

Trayvon Martin's killer, George Zimmerman, acquitted of all charges

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The acquittal of George Zimmerman, the killer of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, is the reactionary culmination of a process that has from the start been a travesty of justice. The basic tragedy is the death of a young man who committed no crime and posed no danger to his assailant.

This outrage was compounded by the initial refusal of the Sanford, Florida police to even charge the perpetrator. Now, a jury has allowed the self-appointed "neighborhood watchman" Zimmerman to walk free after having stalked and fatally shot an unarmed African American youth.

The naked miscarriage of justice announced Saturday night has triggered protests in cities across the United States. From the political establishment, beginning with President Barack Obama, it has evoked pious and hypocritical admonitions to "respect" the verdict and honor the "rule of law." Behind such sanctimonious statements from media commentators, lawyers and officially designated "civil rights leaders" is an awareness of the explosive state of social relations in America and the potential for an event such as the acquittal of Martin's killer to spark upheavals.

Obama posted a brief statement on the White House web site Sunday that declared, "We are a nation of laws, and a jury has spoken." This was written by a president who has effectively suspended the Bill of Rights in order to carry out the illegal surveillance of the entire US population and untold millions more people around the world, and has ordered the drone assassinations of thousands of people, including American citizens.

The murder of Trayvon Martin and acquittal of his killer reflect a deeply dysfunctional society. The prosecution case, undertaken in the first place only under pressure from popular protests denouncing the

failure to charge the killer, was conducted in an ineffectual manner, with police who testified for the prosecution barely bothering to conceal their sympathy for Zimmerman.

But more fundamental processes were at work. The Trayvon Martin tragedy is the product of decades of political reaction in America, during which the political and media establishment have relentlessly promoted all manner of backwardness, deliberately seeking to pollute the public consciousness with law-and-order demagoguery, militarism, the glorification of guns and the promotion of vigilantism.

One expression of this was the passage of so-called "stand your ground" laws in Florida and other states, which provide legal sanction for disoriented and violent individuals to take the lives of others they deem to be threats to their safety.

This process has been intensified under both the Bush and Obama administrations, which have sought to create a climate of fear under the cover of the so-called "war on terror." They have promoted a spirit of hardness and lack of empathy for others, and a general devaluation of human life.

This has gone hand in hand with an assault on the living standards and democratic rights of the working class, and a vast growth of social inequality.

Trayvon Martin's killer, George Zimmerman—the disturbed would-be cop turned vigilante—is a social type nurtured by the promotion of political reaction.

Racism likely played a role in the Trayvon Martin tragedy. But racism is not an independent factor. It is one of the ideological tools used by the ruling class to divide workers and defend capitalism.

The verdict in the Zimmerman trial has predictably been seized upon by so-called "civil rights" leaders such as Al Sharpton and a host of pseudo-left

organizations that base themselves on identity politics to rip the issue of race out of its roots in class exploitation and capitalism. This type of amorphous opposition to racism cannot go beyond presenting the issue in moral terms, and is therefore incapable of fighting discrimination and oppression.

As always, those leaders and organizations that promote it are tied to the Democratic Party. They oppose a unified and independent political movement of the working class and work to channel social discontent behind this party of the American corporate-financial elite.

Democratic politicians, leaders of official civil rights groups and sections of the media are calling for a “national conversation on race.” This is a diversion. What is needed is a “national conversation” on poverty, unemployment and social inequality that assumes the form of a mass working class struggle for socialism.



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