WHAT IS CRITICAL RESISTANCE?

OUR VISION

CRITICAL RESISTANCE envisions genuinely healthy, stable communities that respond to harm, violence, and conflict without relying on imprisonment and punishment to resolve problems. We believe that the prison industrial complex (PIC) is not a broken system to be fixed. The system, rather, works exactly as it is designed to—to contain, control, and kill those people representing the greatest threats to state power. Therefore, our goal is not to fix the system, but to shrink it into non-existence. We know that more policing and imprisonment hurt and reduce our power rather than make us safer. Instead, we know that things like food, housing, and freedom are what create healthy, self-determined families and communities.

OUR HISTORY

For nearly 15 years, CRITICAL RESISTANCE has worked to build an international movement for prison industrial complex abolition. Our work has been as diverse as our members and has sought to make as wide an impact as possible. Throughout our history CRITICAL RESISTANCE has:

- Brought thousands together by hosting groundbreaking national conferences in California, New York, and Louisiana
- Founded chapters across the US and put our ideas into action in powerful coalitions
- Developed the skills, politics, and leadership of hundreds of volunteer members who are at the forefront of CR's work
- Prevented new prison and jail construction across the country
- Resisted racist and destructive police policies such as civil gang injunctions
- Published **THE ABOLITIONIST** newspaper, spreading analysis, news, arts, and culture to thousands of prisoners nationwide
- Produced videos, books, toolkits, a radio program, fact sheets, and other materials that have increased our movement's ability to put up stronger fights against the prison industrial complex
- Trained our members, allies, and people returning from prison to be the confident voices and sharp strategists for our campaigns and other joint struggles
- Supported prisoner organizing from the historic California prisoner hunger strikes to the day-in-and-day out communications across walls of our prisoner mail programs
- Created new language and ideas through art, writing, and other forms of cultural expression, that have urged us to dream wildly, expand our horizons, and envision a future free from the PIC

WHO WE ARE

CRITICAL RESISTANCE is a national grassroots organization building an international movement to abolish the prison industrial complex. We use the term prison industrial to describe the symbiotic relationship between public and private interests that employ imprisonment, policing, surveillance, the courts, and cultural tools that go along with them as a way to maintain social, economic, and political inequities. Because the PIC is a huge, complicated system, we have to attack it from different angles using different strategies. Our broad abolitionist approach uses three main frames: Dismantle, Change, and Build.

CR has volunteer members and supporters across the country. The members make CR run: they plan and implement projects and campaigns, share our analysis and help make abolition common sense, and tend to the health and wellbeing of our organization. CR's staff operates as a co-directorship. Staff members are accountable to each other and the national membership. The staff is responsible for coordinating the communication, support, operations, and resources of the organization; including local chapters and the national office. The relationship between chapters is reciprocal. Consistent communication through phone calls, meeting notes, visits, and email is integral for minimizing problems and helping the organization thrive in its horizontal structure.

WHAT IS CRITICAL RESISTANCE?

WHO WE ARE (CONT,)

CR's local chapters determine their own projects and campaigns with support from the staff and other members. Chapters must support the CR mission and meet specific benchmarks. Together all the chapters comprise our national organization. CR National provides local chapters with resources to support their work such as infrastructural support, political education, fundraising support, technology, trainings and a network of prison industrial complex abolitionists throughout the country.

WHAT WE DO

With the support of the national staff, our chapters develop and carry out organizing projects and campaigns to dismantle the violence of the prison industrial complex and build healthy, self-determined communities. Our work reflects the local problems we think are most pressing and local solutions we think are most appropriate. Chapter projects range from fighting gang injunctions and policing in working class communities of color, to community education projects, to opposing the practice of imprisoning people who cannot pay their fines to the courts, to grassroots campaigns to oppose prison expansion. What unites all of these projects is a commitment to working for the eventual elimination of the PIC as well as to taking practical steps to create the communities we envision for ourselves.

WHY WE FIGHT

Through its reach and impact, the prison industrial complex uses policing, surveillance, the courts, detention, and imprisonment to help secure the authority of people who get their power through racial, economic and other structural privileges (e.g. white people, US citizens, people with property, people with money). In enforcing and defending inequitable power distributions, the PIC benefits government, industry, and individuals who benefit from a well-managed status quo. The processes by which this unequal power is garnered and maintained include: creating dominant media images that perpetuate stereotypes of people of color, poor people, queer people, immigrants, youth, etc., as criminal, delinquent or deviant; earning profits for government agencies and companies that provide goods and services to the prison industrial complex; facilitating political gains; increasing the influence of prison guard and police unions; eliminating social and political dissent by people of color, poor people, immigrants, and others who make demands of self-determination and reorganization of power in the United States.

The prison industrial complex is not a broken system in need of repair. It is a system that works. Over the course of its development, it has actually become even more effective in its purpose--controlling, disciplining, attacking, and disappearing those people who present the greatest potential challenges to the US power structure. Of course day to day mismanagement, mistakes, corruption, and abuse happen in policing, the courts or imprisonment. But, if we truly desire self-determination, we must not fight to improve the killing machine. We must eliminate it.

We are always trying to understand the impact of the PIC on our communities more fully. We certainly don't have all the answers. Since PIC has been so constant in our lives, it is extremely difficult to predict what a world without the prison industrial complex will be like. However, we believe that it is possible and essential to build a new world piece by piece even as we tear down the prison industrial complex. As the saying goes, "Once there were no prisons. That day will come again."

GET INVOLVED

Becoming a member of CRITICAL RESISTANCE is the best way to get involved with CR. If you're interested in stopping prison and jail construction, mobilizing communities impacted by the prison industrial complex, upending the violence of policing, or developing alternatives to punishment and repression that truly make our communities stable and secure, then CR may be a good fit for you!

CRITICAL RESISTANCE is committed to building and expanding the movement against the prison industrial complex by encouraging work at a local level. Our goal is to inspire people in all communities to join forces in the movement against the destructive effects of the prison industrial complex. Please contact us if you are interested in learning more about starting a chapter in your community.

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