

Why not look deeper into what ails policing? : Defunding and abolishing the police is no longer such a radical notion

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When I sat on the Community Roundtable of Strengthening Hamilton's Community Initiative (SHCI) as a representative of Hamilton's Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ Community the conversations leaders from our marginalized communities were having about policing were very different from the ones we are having now.

SHCI was formed in reaction to the 2001 firebombing of Hamilton's Hindu Temple. A shameful and horrific hate crime that took place shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. The main goal of SHCI was to eradicate hate in Hamilton.

20 years ago the BIG request from racialized communities on SCHI's roundtable was more diverse representation within the ranks of the Hamilton Police. The hope was to have more faces that looked like theirs. Then when issues arose in their communities a police officer with the same cultural background who had an inherent understanding of the nuances of their particular culture would work with them.

Two decades have gone by and there are more diverse officers in our Canadian Police Forces, but if the fundamental

foundations of the institution are built on the pillars of white supremacy and colonialism you will never be able to eliminate the oppression that is embedded within it through representation alone.

Defunding and abolishing the police has entered mainstream conversation and is not being dismissed outright as too radical or unrealistic.

In our modern information age we are constantly bombarded with images on our social media feeds of police violence against our most marginalized populations. It is a societal horror we can no longer look away from. Not just in the USA, but here in Canada too.

Why does this institution who we have entrusted with our safety keep failing us?

I know in my profession that if I chose to deal with someone in mental health distress about to commit self-harm by grabbing a gun and killing them, not only would I expect to be fired; I would expect to go to prison.

Ontario's Special Investigations Unit (SIU), which is the official oversight body for police misconduct so rarely seems to hold any officers to account when these kinds of incidents take place that the loved ones of those murdered by police wonder what purpose the SIU even serves.

I have to believe that those who decide to go into policing do it with noble intentions. Why wouldn't they? We have been fed a steady stream of Copoganda in our pop culture from Andy Griffith in Mayberry to Kate Winslet in Mare of Easttown. We are inundated with images and narratives that the police are a necessary and just institution who protect us from the "bad guys".

I recently read Justin Ling's book, *Missing In The Village*, about the serial killer who targeted men in Toronto's Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ community. It is a soul crushing read. It peels away the deep systemic issues within policing that become even starker for members of marginalized communities. There is a cognitive dissonance in going to an institution to ask for help when your community is in trouble when that same institution actively persecutes your community, raids your spaces, diminishes your worth as a human being and harasses the most marginalized among you.

When citizens critique policing far too often police leadership fall into a defensive stance of protecting and maintaining the status quo. Instead of this reflex why not look deeper?

This is our established procedure and the way we have always done things is no longer an acceptable answer. We must do things differently. Lives depend on it.

Iceland, for the eleventh year in a row, has once again been named the most peaceful country in the world according to the 2020 Global Peace Index. Why? Iceland has a high

standard of living, universal healthcare, religious freedoms, free post-secondary education, no military and their police do not carry weapons. They have laws that protect minorities and celebrate equality along with pay equity for men and women. Taxes are low, trade union membership is the highest in the world, income inequality is the lowest in the world, journalist protection law is the strongest in the world and they nearly run on nothing but renewable sources of energy.

Iceland is NOT an imaginary fairy tale land in an alternative universe. It's a real country right here on Earth. If Iceland can do this, why can't we?

Anishinaabe journalist and author, Tanya Talaga, wrote "Those that do nothing in the face of this country's history, and the police shootings and abuses on both sides of the border, work against us. Time will not solve all wounds. Waiting on time has been used by all of those who are indifferent and have allowed systemic racism to flourish in all of our governments and institutions. Progress never happened because we sat around and waited for it. No, we've got to stand up and fight for it. The time is now."

Lyla Miklos is a multiple award-winning queer feminist labour activist, broadcast journalist, chief negotiator, education worker, lay chaplain, publicist and vocalist.

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