

Detroit Workers' Voice



Detroit Marxist-Leninist Study Group PO Box 28536, Detroit, MI 48228 detroitworkersvoice@yahoo.com Dec. 19, 2014 #115

Black lives matter!

In the past weeks, protests have gripped the country in response to police murders of unarmed black victims and grand juries setting the involved white officers free without even a trial. This terror is another episode of the long history of the cops and courts beating down the working class, the poor, and especially the black and Latino poor.

On November 24 a grand jury failed to bring charges against Ferguson, MO white cop Darren Wilson for shooting down unarmed black teenager Michael Brown.

Soon after this, a 12-year old black kid, Tamir Rice, was shot to death by a white cop in Cleveland, OH.

Then on December 3rd a Staten Island grand jury refused to bring charges against Daniel Pantaleo, the white policeman who killed Eric Garner with a chokehold. Pantaleo was assisted by a bunch of other cops who helped murder Garner by crushing his head into the pavement while the helpless victim repeatedly pled "I can't breathe". The alleged crime? Selling loose cigarettes!

The protests

The black masses are not going to take it. And they have gotten massive solidarity from white and other non-white workers and students. After the Ferguson verdict of Nov. 24 that city was consumed with demonstrations day and night, some angrily confronting the police who resorted to violence, tear-gassing and mass arrests of over 400 in a failed attempt to quell the outpouring.

Three days after the Ferguson verdict, some 130 people were arrested in Los Angeles during protests. The MetroRail 7th St. Metro Center Station was temporarily closed because of nearby actions. There was a march to the Twin Towers Correction Facility that called for the release of the arrested demonstrators and severe punishment for the killer cops. Activists also rallied at a couple of police stations and also protested the police shooting of a mentally ill local man, Ezell Ford.

Garner's death was a new spur to action in the Oakland/San Francisco area. 25 activists chained themselves to the BART area cars that are the main transport system connecting the Bay Area. On Dec. 5, hundreds marched through downtown San Francisco shouting slogans including "Fuck the police!" and "The whole darn system is guilty as hell!" On December 6 there was a march which managed to shut down Market Street for a couple of hours.

Elsewhere in the area, hundreds of protesters marched through Berkeley. They confronted a massive police presence but refused to submit even when the police fired tear gas. The next day 500 demonstrators marched right back to the downtown area from the university's Sproul Plaza shouting "Out of your houses and into the streets!" Traffic was blocked, but drivers cheered in support.

But the most powerful of the actions occurred in New York City after the December 3rd announcement that officer Pantaleo would go free despite the video showing his murderous chokehold on Garner. The masses erupted, bringing various sections of the city to a

halt. The Brooklyn Bridge was taken over by thousands of demonstrators. Times Square and Union Square were occupied. A large "die-in" took place at Grand Central Station, and a march went through Harlem. One might imagine all this would lead to conflicts with motorists, but the motorists were honking in solidarity while protesters weaved their way through lines of cars in the streets.

The demonstrators shouted "Black lives matter!", "Hands up, don't shoot", "Being black is not a crime!" and "I can't breathe!" (repeating the plea of Garner while he was strangled by killer cops). Others were militant cries for struggle such as "No struggle, no peace, Fuck the police!" and "Garner and Brown, Shut it down!"

December 13 actions

December 13 was a designated day for nation-wide protests. Thousands of people traveled to Washington, DC from around the region and rallied to proclaim solidarity with the victims of racism and police brutality.

In New York City, there was a huge march estimated at 20-30,000 people by some sources that finished at NYPD headquarters. Crowds gathered in Times Square. Demonstrators also congregated in Foley Square, where there are local, state and federal courthouses and City Hall nearby. People massed on the Brooklyn Bridge. Some protestors compared the NYPD to the Ku Klux Klan while the cops again exhibited their hostility to having their brutality exposed by arresting over 200.

Major actions continued through the streets of Oakland and San Francisco. Several thousand marched and there was a big "die-in" in the streets.

Demonstrators in Chicago managed to race across the Dan Ryan Expressway and briefly block traffic. They also marched in Chicago's Loop area. In Boston, protesters gathered at the State House steps and the Boston Commons and marched on the Nashua St. jail. There were 23 arrests. In St. Louis crowds of marchers shut down many popular streets. Protesters in Atlanta blocked downtown streets and a highway in Dallas was temporarily shut down.

Already activists are promising more actions.

The movement has grown to the point where basketball superstar LeBron James and other professional athletes are giving gestures of support to the victims of the police.

Get out of jail free -- via the grand jury

How is it that the grand jury let off both officers Wilson (Ferguson) and Pantaleo (NYPD)? Grand juries aren't regular trials that decide guilt or innocence, but merely if there's enough evidence to go ahead with a trial. In reality the prosecutors don't always bring cases against the police despite how much evidence of wrongdoing there is. Or if they bring a case, they can hide or obscure evidence, present botched legal views to the jurors, etc.

In cases where the prosecutor is intent on bringing an indictment against social activists, they can do the opposite: they can take some inconsequential or made up “evidence” to help railroad the activist.

In the Ferguson case there was massive evidence against officer Wilson. In the NYC case, the evidence against officer Pantaleo was irrefutable even for the higher standards of a regular trial. If these prosecutors could not win an indictment in these cases, it’s because they were doing their best to prevent indictments.

The “broken windows” policy and Garner’s death

The atrocities by killer cops are not merely some random acts. Behind the police murders against blacks and poor people in general are the policies of the top police authorities and capitalist politicians, conservative and liberal alike. One of these is the so-called “broken windows” policy adopted in New York City. It played a role in the overwhelming police response to Garner for supposedly selling a few cigarettes.

“Broken windows” focuses on intense policing of minor infractions like Garner’s. It also targets things like spraying graffiti on subway cars, or jumping subway turnstiles, or panhandling and vagrancy. In short it was aimed at the poor, many of who were black or Latino. According to the criminologists who first advanced the theory, it was aimed against social programs and didn’t care about the living conditions of the masses. One of the founders of the theory brags that this theory “undermine[s] the decades-long assumption that only large-scale social and economic change could prevent crime; it also meant that breakthroughs in crime prevention could come from the Right” (George L. Kelling, *City Journal*, Special Issue 2009, ‘How New York became safe: the full story’)

Indeed, the Right was enthused. Republican Mayor Giuliani took it up with a vengeance along with his police commissioner William Bratton. Conservative Mayor Bloomberg loved it. And the present mayor and liberal, Bill de Blasio announced he still believes “in the core notion of the ‘broken window’ theory”. In line with this, de Blasio has Bratton, Giuliani’s thug, as his own police commissioner. Bratton has tripled the arrests of panhandlers and spiked the arrests for low level crimes in public housing projects. True, Mayor de Blasio has criticized the enormous amount of racial profiling by the city’s cops. But de Blasio still holds to the basic core of “broken windows”. Don’t change social conditions which would reduce begging or similar low level crimes. Just keep harassing and arresting the poor. Or shoot them dead if they quarrel.

Racist justice and capitalism

The justice system is designed to protect the rich and punish the poor. And as the capitalists step up their exploitation and cut social programs to save their profits, it is no wonder that all sorts of drastic measures are taken against the masses. Deteriorating living conditions lead to crime, and stopping crime becomes the banner of the rich to further bully the masses. The judicial system resorts to finding new ways to keep the working masses down and especially keep poorer blacks and Latinos “in their place.” Racial profiling, the mistreatment of Mexican immigrant workers, massive jailings, attempts to limit voting, cannot be separated from class oppression. At bottom, when the capitalists can deprive one section of workers of their rights, it is easier to keep all workers down.

The outlook of the black bourgeoisie

The longer this wave of anti-racist struggle lasts, some basic differences within it will become more clear. There are leaders like the Rev. Al Sharpton who give fiery speeches but support Obama

who carries out austerity measures against blacks and others and deports Mexican immigrants. After racist vigilante George Zimmerman was found innocent of killing Trayvon Martin, and only went to trial because of weeks of protests, Sharpton proclaimed the justice system worked!

The anti-racist movement

Obama, Sharpton, Jesse Jackson, or Mayor de Blasio are not racists in the normal sense of hating black people, but their class outlook confines them to asking for small changes at the rate the bourgeoisie can tolerate. Racist practices flourish and past victories are threatened.

The strength of the fight against racism depends on how far the masses of the black population take part, and how far the working class and poor take part. They are the ones who suffer the most. They are the ones who get sent off to jail while the bankers and the employers can escape punishment.

It’s the ordinary masses who are giving life to the present demonstrations. The more they have their own organizations and voice, the better things will be. We need to bring more people into the struggle at the workplaces, communities and schools. More radical groups can have their own leaflets explaining the connection between racism, the justice system and capitalism itself. This is what will help sustain the struggle when the present outburst fades and put it in a position to give new power to the next explosion.

Fight the racist system!

Take the fight against racism into the streets! ■

About the Detroit Workers’ Voice email list

This leaflet was adapted from an article by Mark Williams that was sent out on December 14 on the **DWV email list**. It is free to subscribe, and subscribers receive news about the workers’ movement and revolutionary theory. To subscribe, just send a request, along with your email address, to detroitworkersvoice@yahoo.com.

Other topics that have been recently covered on this list include:

- The world in struggle (pt 1): Belgium, Spain, Greece, and South Africa (Nov. 22)
- Climate change is here! Two faces of the newest UN warning about the ongoing climate disaster (Nov. 8)
- A Palestinian denounces the anti-imperialism of fools – in defense of the struggle against the Syrian dictatorship (Oct. 28).
- Against those who, in the name of anti-imperialism, vilify the democratic movement in Hong Kong (Oct. 24).
- Solidarity with the defenders of Kobane (Oct. 14).
- Denounce Israeli barbarism! Solidarity with the Palestinian people! (Aug. 14).

Read Communist Voice magazine

Communist Voice is a journal of revolutionary working-class theory against the capitalist system. It supports the ongoing class struggles against racism and starvation and for freedom, a decent life, and protecting the environment. It stands for anti-revisionist Marxism-Leninism, a theory incompatible with Trotskyism, Stalinism, Maoism, and anarchism, or with the false “communist” regimes like the former Soviet Union, China, and Cuba.

Website: www.communistvoice.org

E-mail: mail@communistvoice.org

Write: CV PO Box 28536, Joyfield Sta., Detroit , MI 48228