

Protesters in Washington, DC denounce police killings

A WSWWS reporting team
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More than 10,000 protesters from many different states attended the demonstration against police killing in Washington, DC on Saturday. The protests were animated by growing popular anger throughout the country over police violence, following the decisions not to charge the police officers who shot Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and strangled Eric Garner in New York City.

The demonstration in Washington was organized by Democratic Party politician Al Sharpton, who is working closely with the Obama administration in the attempt to channel popular opposition back behind the political establishment. The leaders sought to narrowly contain the issues raised, focusing entirely on race. (See, “Tens of thousands join protests against police killings in the US”).

Among those attending, however, there was widespread opposition to both Democrats and Republicans.

Don Miles from Indianapolis, Indiana, said, “I came to register my opposition to all the police killings all over the country. Something is very wrong in this country. There is a cover-up going on. The police should not be able to kill people the way they do. These boys were unarmed, and yet there isn’t even going to be a trial.”

Amanda came from North Carolina to attend the protest with her friend, Rumin, who lives in Washington, DC.

Rumin said, “The decision by the grand jury was not surprising, the prosecutors work with the police.” She added, “The politicians are giving all the money to the wealthiest, and they in turn are paying for all the politicians. It doesn’t matter whether it is a Democrat or a Republican, they are all for the rich. I don’t feel we are living in a representative democracy any more. Money buys the elections.”

Jason said, “It was a travesty to hear Obama say after the Ferguson decision that ‘we are a nation of laws.’ Nothing is further from the truth. The government doesn’t abide by any laws. They are doing what they want. Just look at the wars, the drones, the torturing, and the police are able to do anything.

“I voted for Obama, I don’t regret it. McCain or Romney would have been worse, but the voting for the lesser of two

evils is still voting for evil. This country is being run by the wealthy for the wealthy, not the people.”

Jason added, “The police should not have the power to kill unarmed people. This is an issue for everyone. This is the whole system which needs to be changed.”

Cardell, who traveled from Detroit, said, “We are looking for equality. To stop the militarization of the police and to stop the brutality of the police. We have also got to change the prosecution of the police. You can’t have the prosecutors who are always working with the police being the people that are charged with prosecuting the police.”

“It was ridiculous for Obama to say that the grand jury did its duty, that we are a country of laws,” Cardell continued. “Why should it be legal for police officers to shoot and kill an unarmed black man or to beat and choke an unarmed man to death?

“This is not right. The police are not there to protect the people. They are afraid of the people. They want the people to be afraid to stand up for what is right.”

Amanda and Ali came from New York City. Amanda said, “This is not just about race. Every person, every race, every age faces the problem of the police being given too much power. The police must be held accountable for what they do.

“Police come into every situation ready to fight. They have been militarized. They are pulling out their guns for nothing, when they shouldn’t be. I have seen the police pull out their guns, not at me, but at people they shouldn’t be. They shoot first and think later.”

Ali added, “I don’t want a militarized police force. It is getting like a police state. I go to Costa Rica, and the military are the police. They are walking around with big machetes. They have guns too, but to see the machetes—that is very scary. That is what people are facing in the United States.

“When people come out to protest, they should not face armored vehicles and police pointing assault rifles at you. You are supposed to be allowed to express yourself, and the government is trying to say that that is illegal, to make

people afraid to stand up. This is a danger to everyone. If you can't voice your protests, that is a dictatorship, and that is what the government is heading to."

Sylissa attended from South Carolina. "I couldn't see any reason not to come. I am very mad, and I wanted to be around people who share my frustration. The police think that they can do what they want, that what they do is justice. They behave as if justice belongs to them. That they can do whatever they want, and nobody is going to do anything about it.

"People need jobs. I work in a hospital, a major corporation and we are paid way below what others in our profession are making. They treat us like we should just be happy to have a job and to stop complaining. People are fed up with what is taking place in this country. Everything is for the rich."

Benjamin, from Washington, DC attended with Laurence, from New York City.

"I don't think it is about race," Benjamin said. "I don't care if you are white, black, brown or purple, an unarmed person should not be getting killed by the police.

"I thought it was wrong to bring in the military to Ferguson. The government is treating us like we are the terrorists. People are supposed to have the right to protest. They shouldn't be teargassed and shot at because they want to let their voices be heard.

"They say that we are at war to bring democracy around the world. But what about democracy here? A lot of people don't realize that we are being used."

The WSWs also spoke to protesters who attended rallies in other parts of the country on Saturday.

In California, about 3,000 people participated in a protest in Oakland.

As at other protests, the rally organizers and speakers were united in presenting the issue of police violence within the narrow framework of racism. Tellingly, white protesters were asked by some organizers to leave the steps outside the courthouse which were only for "black and brown."

Roya, a teacher and immigrant from Iran, said, "I'm out here now because I lived through a revolution in Iran. I've always been a socialist, and I'm out here for humanitarian reasons. We need a revolution over health care, education, equality for the black kids I teach."

"The CIA and police follow the same agenda," Roya added. "As an immigrant I disagree with US foreign policy. It often feels like I'm only a second-class citizen.

"I believe the whole system needs to undergo fundamental change. Body cameras [on police] are a band-aid that supports part of the 1 percent with new contracts but doesn't change anything.

"More people need to realize the reality out there that goes

beyond black and white and affects all of us."

Robert came to the protests after watching the events in Ferguson and lack of indictment.

"The police response to these protests is absurd. I'm as opposed to setting the city on fire as anyone, but sending out more cops than protesters and beating everyone violates our democratic rights. They have undercover cops at peaceful protests inciting vandalism, then when they're outed, they pull out the guns and call in backup.

"I think it's interesting that local police are getting military equipment. There's a pervasive culture from top to bottom saying we need more policing and encouraging violence."

At a protest in downtown Los Angeles, Victor, who recently lost his job working as a sign spinner, said the police killing of Michael Brown and Eric Garner was part of a "systemic" problem. "I think it's also definitely a class issue. The people being affected by these killings are predominately poor. If you're rich, you can get away with almost anything, and often they do. But if you're poor, the police will shoot you dead for walking on the wrong side of the street now."

"We shouldn't have any faith in Democrats or Republicans," Victor added. "We need to exercise power and control ourselves. I think that's the only way."

Another protest in Hollywood started from the location where a man was killed by police on December 5.

One of the protesters in Hollywood, Billion, said, "This nation has existed on the basis of brutality for a while. What we see domestically is the other side of US foreign policy. Police brutality at home is a reflection of imperialist wars abroad.

"I think it's good to have these protests as they draw attention on these matters. Black people are being killed every day. However, protest is not a solution. We are past any possible negotiation. In 2003, millions of people protested against war plans in Iraq. Yet, it was not sufficient to stop the drive to war, in fact no one was held accountable. In my opinion, a different type of action is needed."



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