

Police murder in South Carolina

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9 April 2015

Officials in South Carolina have charged North Charleston police officer Michael Slager with murder in Saturday's killing of Walter Scott, a 50-year-old father of four. The decision came only after the release of a cell phone video of the killing, which was taken by a bystander and provided to the *New York Times* by a lawyer for Scott's family.

The video shows an unambiguous act of murder and attempted cover-up. Scott and Slager are together in an empty lot. Scott, unarmed, begins to run from Slager, who then takes out his weapon and fires eight bullets into Scott's back from about 20 feet away.

The police officer then walks calmly toward Scott, yelling at the motionless man to put his hands behind his back. With Scott unresponsive, Slager proceeds to cuff him. He then jogs back to the site of the original confrontation, picks up what appears to be a Taser stun gun, and drops it near the lifeless body. A second officer who has come onto the scene witnesses the attempted frame-up.

No attempts are made to provide CPR or otherwise administer aid to Scott, who is lying face down in the mud. He was later pronounced dead at the scene.

The killing of Scott exposes not only the savage violence carried out by police every day in American cities, but also the modus operandi used to justify these actions. In the three days between the shooting and the release of the video, police and local officials, together with the media, were giving out the standard rationalizations and lies.

The police officer "felt threatened last weekend when the driver he had stopped for a broken light tried to overpower him and take his Taser," the local Charleston, South Carolina *Post and Courier* reported on Monday. The newspaper went on to say that Scott had a criminal record and the cop feared for his life. Officers performed CPR and administered aid, it reported, but nothing could be done.

It was a "tragic incident" all around, Slager's lawyer was quoted as saying.

All lies, exposed only because of the video footage. Walter Scott Sr., the victim's father, noted in an interview with NBC on Wednesday that without the video, "It would never, never come to light. They would have swept it under the rug, like they did with many others." He added, "The way he was shooting that gun, it looked like he was trying to kill a deer."

The murder of Scott is horrific, but it is not an aberration. According to killedbypolice.net, so far this year police officers across the country have killed 312 people, or more than three per day. At the present rate, the number of people killed by police this year will surpass last year's total of 1,100.

Some of the more recent incidents include:

* Philip White, 32, in Vineland, New Jersey on March 31. A video shows the unarmed White, prostrate on the ground, being hit by police and bitten in the face by a police dog. One officer is seen attempting to confiscate the cell phone of the person recording the arrest. White later died in what Vineland Police Chief Timothy Codispoti called an "in-custody, non-shooting death."

* Eric Harris, 44, in Tulsa, Oklahoma on April 2. A police officer claims he shot the unarmed Harris once while arresting him, "inadvertently" using his gun instead of his Taser.

* Justus Howell, 17, in Zion, Illinois on April 4. Howell died from two gunshot wounds in his back. Police claimed that he had attempted to steal a gun earlier, but there are no indications that he posed a threat to officers in any way. There is no video of the killing.

* An unidentified man in Phoenix, Arizona on April 4. Police say the man, evidently mentally disturbed, had been stabbing himself in the street. A local news report states that when officers arrived "the man reportedly

lunged toward” the officers. They “felt threatened and fired their weapons.”

The same basic story is repeated over and over again. Police officers, armed to the teeth with military-grade weaponry, have been given a license to kill, which they use with shocking regularity and almost always with complete legal impunity.

Slager must be convicted for his actions and punished to the fullest extent of the law. All those who sought to cover up for the murder must also be arrested and prosecuted.

However, this is only the beginning of real accountability. The entire state is culpable in the development of what is, in fact, a paramilitary occupying force, composed of death squads operating under the cover of the law.

Today is exactly eight months since the August 9 murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, which provoked popular outrage and demonstrations throughout the country. The political establishment responded by orchestrating the exoneration of police officer Darren Wilson, including the decision by the Obama administration last month not to bring civil rights charges. The wholesale transfer of military equipment to local police forces has continued unabated.

This has been interpreted by police as a green light to escalate their murderous rampage, resulting in at least 746 deaths since Brown’s killing.

The homicidal behavior evident in the actions of Slager and countless others reflects a mentality deliberately and systematically cultivated in the police. The population has no rights. Any act of disobedience can become a capital offense. The lives of workers and poor people are expendable.

Media commentary on the killing of Scott has centered on the fact that Scott is black and Slager white. However, police violence in America, and the determination of the state to defend this violence, cannot be explained simply or primarily by reference to racism, whatever role it might play in any particular incident. The focus on race is aimed at obscuring the more basic questions.

Police repression within the United States is the domestic expression of the same methods employed by the ruling class to defend its interests abroad, through endless wars and drone assassinations. Within the

country, the corporate and financial aristocracy, which has amassed its wealth through fraud and criminality, stands atop a crisis-ridden system, with historically unprecedented levels of inequality threatening to trigger explosive social conflicts. It responds with violence and brutality.

In the murderous actions of the police, one sees the reality of class rule in America.



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