
Cops, National Guard Out Now!

Ferguson: The Real Face of Racist Capitalist America

Every cop in America knows that a badge is a license to kill black people. Michael Brown, an unarmed black 18-year-old, was executed by a white cop in broad daylight for the “crime” of walking in the street after being told to move onto the sidewalk. Shot six times, including twice in the head, he was left exposed in the street for hours, his lifeless body treated with less respect than a stray dog. As always, the police have since tried to tarnish the victim as the criminal. Fifty years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the formal abolition of Jim Crow segregation, this is what it still means to be black in America.

Ferguson, Missouri, is at a flash point. Tired of being told to “get to the back of the bus”—that is, shut up, get out of the street and get home before curfew—protesters have come out in defiant opposition to cop terror and racist injustice, which are inherent to this capitalist system. In this majority black St. Louis suburb, protesters continue to brave an army of mostly white cops firing tear gas, wooden and rubber bullets and stun grenades. One uniformed police thug was caught on video screaming: “Bring it, all you fucking animals!” Now Ferguson is up against a deployment of National Guardsmen, an army of occupation. We demand: *Cops, National Guard out now! Free the arrested protesters and drop all charges now!*

The National Guard are the reserve Army troops used to put down labor, black people and leftists who dare challenge the powers that be, from defending segregation in Little Rock in 1957 and smashing the 1965 Watts uprising to mobilizing against striking Teamsters in Ohio and killing Vietnam antiwar student protesters at Kent State in 1970. The police, who have always used every means at their disposal to enforce capitalist “law and order,” in recent years have gotten their hands on war matériel left over from U.S. imperialism’s occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. The same U.S. ruling class that wreaks terror on its

neocolonial victims abroad also brutally grinds down the working class, black masses and immigrants at home. The message is: submit or else.

Aghast at the scenes of armored vehicles and cops pointing M-16 assault rifles at residents in the Ferguson war zone (where journalists have been among those treated like enemies, tear-gassed and arrested), liberals complain about “excessive” force. And with more farsighted elements in the government expressing concern that their own guard dogs had slipped the leash, a black highway patrol officer and local resident was put in charge to pacify the crowds. But it makes no difference whether the cops are black, white or Latino, local, state or federal—they serve and protect a system built on a bedrock of racist oppression, from chattel slavery to wage slavery. The job of *all* police is to protect capitalist property and the rule of the few who profit from the exploitation of the many.

What occurred in Ferguson is no aberration. The proliferation of SWAT teams, the cop occupations of barrios and ghettos across America and the mass incarceration fueled by the “war on drugs” have for decades been part of daily life for black people. Over the same period, the capitalists increasingly deindustrialized the economy, abandoning the auto and steel plants that used to provide jobs, further sealing in the desperation of the ghetto wastelands. In their drive for profit, they have driven society to ruin and made everyone else pay for it. With no jobs on offer for working-class and minority youth, the capitalists don’t see much need to spend money on educating them, much less on providing any social programs. What is on offer is unbridled state repression.

Defying the odds, Michael Brown managed to stay outside the maw of the prison system, graduated from high school and was about to start college. His mother spoke the bitter truth: “Do you know how hard it was for me to get him to stay in school

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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'." This U.S. racist hellhole consigned Trayvon Martin, Oscar Grant and countless others to a similar fate.

Echoing racist Southern sheriffs who denounced Northern freedom riders, the government and bourgeois media mouth off about "outside agitators" in Ferguson. Meanwhile, from Obama's White House on down, black Democrats and preachers keep telling protesters to simmer down, stay away from the "lawless elements" and get on home. This time around, many protesters aren't going for it.

The killing of Michael Brown hit a nerve among those who are unwilling to silently witness one more cop killing of a black person. They are fed up with the empty promises of "hope" and "change," fed up with the paternalistic advice to pull up their pants and their bootstraps, fed up with being blamed for the ills of society, fed up with the illusion of equality wrapped around the core reality of systematic racist oppression. One Howard University student remarked: "This issue is about the fact that this country is not post-racial, this country is not just, this country is not free."

The authorities want to herd the mass outrage back into the ballot box, while Democratic Party politico Al Sharpton chimes in to scold Ferguson residents for low voter turnout. There should be no illusions in the Democrats or the federal government, which oversees this rotten system that the cops "serve and protect." The notion that the Feds will rein in racist local law enforcement is a lie. FBI agents have been embedded in the Ku Klux Klan and involved in heinous crimes, such as the 1963 Birmingham church bombing and the 1979 Greensboro massacre of leftists and union organizers. With many in Ferguson seeking redress from a Department of Justice investigation, we warn that Attorney General Eric Holder & Co. are the top cops who step in to get people off the streets with the promise that justice may come in the sweet by-and-by, at best enacting cosmetic reforms.

The spontaneous displays of anger by the working people and dispossessed in Ferguson are justified and essential. But unless the labor movement actively mobilizes in defense of the oppressed, such atomized outbursts will remain powerless against the capitalists and their repressive forces, leading to more despair.

Significantly, some unions in New York City are calling their members into the street to join an August 23 protest in solidarity with victims of police brutality, like Eric Garner, killed by the cops last month. But Sharpton's purpose in organizing this protest is to push for federal intervention to bring "justice."

Organized labor's most powerful weapons—its numbers, multiracial composition and capacity to halt the wheels of production-for-profit—are squandered by union tops who politically chain workers to the class enemy. The labor misleaders are slavishly loyal to the Democratic Party and push the lie that the government can be pressured to promote the interests of workers and the poor. The same capitalist state that terrorizes black people will go after the working class when it engages in militant struggle. Labor rights and black rights will either go forward together or fall back separately. For labor to flex its muscle in defense of itself and all the oppressed, a new, class-struggle leadership must be forged that doesn't play by the bosses' rules.

We do not suggest that this will be an easy road, particularly when the labor movement has been losing a one-sided class war waged by the bosses. But it is the only way forward. There will be no black liberation in this society short of a socialist revolution that breaks the shackles of racist American capitalism. And there will be no socialist revolution that does not emblazon the fight for black freedom on its banners.

Missouri was a slave state, and Ferguson lies just north of heavily segregated St. Louis. In 1857, the infamous Dred Scott decision that a black man "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect" sanctioned the reach of the Southern slaveowners into the North. The grave of the former slave Dred Scott on West Florissant Avenue is just a few miles down from where the Ferguson protests have riveted world attention.

It took a Civil War, the second American revolution, to smash the slave system. But the promise of black freedom was betrayed by an alliance of Northern capital with the Southern propertied classes against the aspirations of black freedmen. It will take a third American revolution, a proletarian socialist revolution, to finish the Civil War, eradicate racist capitalist oppression and establish an egalitarian socialist society. The Spartacist League is dedicated to building the multiracial revolutionary workers party that is necessary to achieve this purpose.

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