

# Close California Prisons!

## The Role of Unions in Reducing Imprisonment

Unions and the labor movement play a central role in fighting for strong and healthy communities. Our unions fight for living wages for working people, safer and healthier working conditions, and to ensure that workers' rights are safeguarded. Organized labor and union members have also been a powerful vehicle for advancing social, racial, and economic justice. We are in a crisis of imprisonment that is devastating the lives of workers and our families, yet more money is wasted on prisons rather than improving our communities and economy. Unions and union members can play an important role in reducing imprisonment by working with other social justice movements, and we invite you to join this work.

### **THE PRISON SYSTEM IS ANTI-LABOR**

The prison industrial complex almost exclusively targets working class communities, and disproportionately those in Black communities and communities of color. In the U.S., around 70 million people have a criminal record that bars them from access to employment. Additionally, there are 2.3 million people locked up at any given time –the highest number of any country in the world. In total, the people who are either unable to work or face severe barriers to employment because of being targeted by the prison industrial complex amounts to half the country's workforce.

The prison system's attack on working class people is directly an attack on the ability for unions to grow their organizing power. Studies have shown that people in places with higher incarceration rates are less likely and able to join unions because of the barriers placed on people's employment. Based on this alone, it is in the interest of the labor movement to support the effort to shrink the imprisonment system.

### **THE PRISON SYSTEM IS RACIST**

Black people, people of color, and working class people make up the strength and power of labor unions. Black and Latino communities show the greatest support for unions, and Black communities have the highest rate of union membership across other races. Yet prisons disproportionately impact communities of color. While Black communities only make up 6% of the California population, they account for 27% of the state's imprisoned population. Labor unions have been at the forefront of fighting for racial justice. Yet, mass incarceration is arguably one of the biggest engines of racial injustice in our time. We believe that in order to truly live up to our commitments for a world free of racism, it is crucial for the labor movement to join the effort against imprisonment.

