

AGAINST RACISM AND POLICE BRUTALITY

build a
socialist
fightback



Independent
Socialist
Group

\$5

A SOCIALIST PROGRAM TO FIGHT POLICE RACISM & BRUTALITY

Explosive protests against police brutality have emerged across the U.S. in the wake of the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. We in the Independent Socialist Group have drafted the following program in response. We hope it can help point the way forward in the fight against police brutality, racism, and related forms of oppression under capitalism. Ultimately, the capitalist legal system is set up to defend profit and punish those in poverty, so this document is complemented by our broader program (What We Stand For), where we attempt to point the way forward in the fight against capitalism as a whole. We encourage all activists in the anti-racist movement to read, discuss, and debate this program.

Justice for George Floyd and Breonna Taylor! Build a Fighting Movement!

CONVICT ALL KILLER COPS, PAST AND PRESENT, AND FIRE RACIST POLICE. Police officers involved in the murders of unarmed civilians should be charged with and convicted of first-degree murder. Old cases should be reopened and investigated; there should be no statute of limitations on murder! If the district attorneys refuse to prosecute cops for murder, then they should resign or be fired/recalled. All police officers who espouse racist or white supremacist ideas should be fired, as should those with a history of domestic violence.

RELEASE ALL JAILED PROTESTERS AND POLITICAL PRISONERS! Protesting is not a crime. Charges against protesters should be dropped and bail refunded to the individuals or the funds which bailed them out. Release all people jailed and imprisoned for anti-racist protesting, labor organizing, and other forms of activism, including former Black Panthers and civil rights activists held in custody since the 1960s and '70s.

FOR COMMUNITY COMMITTEES TO ORGANIZE PROTESTS. Workers, youth, and

community members should organize democratically elected councils to develop clear political programs and coordinate action to win their demands. Any leaders in these efforts must be accountable to the movement and subject to recall. Community councils should organize protest support, medical treatment, legal responses, and community self-defense efforts to ensure the health and safety of protesters and develop appropriate responses to police aggression and escalation. These community committees should link up with labor unions, and form city, state, and national councils to ensure the movement's success on a larger scale, while also addressing the unique needs of each locality.

FOR SOLIDARITY BETWEEN ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE ANTI-RACIST MOVEMENT. An injury to one is an injury to all! We have already seen numerous examples of labor solidarity with the protests from unions like the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), where unionized bus drivers in Minneapolis and New York City have refused to transport police or arrested protesters. More recently, unions like the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and Communication Workers of America (CWA) have called for organized work stoppages and strikes in solidarity with the growing anti-racist movement. Unionized public school teachers are struggling in their local communities to remove police presence from middle and high schools. We need unions across the country to follow these examples and organize workplace actions in solidarity with the protesters.

Workers at corporations that indirectly fund police departments, like Target, Google, and Bank of America, should organize job actions to demand an end to bankrolling the cops. Unions should get involved with planning protests, turning out members for union contingents at protests, and organizing members as safety volunteers to help protect demonstrators from police. Unions should also

use their financial and legal resources to support arrested protesters.

EXPULSION OF POLICE UNIONS FROM THE LABOR MOVEMENT. The main role of police in the U.S. is to serve and protect the capitalist class, including by enforcing racist and anti-worker policies, repressing strikes and labor activity, and putting down protests. Current police unions protect police officers from facing any consequences for their actions (up to and including murder). They actively oppose disciplining or firing bad cops and they block any public oversight of the police. All existing police unions should be expelled from labor federations and excluded from the labor movement nationally.

BRING BACK A FIGHTING UNION LEADERSHIP IN THE U.S. Union leaders like AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka who refuse to condemn or take action against police unions or to support the protests must be pressured by the membership to resign and must be replaced with militant pro-worker and anti-racist union leadership. This new leadership must be democratically elected from the rank-and-file workers, subject to recall, and paid only the average wage of the workers they represent.

Police Demilitarization & Accountability

DEMILITARIZE THE POLICE! In the U.S., the police act more like an occupying army than a force concerned with public safety. Outlaw the sale of surplus and new military equipment and armored vehicles to police departments. Ban the use and ownership of chemical weapons by police departments and heavily restrict the carrying and use of firearms by officers. Disband particularly militarized and costly police units such as anti-gang units and SWAT teams. End "warrior training" programs and instead fund de-escalation training, with an emphasis on mental health competency and racial sensitivity.

END “NO KNOCK” RAIDS. We have a right to defend our residences and to see a warrant before police enter our homes. “No knock” raids, such as the one which led to the death of Breonna Taylor, contradict this fundamental right and routinely result in unjust killings of bystanders and innocent people. Law enforcement must be required to announce themselves and wait outside until the resident comes to the door to see their warrant.

END SURVEILLANCE PRACTICES AND ATTACKS ON OUR RIGHTS TO ORGANIZE AND PROTEST. Stop the use of drones, facial recognition, electronic surveillance, and other technology that contribute to the surveillance state. Police, ICE, and other law enforcement bodies should immediately stop all contracts with the companies that provide this technology, such as Amazon and Microsoft.

POLICE OUT OF OUR SCHOOLS! Public schools should be a safe space for students and staff to learn and work. Police officers in schools have done little to prevent mass shootings, often hiding in their offices during emergencies, and have actually served the purpose of criminalizing minor offenses committed by students. Police in schools routinely brutalize and needlessly arrest students and make schools unsafe, disproportionately targeting students of color and students living in poverty. We need to stop criminalizing children and end the school-to-prison pipeline, firing police in schools and instead allocating resources to better counseling, more teachers and support staff, and college readiness and career preparation programs.

DEFUND THE POLICE! Dramatically reduce bloated municipal and county police budgets, especially through demilitarization. Police officers are currently among the highest paid public employees in most cities and towns, especially when you count overtime and detail pay. Use the money cut from police budgets to expand necessary social services and programs—like emergency housing services, mental health and addiction treatment, and domestic violence shelters—that are not only vital to improving the health of our communities but are also proven to be the most effective ways to reduce the most common forms of crime.

DECRIMINALIZE POVERTY AND BAN RACIST POLICE PRACTICES. End the policing of poverty-related and so-called “lifestyle crimes” such as non-violent drug offenses, sex work, loitering, homelessness, and undocumented immigration. Being poor is not a choice, it is a product of capitalist exploitation and inequality; it should not be treated like a crime. Decriminalizing poverty will help reduce the racist dimensions of policing. End the use of arrest and ticket quotas, which serve to encourage harassment of workers and inflate crime statistics to justify more funding for the police. Policies of racial profiling, “broken windows” policing, “stop and frisk”, and the racist War on Drugs should likewise be banned. End police cooperation with ICE, Border Patrol, and Homeland Security. Abolish ICE!

END QUALIFIED IMMUNITY FOR COPS! Police benefit from legal protections unlike those available for any worker, which shelter them from punishment. Ending qualified immunity will ensure that cities and towns are not on the hook for enormous legal settlements against violent, racist officers. And while we must understand that the function of policing within a racist capitalist system is the bigger problem, not individual “bad apples,” we should support democratically determined consequences, including immediate firing and convictions, for all individually criminal police officers.

COMMUNITY CONTROL AND OVERSIGHT OF THE POLICE. We cannot trust bureaucratic city councils and powerless “civilian review boards” to discipline police and protect us. We need to demand the formation of community control boards for each precinct, composed of democratically elected residents with the ability to hire, fire, subpoena, investigate, and charge police officers along with setting police budgets. Community boards can also convene investigations to ensure that police do the necessary work of investigating hate crimes, murders, and sexual assaults, not brutalizing people of color, workers, and the homeless.



Fight Poverty and Systemic Racism for a Socialist Future

FOR A MULTI-RACIAL STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM AND POVERTY. Black people in the U.S. are the targets of police violence and mass incarceration at a disproportionately high rate. Latino and indigenous people are also affected at a higher rate than average. A movement to end police brutality, racism, and poverty must involve all oppressed groups under capitalism. Capitalism brutally exploits the working class as a whole, and people of color, immigrants, indigenous people, the LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities, and women especially. This exploitation is possible when we are divided and blame each other for the problems inflicted on us by capitalism. We must unite all workers, regardless of their identity, under a common banner to fight back against the capitalist system which is responsible for perpetuating these different oppressions.

FOR MASSIVE INVESTMENT IN GREEN JOBS, HEALTHCARE, EDUCATION, AND FARE-FREE TRANSIT. The money saved by cutting police budgets can be reallocated towards social services. We need a federal jobs guarantee, ensuring that all workers can find unionized jobs at a living wage. This can be achieved with the creation of millions of new state and federal jobs to promote ecologically-friendly infrastructure and energy, along with expansions of public education with more teachers and support staff to reduce class sizes and ensure students receive a quality education. Programs such as fare-free public transit, affordable public housing, and free universal healthcare will also go a long way toward lifting working-class communities, in particular communities of color that have been systematically marginalized, out of poverty. Additionally, factories used to produce tear gas and military grade police equipment should be retooled and taken under democratic public ownership by the workers to produce goods for the benefit of the working class.

DEMOCRATIZE PUBLIC SAFETY AND DEVELOP ALTERNATIVES TO POLICING. Resources saved through demilitarization and defunding portions of police budgets can also be reallocated towards developing and expanding programs and

counseling to treat drug addiction and mental illness. We can also fund alternative first responders and other workers to handle basic public safety functions such as directing traffic, overseeing construction projects, wellness check-ups, and de-escalating conflicts.

END MASS INCARCERATION, ABOLISH PRIVATE PRISONS, AND BAN LOW WAGE AND UNPAID PRISON LABOR. Prison labor is the modern equivalent of slavery, due to a loophole in the 13th Amendment allowing prisoners to be paid far less than minimum wage, often only a few dollars per day. Release all non-violent drug offenders, expunge their records, and provide re-entry assistance. All remaining prisons should be taken under public ownership, with a focus on rehabilitative justice and ending the prison-for-profit system. Any labor performed by prisoners must be voluntary and compensated at the rate of a living wage, with safe and sanitary working and living conditions. Prisoners must also receive certification for any skilled labor (e.g., fire fighting, welding, wood working) performed successfully during their imprisonment, with the guaranteed option of a job in that field upon release and an end to all job discrimination based on someone's criminal record.

FOR GENERAL STRIKES TO WIN THE DEMANDS OF THE ANTI-RACIST MOVEMENT. Work stoppages will be even more effective than protests or symbolic days of action. The way to get the capitalist class's attention and force them to concede to the movement's demands is by shutting down "business as usual"—ultimately, they only care about actions that affect their profits. A 24-hour general strike would mean total work stoppage by the vast majority of workers in a specific area, essentially shutting down the local economy for a whole day. For example, if the anti-racist movement in Minneapolis agreed on a common program of reform for the police department, all workers in the city could stop work for 24 hours and call for those demands to be met. Union activists should work with each other to put forward resolutions in their union locals supporting such a strike. Workers in non-union workplaces should discuss with their coworkers and cooperate with unions and other activists in the area

to plan the strike. This would be a first step; longer and broader actions would need to be planned to continue the fight as necessary. These smaller strikes will help to develop militant, anti-racist union leadership drawn from the rank-and-file and build workers' confidence and experience with strikes. Local general strikes can then be organized to occur on the same day, linking the smaller strikes into a nationwide strike wave. As the economy comes to halt and profits fall, the capitalists will increase pressure on politicians to meet the demands of the strikers in order to get people back to work.

FOR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, PROGRESSIVE GROUPS, AND LABOR UNIONS TO BREAK AWAY FROM AND END SUPPORT FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY. Some of the worst recent repression of protesters and long-term police violence has occurred in cities that have been dominated by Democratic Party mayors and city councils for decades. Presidential candidate Joe Biden, architect of the infamous 1994 Crime Bill, has distanced himself from Black Lives Matter and stated that he opposes defunding the police. His proposed solution to police violence is to train police to shoot for the legs, not to kill, in essence ignoring the call for systematic changes in how policing is structured and in no way combatting racist police violence. Biden's progressive counterpart Bernie Sanders has argued for more funding to go to police to increase their pay and promote training programs and other measures which failed to solve the problem of police brutality during the Obama Administration. Democrats in the House of Representatives have proposed a bill that would ban chokeholds, limit no-knock raids, and promote training and data collection programs around racial bias. Yet, this bill would do nothing to reduce bloated police budgets or establish real community control of the police.

We recognize that many of those currently taking part in the movement may vote for the Democratic Party as a "less-evil" but we disagree with this approach, as the role the Democrats have played in the current movement and their failure to reform police in cities around the country makes clear that they do not actually present a serious alternative.

The best the Democratic Party can put forward is a few technocratic reforms, and "tinkering around the edges," without posing any real systemic changes. The Republican Party offers no alternative, continuing to crudely support racist "tough on crime" policies and unabashedly promoting the use of police violence to protect business interests.

BUILD A DIVERSE WORKERS' PARTY TO PUT FORWARD AN ALTERNATIVE TO RACISM, AUSTERITY, AND CAPITALISM. Community councils formed by the current anti-racist protests can link up with fighting labor unions to build an alternative to this corporate duopoly and create a political party funded entirely by membership dues and donations from working-class people, progressive groups, and unions. This new party for working people can select its own candidates and develop its own platform through democratic debates and voting procedures, with all elected officials subject to recall and only receiving the wage of the average worker they represent.

Abolition Through Socialism

As Marxists, the Independent Socialist Group recognizes that the modern institution of the police in the U.S. is intrinsically linked to the rise of industrial capitalism following the Civil War. In many cases, the police were recruited from the ranks of slave catching patrols, and the institution was created to enforce the will of the emerging capitalists upon their impoverished workforces. Worldwide, police brutality against poor people and oppressed groups is a feature of every capitalist country. The institution of the police is a central element to capitalism in general. Ultimately, the institution of the police must be abolished alongside the capitalist system as a whole, but this cannot be achieved through reform.

Marxists understand the role of the state well. As Vladimir Lenin, a key leader of the 1917 Russian Revolution, explained in *The State and Revolution*,

"A standing army and police are the chief instruments of state power. But how can it be otherwise?... It is

impossible because civilized society is split into antagonistic, and, moreover, irreconcilably antagonistic classes, whose “self-acting” arming would lead to an armed struggle between them. A state arises, a special power is created, special bodies of armed men, and every revolution, by destroying the state apparatus, shows us the naked class struggle, clearly shows us how the ruling class strives to restore the special bodies of armed men which serve it, and how the oppressed class strives to create a new organization of this kind, capable of serving the exploited instead of the exploiters.”

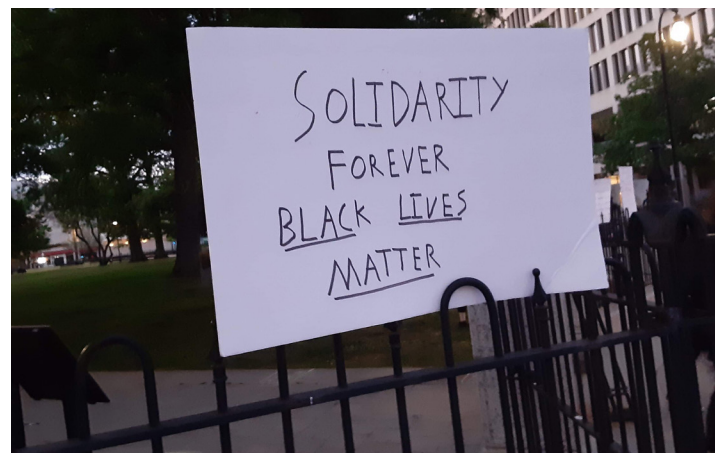
Recently, some Democratic Party politicians have given into the demands of protesters and agreed to “dismantle” local police forces in order to build something new. We must recognize that any form of “abolition” or “dismantling” achieved under capitalism will result in the creation of police by another name. Private police forces have existed throughout U.S. history, including groups like the Pinkertons which have been used to attack workers and violently break up strikes and protests. We’ve already seen the use of private contractors and mercenaries to reinforce police when breaking up the recent protests. In a recent article from Black Agenda Report, activists Max Rameau and Nefta Freeman note how private security firms play a central role in policing in South Africa and argue that in the U.S.,

“...the shift from private security to public utility created the contradiction that allowed civil rights organizations to fight for equal protection under the law, public transparency and other reforms. Of course, this did not end police brutality or alter the fundamental function of police as protectors of wealth and enforcers of the will of the ruling class, but turning the police into a public utility did provide some important tools necessary for the reduction of harm and heightening contradictions when those harms came.”

Community control of the police in the immediate future can disempower the institution and ensure working people and oppressed communities play a role in determining public safety policy. While socialist revolution will be necessary to end capitalist oppression and police forces, winning reforms today that increase police regulation and accountability will make building leadership and parties for the next revolutionary situation significantly easier, ensuring that black lives can be saved to help lead that effort. We must organize and fight for a workers’ government which can make major inroads in terms of dismantling the police and, through beginning the transition to socialism, can build truly democratic alternatives for public safety based on the working class and oppressed communities.

In conclusion, we quote the late Black Panther Party leader Fred Hampton on the only permanent solution to capitalist oppression:

“We don’t think you fight fire with fire best; we think you fight fire with water best. We’re going to fight racism not with racism, but we’re going to fight with solidarity. We say we’re not going to fight capitalism with black capitalism, but we’re going to fight it with socialism. We’ve stood up and said we’re not going to fight reactionary pigs and reactionary state’s attorneys... with any other reactions on our part. We’re going to fight their reactions with all of us people getting together and having an international proletarian revolution.”



WHAT NEXT FOR THE ANTI-RACIST MOVEMENT?

By T.R. Whitworth

In my opinion, the young generation of whites, blacks, browns, whatever else there is, you're living at a time of extremism, a time of revolution, a time when there's got to be a change. People in power have misused it, and now there has to be a change and a better world has to be built... And I, for one, will join in with anyone—I don't care what color you are—as long as you want to change this miserable condition that exists on this earth.

- Malcolm X, 1964

The recent murders by police of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and the lynching of Ahmaud Arbery have reignited the anti-racist movement in the U.S. The current situation is eerily similar to what we saw in 2014, when Michael Brown's murder by Officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, sparked protests that quickly spread around the country. Then, as now, the protests were met with fierce repression and violence by highly militarized police forces. Then, as now, the mainstream media smeared—largely peaceful—protesters as rioters and looters in an effort to discredit the movement.

While the 2014 movement under the banner of Black Lives Matter was energetic and inspiring, like many past movements against police racism and brutality, it failed to materialize real systemic changes. The Obama Administration's Justice Department begrudgingly carried out a few more investigations of corrupt and racist police departments, but even that minor reform was quickly rolled back by the Trump Administration. Body cameras for the police, a central demand of

the 2014 movement, have only been implemented in a patchwork fashion, and even where wearing one is official policy, officers frequently turn them off without consequence.

Encouragingly, the current emerging movement is even larger and more energetic than in 2014. Protests have taken place across all 50 states, many protests continuing for days. The protests are characterized by instinctive multi-racial and multi-ethnic solidarity against racism and police violence. And public support for the movement is high. According to a Reuters/Ipsos poll, "64% of American adults were 'sympathetic to people who are out protesting right now,' while 27% said they were not and 9% were unsure." Given the massive support for and participation of youth in the movement, this 64% figure is probably a conservative estimate.

The ruling class has been shaken to its core by this uprising, and the heavy-handed repressive response of police departments and the Trump Administration has so far backfired, adding steam to the protests instead of extinguishing them. We've seen a series of concessions in past days, granted under pressure from the protests. All four Minneapolis police officers involved in George Floyd's murder have been fired and indicted. Six Atlanta police officers have been criminally charged for using excessive force on protesters. And institutions across the country, especially universities and colleges, have publicly severed ties with their cities' police departments.

But the current anti-racist protest movement lacks organization, leadership, and democratic decision-making structures. Without these, it is vulnerable to fizzling out without achieving lasting change, as people succumb to protest fatigue. It is also vulnerable to being co-opted and de-radicalized by self-appointed "lead-

ers" who would rather celebrate cops hugging black protesters than fight for systemic change.

What We Need to Win

The systemic changes we need include an end to racial profiling, "broken windows" policing, "stop and frisk" policies, the racist War on Drugs, and the criminalization of poverty—which disproportionately affects black communities. All police officers who espouse any form of racist or white supremacist ideas should be fired without question.

The assault on our democratic right to peaceful protest must end. The military, including the National Guard, should be immediately withdrawn from our cities and streets. The use of tear gas, rubber bullets, flash bangs, and riot gear in response to protests should be banned. We should demand the immediate release of all arrested protesters and the dropping of their charges, as well as the release of former Black Panthers and all other imprisoned black liberation activists.

All killer cops, past and present, should be prosecuted. It needs to be easier to fire police officers with excessive force complaints and criminally charge and convict killer cops. District attorneys' offices have shown that they are not capable of prosecuting the same police officers that they work with on a daily basis and rely on to testify in court. Police departments have proven that they are not capable of investigating themselves.

We need community control of the police through democratically elected committees of workers and community members with hiring and firing power, the ability to review and create policy and budgets, and authority to conduct independent investigations into cases of police misconduct.

Police unions like the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association and the International Brotherhood of Police Officers should be kicked out of the labor movement. Law enforcement unions are not like other unions. The main role of police in the U.S. is to serve the will of the capitalist class, including by enforcing racist and anti-worker policies, repressing strikes and labor activity, and putting down protests. Police unions exist to protect police officers from facing any consequences for their actions (up to and including murder). They make it difficult to discipline or fire bad cops and they oppose any public oversight of the police.

Police departments across the country must be demilitarized and their budgets reduced. Cities must stop wasting public funds on military technology and weaponry and invest the money instead in affordable housing, public transit, schools, and other social programs and services in order to make a dent in the poverty that disproportionately affects black workers. Even many police themselves complain that they are expected to do the job of social workers. Let's take some of the public money currently spent on police budgets and use it to hire actual social workers instead.

Finally, we need a political party—a workers' party—that will offer a real alternative to racism and austerity. Both the Democratic and Republican Parties have failed for decades to meaningfully improve the conditions under which we live: widespread poverty, entrenched racism, lack of access to decent education, housing, jobs, and healthcare. Both parties play off of each other and seek to divide workers along racial lines—as well as by nationality, gender, sexual identity, etc. Despite their more “progressive” rhetoric of racial justice, when in office the Democrats have disappointed again and again. Just look at cities like Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Minneapolis, where decades of Democratic Party rule have not resulted in reforms to policing, and in many cases have actually passed some of the worst police policies, including “stop and frisk.” In fact, Democratic Party controlled major cities have been the epicenters of the majority of the murders of unarmed black people by police for decades.

How to Win These Demands and More

To achieve these needed systemic changes will require a high level of organization and coordination. The ruling class and their police and military forces are organized and we should be too. We should immediately form neighborhood committees, with elected members—workers, youth, and community members—and democratic structures, to decide future actions and tactics and develop a program with clear demands to direct the movement. These neighborhood committees should elect delegates to city-wide committees, which should in turn build links state- and nation-wide.

These elected neighborhood committees should prepare plans, train volunteers, and collect supplies and equipment for dealing with tear gas, rubber bullets, “kettling,” and other aggressive police tactics at protests and demonstrations. They should be ready to assess situations, make tough calls, and put forward proposals in the heat of the moment for how best to keep protesters and neighborhoods safe from police and right-wing aggression. They could also organize neighborhood patrols to document police interactions with community members.

Labor unions need to get involved and take a strong stand against police brutality and in support of the protests. Issuing public solidarity statements is a good first step, but unions should go further by organizing workplace meetings and discussions on the movement, and mobilizing members to form union contingents at protests. Unions should also use their legal resources to defend protesters. Representing 11.6% of all U.S. workers—and 12.7% of black workers—unions are among the most diverse institutions of the working class. Solidarity against racism and all forms of oppression must be a key point of struggle for the whole workers' movement.

Protesting can only be one part of our organizing strategy. Protests are effective to the extent that they call attention to the issue, demonstrate public outrage or support, and disrupt “business as usual.” But ultimately the ruling class

only cares about actions that affect their bottom line—their ability to make profit. We should begin to organize for 24-hour general strikes of workers in all sectors in cities across the country to win the movement's demands by putting further economic pressure on the bosses who are already staggering from the blows of the health and economic crisis. They will quickly get the message to their paid-off politicians that it's time to grant substantive reforms.

Unions should play a key role in calling for and planning any general strikes, but both union and non-union workers should participate. If the union bureaucrats won't do it, rank-and-file union members and workers should take up the planning themselves (and then elect new union leaders prepared to genuinely represent their class, not suck up to the bosses).

We need to build a truly mass movement to unite workers of all races in the struggle against capitalism and the racist inequality and violence that the system was founded upon. Only a multi-racial working-class movement has the power to win demands like demilitarizing the police, convicting killer cops, ending the War on Drugs, and community control of the police.

Only a movement that unites workers and youth regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, or any other form of oppression, can win guaranteed jobs, housing, healthcare, education, and a living wage for all. These reforms can be paid for by taxing the rich and nationalizing big corporations, as a step toward ultimately ending capitalism and replacing it with a democratic and egalitarian socialist society with power firmly in the hands of the working class. As MLK, Malcolm X, and Fred Hampton all came to conclude, the only way to defeat racism is to defeat capitalism.



Excerpts from

Marxism, Racism, and the Class Struggle

Shaun Arendse, Marxist Workers Party (CWI South Africa)

Racism is not the result of an “inevitable” racial friction between white and black. It is maintained by the class structure of capitalist society. Indeed, capitalism itself was responsible for the birth of racism. Before capitalism, discrimination against an entire people based on permanent prejudices of supposedly inferior ancestry, skin color or other physical and mental characteristics did not exist. Historically, racism emerged to justify the Atlantic slave trade, an enormous source of profits for the fledgling capitalist class. Once arisen, racism was molded and adapted to justify the shifting economic interests of the capitalist class in their colonial conquests and as part of capitalism’s ideological armory against the revolutionary working class. Charting the development of racism against the ebbs, flows, twists and turns of the class struggle is the only way to understand why racism exists. This requires a Marxist analysis.

The Marxist Approach

For Marxists, all ideas, including racism, are ultimately a reflection of social conditions. This materialist approach means ideas must be examined as products of the specific historical circumstances that created them and which have maintained and modified them up to the present day. Trying to understand any idea without a materialist approach is like examining the shadow independently of the object that casts it.

The most fundamental social conditions that must be examined are the relationship between classes which themselves arise depending on how society organizes production. Different ways of organizing production give rise to different classes but the common feature is a minority ruling class who exploits the working majority by expropriating (i.e. stealing) the surplus wealth created by their labors. This is the fundamental divi-

sion in society.

Different systems of belief (or ideologies) emerge to justify the position of the ruling class and to persuade the masses to accept their exploitation. However, the history of slave uprisings, peasant revolts, and the mass revolutionary struggles of the working class in our own time shows that the ruling class only ever partially succeeds in fooling the classes they exploit.

It is the conflicting interests of different classes that are the real social basis upon which racial prejudices, discrimination and oppression form. In the struggles between classes, differences of race but also gender, age, sexuality and religion are frequently given an antagonistic form leading to corresponding ideologies of racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia and religious prejudice. The great Marxist Friedrich Engels dealt extensively with the roots in class society of oppression against women and the sexist prejudices this gives rise to; later writers have shown how homophobic prejudices emerged in the nineteenth century based on the form of the family in capitalist society.

However, Marxism’s power as a method of analysis does not lie in a simplistic materialism that says economic interests are always reflected as ideas and ideologies in a crude and obvious way. Rather it lies in Marxism’s dialectical materialism.

Dialectics means to examine the development of social conditions as processes and interactions. This means that Marxism recognizes that ideas and ideologies can themselves interact with the economic forces that originally created them adding layers of complexity to social conditions.

Dialectics are the key to understanding what can otherwise appear as contradictions in the historical development of racism. For once arisen, an idea or ide-

ology, even a prejudice, can take on a certain life of its own within limits. Under the weight of historical inertia ideas can persist long past their use-by date. So for example, whilst it is not possible to be born racist, it is possible to be born into a racist society and raised to accept prejudices that were created by the social conditions of a past period. Also, ideas and ideologies can be given a new content by changing social conditions even as the language they express themselves in remains unchanged. Ideas that were progressive in one period in history can become reactionary in another as they are adapted to serve different class interests. Different ideologies can intertwine. This has been the case with racism and nationalism. It is only Marxism that can cope with such contradictions by basing itself on the real thread of continuity in changing social conditions and not the ideological shadows they cast.

Marxism can accommodate and explain why sections of classes, under certain conditions, can support ideologies that do not correspond with their fundamental interests. Marx observed that, “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.” This means that the ruling class’s control of society gives them the means to partially impose ideologies that reflect their interests onto society in general. Under the right historical conditions, ruling class ideologies of racism and nationalism can succeed in creating divisions amongst the working class and poor and prevent them from uniting against their common exploiter, the capitalist class.

The Weakness of the Bourgeois Method

The ability of Marxism to illuminate the social conditions that create and nurture racism can be further demonstrated by comparing it to the weaknesses of bourgeois (i.e. capitalist) academics’ attempts



to explain racism. To describe them as bourgeois is not meant as an insult to the writers but a description of the weakness in their method of analysis.

This weakness can be summed-up as the failure to consistently place the examination of social conditions, especially class relations, at the center of analysis. Whilst bourgeois academics plunge into the depths of history, they begin to treat racism itself as an ahistorical phenomenon. In other words, as something that has always existed, rather than something that was brought into being under certain social conditions at a definite point in history. This means they cannot account for the emergence of new ideas and prejudices or the circumstances that cause them to change their form. The bourgeois approach is ultimately descriptive rather than analytical. Crucially therefore, they cannot point out the tasks necessary to end racism.

Those that assert that the only racism is the very real prejudices of white people, held by all white people regardless of time and place, likewise treat racism as an ahistorical phenomenon. Without a historical explanation of how white people came to hold racist prejudices it has to be assumed that they must have lain dormant in those periods of history where the mass of white and black people would never have encountered each other or even heard of each other's existence.

Prejudice and Discrimination before Capitalism

The social conditions necessary to give rise to the ideas of "race" and "nation" were absent in the feudal societies that pre-dated capitalism in Europe.

In feudal society Catholic ideology justified the feudal "domestic policy" of a fixed hierarchical social order by declaring that it was ordained by God. Everyone was born into their station in life from the king and the lords down to the peasants. Feudalism was composed of small-scale political entities united under a distant monarch or emperor. The mass of the peasant population was tied to a small area of land for life.

It took the development of capitalist social relations and the rise of the capitalist class to exert the pressure toward the formation of nation-states. The chief necessity was the need for a sizable national market that would allow the capitalist class to develop the scale of production in order to increase their wealth. Once this process was underway it stimulated nationalist ideologies to correspond with it. In the course of capitalism's development racism and nationalism would increasingly intertwine.

In feudal society the Catholic doctrine of "universalism" justified the feudal 'foreign policy' of expansion by conquest. This doctrine held that all people, whatever their ancestry or skin color, were potential Christian converts. It was the duty of Christian rulers to try and bring them into the fold. This doctrine justified the economic interests of the feudal ruling class who could only increase their power and wealth through the conquest of new lands and the peasants that were tied to them by birth.

The social conditions of feudal society and the interests of the feudal ruling class gave pre-capitalist prejudice and discrimination their expression in religious terms. Having the "wrong" religious beliefs, and their expression in different cultural practices, was the only basis for discrimination. But this could be escaped through religious conversion. A person's ancestry or skin color could not become the basis for permanent discrimination.

In their struggle to become the new rulers of society, the capitalist class would of necessity destroy the feudal ideologies that justified the old society and create the social conditions for new forms of prejudice and discrimination.

Discrimination Based on Descent

A crucial watershed for the development of racism was the undermining of the Catholic doctrine of universalism and the development of the idea that the "wrong" religion could be passed on by descent. This watershed came in fifteenth century Spain. There, the Jewish and Muslim populations were faced with the "choice" of expulsion from society or conversion to Christianity. However, in a

new departure, those that converted continued to suffer discrimination because of their "bad blood."

The "New Christian" converts were concentrated amongst the proto-capitalist merchants who were growing in wealth and power. The declining feudal landowners, jealous of the new-money wealth of the merchants, used their control of feudal political institutions against their class rivals. Laws were enacted excluding New Christians from state office, church office and membership of professional bodies as well as trade and craft guilds. The intention of the landowners in this struggle was not to destroy the New Christians but to bolster their own political power in order to take a share in the growing money-economy which the merchants dominated. The new laws existed more as a threat against uncooperative merchants and were only used selectively.

If the landowners were to successfully prosecute their class struggle against the merchants, it was necessary for them to maintain a basis for discrimination even when the merchants "chose" religious conversion. They found the answer by building upon the pre-existing, but until then limited idea, of "noble blood." This early form of racist discrimination and proto-nationalism, both maintaining significant religious colors, began the long intertwining of these twin ideologies. The impetus to this early racism was given by the economic forces created by capitalism. But it was not an ideological weapon of the rising capitalists but rather the declining feudal landowners. This only underlines the complex relationship between social conditions and ideas and ideologies. For, as they grew to maturity, the capitalist class would harness the ideological seeds sown in this period of feudal decay to advance their own class interests.

The Capitalists Reinvent God

The Catholic doctrine of "universalism" was no match for the rising economic interests of the proto-capitalist merchant class who pioneered the Atlantic slave trade from the mid-fifteenth century. Centuries of theological debate followed about the morality of enslaving poten-

tial black converts. However, in Northern Europe, especially Britain and the Netherlands, the rising capitalist merchants reinvented Christianity to reflect their own class interests in the new creed of Protestantism.

The rising capitalist class was struggling to end the feudal restrictions in society that had become a fetter on their accumulation of wealth and aspiration to political power. Protestantism armed the rising capitalist class with an ideological weapon to attack the ideas that justified the feudal social hierarchy as ordained by God. In contrast to the tight social control exercised by the Catholic Church, Protestant ideology promoted the possibility of a personal relationship with God unmediated by the Catholic hierarchy. This “democratization” of Christianity meant that every aspect of Catholic ideology was now up for debate.

The Calvinist Protestant sect reflected the rising capitalist class’s economic interests in the most straightforward way. The Calvinist ideas of “predestination” and “a calling from God” made the highest virtue of the accumulation of wealth as a sign of God’s favor.

The Atlantic Slave Trade & the Creation of Anti-Black Racism

The major capitalist economic interest that would create the social conditions for anti-black racism was the Atlantic slave trade. But the history of slavery in general is not the history of racism. In Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome people of all shades could be enslaved.

In the early capitalist period, slavery maintained its multi-racial character. When the first merchant slave ships arrived in Africa in the 1440s and began a small-scale barter trade with West African rulers for black slaves, their trade existed alongside the West African practice of taking slaves in war, the long established trans-Saharan slave trade under the control of North African Muslims and the continued enslavement of white people in parts of Europe.

The difference between the Portuguese merchants and their early competitors was that the former represented the ris-

ing capitalist class and the latter the remnants of old social forms that capitalism would soon sweep away. This proto-capitalist class of merchants would reinvent slavery. In putting it to use in the newly conquered Americas they transformed it into a vast capitalist enterprise. It was only upon the basis of capitalist slavery that the social conditions were created for the emergence of anti-black racism by making slavery, for the first time, exclusively black.

But this would take many years. The first Atlantic slave ship to carry black slaves sailed from Africa in 1510. Fifty black slaves were taken to the Spanish controlled island of Hispaniola (the modern day Haiti and Dominican Republic). This “innovation” took place because the indigenous populations that were the first to be enslaved and put to work in the new silver and gold mines and on the new tobacco and sugar plantations died too readily from the diseases carried by the Europeans. Up to the seventeenth century the Atlantic slave trade remained intermittent and on a small scale compared to what was to come.

The key to understanding the scale of the Atlantic slave trade is the demand for labor in the new American colonies which in turn depended on the development of capitalism in Europe and its creation of new markets. The turning point came in the seventeenth century when sugar became the main cash crop throughout the Caribbean and South America. This rapidly accelerated the need for labor which was most easily satisfied by the importation of black slave labor from Africa.

Over the next two centuries over twelve million black people were enslaved and sent to the Americas. Their status as slaves, the bottom rung of the social ladder, became inseparable from their skin color. As Marxist historian Eric Williams described it in his book, *British Capitalism and British Slavery*,

“the features of the man, his hair, color and dentifrice, his ‘subhuman’ characteristics so widely pleaded, were only the later rationalizations to justify a simple economic fact: that the colonies needed labor and

resorted to Negro labor because it was cheapest and best.”

Anti-black racism had been called into existence and would not now disappear. It existed in the colonies and in the metropolises that benefited from its existence. When slavery was ended throughout the nineteenth century, Williams noted that this did not eradicate the racist prejudices it had created. He said, “the ideas [racism] built on these interests [slavery] continue long after the interests have been destroyed and work their old mischief, which is all the more mischievous because the interests to which they corresponded no longer exist.” But this was not just historical inertia. Despite the ending of the Atlantic slave trade capitalism would require racism to justify new economic interests.

The North American Road to Racism

Under different social conditions, the development of slavery and anti-black racism took a different path in the North American colonies. After similar failed attempts to enslave the indigenous population, the North American landowners next turned to white indentured labor to solve their labor shortage. To be indentured meant to work as virtual slaves for a period of up to seven years before being set free. For 150 years up to 250,000 English, Irish, German and other impoverished white people were sent to the North American colonies to be indentured. But the death rate due to over-work and mistreatment, not to mention the ease and frequency of extending the period of indenture meant many died in bondage.

Throughout this period there was also a steady arrival of black people purchased from slave traders. However there was no system of outright slavery in North America. Upon arrival these black slaves were converted into indentured servants and integrated into the existing labor system. Being black did not yet automatically brand them a slave. Some even lived to achieve freedom and became masters of indentured servants themselves.

In the fields of the plantations black and white indentured servants worked together. Shared misery and a sense

of class solidarity prevented the emergence of racism between the exploited. Amongst the ruling class, prejudices developed to justify their brutal treatment of indentured servants, both black and white. All were dehumanized and equally regarded as “filth and scum.” An explicitly anti-black racism served no purpose in these social conditions and accordingly did not arise.

The turning point in the development of anti-black racism in North America came with the 1676 Bacon’s Rebellion in Virginia. In this uprising against the aristocratic landowners, black and white indentured servants, runaways, landless free laborers and small farmers united. The Rebellion was brutally crushed. The final group of rebels killed, who chose to stand together in class solidarity and fight to the bitter end, comprised “Eighty Negroes and Twenty English,” according to an account of the time. And it was this that terrified the ruling class.

After the suppression of the Bacon Rebellion, the ruling class, anticipating the South African apartheid regime by several centuries, set about creating a privileged middle layer to act as a social buffer for their rule. The potential dividing line was apparent in seventeenth century Virginia as it was in South Africa on the eve of apartheid – white should be consciously divided from black. The legal position of white indentured servants was improved. Whipping was forbidden. When the period of indenture finished, whites were to be provided with “corn, money, a gun, clothing and fifty acres of land” to give them a stake in the existing order of society.

Meanwhile, black indentured servants lost all of their rights. Indentured labor became lifetime slavery. On the big plantations, white and black living quarters were segregated and the whites given superior clothing and easier work to distinguish them. Whites were forced to learn that they were “superior” as racist prejudices were consciously encouraged. In another intertwining of racism and nationalism, for the first time, Englishness was explicitly defined as meaning white skinned.

With the establishment of black slavery and later the cultivation of cotton in the

South, the stage was set for the development of the slave system of the Southern United States. The racist ideology that developed upon this foundation would survive long after the ending of Southern slavery in 1865. Again anticipating the apartheid regime, 1876 saw the introduction of the racist segregation laws of Jim Crow in the South that would survive into the 1960s.

Early Modern Science Invents “Race”

The development of the modern scientific method of observation and experimentation in the sixteenth century “Scientific Revolution” allowed human understanding of the world to take enormous strides forward. But the class struggle would inevitably find reflection in the new sciences.

In early modern science the capitalist class found a new framework to establish prejudices and justify racial discrimination through the new idea of “race.” The construction of this idea reflected the existing social inequalities of the time rather than any “natural” inequality. Attempts by scientists such as Carl Linnaeus in the early eighteenth century to classify nature in a hierarchy, with humans at the summit, in turn led to attempts to place differences between humans in a hierarchy. Racial, but also class inequalities, could now be justified as “natural.” If they were “natural” they were justified to continue. The ideological ground was prepared for later pseudo-scientific theories of race that would underpin the monstrous forms of white-supremacist racism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



Craniometry (skull measurements to predict intelligence/personality) during a Nazi Germany Anthropological Study in Tibet, 1938

The Deceit of Liberalism

Another new ideological development in capitalist society which would reinforce racism was, ironically, the Enlightenment ideas of individual reason and individual rights that were fought for in the French revolution. These developed as another vantage point from which the capitalist class could justify its class struggle against feudalism. In reality though, it was not the “rights of man” that were being advocated but the rights of the capitalist class. No right was more important than the right to private property. But in order to rally all classes to the capitalists’ banner in their struggle against feudalism these rights had to be posed in revolutionary terms applied equally to all.

After its victory against feudalism, the capitalist class had no desire to share their new political power with the working class, let alone to sacrifice the immense source of profits that depended upon the Atlantic slave trade. The capitalist class would continue to exclude the working class and the slaves of the colonies from political rights to maximize their exploitation. The racism already developed on the back of the Atlantic slave trade would be reinforced and further developed to justify the exclusion of black people from the new capitalist “liberty.”

But this could only partially succeed. The working class and slaves had taken the capitalist class at their word. The black-slaves of Saint-Domingue rebelled in support of the French Revolution which in its early stages found its most energetic support among the working masses. The French masses instinctive opposition to slavery was described by the Marxist historian C.L.R. James in his classic history of the Haitian revolution, *The Black Jacobins*:

“In these few months of [the masses] nearest approach to power they did not forget the blacks. They felt towards them as brothers, and the old slave-owners, whom they knew to be supporters of the counter-revolution, they hated as if Frenchmen themselves had suffered under the whip. It was not Paris

alone but all revolutionary France. ‘Servants, peasants, workers, the laborers by the day in the fields’ all over France were filled with a virulent hatred against the ‘aristocracy of the skin.’ There were many so moved by the sufferings of the slaves that they had long ceased to drink coffee, thinking of it as drenched with the blood and sweat of men turned into brutes ... Noble and generous working people of France ... These are the people whom the sons of Africa and the lovers of humanity will remember with gratitude and affection, not the perorating Liberals in France...”

The capitalist class’ early opportunistic opposition to slavery to win the support of the working class for their revolution was reversed at the first opportunity. The former-slaves of Saint-Domingue were forced to continue their struggle, now against the forces of the new capitalist government of France. They were victorious and succeeded in establishing the first black republic in history with the creation of Haiti in 1804.



Toussaint L'Ouverture, leader of the Haitian Revolution.

Colonialism & Monopoly Capitalism

Just as Africans were not enslaved because they were black, neither was Africa colonized in the nineteenth century because its people were black. The further development of capitalism across Europe led to the rise of monopoly capitalism. “Free” competition was outgrown. Competition among the capitalist powers to secure markets for their investments as well as to secure control of raw materials intensified “the struggle for the partitioning of the world,” in Lenin’s words. The class struggle between competing European national capitalist classes was the motive force for colonialism.

The fact that anti-black racism had already been created simply saved the capitalist class the time of inventing it. But as ever, these new economic interests required adaptations to racism. White-supremacist ideas and the pseudo-scientific theories of race came to the fore to justify the colonial conquest not just of black people in Africa but the people of Asia too. If the white European capitalist classes were to dominate the entire world and its people it was easier to assert the “superiority” of their own race rather than the specific “inferiorities” of every other race. Such ideas were not entirely new but the need to justify colonialism developed and promoted them to new heights. Consequently, the twentieth century struggles for national liberation in the colonial world acquired a character as anti-racist struggles too.

The Rise of the Working Class and the Reaction of Nationalism

As described above, nationalist ideologies emerged in Europe out of the economic interests of the capitalist class. Nationalism was an essentially progressive ideological weapon in the hands of the capitalist class in its struggle against the feudal ruling class. However, as soon as the capitalist class achieved political power throughout most of Europe, they immediately had to square-off against their new working class enemy. Even in the French Revolution of 1789 and after, and the 1848 Revolutions across Europe, the demands of the working masses were

increasingly at odds with the interests of the capitalist class with whom they were generally still in alliance against feudal society. In the 1840s Chartist movement in Britain, the publication of the Communist Manifesto in 1848, the first ever workers’ state in the short lived Paris Commune of 1871 and the rise of trade unionism, the working class demonstrated the truth of Marx’s point that capitalism creates its own grave-diggers.

Reactionary nationalism became crucial to the capitalist class’ justification of class inequality and class exploitation in Europe. It was the counterpoint to the racism that justified exploitation in the colonies. Increasingly the two would intertwine. In the face of the revolutionary working class call for class solidarity, class struggle and internationalism, the capitalist class counterposed national and racial solidarity, the struggles of nations and nationalism. The roots of both racism and nationalism within capitalist social conditions were laid bare by the emergence of the revolutionary working class movement who were compelled to overcome both ideologies in their struggle for a society that would be organized in their own class interests – a socialist society. Marxism is the ideology most consistent with the working class’ real interests and therefore most consistent in its opposition to racism.

The most extreme form of capitalist reaction against the revolutionary struggle



Unemployment rally at local Communist Party headquarters in Washington, DC prior to picketing the White House. Credit: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-F8- 44120 [P&P]

of the working class came in the twentieth century in the form of fascism. In the immediate aftermath of the victory of the working class in the 1917 Russian Revolution and the revolutionary movements for socialism that swept across Europe, combined with the capitalist crisis of the 1930s Great Depression, fascism became the last roll of the dice for a desperate capitalist class on the threshold of losing power. Fascism's principal task was the smashing of the organized power of the working class. The ideological dressing for this capitalist reaction fused an extreme racist white-supremacy with imperialist expansionist nationalism and a virulent anti-socialism.

A History of Struggle

Throughout the history of capitalism and its development of racism, the exploited masses, the slaves, and the working class overcame racist divisions in their struggle against capitalist class divisions and the class exploitation that racism rested upon. The first black slave revolt occurred just twelve years after the first black slaves arrived in Hispaniola. Another ten years later and the black and indigenous slaves united in revolt on the same island. The entire history of slavery in the Americas was a continuous history of slave revolts.

We have already mentioned the unity of black and white in the Bacon Rebellion and the successful Haitian revolution supported by the white working class of France. The working class of Europe also played an important role in the abolition

of the Atlantic slave trade and in the Civil War in the United States that ended the Southern slave system. The colonial revolutions in Africa and Asia in the twentieth century and the civil rights movement in the U.S. continued those determined struggles for self-determination and genuine equality. Wherever the working class has been organized upon the basis of Marxist and socialist ideas that correspond to its real interests it has supported these struggles. When it has not, it has been the result of conscious divide and rule policies by the capitalist class.

Race or Class?

After the disasters of the two world wars in the twentieth century which expressed themselves in the racist and nationalist ideologies described above, the "official" policy of the imperialist capitalist classes whose predecessors created racism is a hypocritical anti-racism. But racism and racial inequality in the twenty-first century, the world over, have their material roots in capitalism's very nature as a system of class inequality; racial inequality is one of its forms of appearance. As long as society remains divided into classes the social conditions for racism will remain.

The intensity of racism and its use as a means of discrimination will continue to ebb and flow with the crises of capitalism and the class struggle. The capitalist class will continue to rely on it as part of their reactionary ideological armor to divide and rule the working class limited only by the level of organization

and the fighting capacity of the working class. Which has primacy? Race or class? This question is frequently posed in political debates and discussions. Relying on their ahistorical understanding of racism, black nationalists will usually assert that it is race. But Marxists should start by challenging the assumptions of the question. Yes, for Marxists class has primacy. But this does not exclude race from being of huge significance and importance in class relations and the class struggle. For it is in the dialectical interaction of class and race that racism arose and it is in the dialectical interaction of class and race that racism acquires all of its modern forms. C.L.R. James made the point that for Marxists,

“the race question is subsidiary to the class question... But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental.”

Anyone wishing to understand the history of racism must examine whether Marxism is able to uncover and explain its real historical development. We believe that it does. But Marxism does not attempt to explain racism simply as a mental exercise but rather as a guide to action in the struggle for a socialist future. If Marxism is able to expose the real class foundations of racism then it is necessary to draw the full conclusions and join the working class struggle for socialism as the only means of eradicating the real capitalist basis for racism.



Black and white youth rise up against racism—US protester speaks with UK Socialist Party organizers

Emery Addams from the Independent Socialist Group spoke to the Socialist Party in England and Wales—co-thinkers of the Independent Socialist Group—about the significance of the mass anti-racist protests shaking the US, outlining the program and organization necessary to end racism. Originally published June 10, 2020 on socialistworld.net.

This is the biggest anti-racism mobilization since the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. The capitalist media has focused on riots and violence, despite the bulk of the action being peaceful protest. How has this uprising developed so far?

At this stage, violence almost exclusively stems from the police. Despite these attacks, the movement has won incredible victories from the capitalist class in a couple of weeks that were almost unimaginable a month ago. Not only have all of the officers responsible for George Floyd's murder been charged and fired, but the momentum is being pointed at the police as an institution.

This can be seen through the push for schools to cut ties with the police, the \$100-150 million that has been cut from the Los Angeles Police Department budget, and the calls from the majority of Minneapolis city council to "dismantle" their entire police force.

A multiracial movement is emerging that treats racism and police brutality as issues against which all people must fight. US workers and youth are finally seeing what they can win when they act. The task for the movement now is to organize for even larger victories.



Are protesters only angry about racism?

Absolutely not! This movement was born out of the material conditions of the working class—the pandemic response that favors capitalist profit over workers' lives, the recession, and the ever-present realities of police brutality.

Protesters are angry about how capitalism controls and so easily ends their lives. They're protesting for more than the removal of individual racist and murderous cops. Protesters are fighting for a change in the system as we know it.

As socialists, we know that this change can only be achieved by replacing the brutal capitalist system with a democratic and equitable socialist one.

There have been further police attacks since the murder of George Floyd. An unarmed Latino man was killed in California, and many protesters have been beaten, tear-gassed, shot at and rammed with vehicles. How has this affected the mood?

As of June 7, at least 12 people have been killed due to police violence at the protests, with countless others facing mild to severe injuries and arrest. This hasn't slowed the movement. If anything, it has highlighted to protesters the exact reason they are fighting.

This has also further mobilized nurses, already radicalizing due to the pandemic. As police violence grows, nurses are leaving their long shifts fighting COVID-19 to immediately provide medical assistance to injured protesters.

The realities of the triple crises of COVID-19, the ongoing recession, and police brutality have created an environment of

solidarity among the working class—only strengthening the movement.

Meanwhile, in some cities, police have taken a hands-off approach, or even joined protests. What does this represent?

These are essentially public relations stunts employed by some of the smarter police departments. It allows them to both attempt to pacify protesters, and to push the narrative of "good cops" versus "violent protesters." In numerous cases, the exact same police who kneeled or marched with protesters attacked them just hours later. For the most part though, protesters aren't willing to blindly accept this. Regardless of the performative actions of the police, protesters have continued to push for genuine, systemic change.

A white bar owner shot and killed a black protester in Nebraska. Some might see this movement as a conflict of white versus black.

It's important to note that the protests are widespread and very multiracial. We should also recognize the real source of racism as we know it—capitalism. Racism deliberately perpetuated in the media, education, pop culture, etc., shapes people's attitudes, then reinforces attitudes and unequal conditions through laws. This makes violence against people of color easy in order to exploit and control the working class as a whole.

These same divisions are created between different genders, sexual orientations, ethnicities and nationalities, and allow the capitalists to pit workers against each other to the benefit of the ruling class. When we fight each other, we can't unite and fight back against our common exploitation by the capitalists.

The only way we can overcome racism for good is to fight for socialism—with an organised movement of the entire working class.

There are calls from some quarters to make certain police tactics illegal and cut police funding. Would this stop police violence?

Stopping police from using incredibly dangerous tactics and weapons is a reform we support. Cutting police funding, which is wildly expensive and out of control in the US, would also help many communities transfer needed funds to schools, housing, healthcare, and so on, which would do far more to resolve crime and inequality than policing.

But no reform under capitalism is guaranteed to last. As soon as we look away, the capitalists will roll back the victories we won. The police, as an institution, functions to protect the capitalists, and (often violently) repress the working class. No amount of policy reform within the capitalist system will change this. To truly stop police violence, we need democratic community control of public safety by the working class.

Some organisations are also demanding boycotts of businesses owned by known racists, favoring businesses with black or non-racist owners. Would this resolve inequality?

In the 1960s, Fred Hampton, deputy chairman of the national Black Panther Party, accurately said: “You don’t fight racism with racism. We’re gonna fight racism with solidarity ... you don’t fight capitalism with no black capitalism; you fight capitalism with socialism.”

While certain individuals would be supported in the short term by buying from black-owned businesses, this would do nothing to solve the problems of workers who don’t own businesses, which is the majority of society. Instead, imagine what a week of a full economic shutdown from a general strike could win us! Organised action by workers that impacts the cap-

italists’ profits can win systemic change for workers of all races. Individual shopping choices don’t hold the same power.

The Black Lives Matter movement fizzled out after its 2014-16 peak. How can young people and workers organize to build the anti-racist movement this time?

We’re seeing intense energy in the streets right now, but that can fizzle out quickly if the movement isn’t organised around concrete demands. These demands must draw together workers of all races and ethnicities.

The movement also needs to be organised with democratic structures for discussion, debate, and coordination. We can organize neighborhood committees – elected groups who would decide tactics and future action—create a program to direct the movement, and elect delegates to city-wide, state-wide, and nation-wide committees for larger-scale discussion and coordination. Similarly, a key part of escalating this struggle and maintaining momentum is for the working class as a whole, including unions, to get involved. We need to organize our workplaces through new union drives, and use our unions to defend members against racist incidents and negotiate better conditions for all workers.

We also need workplace action, including slowdowns, sickouts, walkouts, and strikes in solidarity with the anti-racist movement, requiring specific demands

to be met before we return to work. This economic pressure would force the capitalists and their politicians to concede to demands such as convicting cops, defunding and demilitarizing the police, and more.

Socialists fight against racism in every form, wherever it crops up. But decades of struggle have not ended it. What is needed to finish the job?

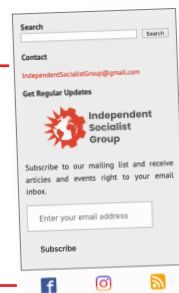
Many movements have been co-opted and demobilized. Capitalist politicians, especially Democrats, will promise reforms, push the momentum of the movement into the nearest election cycle, and then drop those demands the second they’re in office.

We must refuse to accept surface-level concessions, and organize a multiracial movement of the working class outside of the capitalist political parties to fight racism and all other forms of oppression.

This movement should work to build a new workers’ party that has democratic structures and a socialist program. The capitalists are beginning to see the power of the working class. This is no time to slow down—join us, and continue the fight against racism and for socialism.

SUBSCRIBE

For working class news and analysis straight to your inbox
independentsocialistgroup.org



LIKE WHAT WE HAVE TO SAY?

Get involved at
independentsocialistgroup.org/join-us/





Independent
Socialist
Group

BUILD A MASS MOVEMENT TO SMASH RACISM



**"You
can't have
capitalism
without
racism"**
Malcolm X

FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM

independentsocialistgroup.org

