

Baltimore rally against police brutality encourages illusions in Democrats

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On Saturday, over a thousand people protested in Baltimore, Maryland against police brutality and the continued presence of National Guard troops in the city. Protests also took place in Boston, Atlanta and other US cities over the weekend to oppose the wave of police killings across the US, including the murder of 25-year-old Baltimore resident Freddie Gray.

The Baltimore protest occurred as Maryland's Republican Governor Larry Hogan and Democratic Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake continued the police-military occupation of the city by 3,000 National Guardsmen, 578 state troopers and 432 cops from the city and surrounding areas.

Fifty people were arrested Saturday night, including two members of the National Lawyers Guild and individuals serving as medics, for violations of the 10 pm to 5 am curfew imposed after minor rioting broke out early last week in the city's most impoverished areas. The mayor ordered police to essentially stand down on April 27 so isolated cases of looting could be used as the pretext to declare a state of emergency, deploy troops and impose the curfew.

Nearly 500 protesters have been arrested since April 23. Prisoners, including young teenagers, have been penned up for days and then dragged into court with their hands and ankles shackled. Among those arrested was Kevin Moore, who shot the video of Freddie Gray being arrested and loaded into the police van before his fatal "rough ride" on April 12.

After the deployment of troops was unable to suppress opposition, city officials, in close coordination with President Obama's Justice Department, decided to file charges against six cops involved in the murder of Gray. Announcing the charges—which range from second-degree murder to manslaughter by vehicle and false imprisonment—State Attorney Marilyn Mosby last week said the charges were not an indictment of the entire

police force. Insisting no further protests were necessary, Mosby said she had heard protesters in Baltimore and across the US say, "No Justice, No Peace," and now "your peace is sincerely needed as I work to provide justice on behalf of this young man."

Leading the protest on Saturday were groups tied to the Democratic Party, which sought to boost illusions in the city's political establishment, which has long been dominated by an affluent layer of African American politicians, judges, prosecutors and other administrators.

Malik Z. Shabazz, president of the Washington, DC-based activist group Black Lawyers for Justice (BLJ) and the former leader of the so-called New Black Panther Party, praised Mosby. He claimed that the wave of police killings was due to racism, not the class division of society. Such claims fly in the face of reality under conditions in which the president, the city's mayor, police chief, half of the Baltimore Police Department and three of the six cops indicted for the murder of Freddie Gray are African American.

This promotion of racial politics is aimed at shoring up the credibility of this deeply discredited social layer and protecting the wealth and power it has accumulated in one of the most unequal cities in America. A household in the top five percent of income earners in Baltimore receives \$12.30 for each dollar earned by those in the bottom 20 percent.

Democratic State Senator Catherine Pugh—who only days before was peppered by angry crowds when she implored them to honor the curfew—told protesters they were "lucky" to have a state prosecutor such as Mosby, adding, "we know that police reform is on the way." As regards the crushing poverty in cities across the US, she said the answer was to "equalize the wealth," by setting up "public-private partnerships for investments not only in downtowns but in our neighborhoods."

In an interview with WBAL-TV, Pugh made it clear

exactly who she thought should get a bigger share of the wealth. While denouncing “looters,” Pugh insisted, “We have to bring back the jobs but we have to understand that the African American community is not monolithic. We are a microcosm of America—we have very poor and very rich. We have people who have the capacity to expand the businesses in our communities. We just need a fair playing field so we all take part in it.”

Pugh said she had authored legislation for the state of Maryland to channel a larger portion of its pension investments into minority-owned businesses in order to “share the wealth.”

Ruling class spokespersons such as Pugh hate and fear the masses of working class people. They offer no program to ameliorate the poverty and inequality created by decades of deindustrialization and the systematic dismantling of public education and other essential services, carried out to channel more money into the hands of the corporate and financial elite.

The Obama administration and local Democratic Party in the big cities are seeking to cultivate a new layer of opportunists and careerists as “civil rights leaders” and “community activists” on the basis of seed money for minority start-ups and other lucrative projects.

While Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake lifted the city’s curfew Sunday and Governor Larry Hogan announced a “draw down” of National Guard troops, these repressive forces remain on alert and could be redeployed if social anger erupts again. Whatever the legal outcome of the Freddie Gray case—and indictments are not the same as convictions—the police and the military are required to defend the property and wealth of the super-rich minority against the ever more impoverished majority.

The fascistic outlook that permeates a wide layer of the cops was revealed last week by a caller to a WBAL talk show. Saying there was widespread support in the police department to throw the mayor out for restraining them during the protests, he said, “The moment it started, we could have ended it. Trust you me. They would not let us. It’s on the mayor’s shoulders now for the people who were injured, the buildings that were burnt, and the officers that were hurt. The city may never recover from what she let happen.

“You had no idea what it did to us as police officers to sit there and let people, I’m gonna say it, thugs, hoodlums, little animals do what they did to us in the streets of Baltimore,” the caller added. He praised the police in New York City for immediately arresting 120

protesters last week.

Similarly, Teana Walsh, a member of the Wayne County Prosecutor’s office in Detroit, was forced to resign Friday after saying the solution to such disturbances was to “Shoot ’em. Period. End of discussion.”

Many in attendance at Saturday’s march in Baltimore expressed doubts there would be any serious effort to provide jobs or decent public services. Trina, an out of work cook living in east Baltimore, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “[Mayor] Rawlings-Blake has got to go. She’s closed all the city’s recreation centers and the kids have nowhere to go now. Drugs and everything else infests these neighborhoods, not to mention there are hundreds of vacant lots in the city.”

According to an article published in the *Washington Post*’s Wonkblog section last week, there are dozens of neighborhoods located in the city of Baltimore that have standards of living equivalent to those of an undeveloped country. “Fifteen Baltimore neighborhoods have lower life expectancies than North Korea. Eight are doing worse than Syria,” the *Post* reported.

Tavon Miles, another protester, expressed doubts that Mosby’s announcement of charges against the officers would end in a conviction. “You want to know what the real injustice here is? It’s that the kid who broke the police car’s window [during the eruption of social anger after Freddie Gray’s funeral last week] is still being held on a \$500,000 bail, when the cops, who are charged with committing a murder, got \$350,000 bail. That’s the injustice here.” Tavon added, “I’ve never even seen someone able to get bail for a murder charge.”



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