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With Minneapolis under police siege, Congressional bill would give more money to cops

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Minneapolis protest on opening day of Derek Chauvin's trial, March 8. Photo: Brad Sigal

On June 25, one month after the brutal murder of George Floyd by Police Officer Derek Chauvin sparked an uprising against racist killer cops, the [Minneapolis City Council voted](#) to get rid of the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) and replace it with community-based safety mechanisms.

Today, just over eight months since that vote, [Minneapolis is an armed camp](#) overrun by police. As jury selection in the trial of killer cop Chauvin began on March 8, downtown Minneapolis was covered with fencing and razor wire. Police were brought in from other cities to bolster the MPD against anticipated protests.

And that very same 13-member Minneapolis City Council (all Democrats with the exception of one Green Party member) had again voted — but this time to [spend \\$6.4 million](#) to recruit MORE cops. The pledge to disband the MPD was completely discarded.

It would be hard to find a more blatant about-face, even by the standards of a Democratic Party that frequently buries its progressive promises to the poor, working-class and oppressed people who make up its voting base.

This didn't stop [more than 1,000 people](#) from coming out in Minneapolis on International Women's Day to demand "Justice for George Floyd," mobilized by the Twin Cities Coalition for Justice 4 Jamar (TCCJ4M) and other groups.

Actions were held in many cities as Chauvin's trial kicked off, in response to a call from the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (NAARPR). In Grand Rapids, Mich., [police arrested organizers](#) of an anti-racist protest.

Supporters of the NAARPR in Minneapolis had warned last summer that the City Council's pledge to abolish the MPD would come to nothing unless it was backed up with real measures to implement community control of the police, like the Civilian Police Accountability Council (CPAC) advocated by Chicago organizers. This would create a completely independent body, its members voted for by the community, that would have control over the hiring, firing and punishment of cops.

Congress: More funds for police

Timed to coincide with the start of Chauvin's trial, the [House of Representatives passed](#) the "George Floyd Police Reform Act" on March 3 by a vote of 220-212. Congressional Democrats and the White House hailed the measure as the fulfillment of the party's many election-year promises to rein in racist police terror.

However, it seems unlikely that this bill will pass in the Senate, where it requires the

votes of 10 Republicans along with every Democrat. The House bill received only one Republican vote.

But this measure named for George Floyd, even if adopted, would do nothing to prevent the exact same kind of police murders that he and Breonna Taylor suffered last year.

The bill's much ballyhooed provisions against chokeholds and no-knock warrants, and limitations on qualified immunity for brutal cops, only apply to federal police. The vast majority of police and police brutality cases in the U.S. are overseen by local and state agencies, and these measures would hold no power over them.

One of the most popular slogans of the Black Lives Matter protests that spread across the U.S. in the summer of 2020 was to "Defund the police" and use that money for community needs, like expanding healthcare, improving public schools and housing the homeless.

But Congress's so-called "Police Reform Act" actually includes provisions to [give millions more federal dollars](#) to local and state police agencies in exchange for their pledge to make "reforms" like using body cameras — which have not prevented police killings in places where they have already been adopted. It's common practice for brutal cops to simply turn off the cameras or discard the footage.

One of the bill's provisions is actually to fund police recruitment!

Don't let Biden and Congress off the hook

Donald Trump's 2020 reelection campaign fueled a racist backlash against the Black Lives protests. This led to the white supremacist siege of the Capitol in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 6 that sought to overturn the results of the presidential election in Trump's favor.

But the backlash wasn't limited to this. Almost immediately after the protests started to subside, police agencies, local governments and mainstream media began a concerted effort to build up the idea of a "massive crimewave" sweeping the country as a result of anti-police-brutality sentiments. The idea was to make people fear for their safety and scare them into supporting more, not less, funding and power for the police.

Democrats like New York Mayor Bill de Blasio and Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot were instrumental in promoting this pro-cop narrative, while shielding the police from punishment for their brutal treatment of Black Lives protesters. Then-candidate Joe Biden (in)famously gave his nodding approval to the campaign when he advised cops to ["shoot them in the leg"](#) instead of the heart.

What role the police themselves had in promoting the narrative has mostly gone unquestioned. However, an investigation published by the Star Tribune on March 8, ["Minneapolis residents demand transparency after police inflate carjacking charges,"](#) helps to shed some light on the real goings-on.

MPD carjacking scam

Following the George Floyd uprising, Minneapolis police promoted the story of a wave of violent carjackings and bragged about how their subsequent actions had netted a large number of arrests.

"Police and the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office said that aggressive enforcement and helicopter surveillance netted 87 arrests and dozens of felony charges during carjacking crackdowns this winter in south Minneapolis.

"But a Star Tribune analysis of Hennepin County jail rosters on the days the helicopter was in use could not verify authorities' claims that the operations 'resulted in 41 felony-level arrests' in December and 46 arrests with '69 felony-level

charges' in January.

"When pressed on the issue, city officials later acknowledged that just 15 of those cases were actually charged, though police say many remain under investigation," according to the report.

"The enforcement campaign's inflated success is deeply concerning to many south Minneapolis residents who endured days of low-flying helicopter operation that now has them questioning the value of the surveillance and wondering what other information authorities were collecting. ...

"The inflated numbers announced by authorities baffled members of the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, who worked to track down the cases after Minneapolis police publicized charges that had not been filed."

Resident Molly Priesmeyer told a reporter that "her neighborhood felt like a war zone, and it brought back traumatic memories from last summer, when helicopters constantly hovered following George Floyd's death."

Multiply this example by the number of big-city police departments with vast multi-million-or-billion dollar budgets, sophisticated PR departments and connections to both legal and illegal organizations. We should demand an investigation of similar practices in every city.

Most of all, we can't rely on Democratic officials to keep their promises to reign in the police. The movement must continue to fight for community control, as a step toward abolishing these defenders of private property and the racist status quo once and for all.

