

A police killing and a criminal conspiracy in Chicago, Illinois

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By now, most readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* have viewed the seven-minute video of Chicago policeman Jason Van Dyke carrying out the street execution of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald. The murder is depicted at the six-minute mark of the video: Van Dyke fires two shots into McDonald as he moves away from the police, bringing him to the ground. Then he fires 14 more shots into the crumpled body of the black youth, as he lies dying in the middle of the road.

The release of the video, after a 13-month legal battle against ferocious resistance by the Chicago city government and Democratic Party Mayor Rahm Emanuel, does more than document the actions of a killer cop. It sheds light on what followed the killing of Laquan McDonald: the line-up of the police, the political authorities, the media and the “civil rights” establishment to cover up the police killing under a barrage of lies.

No sooner was McDonald pronounced dead on October 20, 2014, than the Chicago Police Department and the police union declared his killing to be a justifiable act of self-defense by Officer Van Dyke. Referring to the three-inch folding knife in the youth’s hand, a police union statement read: “He now has the knife fully in his hand going at one of the officers at that point, the officer defends himself.” The truth of this statement can be judged by the video, which shows Laquan moving away from the police, not towards them. The police are in no danger. None of the other five cops, including Van Dyke’s partner, discharged their weapon.

This is murder, pure and simple. And it was followed up by a cover-up that is itself a crime. None of the police did anything to assist Laquan as he lay dying. They did not check his pulse or make any move to seek medical assistance. Instead, they worked the crime

scene, not as investigators, but as accomplices after the fact. They dispersed witnesses with threats of arrest rather than take their statements. They later obtained the footage of a security camera at the Burger King and erased 86 minutes of it, comprising the entire period leading up to and following the shooting. Only the dash-cam video was overlooked, allowing the conspiracy to be exposed.

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel blocked release of the video for 13 months. Aside from his general support for police violence, he had immediate political considerations: his reelection campaign would have been threatened if the graphic video had surfaced during the primary and runoff elections, a process that extended from February 24 to April 7. The Emanuel administration would not even identify Van Dyke as the cop who shot Laquan McDonald. Meanwhile, the “civil rights” establishment of the city, including most of its African-American preachers, lined up behind the Emanuel reelection campaign.

Chicago’s corporate-controlled media, including two daily newspapers and numerous television stations and regional and suburban papers, showed little interest in the McDonald case, even after it became known that video existed of Van Dyke’s fusillade. It was a local freelance journalist who obtained the coroner’s report detailing the findings of an autopsy, documenting the 16 bullet wounds in Laquan McDonald’s body. It was another freelance journalist who brought the Freedom of Information Act lawsuit that ultimately obtained a court order to release the video, after 14 news organizations declined to join in.

Then there is the laughably misnamed Independent Police Review Authority (IPRA) which supposedly investigates charges of misconduct against police. Over the past five years, of 400 police shootings in Chicago,

the IPRA has found exactly one to be “not justified.” Similarly, the Chicago Police Department has dismissed 99 percent of all complaints of police misconduct, including the numerous charges previously filed against Jason Van Dyke.

If Van Dyke is to be charged for the murder of McDonald, as he should, alongside him in the dock should be many others who did whatever they could to prevent exposure of his crime.

The three most prominent Democrats in the United States issued nearly identical statements on the issue Wednesday, with not a word of criticism of either the Emanuel administration or the Chicago Police Department.

President Barack Obama weighed in very briefly, issuing a one-paragraph statement via Facebook, which did not express regret over the killing of Laquan McDonald or sympathy for his family—sentiments apparently beyond the pale for a “commander-in-chief.” Obama declared himself “deeply disturbed by the footage,” adding that he was “thankful for the overwhelming majority of men and women in uniform who protect our communities with honor. And I’m personally grateful to the people of my hometown for keeping protests peaceful.”

There you have the response of the US ruling elite in a nutshell: disturbed by the footage only out of concern that it might spark rioting, and lined up 100 percent behind the millions of heavily armed “men and women in uniform” who constitute the most important line of defense for the capitalist system and the wealth and privileges of the financial oligarchs who rule it.

The two leading contenders for the Democratic presidential nomination expressed themselves in equally perfunctory statements. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton coupled an expression of sympathy for McDonald’s family with the claim, “All over America, there are police officers honorably doing their duty, demonstrating how to protect the public without resorting to unnecessary force. We need to learn from and build on those examples.”

Senator Bernie Sanders managed all of 82 words on the subject, declaring himself “sickened” by the video, embracing the slogan “Black Lives Matter,” and framing the issue entirely in racial terms: “Criminal justice reform must be the civil rights issue of the 21st century and the first piece must be putting an end to the

killing of African-Americans by police officers.”

None of the Democratic politicians, from Emanuel to Sanders, can even hint at the essential class character of the orgy of police murders in America. The police have killed more than 1,000 people in America so far this year: the majority white, a disproportionately large minority black and Hispanic. But virtually without exception the victims were from the working class.

Police violence against the working class, particularly against working class youth, is a symptom of the extreme tension building up in class relations. Under the impact of worsening economic inequality, the slashing of public services and jobs by the Obama administration and both the Democratic and Republican parties, and the turn by American imperialism to military aggression all over the world, opposition to police violence must be connected to a political movement of the working class against the capitalist system.



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