

“Law Enforcement” against African Americans: Atlanta Struggle to Stop “Cop City” Continues After Council Approval

Residents and community activists initiate a petition to place the controversial law-enforcement training center to a vote by the electorate.

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Global Research, June 13, 2023

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

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There is much at stake for the ruling class and its law-enforcement surrogates in the mass campaign taking place in Dekalb County, Georgia to prevent the construction and operation of a training center which will cost tens of millions in tax dollars.

In a vote by the Atlanta City Council on June 5, the legislative approval of the project took place despite the objections of hundreds of people.

This training facility, if completed, would cost at least \$90 million. The center would be the largest of its kind in the United States. With Atlanta being a majority African American Southern municipality, it would be against the interests of its population to fund or allow such a project.

Historically, African Americans have been disproportionately impacted by police violence within their communities. The police represent the entry point of millions into the criminal industrial complex, where again, African Americans are sent to prison in far greater numbers to their percentage within the U.S. Consequently, it should not be surprising that many African Americans and other oppressed peoples along with their supporters are calling for the defunding of police and the abolition of the prison systems.

Concerned people stood in line for hours in order to make statements against the building of the complex located in a rural forested area outside of Atlanta. However, despite the growing opposition to the project, the City Council revealed that their status largely depends upon a subservience to the ruling class and the police.

Demonstrations surrounding the building of Cop City have resulted in the shooting death of

one activist—Manuel Paez Teran (Tortuguita)—the arrests of hundreds and the now attempted framing of those who are organizing a defense campaign to provide legal assistance to people ensnared by the State of Georgia’s criminalization of protests. Many of those arrested in protest actions are being prosecuted on terrorism laws where if convicted could result in decades of imprisonment.

On May 31, agents of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) accompanied by local police agencies raided the offices of the Atlanta Solidarity Fund, arresting three of its officials. The activists are being charged with money laundering and charity fraud under the Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organizations (RICO) laws. Statements from governmental officials in Georgia attempt to frame the activists opposing the construction of Cop City as terrorists with no legitimate right to exist in the state.

Micah Hersking, a key organizer in Atlanta [noted that](#):

“This is a major escalation — they’re arresting those who defend the arrested. The implications of these arrests is that not only can you not protest, but you cannot defend those who are arrested for protesting. There is no first amendment in Atlanta.”

Another important figure in the opposition to Cop City, Kamau Franklin of the Community Movement Builders, [was quoted as saying](#):

“This is targeting of organizers and movements by the police and the state. Bail funds have been a part of organizing the Civil Rights movement and labor movement. We will continue to fight back against cop city and the political arrest of our friends and comrades.”

Opponents of Cop City have two months to collect 75,000 signatures of registered voters which is the minimum needed to place the question on the ballot in November. People living near the area where the law-enforcement training center is being constructed would not be eligible to vote since they do not reside in the city of Atlanta.

Obviously, the City of Atlanta and the State of Georgia wants to crush the movement to stop Cop City. The recalcitrance of the municipal and state officials is reflective of the commitment of the Democratic and Republican parties to maintain the funding of law-enforcement in the country. As class contradictions escalate during a period of declining standards of living among the workers and oppressed along with record profits for the energy and other sectors of the economy, the ruling interests which control the banks, multi-national corporations and the defense industry, fear that there will inevitably be a sustained rebellion against the status quo.

Police and Electoral Politics

The police are the first line of defense for the ruling class since its principal purpose is to defend private property and the state apparatus. This fact has become quite clear since the mass demonstrations and rebellions of 2020 in the aftermath of a series of racist police and vigilante killings of Ahmaud Arbery of Georgia, Breonna Taylor of Louisville and the most notable, George Floyd of Minneapolis.

Dozens of people lost their lives during the summer and fall of 2020 in pitched battles with the police and vigilantes. Thousands of others were injured and arrested as then President

Donald Trump evoked the slave-era Insurrection Act of the early 1800s. Federal troops and other agents were deployed to urban areas to assess and contain the demonstrations and rebellions.

Trump's response to the George Floyd rebellion and the COVID-19 pandemic set the stage for his defeat by then former Vice President and Senator Joe Biden in November 2020. Yet, Biden and the Democratic Party have failed to pass the reform legislation which could address the increasing poverty among growing segments of the U.S. population. Neither has the Biden administration effectively addressed the burgeoning problems of infrastructural decline in areas across the country.

The inability of the Biden administration to usher through the House of Representatives and Senate the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act speaks volumes about the role of law-enforcement within capitalist society. Biden and other high profile Democratic officials have continued to denounce the demands emanating from the mass struggles for the defunding of police. Instead, projects such as Cop City continue to be prioritized by both ruling class political parties and their elected officials on the local, statewide and federal levels.

Biden's lack of political success on a domestic level along with the military defeat in Afghanistan in 2021 and the escalating proxy war against the Russian Federation, has contributed immensely to his decline in popularity. African Americans, Latin Americans and other people of color communities were instrumental in the electoral alliance that defeated Trump in 2020. It is highly unlikely that Biden can win the White House for a second term without the electoral support of the oppressed peoples and the proletariat as a whole.

However, lessons from the last six decades indicate that it will take much more than the election of Democratic candidates to eradicate police brutality. The masses of the people, through the emergence of the movement in Atlanta to stop Cop City illustrates the incipient opposition to the further militarization of local and state police agencies.

Priorities Must be Redirected to Serve the Needs of the People

The proliferation of federal and private funding programs for law-enforcement agencies is only fueling the misconduct, brutality and murderous practices of the police. African Americans are still being gunned down by law-enforcement personnel, and in most cases, these officers are not arrested and prosecuted.

Resources need to be directed towards the social spending projects which have been abandoned by the Congress. There is a widespread need for services in the schools, communities and among people living with disabilities as well as senior population groups.

Infrastructural projects are desperate for federal, state and local funding. The recent problems with the railway industry where in East Palestine, Ohio a major accident has endangered the entire community. In Philadelphia, a fire sparked by a collision of a truck into an embankment led to the collapse of a bridge on the I-95 highway. A truck driver is known to be dead, while the searches of the wreckage may result in the discovery of even more bodies.

The rapid rise in the cost of living for working people is largely the result of inflation and the actual decline in real wages. Every month the Biden administration praises the relatively low unemployment rate in the U.S. and claims that this is a direct result of the government's

efforts.

However, money spent on the hundreds of military bases and wars of conquest and occupation could be channeled towards rebuilding urban areas based upon the educational, social and environmental needs of the masses of people. At the same time, funding earmarked and allocated to meet the social and educational needs of working and oppressed people domestically are often siphoned away to provide further assistance to the police and the large corporations.

These are fundamental issues that face the workers and oppressed in the U.S. and around the globe. These exploited and oppressed people must organize independently in order to make sure that their issues gain top priority in the ongoing struggle to win freedom and social justice for all.

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Featured image: Atlanta Cop City banner at City Council meeting on June 5, 2023 (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

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