

Racist Cop Murders spark resistance

Jeff Albertson, Workers Power USA Thu, 21/08/2014 - 13:40

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The execution of unarmed black teenager Michael Brown by white police officer Darren Wilson on August 9 has provoked almost two weeks of protest on the streets of Ferguson, an impoverished suburb of St Louis, Missouri.

Solidarity demonstrations have erupted across the country, not just in protest at the impunity with which police kill black youths, but against the entrenched social oppression which makes black Americans second class citizens in their own country.

Michael was shot six times - twice in the head ? despite having his hands in the air showing clearly to the officer who killed him his cooperative demeanor and nonviolent intentions.

To add to the grief and anger of the inhabitants of Ferguson Chief of Police Thomas Jackson released to the media a video showing somebody, supposedly Michael Brown, robbing a convenience store right before the shooting. The purpose was clear: to smear Brown ? who had no criminal record - as a violent thug who had probably provoked the police officer who shot him.

In reality, it was a crude character assassination; Chief Jackson later went on record admitting that the offending officer had no idea that Brown might have been a suspect in a store robbery. There would have been no reason for the officer to assume Brown would be in any way violent or a threat. After being harassed by the officer, Brown was peacefully retreating. As the autopsy report commissioned by Brown?s family demonstrated, the bullet groupings were consistent with shots fired from a distance.

High-profile incidents of brutality and violence against black people - particularly the young ? by white cops from overwhelmingly white police departments have become a ?normal? aspect of American life.

People have become all too familiar with the most recent and infamous names and cases: Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, Oscar Grant, Eric Gardner, and now Michael Brown. However, what many people are still unaware of just how commonplace it is for Black people nationwide to die at the hands of police, security guards, or of vigilantes like George Zimmerman. And to this must be added the impunity they routinely benefit from - Zimmerman walked free after murdering Trayvon Martin in cold blood.

The statistics are simply astounding. In New York City, for example, Black people are 25 per cent more likely to be shot by police than Whites. According to a recent NYPD report, Black people comprised roughly 70 per cent of all shooting deaths in just the first half of 2013. Think that sounds terrible? Consider this: throughout the entire United States, at least one Black man is killed by police roughly every 28 hours.

Couple these realities with worsening racial segregation in neighborhoods and public schools alike, deleteriously affecting quality of life and education for millions of communities of color, mass unemployment afflicting Black youth, rampant poverty and misery, and pitifully low wages for those

fortunate enough to find jobs, and one can easily understand the outrage and rebellion gripping Ferguson and other districts and cities.

This was movingly expressed by Michael Brown's mother Lesley McSpadden to local TV news station KMOV

"You took my son away from me," "Do you know how hard it was for me to get him to stay in school and graduate? You know how many black men graduate? Not many. Because you bring them down to this type of level, where they feel like they don't got nothing to live for anyway. They're going to try to take me out anyway.?"

Michael had graduated from Normandy High School eight days before his death and was due to enroll at Vatterot College technical school on August 11. His teachers called him "a gentle giant".

Resistance is futile?

The "shock and awe" repression dealt out to peaceful protests by the militarized police and National Guard is not just the reaction of a racist police force which views black neighborhoods as warzones to be occupied. It is a conscious attempt to demonstrate to black communities across Missouri and the United States that it is futile to resist - let alone challenge - the white supremacist foundation of the capitalist state. Peaceful crowds chanting "hands up, don't shoot" faced sniper rifles trained on them from military grade armoured vehicles, tear gas, smoke bombs, sonic weapons and rubber bullets.

Mass incarceration and intimidation of journalists have been used to suppress the protests. 78 people were arrested on Monday night alone, and at least 13 journalists have been arrested so far. The Federal Aviation Authority even imposed a No Fly Zone over Ferguson in an attempt to prevent the country and the world witnessing the repression.

Nevertheless, while the police chiefs in Ferguson might be willing to simply crush the protests with extreme violence, they are clearly under pressure from Federal bodies concerned that the images broadcast around the world could provide the spark for a more general uprising.

The race question

Ferguson is 70 per cent Black but only 6 per cent of the police force are. In a population of 21,000, a quarter of the residents live below the poverty line and in the surrounding areas, this rises to 40 per cent. Generalised unemployment and low-wage work leave a median household income of just \$14,390 per year. Another crucial aspect of social oppression is the political repression and loss of civil rights engendered by the criminal justice system.

While African Americans comprise around 13 per cent of the population, they make up 40 per cent of the male prison population. (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). This has increased enormously since Ronald Reagan's 1980s War on Drugs. Police have used drug laws to imprison much higher numbers of young Black males, despite evidence showing drug use is no higher amongst Blacks than their White peers. Conviction and imprisonment under felony drug laws has serious political consequences - loss of civil rights for long periods or for life.

The US constitution allows individual States to disenfranchise convicted felons after their release from jail. In the 2012 national elections, such laws blocked a record 5.85 million Americans from voting; up from 1.2 million in 1976. Whilst this robbed 2.5 per cent of the electorate in general of the vote, the figure was eight per cent for Black voters. This has been referred to in a 2012 book by Michelle Alexander as "the New Jim Crow", a reference to the repressive laws imposed on the former slaves after Abolition and supposedly in

turn abolished as a result of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

The reality is that the structural racism of the United States is maintained by a ruling class thoroughly imbued with the white supremacist premise inherited from the colonial project. The former slave population has won formal equality ? but this ?equality? is policed by a racist police force or else embodied by illusions in the Black so-called ?leaders? like Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton and Barack Obama whose privileges were won in exchange for their services in mediating, diverting and ultimately delegitimizing the agency and struggles of the mass of the working and declassed Black population.

The active and passive participation of the white majority is structurally integral to the segregationist system. Here too the at best verbal anti-racism of the union leaderships has to be mentioned. Of course the division of labour engenders the stratification of the working class along material, cultural and social lines in every country. Capitalism always knows how to apply the principle of divide and rule through the exploitation of the antagonism and fears of different strata.

Those who perceive themselves to be either objectively (through higher wages, better living conditions, preferential treatment at the hands of the state) better off than others transform this through the permeation of capitalist ideology into subjective ideas that this derives ?naturally? from their skin color or nationality. It requires a conscious political struggle to overcome this division, so injurious to the interest of the workers as a class.

In the United States this process has entrenched itself for hundreds of years. As mentioned above the demonization of the black population did not end with abolition, and the partial gains made through the Civil Rights movement were rolled back by the ruling class offensive launched under the guise of the ?war on drugs?.

Whilst by no means all Whites buy into the racist narrative about Black people, for those involved either in direct competition for low wage work or particularly in the repressive state apparatus, it is much easier to rationalize their daily activity by adopting the racist ideology of the ruling class. It is from this material position of justifying relative privilege that comes the fear of the Black population.

But those intimately involved in the violent suppression of the Black population, especially those directly charged with the responsibility of keeping Blacks subordinated as second-class, low-wage sources of expendable labor for US finance-capital ? the police, vigilante groups, etc. ? have good reason to fear the antagonism of the people who they oppress. This accounts in large measure for the spontaneous ?White rage? with which cops humiliate, harass and execute Black youths.

Implications

However the resistance in Ferguson and the national and international response it has generated is forcing the state to attempt to calm things down by a show of going through due process and limited investigations and promises of reform.

The St. Louis County Grand Jury will decide whether Officer Wilson should be indicted on criminal charges. Federal authorities from the Justice Department are considering pressing additional charges, citing the potential violation by the offending officer of US civil-rights laws. Attorney General Eric Holder, on behalf of President Obama, is presently stumping around Ferguson in an attempt to reassure both Brown?s family and the resident populace that there will be a ?fair and full investigation?.

However experience shows time and again in such cases that both the ?justice? system and the agencies it is supposed to hold to account are typically inclined to protect one another. That is precisely why no trust

or confidence should be placed in either the bourgeois judicial process or the apparatus of the courts. Instead, the community of Ferguson should democratically organize itself to elect a ?justice committee? to oversee all aspects of the investigation and possible future trial. All evidence must be made available to such a committee. It should have the power to confirm or veto the assignment of any trial judge. The ability to confirm or reject a potential jury must be part and parcel of its authority.

But alongside winning justice for Michael Brown, the community of Ferguson has to protect itself from the forces of the state now and in the future. There must be no more killings. The degradation and racist violence have to be brought to an end, and the only way to do that is for oppressed communities of color to ?police? themselves.

Self-defense is no offense

Democratic assemblies of the people of Ferguson should be organized - with the aid of the organized labor movement - to both help form, and provide material and financial support to, armed neighborhood safety patrols and to provide direct oversight of their activities. These should be extended to encompass, as much as possible, the surrounding neighborhoods. Such self-defence groups should be representative of the ethnic composition of the communities in which they operate to ensure their accountability.

The racist cops are the major part of the problem, so simply remove them from the equation. Let the workers and poor of Ferguson organize their lives and provide comprehensive safety in a manner the bourgeois police never can.

Killer cops, National Guard, and KKK vigilantes must be driven out of Ferguson and the surrounding majority Black neighborhoods.

The fight for justice for Michael Brown, and the countless others who came before and, until the system is overthrown, will come after, does not end with the punishment of Officer Wilson; it is just the beginning. For that, the causes of the centuries of social oppression suffered by Black people in the United States must be ripped up by the roots; the capitalist system - which is the structural basis for modern day Black oppression - must be abolished and replaced with a democratic, socialist society embracing the full and equal development of Black, White, Brown, Latino, Asian, - indeed, people of all colors.

The base organization of this should be done via the mobilization of the organized labor movement in a massive campaign for civil rights and social equality ? concentrating particularly on the most deprived and exploited sections of the working class, and through this emphasis drawing White workers into common struggle with their brothers and sisters of color.

Such a movement could mobilise tens of millions into political struggle ? confronting and shattering the illusions in and the nefarious influence of the Democrats, paving the way for a new kind of party. This would be a fighting organization, a political party of a multi-racial working class that will set itself the strategic task of forcibly taking all power out of the hands of the capitalist class through revolution and destroying for good their forces of repression at the same time. Afterwards, we will then be able to look back at our racist, exploitative and unequal society, as it exists today, as horrible nightmare that, thankfully, has been buried for good.

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