

Police killing sparks protests in New Jersey

Unarmed man shot in front of children

Bill Vann
10 May 2001

A cop's fatal shooting of an unarmed Irvington, New Jersey man has sparked angry protests in a predominantly black community that has long suffered acts of police violence and brutality.

Bilal Dashawn Colbert, 29, was about to drive his fiancée's two daughters to school April 29 when police officer William Mildon approached the car with his gun drawn. When Colbert ignored an order to halt, the cop fired once, striking the motorist in the neck and killing him instantly. The two girls—Shaquita Boyd, 10, and Shanice Henry, 8—who were in the back of the car, ran screaming from the scene.

Hundreds of protesters marched on Irvington police headquarters last Saturday, chanting “no peace, no justice” and carrying signs reading “enough is enough.” Demonstrators linked the latest killing to a series of incidents in New Jersey, including the shooting death of an East Orange teenager two weeks ago by an off-duty cop and the case of Earl Faison, who in 1999 was beaten to death while in the custody of Orange police.

Officer Mildon, a white cop, killed another young black man himself just four years ago. He shot to death Keion Williams, 24, in a similar incident involving a traffic stop.

Rev. William Rutherford, the leader of the New Jersey NAACP, charged that Officer Mildon had engaged in systematic harassment of Colbert, his latest victim, for at least a year before the shooting. “Officer Mildon would see Mr. Colbert sitting on the stoop and make gestures with his hand as if he had a gun and was shooting him,” Rutherford said. “On Monday morning at 8:30 a.m., Officer William Mildon no longer made gestures, but succeeded by being judge, jury and executioner.”

In a bid to intimidate critics of the police, an attorney

for the cop filed a defamation lawsuit against the NAACP leader for calling Mildon a “racist” and a “murderer.” Meanwhile, the Irvington Police Department has taken no action against the cop, who was allowed to go on a scheduled vacation.

Irvington was the scene of a notorious act of police brutality five years ago when a group of cops barged into the apartment of a Haitian immigrant in response to a complaint from a neighbor about noise from a party there. When the cops started shoving people, one of the guests, Max Antoine, challenged them, declaring that people had a right to be there and that the American police were not allowed “to act like Ton Ton Macoutes,” referring to the notorious security force in his native Haiti.

The cops moved swiftly to disabuse Antoine of this notion, smashing his head into a wall and beating him with night sticks. After dragging him down the stairs, several cops picked him up and rammed him headfirst through the glass pane of a storm door. They then threw him into the back of a patrol car, shooting pepper spray into his face. Taken to a station house, he was thrown handcuffed and bleeding into a cell and denied medical attention for two days.

The beating left Antoine paralyzed below the waist, blind in one eye and with severe brain damage. Despite complaints filed by his family and a number of guests at the party, no action was ever taken against the cops who brutalized him.

New Jersey has been rocked recently by revelations that former state attorney general and now state Supreme Court Justice Peter Verneiro concealed information about racial profiling by state troopers. Minority troopers have themselves come forward to testify about a police culture rife with racism. Meanwhile, the state legislature has taken preliminary

steps towards Verneiro's impeachment.

The tensions between the police and poor and working class neighborhoods ringing the city of Newark and acts of police brutality in these areas have escalated in direct proportion to the ever widening social chasm between the haves and have-nots in New Jersey, a state which has seen its poverty rate grow over the past decade, even as per capita income has remained the second highest of any state in the nation.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact