

International Bolshevik Tendency

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RACIST COP VIOLENCE TRIGGERS MASS OUTRAGE

FOR LABOR STRIKES AGAINST REPRESSION & AUSTERITY!

Marxists stand in solidarity with those protesting the racist police murder of George Floyd. From Minneapolis to New York City to Los Angeles, multi-ethnic crowds of thousands have taken to the streets to express their anguish and outrage at yet another killing of an unarmed black man by a white cop. In the United States, about one in a thousand black men “can expect to die at the hands of police,” according to a Rutgers University study from last year—about 2.5 times more likely than white males. A high mortality rate for those with COVID-19 has prompted governments around the world, including in the U.S., to enact emergency lockdown measures—but the pandemic of racist police brutality is just business-as-usual in the “world’s greatest democracy.”

Derek Chauvin, the cop who knelt on a pleading George Floyd for eight minutes until the life drained out of him, has been fired and charged with third-degree murder. In his 19 years with the Minneapolis Police Department, Chauvin racked up about one complaint a year and was twice reprimanded. Yet Chauvin is not some “bad apple” in a barrel of good cops. In the U.S., law enforcement is designed to “serve and protect” racist capitalism, and it recruits (or creates) racists, bullies and depraved psychopaths because that is what is required to maintain “law and order” in a society of grotesque disparities of wealth and power. Statistically speaking, Chauvin’s arrest was highly unlikely; his conviction is improbable. The capitalists love their killer cops.

We call for jailing Chauvin and his accomplices for life, but we are under no illusions that the courts—another key branch of the repressive apparatus of the state—will grant even that modicum of justice.

The killing of Floyd, like other African American victims before him such as Eric Garner, Mike Brown and Tamir Rice, exposes the naked brutality of the capitalist state. The response of governments to the protests further confirms that the state exists to beat down the oppressed. While the National Guard has been activated in Minnesota, California, Texas and several other states, Trump threatened a federal military response to “assume control” and “get the job done right.” Protesters have targeted the White House itself, with the president promising to greet them with “the most vicious dogs, and most ominous weapons.” Outside the official state forces, but ready to step in to supplement repression, are armed fascist elements who have been emboldened in recent years.

The response of the Democrats is distinguishable from that of the Republicans only by the occasional acknowledgement of racial inequality. America’s first black president Barack Obama sought to reassure and lecture:

“It will fall mainly on the officials of Minnesota to ensure that the circumstances surrounding George Floyd’s death are investigated thoroughly and that justice is ultimately done. But it falls on all of us, regardless of our race or sta-

tion – including the majority of men and women in law enforcement who take pride in doing their tough job the right way, every day – to work together to create a ‘new normal’ in which the legacy of bigotry and unequal treatment no longer infects our institutions or our hearts.”

—NPR, 29 May 2020

Police killings under the Trump administration are at roughly the same level they were under Obama. Democrats are just as complicit as Republicans in the savage repression of black people. Democratic presidential candidate and former vice president Joe Biden—who recently declared that those African Americans who choose not to vote for him “ain’t black”—was a leading proponent of the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement act signed by Bill Clinton. The notorious “crime bill” was not only promoted with dog whistle racist appeals but bolstered the mass incarceration of young black men that began a generation earlier. While Republicans rage at the “looting” of department stores and Democrats like Minnesota Governor Tim Walz cry for “peace,” both parties joined hands to engage in class warfare by transferring trillions of dollars to the ultra-rich in “coronavirus relief” that will be taken out of the hide of working people.

Class warfare is exactly what we need—the multiracial working class needs to fight back against the depredations of capitalism, including the racist police brutality that serves to terrorize black and brown people. But the anger and outrage that are driving thousands into the streets must be organized and focused. Committees of action, with representatives from different working-class neighborhoods, could coordinate defense of communities against killer cops and other expressions of state violence.

Power to effect real change lies at the point of production: workers can bring the capitalist machine to a grinding halt. Five years ago, Local 10 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) shut down the Port of Oakland on May Day to protest racist police killings. While small actions such as these will not change the system, they set inspiring examples of what could be possible on a larger scale. Unionized bus drivers in Minneapolis and New York City have refused to carry arrested protesters to jail (*The Root*, 30 May 2020). Widespread

sympathy for the protesters and a shared sense of outrage over state violence and the worsening economic crisis show the potential for building toward a general strike in Minneapolis and other cities.

The protests are taking place in the context of a pandemic that disproportionately affects black people, the poor, the old and the homeless. Bourgeois commentators sit comfortably at home and express shock at the “violence” against property and failures to observe “social distancing” and lockdown rules. Millions of workers across the U.S. have no choice but to venture out to earn a living and run essential services in healthcare, transportation, retail, etc., just as they feel compelled to fight the injustices that threaten their lives and the lives of their families.

Marxists intervene in protests against police brutality to highlight the need for action by working people to overthrow capitalism as the only way to end cop killings and racism. We seek to build support for a class-struggle perspective inside the unions—against the sabotage of the pro-Democratic Party labor bureaucracy—and more broadly among the working class. As we wrote in “Down with Racist Police Terror!” (1917 No.37):

“It is necessary to gather the most politically advanced elements of the working class and oppressed together in a revolutionary organization committed to advancing a program that connects the immediate, day-to-day needs and concerns of working people (whether for a decent living or for protection against racist police violence) to the historical project of expropriating capitalist property and supplanting the capitalist state with institutions of workers’ power. A mass revolutionary party with deep roots in all sectors of the working class can be built, but it requires the dedication of smaller numbers of activists today to begin to take seriously the need to study history—above all the lessons of the Russian Revolution of October 1917 led by the Bolshevik Party of V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky—and engage in vigorous discussion and debate of the essential elements of a revolutionary program. The International Bolshevik Tendency seeks to participate in the process of building a revolutionary party in the U.S. and around the world.”