

Alabama prisoners strike against racism and unlivable conditions

written by Lev Koufax
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The 'Break Every Chain' rally outside the Alabama Department of Corrections Headquarters in Montgomery, Sept. 26.

On Sept. 26, thousands of prisoners across the state of Alabama declared a general strike in the 13 state prisons. Prisoners refused to work until the Alabama Department of Corrections met several demands. These demands were also delivered to Alabama Governor Kay Ivey and the state legislature. While work has resumed at some facilities, [as of Oct. 3](#), five facilities averaging 7,000 prisoners each were still under work stoppages.

Alabama is one of seven states that does not pay prisoners wages for their work. The state has a reputation for brutal and dangerous state prisons. Prisoners have [complained for decades](#) about savage guards, inadequate food and severe overcrowding.

In particular, the Alabama Black Community has suffered from the high level of incarceration and the subsequent treatment of those incarcerated individuals. While 28% of Alabama's population is Black, 54% of those in prison are Black.

This strike, organized entirely by the prisoners themselves, was built for years as the COVID-19 pandemic worsened conditions. Any dissent against the lack of humane treatment was met with beatings, solitary confinement and delay of release dates.

The U.S. prison system is one of the most racist, exploitative, and inhumane institutions in a country riddled with them. The federal government fuels mass incarceration with its war on drugs and laws that allow for expansive prosecution. The states follow suit. These policies are a form of warfare on the Black community and another method by which the capitalist system squeezes every ounce out of every worker.

State governments save millions staffing laundry rooms, maintenance departments, and kitchens with unpaid prison labor. Those same state governments make millions from prisoner-created products. Alabama has a particularly developed correctional industry. Their [expansive website](#) offers everything from \$220 conference chairs to

custom millwork valued at tens of thousands of dollars – all made by unpaid prisoners, the same unpaid prisoners who are denied adequate meals on a daily basis and are often victim to summer air conditioning shut-offs.

For all the above-stated reasons, the prisoners are determined not to end their strike until their demands are met. These demands include: the establishment of a mandatory parole criteria; eliminating life without parole sentences; the creation of a statewide conviction integrity unit; ensuring eligible persons receive a “good time” incentive; and the repeal of Alabama’s Habitual Offender Act, which requires stricter punishment for prior offenders.

These demands were carefully aimed at exposing Alabama’s violation of the Constitution’s 8th Amendment, forbidding the government from using torture as well as excessive fines and bail to punish people who have broken the law. Further, if implemented, these proposals would significantly relieve the overcrowding issues in Alabama prisons. As of April of this year, Alabama prisons were at 155% capacity, housing 18,773 prisoners in facilities designed for roughly 12,000.

Yet, right-wing Governor [Kay Ivey](#) dismissed the demands as “unreasonable.” It should be noted that soon after she took office, Ivey signed a law protecting all [Confederate monuments](#) in Alabama.

The U.S. prison system is as cruel as it is racist. Alabama demonstrates this reality more than most states. Stand with the Alabama prisoners on strike against cruelty and racism. We have to be in solidarity as a movement and as a class with those who fight against racist mass incarceration and modern slavery.

Tear down the walls! Justice for Alabama prisoners now! Solidarity with all the strikers!

