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What we mean when we say 'Defund the police'

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SLL photo: Greg Butterfield

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Thank you to the comrades of the December 12th Movement for organizing this commemoration of Juneteenth and putting some teeth in the call to “Defund the police.”

Millions of people have sincerely embraced the slogan “Defund the police.” But the problem is that it is such a vague demand. It can mean anything depending on who is saying it. We see pro-cop politicians like Mayor Bill de Blasio talk about “defunding” the New York Police Department. It’s not serious. Defund is only a serious demand for change when it’s combined with demands for community control and to fund people’s needs instead — to fund a public health system, to pay reparations.

Defunding is not the goal. It’s a first step to the goal.

When we talk about defunding the police, we are talking about disarming the police. Take away their weapons. Not just the military hardware, but their guns, tasers, batons. That would be a serious step to stop the police murder of Black and Brown people.

When we talk about defunding, we don’t mean a small percentage of the budget. We mean take away all of their funding. We mean dismantle the NYPD. On Juneteenth, it seems right to remember how the police in the U.S. came into being. They came out of the patrols that chased down escaped slaves. They were created to defend white supremacy and protect private property. Those two reasons are why they still exist today.

The essential workers who have kept us all alive through this pandemic, the health

care workers, all of us, are capable of defending and organizing our own community safety. We say community control as a step toward abolishing the police.

When we talk about defunding police, we don't just mean the NYPD or police departments across the U.S. We also mean defund the global police of imperialism, the Pentagon. We mean end the wars, close the military bases, bring all the troops home. We mean end the sanctions on Zimbabwe, Venezuela, Iran, Cuba, Korea and many other countries.

The police exist only to protect capitalism, the rule of the rich over the rest of us. The only way to really get rid of the racist police system is to abolish capitalism. The only way to get there is to fight for socialism, for self-determination for the Black nation, for the working and poor people to establish their own forms of government and self-defense. That's what we mean when we say, "Defund the police!"

