2018 uprising at Lee Correctional Institution in South Carolina, during which seven men lost their lives.

Behind prison walls, individuals encounter brutality and exploitation that can only be understood by those who have shared in the experience. With roughly 5 percent of the world's total population but 25 percent of the world's total prison population, the United States incarcerates the highest number of people in the world in both absolute and relative terms. Mass incarceration perpetuates modern day slavery and, as socialists, we seek to dismantle this system of exploitation, dehumanization and subjugation. We see that the true goal of the carceral state is not to rehabilitate or protect, but to deny humanity and further the rancid institution of slavery that undergirds this country in the name of profit.

We know that dehumanization through criminalization, which begins for many at a young age, haunts our neighborhoods and communities by stripping individuals of their autonomy and agency. In Middle Tennessee, we further recognize that gentrification exacerbates this phenomenon; North Nashville, a historically Black community

that has been cyclically plundered and neglected by the ruling class of the city since former slaves settled here 150 years ago, and which is once again under assault from both developers and local government, experiences an incarceration rate of 14 percent -- the highest in the nation. People who have lived in our communities for decades are being pushed out in the same way that the colonizers of this continent displaced indigenous tribes who inhabited these lands for generations. As before, those who refuse to move will have the boot of the state pressed on their neck.

Mass incarceration is not an aberration but rather the product of a system created with the express purpose of ensuring that those profiting from the exploitation of society's most marginalized will continue to do so. This is a system built by the creators of the United States of America and maintained by the forces of both capital and the state. The alliance between capitalism and the state is on full display when CoreCivic, the largest private prison corporation in the world, headquartered in Nashville, pays both its shareholders and sympathetic politicians dividends extracted through the misery of imprisonment. These profiteers are the direct ideological descendants of the architects, benefactors, and overseers of the Atlantic slave trade.

We support the demands of this strike, which are:

1. Immediate improvements to the conditions of prisons and prison policies that recognize the humanity of imprisoned men and women.
2. An immediate end to prison slavery. All persons imprisoned in and place of detention under United States jurisdiction must be paid the prevailing wage in their state or territory for their labor.
3. The Prison Litigation Reform Act must be rescinded, allowing imprisoned humans a proper channel to address grievances and violations of their rights.
4. The Truth in Sentencing Act and the Sentencing Reform Act must be rescinded so that imprisoned humans have a possibility of rehabilitation and parole. No human shall be sentenced to Death by Incarceration or serve any sentence without the possibility of parole.
5. An immediate end to the racial overcharging, over-sentencing, and parole denials of Black and brown humans. Black humans shall no longer be denied parole because the victim of the crime was white, which is a particular problem in southern states.
6. An immediate end to racist gang enhancement laws targeting Black and brown humans.
7. No imprisoned human shall be denied access to rehabilitation programs at their place of detention because of their label as a violent offender.
8. State prisons must be funded specifically to offer more rehabilitation services.
9. Pell grants must be reinstated in all US states and territories.
10. The voting rights of all confined citizens serving prison sentences, pretrial detainees, and so-called "ex-felons" must be counted. Representation is demanded. All voices count.

We call for solidarity between those of us whose only chains are wage labor and the incarcerated individuals who will begin striking on August 21. Through solidarity we will support those caught in the snare of the prison industrial complex until and after they are free. Through solidarity we will break down the walls that the racist, classist, sexist bourgeoisie erected to separate us. Through solidarity alone will we create a future for all of us that exists without chains or bars.