

Washington D.C. Democrats and pseudo-left support draconian, punitive crime bill

Pete Salmon, Nick Barrickman
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The Council of the District of Columbia, Washington D.C.'s local legislative body, voted on February 6 to advance the right-wing "law and order" Secure DC Omnibus Amendment Act of 2024. A final vote will take place within the next few weeks, during which more amendments are expected to be made.

The bill combines proposals from several crime bills proposed last year, in the wake of a supposed crime wave that has hit the District. According to official figures, the city's homicide rate has increased by 36 percent in the past year, reaching the highest level since the 1990s.

As is the case in Democratic Party-run governments at the local and national levels, rather than deal with the root social causes of crime, bourgeois politicians advocate a massive crackdown on the poorest layers of the population, thus criminalizing poverty.

The bill would give the chief of police the power to create temporary "drug-free zones" for a period of five days at a time. Within these drug-free zones, if the police believe a group of at least two people intend to commit a drug-related crime, they could be asked to leave or face arrest. This portion of the bill would give encouragement to police harassment against groups congregating in such zones for other reasons.

Theft for the purpose of reselling merchandise would be treated as a felony with a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison. A punitive amendment which would have reduced the threshold for first-degree theft—punishable by up to 10 years in prison—from \$1,000 to \$500 was deferred for the final vote.

The bill would drastically increase the length of pre-trial detention from a maximum of five days to 225 days. Furthermore, the bill would permit pre-trial detention of juveniles for many crimes, including violent crimes and certain unarmed offenses. The D.C.

Jail has been cited on numerous occasions for its inhumane and downright horrific conditions.

"Every day, I hear from residents across all eight wards about the urgent need to address crime in our neighborhoods," the bill's sponsor, Democratic Councilwoman Brooke Pinto, declared in a press release last month. In a sham effort to provide the "law and order" bill with a popular gloss, Pinto added, "It is resoundingly clear—from residents across the District, businesses, visitors and our federal and regional partners that urgent and effective action is needed now."

In fact, "urgent and effective action," that is, addressing underlying issues impacting Washington D.C.'s increasingly impoverished working class, is excluded from this bill and the city's Democratic Party establishment's overall agenda.

Nowhere in the bill are the root causes of crime addressed—poverty and the soaring cost of living. Currently, one in seven people in the District of Columbia live below the poverty line. The National Low Income Housing Coalition has reported that D.C. has a shortage of 33,000 rental homes available for "extremely low income" renters, defined for a family of four as having an income of \$41,400 or less. Seventy-three percent of people in this category spend over half their monthly income on rent.

So intense is the need for rent relief that the Emergency Rental Assistance Program established at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, described as a "lifeline for residents facing displacement" by Street Sense Media, was forced to stop accepting applications within hours after it came back online in early January. According to the publication, "ERAP historically runs out of money mid-year," and has taken to opening for brief periods on a quarterly basis in order to extend the

program's funds.

The Democrats, who have long ago cast aside all pretenses of concern for the working class, have no interest in addressing these issues. Instead they serve business owners and their upper-middle-class base by further marginalizing the poor.

For example, to advance the needs of big business, a homeless encampment in McPherson Square was cleared out last February, an operation in which 70 homeless people were removed and most of their belongings destroyed, with promises to help the homeless going almost entirely unfulfilled.

Democratic Mayor Muriel Bowser recently offered \$500 million in renovations to Capital One Arena in an attempt to prevent Monumental Sports and Entertainment, owner of several D.C.-area sports franchises, from moving to a potential new arena in Alexandria, Virginia. Monumental's chairman and CEO, Ted Leonsis, has an estimated net worth of \$2.8 billion.

Bowser has been offering further enticements to businesses to open up shop in D.C., offering \$20 million in grants altogether in the hopes that downtown D.C., greatly affected by years of a pandemic that shows no signs of slowing, can be rejuvenated.

Several activist groups were present at the Secure DC bill's vote to express their opposition. Tia Bell of the TRIGGER Project expressed concern that the law would ultimately hurt the neighborhoods most affected by gun violence, while others claimed that the bill's punitive approach would disproportionately harm black residents.

Of the 13 D.C. Council members—11 Democrats and 2 independents—all but one of them voted in favor of advancement, with Ward 8 Councilman Trayon White, a Democrat, voting present. Among the council members who voted in favor are several who were endorsed either by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) or other pseudo-left groups.

Janeese Lewis George (Ward 4) and Zachary Parker (Ward 5), were endorsed by the DSA, while Matthew Frumin (Ward 3) and Brianne Nadeau (Ward 1) were endorsed by other “progressive” groups and the trade union bureaucracies. All voted to accept the law-and-order bill.

Frumin, in a press statement released on the day of the vote, thanked Pinto for “her leadership and hard

work in introducing this bill.” Frumin offered vacuous criticism, noting that, while the bill “focused heavily on accountability and enforcement,” the Council “must be equally committed to creating hope and opportunity.”

For the DSA-endorsed Parker and Lewis George, no hint of criticism was expressed. The latter's support came after an amendment was introduced that would “[expand] the types of criminal records eligible for sealing or expungement.” This is, of course, after the crime bill would have made possible the targeting of underage youth by the police.

Parker, who has voted to accept previous “law and order” packages, did not even bother to publicly acknowledge his vote. In 2022, the Washington D.C. chapter of the DSA publicly endorsed Parker, declaring that his campaign was a “massive opportunity for the progressive left to elect an uncompromising champion for our values.”

Not content with prostituting their supposed “values,” the DSA stated their “endorsements are not just a recommendation to DSA members to vote for a particular candidate, but rather a commitment to fight to get that candidate elected.”



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