

MUNICIPAL SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

Program 2023

Socialist Solutions to Capitalist Crisis

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Note: This is a draft program. All members of the Municipal Socialist Alliance democratically debate and decide on what will be included in the final version.

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO HOUSELESSNESS

The housing crisis is severe. Skyrocketing rents are driving working class families, low-income communities, seniors, and students out of the GTA, into debt, into unsafe or deplorable living situations, into the shelter system or onto the streets. Those who can't pay inflated rents are exploited. The housing market is dominated by real estate and development speculators. The establishment is completely unwilling to fight for the solutions we need. It's time to build rent-geared-to-income, publicly-owned and cooperatively-run accessible housing. In the meantime, expropriate vacant units in large multi-unit buildings and assign them to people in dire need of housing. Landlord licensing is needed so that landlords who fail to keep units in good repair and meet basic standards would have their rental properties turned into cooperatives. Orders and judgments against landlords must be enforced.

1. Repeal Code 608 (the no camping bylaw).
2. Eliminate blind bidding on property sales.
3. Introduce real rent control/freeze.
4. Vacancy tax to kick in after 3 months, at 30% of property value annually, with expropriation after two years of vacancy. Primary residences excluded.
5. Freeze on property tax for personal property.
6. 30% tax annually on investment properties. This does not include individuals renting out portions of their primary/personal residence.
7. Aggressive inclusionary zoning — 50% of newly-constructed condo units to be rented at median-market rent.
8. Public registry of property ownership, which includes the designation of primary/personal residence and secondary/investment properties. Individuals would be limited to two primary/personal residences. (*address loopholes in future)
9. Colour-coded rating system for apartments.
10. Hire more housing inspectors — empowered to speak with tenants and inspect units. Create a public and accessible system for reporting landlord abuses. Build on the 311 system.
11. Introduce mechanisms to transfer property from landlord to city. a.) city has right of first refusal if landlord sells property b.) city takes over for bad landlords (i.e. code red).
12. All housing units expropriated by the city will be rented to tenants as non-profit housing. Rent would cover only utilities and maintenance.
13. Index the shelter allowance to median-market rent.

FREE PUBLIC TRANSIT

Public transit is an essential service for many residents and front-line workers. Toronto should deploy more buses to allow for physical distancing and use back-door boarding to protect transit operators, and abolish fare enforcement. Resume building of the LRT in Peel.

REPAIR SCHOOLS AND REDUCE CLASS SIZES

The province must make real investments in schools. Stop the phony re-announcements of money already committed. We need immediate repairs to reverse years of neglect. Schools need improvements to their air-filtration systems and an immediate reduction in class sizes to 15 students per class. Cities should strive to bridge gaps in the public-school system left by the province, strive for a unified, secular school system, and put a hefty tax on private schools. We need comprehensive, science-driven sexual education that also validates the existence and struggles of LGBTQIA2S+ people.

FOOD FOR ALL

Price control of basic foods to be achieved through the education and empowerment of communities to grow and prepare their own food via community gardens and kitchens, establish regulations governing food waste including a spoiled food tax and the seizure and distribution of otherwise discarded and excess food (build a pipeline from the private grocery store to the community kitchen), and the possible expropriation of private corporate-owned grocery stores to be run in the public interest within a no profit framework. Transition the city to a food system based primarily in local and sustainable agricultural practices.

PARTICIPATORY BUDGET PROCESS

Instead of a “strong mayor” system, the MSA strives for the empowerment of the working class, racialized communities, marginalized and impoverished residents through a Participatory Budget process like the one pioneered in Porto Alegre, Brazil starting in 1989. There, on an annual cycle, scores of regional meetings involving thousands of local people are convened to formulate the municipal budget through their extensive input. Even though elites and other orders of government act to constrain them, self-organization of the grass roots advances.

FREE, QUALITY, 24-HOUR CHILD CARE

High quality child care is critical to building a stronger, healthier and more vibrant community. The 24-hour child care service enables single parents to positively contribute to our economy. All families who are earning less than the living wage of \$25/ hour on a full-time employment basis shall be provided immediate access to childcare services in partnership with the province. To address child poverty, the city and the province should top up all families with children to have a minimum \$4,000 income threshold per household to raise children in the city.

IMPROVE TRAFFIC AND ROAD SAFETY

Make streets safer for cyclists. Bike lanes and rush-hour bus lanes should be expanded across the GTA. Expand bus service along major transit routes during peak hours. Fines and fees should be geared to income. Implement pedestrian-only zones along Yonge Dundas Square and further projects to include Bloor, Eglinton and other streets where there is high pedestrian traffic. City and traffic planners should learn from Copenhagen, which began converting its main street Stroget into a pedestrian street in 1962 and is now largely traffic free.

ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

A municipal Green New Deal, based on a rapid transition to sustainable energy systems, is urgently needed. Regulations should require new construction projects to incorporate some type of life sustaining green roof. We must consult communities and severely restrict any environmental damage before the development begins. Parts of the GTA are fortunate to have beautiful parks and green spaces that are home to many animals and plants. Increase city services including garbage collection and snow removal. Empowered, democratically elected community boards should review proposed developments. Cancel Highway 413, stop urban sprawl, and build high-density housing. Our notion of a Municipal Green New Deal puts the interests of the working class first. Enact public control over resources, fully respecting Indigenous peoples. Before Reconciliation there must be Restitution, in harmony with nature.

INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY

Increase the number of public washrooms and their accessibility. Make transit accessible as soon as possible. Urgent construction of elevators to ensure the service in every subway station.

AC IS A HUMAN RIGHT

With intensifying, harmful climate change, basic health, even higher mortality is increasingly at risk, especially for seniors, disabled folks and other vulnerable people who are sweltering in crowded apartment buildings. Just as the heat by-law forbids inside temperatures falling below 21 degrees Celsius in the cold months, it should be illegal for landlords to allow the interior temperature to rise above 26 degrees Celsius. Air Conditioning, in tandem with more green space and ecological urban design, is a health priority and a human right.

DE-FUND, DISARM, AND DISBAND THE POLICE

Globally, millions of people demand de-funding the cops. In Toronto, the response by City Council, even of the 'progressive' members of Council, was underwhelming. The bloated police budget should be cut by at least 50%. Money saved should fund community programs, mental health supports, rent-geared-to-income housing, youth programs, and restorative justice. We need to replace our current system of law enforcement with democratic, community-controlled policing. Shift away from jails and prisons - towards restorative justice programs. This can be done by demilitarizing and substantially disarming the police, in combination with a reduction in patrol vehicles and security camera systems. At a minimum, there should be an Elected Community Oversight Board with full powers over the police!

In response to multiple instances of deadly use of force by police officers, millions of people around the globe demand de-funding the police. This call has not resulted in any action in Toronto, but the MSA is committed to fight. See action on page 9-13.

HANDS OFF CYCLISTS

A recent spate of cops ticketing (even colliding with) cyclists in High Park underscores the need for safer, more visible, self-contained bicycle paths, rather than a punitive policing approach. The MSA insists that increasing the safety of pedestrians and cyclists will aid the transition to a greener, cleaner, healthier, more sustainable urban mode of transportation.

DENOUNCE ANTI-PALESTINIAN RACISM

The Municipal Socialist Alliance (MSA) supports the Palestinian struggle and opposes the colonial-settler Israel state. The struggle against apartheid, settler-colonialism, and anti-Palestinian racism must be forwarded in the various city councillor and school board trustee elections. Just like the mass international movement it took to topple South African apartheid, it will take a mass international movement to overthrow Israeli apartheid. We support a one-state solution, Palestine, with democratic rights for all. No one is free until Palestine is free!

We continue to witness that the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) entrenches anti-Palestinian racism by equating anti-zionism with anti-semitism. We saw the TDSB attack Desmond Cole for proclaiming “Free Palestine” at a learning session for senior TDSB educators. We saw Javier Davila, a student equity program adviser for the TDSB, placed on home assignment for sharing resources critical of Israeli settler-colonialism. This pro-Palestinian material drew the ire of TDSB trustee Alexandra Lulka Rotman (Ward 5), who declared she would work “to ensure that none of these hateful materials ever see the inside of a TDSB classroom.” While the integrity commissioner found that Rotman’s statement “fell within the TDSB definition of being discriminatory,” TDSB trustees voted 10-7 to reject these findings. And more recently in July 2022, a joint delegation from the TDSB and the Toronto Police visited occupied Palestine as part of their partnership with Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre (FSWC). These attacks on supporters of Palestine stem from the TDSB’s quiet adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-semitism, which equates criticism of Israel with anti-semitism. It’s clear that there is a “Palestinian exception” to the TDSB’s position on anti-racism.

The blatant anti-Palestinian racism on display by the TDSB mirrors broader attacks on Palestinians and their allies in our communities. A wealthy donor blocked the University of Toronto from hiring Dr. Valentina Azarova because her research included a focus on the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The owner of the Foodbenders restaurant, Kimberly Hawkins, was defamed as anti-semitic for displaying pro-Palestinian signs, including by Toronto Mayor John Tory. And the University of Toronto froze funds earmarked for the U of T Graduate Student Union’s Boycott, Divestment, & Sanctions (BDS) caucus.

But we see people fighting back!

Students at Marc Garneau Collegiate Institute (Ward 11) walked out in November to protest anti-Palestine racism following the attack on Desmond Cole. Hundreds more walked out of a Catholic school in Ottawa for similar reasons. 300 students, staff, and parents wrote an open letter calling on the TDSB to “discard the IHRA’s definition of antisemitism and adopt one that does not dehumanize Palestinians, one that is more

balanced and nuanced” among other demands. Kimberly Hawkins won her court case where she was accused of discrimination and antisemitism. The University of Toronto Student Union (UTSU), second largest in Canada, passed a BDS resolution early in 2022. The Palestinian Canadian Congress and Legal Centre for Palestine recently brought a human rights application against the Ford government and York Region District School Board (YRDSB) for suppressing a student’s video about the reality of Palestine under Israeli occupation. The Nakba and Land Day marches in Toronto continue to draw thousands of people in the streets in support of Palestine.

The tide is shifting against the unjust Israeli occupation of Palestine. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch both released reports in the last two years detailing Israel as an apartheid state. The BDS movement continues to win victories. More and more, advocates for liberation speak out for Palestine.

With the role that school boards play in legitimizing Israeli occupation and apartheid, we see the necessity for the Palestinian cause to be brought to the fore of upcoming school board trustee elections.

COVID-19 IS A CAPITALIST DISEASE

The global pandemic comes from capitalism, from its need to exploit nature for profit. It has nothing to do with ethnic origins. Challenge attempts to blame, harass, or cause violence against our Asian community. Confront hatred and all forms of discrimination. Anti-pandemic measures, including mandatory vaccination, are urgently needed. Follow the advice of medical professionals about wearing masks, social distancing, and hand hygiene. We need to insist that all workers, especially those in front-line health care, are provided with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Ensure that private profit is never put ahead of health and safety concerns. Nationalize private for-profit Long Term Care companies.

Action Plan to De-fund, Disarm and Disband the Police

1. Immediate hiring freeze for Toronto Police Service until the 50% budget reduction target has been met. The freeze will explicitly cover the following areas:
 - No new external hiring for any positions of any kind.
 - No net new positions at the constable rank or any back-fill of vacated (temporarily or permanently) constable positions unless by return of a constable from a temporary acting assignment, return from leave or as transfer of a constable from a different division within the Toronto Police Services.
 - Back-fill of vacated uniformed positions at the detective/sergeant or higher level is permitted but only as promotion for an existing active uniformed officer at an equivalent or lower rank.
 - No net new non-uniformed positions are to be created or filled. Vacated positions can be filled either by transfer of an existing uniformed or non-uniformed permanent employee or by a temporary contract employee as required.

2. Target a 50% reduction in the total Toronto Police Services Budget Vs 2020 Approved Budget by no later than 2025. This budget reduction will represent a savings in total City of Toronto budget of approximately \$538 Million per year by 2025 with these funds being redirected to alternate services as detailed in point 4 below. The reduction will be achieved incrementally with consultation from the Toronto City Council, Toronto Police Services, Ontario Ministry of the Community Safety and Correctional Services, Community Groups, and the general public. A list of proposed opportunities for achieving these savings are below:
 - An end to any and all police action against houseless peoples including but not limited to forced relocation, removal of personal property or shelters permanent or temporary or incarceration on the basis of being houseless.
 - An end to police resources for the investigation and / or prosecution of non-violent drug offenses.
 - An end to racial profiling, random police stop without warrant or just cause and police patrols unless explicitly requested or required due to a report of criminal activity.
 - Emergency police response should only be engaged when there is a report of an individual or group that present a credible threat of danger to themselves or others. The deployment of armed police officers to non-violent public disturbances or suspicious activity has been demonstrated to be the cause of violent escalation rather than mitigating it.
 - The end of use of on duty police in defense of private property from theft, trespass, or damage. This does not preclude the use of police resources in

the investigation of property crime; however, these should be exclusively investigative resources and / or arrest resources when there is credible evidence to support an arrest of a specific individual. It does not include emergency response to intervene in a non-violent property crime in progress or in defense of property at risk.

- Eliminate the use of TPS officers for use in enforcing road safety laws and rules.
- An immediate end to all paid overtime for all TPS employees until such time as the 50% budget reduction target has been met AND only to cover for unexpected staffing shortages against the approved staffing levels. This includes but is not limited to overtime for the purposes of Police Paid Duty, Court Duty and any duties that require a police officer but are currently not included in the day-to-day responsibilities of a police officer. These activities when required should be planned and staffed for accordingly until such time as the TPS staffing has been reduced to within the 50% reduced budget level AND overtime is more cost effective than additional paid permanent employees. The immediate elimination of these costs will aid in accelerating the implementation of budget reductions while reducing the level of Layoffs and Redundancies within TPS.
- Increase revenue per hour of paid duty to cover not only the salary cost of the time duty time but also the equivalent costs in police recruitment, training, uniforms, equipment, benefits, vacations, pensions sick leave, HR and other administrative support services, Management Salary, and benefits that all support the maintenance of a trained and effective Police force. If the use of highly trained and well-equipped officers is deemed as being of benefit to businesses then the full cost of their use should be paid by those businesses.
- Elimination of all police 'education' programs with funds being redirected to equivalent programs that are developed by and for communities with specific attention and emphasis on the needs of a particular community.
- The proposed reduction and redeployment of police resources will represent (over time) a significant reduction in the total volume of Uniformed Police Constables. With this reduction in total police constables there will also be a reduction in the requirement for HR, Training, Management, administrative staffing, and other operational expenses that help support these uniformed officers. As these other operating expenses reduce, they should be redirected to support of mental health, crisis, drug treatment and houselessness services.
- The elimination/reduction of police patrol and response services will significantly reduce the requirement for police capital assets including police vehicle fleets, police buildings and offices etc. Wherever possible and practical, these assets should be repurposed to support the

enhancement of mental health, crisis, drug treatment and houselessness services. Such as use of vehicles for response services or detainment facilities and offices into treatment centers and or shelters (after significant retrofitting) where it is cost effective to do so. If not practical or cost effective to repurpose these resources or infrastructure the sale of these capital assets should be redirected to cover costs of acquisition of resources for other services and / or to cover the one time cost of redundancy packages to accelerate the implementation of budget reductions. Any sale of capital assets should not be counted as a budgetary reduction against operating expenses.

3. The movement to defund the police is not intended to be a net reduction in municipal operating budget but rather a shift in spending from police and crime prosecution to services that can prevent the root causes of crime and better serve the needs of the community. Below is an outline of the proposed enhancement to Toronto City Programs that will be funded through the reduction in Police Budgets:

- Improvements in access to affordable and supportive housing through a combination of initiatives including increased publicly owned co-operative housing.
- Enhanced drug and addiction treatment services. Including drug treatment experts as first responders on drug related emergency calls instead of police, needle exchange sites and confidential access to drug testing resources.
- Utilization of social work / mental health experts on first response calls instead of police officers where there is not a credible threat of deadly force. These responders will be specifically trained in de-escalation techniques and will have a mandate of assisting persons in crisis in accessing voluntary services. Police, as enforcers of the law, prioritize the assessment of potential criminal activity and detainment for questioning over public assistance and treatment. This will lead to improved outcomes of non-violent calls.
- Improved support for community groups to engage their own communities in making neighborhoods safer. This includes support for unarmed democratic community-controlled policing groups and community education campaigns that do not have police presence or 'crime prevention' subtext.
- Increase in and improvement of Bicycle lanes and free and improved public transit to decrease traffic and increase road safety and reduce the requirement for traffic law enforcement.
- Creation of unarmed civilian traffic enforcement department outside of TPS for the monitoring of road safety laws.

4. Further, we recommend the following changes in police policy and procedure to enhance safety and accountability within the community:
- Disarmament of all police officers when on duty except under the following circumstances:
 - If part of a specific highly trained unit who specifically deal with firearm related crimes. Even these officers should secure their firearms when not actively engaged in policing activities that puts them at high probability of being involved in armed situation.
 - If responding to a situation where an individual or individuals have been positively identified as being armed AND where they represent an immediate threat to the public
 - If engaged in exercising a warrant for the arrest of an individual for whom it has been positively identified as likely to be armed and dangerous. Such a designation for the suspect should be designated in the warrant such that the need for armed officers for arrest is required.
 - As required during training or evaluation in controlled environment under supervision from a designated trainer.
 - All police officers should be required to undergo training related to equity & diversity, ethics, de-escalation, and cultural sensitivity on an annual basis. The training should be written and conducted by experts in the respective fields from outside the TPS. Successful completion of the training, including testing on understanding, should be a requirement of employment for all police officers.
 - A Police Officer Review and Investigation body should be established and overseen by the public. This body must not include any people who have been employed by any police agency in the past or present and should be ineligible to be employed by the TPS at any time following service on the body. They will be responsible for review of any complaints against police officers by the public, fellow officers or any incident involving the use of a firearm or other item intended to immobilize or otherwise disable a suspect or attacker.
 - Every reasonable effort; through negotiation with the CANADIAN OFFICE & PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES UNION, LOCAL 343, should be made to amend section 4.06 of the Toronto Police Services Collective agreement paragraph 3 to the following “The Employer’s use of surveillance cameras to monitor the work of employees, will be limited strictly within the confines of Article 4.06 below. No information obtained through the use of this equipment shall be used against employees unless such information constitutes evidence of alleged criminal acts, contains evidence pertinent to

an investigation of a public complaint of; police harassment, hate speech (including but not limited to racism, homophobia, transphobia or gender discrimination), excessive use of force, brutality, sexual assault or any other form of abuse of police authority, and / or contains video or audio of any use of a firearm, taser, pepper spray or any other weapon except when directly permitted for the purposes of training under supervision.” As officers of the law TPS should be more, not less, accountable for their actions when dealing with the public. Given their position of power they should be subject to increased scrutiny and surveillance over and above that of regular citizens.