

After the Paul O’Neal murder

Stop the police killings! Unite workers and youth of every race and nationality!

Jerry White—SEP candidate for US president
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The police have murdered yet another unarmed youth in an American city. This time 18-year-old Paul O’Neal, who had recently graduated from a Chicago high school, was hunted down like an animal in a South Shore neighborhood and fatally shot in the back by cops.

As the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for US president I condemn the slaying of O’Neal and demand the arrest and charging of the police responsible for murder. I call on all workers and youth—of every race and nationality—to oppose the wave of police killings, which has already claimed the lives of 700 victims so far this year.

The video footage from nine police dashboard and body cameras, which was not released until more than a week after the July 28 killing, shows cops firing 15 bullets in five seconds into a car they allege O’Neal had stolen. After the car comes to a halt and the youth flees on foot, the cops, brandishing firearms, pursue him in broad daylight through the backyards and gardens of a working class neighborhood as terrorized residents watch. Then, off camera, four gunshots are heard and the violent pursuit comes to an end.

In one video a pursuing cop screams “Hands behind your back. Don’t F—ing shoot at us” before he handcuffs O’Neal who is motionless and bleeding to death. Police later acknowledged the youth did not have a weapon.

The violent manhunt resembles those of US soldiers in Afghanistan or Iraq kicking down doors and murdering opponents of the US occupations. It is no different in the United States where the police are essentially an occupying army and the victims, regardless of race, are all working class and poor.

The police have all the respect for human life and basic democratic rights as the death squads organized by President Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, or the government in Brazil, which execute alleged criminals in the slums of Manila and Rio de Janeiro.

The media has sought to justify the killing of O’Neal by saying he did not obey police orders to stop. Is it any wonder, however, that the terrified young man would run from cops who act as judge, jury and executioner?

Predictably, none of the released video shows O’Neal’s murder. Police officials claim the body camera worn by the officer who fired the fatal shot “was either not working or fell off during the chase.” Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson came up with an even more novel explanation, claiming the cops hadn’t learned how to use new body cams yet. “There’s going to be a learning curve,” he said.

In fact, one video shows a cop telling his cohorts, “Make sure these are all off,” in an apparent reference to their body cameras. Other cops gather to get their stories straight, while another complains, “I’m going to be on the f—ing desk for 30 days,” in an apparent reference to being relieved of street duties during a pro forma “investigation,” ie., cover-up of the incident.

Routine police killings, approximately three every day across the country, are not the result simply of this or that psychopathic cop. Instead, they flow from the immense social inequality and social tensions that characterize capitalist America.

Chicago epitomizes this class chasm. The nation’s third-largest city has 15 billionaires and 134,000 millionaires, who enjoy limitless luxury, while hundreds of thousands of working class and poor residents struggle each day to survive. Decades of

deindustrialization, low-wage jobs, school closings and budget cutting on the one side, and endless bailouts and corporate handouts on the other, are driving workers and young people into struggle against the Democratic Party machine, which has long overseen Chicago and other big cities.

In the face of an angry and restive population, Obama's former White House chief-of-staff and current Chicago mayor, Rahm Emanuel, has repeatedly warned of civil unrest. For more than a year Emanuel sought to conceal video evidence of the 2014 police killing of Laquan McDonald, another unarmed youth gunned down in the street.

The latest state murder takes place just weeks after the national conventions of the two capitalist parties. The Republican convention in Cleveland was a celebration of militarism and the police, who were presented as victims of popular protests. The neo-fascistic billionaire Donald Trump declared that he would be the "law-and-order" candidate who would stand with the police.

As for the Democrats, they combined identity politics and claims that police killings are solely the result of racism with out-and-out defense of the cops. Hillary Clinton—whose husband made a point of returning to Arkansas during the 1992 US presidential campaign to oversee the execution of a mentally ill African American man convicted of killing a cop—cynically exploited the mothers of African American victims of police killing, including Michael Brown from Ferguson, Missouri, to promote this racist myth.

The fact is that whites comprise the largest percentage of victims of police killings. Meanwhile, many of the cops, police chiefs and other authorities who have perpetrated these crimes, including the US president who has overseen them, are black and Hispanic. The Obama administration has armed local police departments with military hardware from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, intervened to block any federal prosecutions of killer cops and backed the martial law methods used to crush protests in Ferguson and Baltimore.

While the police have long been a magnet for the most racist and backward elements of society, police killings have not been stopped by the racial integration of the cops, "sensitivity training," or similar measures. This is because the essential role of the police, like the

rest of the capitalist state, is to protect the property, wealth and political power of the corporate and financial elites. Upper-middle class forces associated with Black Lives Matter seek to conceal this fact while exploiting the anger of minority youth to move up the ladder of political influence and economic affluence.

What all the victims of police brutality have in common is that they are working class and poor. In opposition to all those who seek to divide the working class, my running mate Niles Niemuth and I are campaigning to unite workers and youth regardless of race or nationality.

The Socialist Equality Party is fighting to unify every struggle—against police killings, war, poverty and social inequality—into a single, political struggle of the working class against the capitalist system, which is the source of social inequality and state repression.

In opposition to Clinton and Trump, the SEP calls for ending the economic and political dictatorship of the super-rich, the dismantling of the bodies of armed men that protect the wealthy few, and the establishment of a government of the working class, by the working class and for the working class.



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