

**A LETTER FROM THE J20 DEFENSE CAMPAIGN OF
THE MID-ATLANTIC GENERAL DEFENSE COMMITTEE OF THE IWW:**

On January 20, 2017, thousands took to the streets of Washington, D.C., to protest the presidential inauguration of Donald Trump. During one of the many marches held on Inauguration Day, the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department showed the world how it planned to treat dissent moving forward: Shortly after the protest began, hundreds of protesters were attacked with pepper spray, rubber bullets, and batons. Police confined over 200 people within a “kettle” for hours before arresting them. Every protester’s cell phone was confiscated as evidence and rooted through. Upon being released, they were handed a riot charge. Months later, US attorneys piled on 8 additional felony charges, including “Conspiracy to Riot”. Protesters now face up to 75 years in prison - all for attending a demonstration.

Among the people arrested were over two dozen members of our union, the Industrial Workers of the World, and its affiliated legal defense and community organizing body, the IWW General Defense Committee (GDC). Within the IWW and GDC, we don’t shy away from our members’ politics, and support our members’ rights to express their politics through protests and marches, a tradition that goes back within our union to battles over free speech in the early 20th century.

Since the arrests, D.C. prosecutors and police have shown a disturbing pattern of repression as well as specific targeting of IWW and GDC members. Our members had their union cards and buttons confiscated and held as evidence. Months after the protest, three individuals (including two prominent members of the DC IWW local branch) were served with warrants for their arrest on charges of conspiracy to riot. Prior to their warrants being issued, the prosecutor’s office revealed that they had created separate trial groupings, including one grouping where nearly all defendants were IWW or GDC members. While they will not say as much in public, it has become clear that the city attorneys for Washington, D.C. are treating membership in our union as evidence of a criminal act.

This is not the first time the IWW has been targeted for repression, and it is unlikely to be the last. The crackdown on protesters in D.C. is part of a larger effort to criminalize and silence dissent in working-class and marginalized communities. D.C. is just one of more than a dozen states that are attempting to quell dissent through legislation or harsh legal penalties. This is not a coincidence. **People in power want activists and organizations to be afraid to protest Trump’s agenda.**

The labor movement cannot succeed if union members are treated as criminals when protesting anti-union and anti-worker politicians and their policies. No social movement can operate in repressive conditions like that. We have always stood by the principle that “an injury to one is an injury to all.” **In this spirit, we are calling on our friends and allies in the labor movement, as well as in allied progressive or left groups, to share this letter and pass the following motion within your union local or organization (on next page):**

“We are deeply concerned about the severe repression against all protesters facing charges for exercising their First Amendment rights on January 20, 2017 in Washington, D.C. We assert our support of the demand to drop the charges against all protesters. We further commit to:

- 1. Contacting **info@midatlanticGDC.com** to add our organization’s name to those endorsing this letter, to be found at www.midatlanticGDC.com/letter*
- 2. Requesting the appropriate individual post to our organization’s social media accounts that we support this letter*
- 3. Requesting the appropriate officer or individual send an expression of our support for this demand to the **United States Attorney's Office, ATTN: Channing Phillips, 555 4th Street NW, Washington, DC 20530***
- 4. Encouraging our members to get involved in the effort to support all defendants at www.defendj2oresistance.org and www.midatlanticGDC.com”*