School-to-Prison Pipeline Town Hall

The Agenda of School-to-Prison Pipeline Town Hall was to spread awareness of things that happen to students once pushed out of school and on to streets. It also compared the practice of zero tolerance with digital surveillance in smart city. The panel consisted of parent, teacher, student, legal service and activist.

The town hall kicked off with the host, prof Yusuf introducing the panel members. He then asked activist Lana about her opinion on school to prison pipeline. Lana spoke about some instances wherein students were suspended due to unclear reasons, which was, in fact, a violation of their civil rights. She spoke about how people with color are discriminated in terms of school suspension. She also mentioned how people with disabilities are prone to be misjudged. She recommended a policy to be in place to protect the citizens of Syracuse against racism, patriarchy, and ableism.

Prof Yusuf then asked Susan Young, a member of legal service about her opinion on young people put in solitary confinement. Susan gave a brief explanation of the Individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA). She mentioned how once a student with disabilities is suspended, reasonable notice is required to be sent to the student's parents and they should be given the right to meet the principal. She also explained with examples, how it is unfair to suspend a student for behavior they have no control over. Before the suspension, the officials should reason whether the student behavior had a direct relation to his/her disability. Also, it is important to know whether counseling was available to such students before taking such decisions.

Next member of the panel, Tony, who is a senior organizer for NYCLU was asked about her opinion on the hardening of schools after 9/11. She spoke about how the committee is trying to train educators with a more restorative justice practice and reduce the default approach of exclusion, suspension and calling the police. She explained how security in the form of surveillance has increased since 9/11 and how it is threatening the privacy of students. She recommends training the police force in schools to be more like social workers/counselors to the students. She also stated that introducing surveillance cameras in smart cities could encourage the zero-tolerance discipline.

Next, a 11th grade high school student addressed her concerns about security checks in her school. She talked about the recent security checks which took place in her school wherein, the bags of students were searched by police dogs. She also mentioned the security checks which took place last year at her school during Halloween. At this point, a question was raised by Lana about who would feel safe from these security checks. She also spoke about how people with disabilities are suspended for being disruptive.

Later, Tony spoke about governing bodies, exploiting facial recognition and biometric technology for surveillance instead of emergency response. She opposed the use of such technology for surveillance as currently the digital privacy laws are not up-to-date and also the technology is flawed due to biases. She gave an example of the Amazon facial recognition technology which was inaccurate in predicting Congress members with color over the whites.

To conclude, the members of panel proposed a ban on surveillance cameras in Syracuse school districts and to think of alternate restorative solutions to student suspensions.