

San Diego city council approves \$27 million increase in police budget, pledges millions for an Office of Race and Equity

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26 June 2020

The City Council of San Diego, California passed their 2020-2021 budget after a 12-hour marathon meeting earlier this month. Coming in the midst of the on-going international protests against police brutality, the new annual budget includes a \$27 million increase for the San Diego Police Department (SDPD).

As reported by the *San Diego Union Tribune*, the approved increase brings the police department's total budget for the year 2020-21 to \$566 million, a 44 percent increase over the past decade. The city is on course to spending 37 percent of its total budget on the police department.

There was significant public outcry during the meeting itself, with over 400 calls and 4,000 emails and public comments from citizens opposing additional funding for the police and demanding that the city invest the money instead in social programs.

Many residents wanted the budget to devote resources towards community and social efforts including housing for the homeless, mental health services, and rent relief for those who lost jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The city council sought to off-set the anger by allocating \$3 million for an Office of Race and Equity, spearheaded by council member Monica Montgomery, a Democrat and advocate for "police reform."

According to KPBS San Diego, the office will seek to promote minority-owned businesses and "work towards greater racial equity in the city." Council members have also suggested that this could be a means by which the SDPD might work with community groups to foster improved "race relations" between the police and "communities of color."

This initiative exposes the class character of identity politics, seeking to cultivate and enrich a thin layer of middle class and bourgeois elements among minority

groups, while reinforcing the oppressive apparatus of the state which is used to suppress the working class.

Montgomery—the Democratic council member credited with influencing Republican Mayor Kevin Faulconer to back the creation of the office—declared that as the "Sole Black San Diego City Councilmember... I did everything in my power to have the hard conversations around diverting funding and repurposing it for social and economic justice programming."

The budget passed by the City Council, she claimed, "restored hours" for libraries and services for other community programs. However, she conveniently neglected to mention the fact that although these services were "restored," they still suffered cuts, including reductions in hours for city workers and programs for youth.

Having initially declared that her vote for the budget represented "fighting for the things we need," Montgomery was compelled by the extent of popular opposition to provide additional justification.

Giving what was termed a "Community Healing Address" on Facebook Live, she spoke of the protests against police brutality that had drawn thousands in San Diego alone and, in another video, claiming that she understood "the root cause of all of this... is structural racism in our system," and that "until we go down deep and deal with [these causes]... we will find ourselves doing these reforms and never change a doggone thing." The City Council's budget was a "step in that direction," Montgomery claimed, though there was still a long way to go, since "we have 401 years to make up for."

Here the ideological component of identity politics is in full display. Although racism no doubt is a factor in police killings and brutality, the root cause of all of this is the class division of society, with its attendant poverty,

inequality, and violence. If it were an independent country, California would rank third in the world in terms of billionaires, while life for working people of all races and ethnicities remains extraordinarily difficult.

San Diego in particular has one of the highest homeless populations in the country. In these explosive conditions, the “bodies of armed” men ultimately tasked with protecting and enforcing these social divisions, are bound to resort to more and more brazen forms of violence.

A report published by the *San Diego Union Tribune* indicated that 217 San Diego residents have been killed by the police since 2000, with the largest share of those victims being white (39.2%), followed by Hispanics (37.8%), Blacks (14.7%), and Asians (5.5%). The vast majority of these people, as is the case throughout the nation, are members of the working class.

Following the playbook of Black Lives Matter, the national Democratic Party and the *New York Times*, Montgomery’s account of racism as the singular “root cause” of police killings is a way to conceal the real magnitude of the problem and sow divisions in the working class, the only class that has an interest in putting an end to police violence.

The angered response by many members of the public to the increased police budget shows that this strategy is wearing thin. Many took to Twitter to make clear their disgust with the council members, particularly the “progressive” Democrats. “...Our police should not be rewarded for attacking and murdering our neighbors.”

Replying to City Council President Georgette Gomez, one Twitter follower noted, “You let us down. You called for more work to be done to fix police issues. Right now, those are hollow words without a plan...when you had a vote, and a LEADERSHIP ROLE- you voted to increase FUNDING FOR POLICE. You need to retire. You don’t care about systemic inequalities when asked to VOTE AGAINST IT.”

Gomez, a Democrat who specializes in LGBTQ and “Latinx” identity politics, recently published an essay in the *San Diego Union Tribune* defending her vote for the budget. Her hypocrisy of addressing “systemic inequalities” is astounding and contradictory, stating that the decision to increase the police budget was “an incredibly tough decision, especially for me—a queer woman of color,” but that “The budget we did pass has the potential to erode the systemic inequities in San Diego...”

In a video posted to her Twitter account after the first weekend of protests across the nation, in light of George

Floyd’s murder by Minneapolis PD Officer Derek Chauvin, Gomez said, “As somebody that holds an elected position, [this] has been a time to reflect... on why I’m at City Hall, and why I’m doing what I’m doing... [it’s] an opportunity to do better.” These are hollow words. Gomez, along with every other member of the city council, has been placed in these positions because they represent the class interests of the ruling layers in the city and will carry such policies out under the banner of a “queer woman of color.”

The Democratic Party has repeatedly sought to hoodwink workers by claiming that bourgeois politicians who share their race, gender, or sexual orientation are by default their friend or ally.

Six of the eight city council members who voted in favor of the budget are Democrats. In news interviews with two of the councilmembers—one Republican, and one Democrat—both threw overwhelming support behind the budget, stating that “Defunding the police would be a terrible mistake for San Diego,” and that higher salaries for cops would “entice” the “best and brightest” to come to the region to become police officers, despite record-low crime rates.

The support of both parties for the police force only serves to prove once again that the Democratic Party, the oldest capitalist party in the world, is not an avenue for advancing the working class.

The root cause of police violence and inequality in all its forms is capitalism. The police exist to enforce the domination of ruling class and maintain its astronomical wealth over society. Therefore, the fight for the elimination of the police is bound to the fight by the working class to expropriate the vast wealth at the top which is hoarded and accumulated through exploitation. At its base, the fight against police violence is the fight for socialism and the unity of the working class.



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