

## Capitalism Creates The Need For Prison

By: Laci Hamilton

For many people in the U.S., the high hopes of securing a career, or at least a full-time job that pays a living wage, a relatively stable community, or a clean environment with a quality future for their children has been wiped out. More and more people continue to be marginalized and rendered destitute by capitalism, forced by necessity to learn to live outside the formal economy. In this climate the politics of poverty, hunger, homelessness, constant uncertainty, and necessity expresses themselves sometimes in defiance of law.

Many will, at first, commit offenses against others who are catching the worst of it. These acts are part of the normalized practices and beliefs that become embedded in the social structure. But given the proper explanations for economic disparities, chances are many will rebel against the capitalist. The banks and corporations that arm-twist cities for land on the cheap, tax breaks worth millions, poison the land, pollute the air, and pay wages that make 60 and 80 hour work weeks necessary just to barely get by. Rebel against the media, academics and others who construct ideologies that justify and perpetuate practices that benefit the capitalist.

Banks and corporations need cooperative governments in order to grow into more powerful economic forces relieved of responsibility to anyone who is not a stockholder. Need cooperative governments in order to legitimize through laws, placing people into a virtual hostage situation to financial and commercial systems. Need cooperative governments in order to deprive the public of meaningful participation in the decision making process. Need cooperative governments in order to dispose of the people displaced by downsizing, streamlining, automating, and exporting jobs to places most people could not find with the assistance of a map. There is also likely to be increased resistance to the state itself.

We are caught in a terrible dilemma. Capitalism cannot satisfy the needs that it creates. The rising standards and costs of living means many will sink, and be left to drown. Some out of pure desperation, some the sheer will to survive, others because of deformed consciousness, will do whatever they can, whenever they can, to meet the rising standards and costs of living. Prison being the end result. Masking the way capitalism weaves into the social fabric systems of oppression. We have reached a point in history where we need to rethink not only the use of prison but, what is the real function of prison in this society.

People forced to learn to live outside of the formal economy, their culture and history can be distorted, discounted, deleted, or disencumbered by presenting the world from the

perspective of the capitalist. Because of the pervasiveness of said perspective it is difficult to see capitalism for what it is: winners and losers, with the latter far outweighing the former. We are so immersed in the system of capitalism, competing for education, work, status, relationships, even identity, that it is difficult to step outside the system of capitalism to see it from a different perspective. Additionally, the system of capitalism provides explanations for why some people win and some people lose based on the innate and inevitability of things the way they are. The more institutionalized, sophisticated and embedded capitalism has become, the more difficult it is to see it as the major contradiction leading people to defiance of law.

Prison is of course not the only tool masking the way capitalism marginalizes more and more people, but given the enormity of the U.S. prison system, it is arguably the most important. At least one should not discuss prison without giving capitalism a central place. Moreover, economic issues have historically been intertwined with the hiring of more police, what and who police decide to police, increased spending on an ever more elaborate criminal judicial system, building more prisons, and the use of the death penalty.

Some people will vehemently argue that capitalism is not the sole cause of those who are marginalized. As if any cause of marginalization is acceptable. Capitalism nurtures and reinforces many of our worst problems. It is an ideological package that influences and perpetuates destructive policies. One of which creates the need for prison.

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