

Workers and young people speak on Ferguson, Missouri, police violence

A WSWS reporting team
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World Socialist Web Site reporting teams spoke to workers and young people in California and Michigan about the killing of unarmed black teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and the wave of police shootings across the country. The brutal killing of Brown ignited more than a week of protests in the St. Louis suburb, leading to the imposition of a state of emergency and a curfew.

In Detroit, Michigan, workers reacted strongly to the Brown shooting and the police-military occupation of the small working class city of Ferguson.

A young second-tier Chrysler worker from Detroit said, “It is happening all over the world. They are putting this in place to see how people are going to react. I feel bad for any family that has to go through something like this—black, white or Hispanic. We are talking about a guy who was unarmed.

“What irks me is when something tragic like that happens they try to bring in people like Al Sharpton or Barack Obama to keep the peace. They want you to misplace your focus. People should be angry.

“Right now they are trying to shift the blame to the victim by saying the police were called about an armed robbery. When the policeman grabbed Michael Brown there was no weapon. He shot him in the head, and when he fell, he shot him on the ground.

“The police officer is a criminal now, a very dangerous criminal. That was an execution. But instead of protecting the community, they are protecting the police officer and his family. But we don’t want harm to come to our families either.”

Another young worker, Xavier Robinson, spoke briefly to the WSWS while catching a bus in northwest Detroit. He works an eight-hour shift, but his workday is 7 a.m to 7 p.m. or later due to a four-hour daily commute on the underfunded and dysfunctional Detroit

bus system.

“Yes, I know about Ferguson,” he told us. “Now they are killing people for nothing—nothing!”

“Cops are doing some people wrong these days,” he added. “Why don’t they just talk to them as civilized people? I say, ‘Stop beating up on us and killing us.’ I have had experiences with the cops. They came around and thought I was in a gang. I told them, ‘I am working. I am going to school. I have done nothing wrong!’ I felt I was being harassed for nothing!”

Loretta, a full-time student pursuing a second career as a pharmacist, said, “They’re making an example of somebody, terrorizing us. They talk about terrorism. The United States is the biggest terrorist there is. We bully people.

“There’s not much for young people to look forward to. You can’t have peace of mind when your children go to work. Many get messed with by the Detroit Police Department.”

On August 17, WSWS reporters spoke to workers and young people in Los Angeles attending a protest over the police shooting of Ezell Ford. Police shot the unarmed, mentally impaired youth multiple times in the back. The young man was engaged in no criminal conduct at the time.

Sarah said, “I think it’s quite clear that neither Michael Brown nor Ezell Ford did anything to justify their killing. The officers were in no danger from them, and multiple witnesses say that neither was involved in any fight with the police when the shootings happened.

“One main factor is that the police have no accountability now to anyone.”

Tracy said, “My son was killed just like Mike Brown by the Lakewood [suburb of Los Angeles] Police Department. They shot him in the back and claimed that he was trying to rob a store. We eventually settled

out of court, but this doesn't bring my son back to me. It didn't bring justice.

"They're shooting these kids in the back. How can these kids be any danger when they're being shot in the back and with their hands up too? It's just open season on young, poor, especially black men, and it needs to stop, and it needs to stop now.

"As far as these kids are concerned, they have every right to run from the police now. They know full well that they can't even expect jail time; they can expect to die instead."

Willie, Ezell Ford's uncle, added, "We didn't hear about the killing until about 5 in the morning, when we learned it was a police shooting. Ezell was handcuffed and was shot five times in the back while cuffed. There were several witnesses who saw the shooting.

"All of the stories were consistent. All say that Ezell was complying with police orders, was not fighting and certainly didn't go for any police officer's gun as they're saying he did. The witnesses all said that one of the officers then just yelled out 'shoot him' and then afterwards said, 'shoot him again.' It was completely unprovoked and out of the blue. These officers know Ezell and know that he was mentally disabled. Apparently, police had been bothering him for some time, and neighbors asked the police why they kept bothering him.

"What we're asking for is that the family receive monetary compensation for the death of Ezell Ford, that the officers involved in the shooting be charged and that the LAPD completely change its policies when dealing with unarmed people."

Neda told the WSWs that her son, a father of four, had been killed by police. "My son was in a similar situation. His name was Michael Nida. He wasn't African American, he was a white kid, but he had tattoos and dressed himself like a lot of inner-city African American kids do.

"There was a robbery in the area in the city of Downey where we're from. My son was near the store that was robbed. He was subsequently stopped by police even though he had absolutely nothing to do with the robbery.

"They asked him for his ID and detained him for an extremely long time. He protested, telling the police that they were wasting everyone's time and telling them that he needed to get to his birthday party, which

his wife and friends were preparing. The police immediately attacked him after he did this.

"These police have no regard for the law. Everything is a personal vendetta with them. One officer stuck a gun to his head and promised to shoot him and another shoved him to the ground and stomped on my son's back with his foot.

"My son's reflexes kicked in. He arched his back and tried to get up quickly and he unintentionally made contact with the officer holding the gun, and that officer shot him.

"I really feel for the parents of Mike Brown, and I hope they get justice. But we have to remember that there are hundreds of stories like this that go unreported."

Daniella, also at the Los Angeles protest, told the WSWs, "It's not just that the police are targeting young men; they're also targeting women, who are even more fragile. This isn't just a racial phenomenon. They'll attack women, but they'll never attack a person who seems to have some kind of power, like a lawyer or politician, only people who are powerless.

"A few years ago, I came back to this country from Iran. I knew there was a lot of filming going on in the area, and not knowing better, I assumed that yellow tape meant that a studio was marking off an area for filming. My hat blew off behind the yellow tape and I stepped across the tape to pick it up. Immediately, a police officer forcibly grabbed me and yelled at me. I assumed he was a set security guard and told him not to touch me. He then forcibly shoved me to the ground, pinned me there, cuffed me and arrested me.

"I don't have full range of motion in my right arm and experience pain to this day."



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