06/24/20

Defund Police, Dismantle Police Technology

The following is a perspective from the organizing committee of [NYC-DSA's Tech Action Working Group](#) on the relationship between technology, policing, and the people's protests in response to the death of George Floyd and countless others at the hands of the police:

First and foremost, Tech Action stands in unconditional solidarity with protestors and all those organizing to abolish the police and prison system across this country and internationally. As technologists and as socialists, we strive to strip the police of their tools of enforcement, and to attack the profitable relationship between private tech firms and public law enforcement agencies. Tech Action reaffirms the NYC-DSA call to [defund the NYPD](#) and we further demand an immediate halt to all of the NYPD's surveillance technology programs. Lastly, we ask tech workers to organize internally to stop their employers from collaborating with the police.

Despite their public funding and stated public safety mandate, the primary function of municipal police forces is to protect private wealth and reinforce an oppressive capitalist economic system. The police use surveillance and violence to manage "unproductive" members of society, disproportionately targeting, criminalizing, incarcerating, and murdering low-income people, Black people, and other people of color, while also forcefully suppressing social movements for equality, democracy, and justice.

The tools that police use to execute this heinous agenda are sold to them by private vendors at maximum profit. High-tech tools developed and sold to law enforcement agencies include, but are not limited to: "cloud" storage and computing, facial recognition and other biometric surveillance, algorithmic decision making systems, geolocation trackers, consumer surveillance platforms with police-accessible back ends (e.g. Ring, NextDoor, Citizen), and video networking, editing, and analysis software for use with body-worn cameras, cctv, and other recording devices. As police budgets have skyrocketed so too have the profits of their tech industry suppliers. And even when budgets are cut, the money keeps flowing, as automated predictive policing and surveillance systems are pitched as efficient alternatives to uniformed officers.

Yet, tech CEOs and their venture capital backers benefit from more than just direct sales. These firms are often eager to work directly with law-enforcement agencies—providing warrantless data sharing for instance—in exchange for a continued absence of regulatory oversight. And, since the market for instruments of surveillance and control goes beyond the police, tools initially developed for law-enforcement use are soon repackaged for landlords, bosses, and advertisers to surveil and subjugate us in our homes, our workplaces, and our day-to-day lives.

This all amounts to a direct transfer of public wealth into private hands through an institution—the police—designed to terrorize and brutalize. The police depend on the tech industry to supply them with the tools to more effectively implement their authoritarian control and violence. And private tech firms have a vested interest in enabling police abuse and brutality as long as it remains profitable. We need to act to disrupt this perverse symbiotic relationship now!

1. **Tech Action supports the ongoing protests and direct action happening across the country.** To the extent we are able, all of us must vocally and physically reiterate that Black lives matter and condemn police violence and oppression. In addition to bringing much-needed attention to the issues at hand, these actions are taxing the resources of the state and providing the leverage we need to win concessions from elected officials, employers, and more.

2. **Tech Action rejects a New York City austerity budget that makes deep cuts to social services while leaving the NYPD budget untouched.** We demand our elected officials invert that equation, defunding the police and reinvesting in services that keep our communities safe like education, housing, and healthcare.

3. **We further demand the dismantling and outright banning of high-tech NYPD enforcement tools and systems** including, but not limited to, facial recognition software, the "gang database," the Domain Awareness System, cell-site simulators, aerial drones, geolocation trackers, and body-worn cameras.

4. **We call on tech workers in particular to organize internally against employer collaboration with law enforcement agencies.** Leverage your unique position within this system to stand in solidarity with Black lives and dismantle these tools of oppression at the point of production. We commend recent statements by workers at Microsoft, Amazon, and Google to this effect, and encourage more workers to embrace their demands and to go further:
   - Demand your company drop all contracts with law enforcement agencies, and cease bidding on new contracts.
   - Demand your company cease business with other firms who contract with law enforcement.
   - Demand your company refuse to collaborate voluntarily with law-enforcement requests not accompanied by a subpoena.
   - Demand stronger user data encryption, so no useful information can be shared even when legally compelled.

   Withhold your labor until these demands are met. The collaboration between tech firms and the police is motivated at its base by shareholder profits. These companies can not and will not act against their financial interests. By stopping work on these tools and systems, or stopping all work outright until your demands are met, you can make it unprofitable for the relationship between tech firms and the police to continue.

We cannot allow this moment of anger and energy to pass without yielding deep systemic change. Through collective action in the form of sustained protest, direct attacks on funding, and workplace organizing, we can significantly roll back police power, dismantle the technology of oppression, and create a world that values Black lives over profits!

In solidarity,
NYC-DSA Tech Action Organizing Committee
Danny, David, Kristen, Raksha, Robbie, & Will