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By Ted Kelly  
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## *The govt, the Klan, cops and prisons*

*The following talk was given by Ted Kelly of Philadelphia during a May 16 webinar sponsored by the Prisoner Solidarity Committee of Workers World Party.*



I'll begin by quoting two different passages. The first is from Workers World Party founder Sam Marcy's book, "The Klan and the Government: Foes or Allies?"

"The far more important problem is the reciprocal relations between the capitalist government and the Klan. More often than not, the former is made to appear rather hostile to the Klan. The public impression conveyed is that the government is forced under the law (the First or 'Free Speech' Amendment to the Constitution) to defend and secure the Klan's rights.

“In reality, however, the capitalist government has covertly encouraged and promoted the Klan over many decades. It is often completely overlooked in current discussions and in the press and media reports that the durability of the Klan rests on solid long-term bonds to the state, and that the two share a common political ideology, for the most part.

“When the ruling class had the opportunity to wipe out the Klan more than a century ago, it failed to do so. The Northern industrialists and bankers were more interested in reaching a compromise with the ex-slave owners than with the newly freed slaves.

“The U.S. government capitulated to the Southern planters and ex-slave owners after the period of Reconstruction when it withdrew federal troops from the South without establishing an independent citizens’ militia composed of the Black people and poor whites.

“It also left them politically defenseless and deprived the Black population of economic power by failing to grant the newly emancipated people the land which they had tilled for centuries.

“The violence against the Black people which had begun on a minimal scale during Reconstruction began to take a tremendous toll after the U.S. government finally withdrew its troops. It was in this period that lynchings, the most barbarous form of counterrevolutionary terror, became the hallmark of the reactionary attempt to keep the Black people in semi-bondage. As many as 5,000 lynchings took place between the 1880s and 1951.”

The reason I start by quoting Sam Marcy on the history between the Klan and the U.S. government is because it is out of this history that police forces in the United States were formed. To not merely collaborate with the Ku Klux Klan, but to establish alongside them a formerly deputized violent gang to supplant them.

The second short passage I’m going to read is from Mumia Abu-Jamal, “Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?” where he describes the police:

“They are servants, if at all, of the political structures of which they are a part, not of the people. They are servants, if at all, of the state. They serve the interests of capital, of the wealthy, of those who run this system from their bank vaults and corporate offices.

“They do not serve the poor, the powerless, nor the un-influential.

“They never have.

“They are an armed force organized to protect the interests of the established and those who own capital. The history of labor in this country is splattered by the blood of trade unionists who were beaten, shot, and crushed to the earth for striking against the trusts, combinations, and mega-corporations of capital. Who did the beating? The shooting? The crushing? The cops, who served the interests of a state that declared, as did the U.S. Supreme Court, that unions were ‘criminal conspiracies.’ ”

In all capitalist states and sites of colonial occupation, police units were armed gangs set up to protect the property of the rich while smashing any nascent organized working-class power. Private police forces like the Pinkerton agents provoked, spied on and killed working-class organizers.

Likewise, the Federal Bureau of Investigation was born as a political police force to track and subvert anti-capitalist activities. They arrest and they assassinate and they incarcerate — from the early 20th-century labor organizers to the Black Panthers, to the MOVE Organization, to the supporters of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, until today with the assassinations of Ferguson, Mo., organizers and the jailing of those who resist police attacks, like Ramsey Orta. The Indigenous water protectors who organized against the Dakota Access Pipeline — Dion Ortiz, James White, Little Feather, Rattler and Red Fawn — are now hounded and threatened with felony charges by the state.

This is all to say that this is the function of police and therefore the function of prisons in this country.

As Fermin Morales, a Puerto Rican activist and ally of WWP Philadelphia, said in a speech on May Day, poor and oppressed workers are given a choice: “You can fight to survive, doing whatever you need to do to make money, and you will end up in prison if you step outside those bounds; or you fight for your nation as a Puerto Rican and you can end up in prison for the reason of fighting for political power. You end up in prison.”

Just down the street from where Morales was speaking was a federal penitentiary. And across the street from that is the African American History Museum. She said, “If you

learn too much in that museum, you will end up across the street in that prison.” That is the function of prisons in this country.

White supremacy is one of the fundamental pillars upon which capitalism is founded and supports itself. Prisons and police are the state’s most violent tool of racist oppression. We cannot abolish capitalism without abolishing police and abolishing prisons. For this reason, at the beginning of this new crisis, as capitalism reaches its dead end, we have relaunched the Prisoner Solidarity Committee of Workers World Party, 50 years after its inception, after the uprisings at Attica and Auburn.

Prisoners and incarcerated workers represent one of the most oppressed sectors of our class, and they cannot be ignored. They face unprecedented threats against their livelihood and against their ability to politically organize. And that is one of the most important tasks the PSC of WWP is taking up.

We must tear down the walls if we are to build a Workers World.

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