

2018 begins with US police reign of terror

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While largely ignored by the mass media, the reign of terror by police officers continues to rage across the United States. The entire state apparatus, from local cops to immigration agents, has been unleashed by the Trump administration to beat, maim and kill with impunity.

During a speech to hundreds of uniformed officers last July, Trump urged the police to not be “too nice” and to treat detainees “rough.” The Justice Department has at the same time ended the toothless pretense of federal oversight over a handful of police departments put in place by the Obama administration.

In the year since Trump was sworn in as president, at least 1,223 people have been killed by police. Since the beginning of 2018, according to killedbypolice.net, 3.5 people have been killed on average every day.

A *Washington Post* database reports 78 fatal police shootings so far this year. As in previous years, the figures show that police killings impact every race and ethnicity, with whites comprising the largest share of victims, while African Americans are killed at a rate higher than their overall percentage of the population. In those cases where race or ethnicity has been identified by the *Post*, 54 percent of victims were white, 25 percent African American, 15 percent Hispanic, 3 percent Asian and 2 percent Native American.

Among the most recent victims is Donte Shannon, a 26-year-old African American man who was killed by police in Racine, Wisconsin on January 17 after fleeing a traffic stop. According to the police account, Shannon’s initial crime was not having a front license plate on his vehicle. Officials claim the police were forced to unleash a hail of bullets after Shannon pointed a gun at them, though investigators have not reported finding a weapon at the scene.

On the same day, a deputy in Columbus, Ohio shot and killed 16-year-old Joseph Haynes, a white youth,

during an altercation after a court hearing. Haynes, who was unarmed, was thrown to the ground and shot once in the abdomen after he confronted a deputy for pushing his mother up against a wall.

In addition to those killed, workers and youth are subjected to police harassment and brutality on a daily basis.

Earlier this month, Louisiana teacher Deyshia Hargrave was removed from a school board meeting and handcuffed by a deputy marshal after she raised questions about school officials awarding themselves raises while denying them to teachers and staff. Former coal miner Gary Michael Hunt was choked by a police officer and removed from a public meeting after demanding clean water for the residents of Martin County, Kentucky.

Not even children are spared, as shown by a report Sunday that a 7-year-old child in Miami, Florida was led away from his school in handcuffs after an altercation with a teacher last week.

The issue of police killings and brutality erupted into national and international prominence with the murder of Michael Brown in August 2014 and the militarized police response to protests. Popular anger over police violence has not gone away. However, over the past three and a half years there has been a systematic effort to smother opposition and channel it behind the Democratic Party.

A critical role has been played by Black Lives Matter (BLM), which was developed and promoted to push the false claim that police violence is a racial rather than a class issue. Along with the various other organizations that promote and support the Democratic Party, BLM sought to cover up the relationship between police violence and the nature of the capitalist state as an instrument of class repression. BLM pushed for various reforms, including body cameras, oversight boards and more minority police officers, as the supposed solution

to police violence.

In 2016, the main leaders of BLM threw their support behind Hillary Clinton, the favored candidate of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus. During the election season, the Ford Foundation announced that it would funnel \$100 million to a panoply of organizations associated with the BLM movement. This was followed by the announcement of an initiative by BLM to promote “black capitalism,” including the introduction of a Black Lives Matter debit card.

The Democratic Party is fully complicit in the epidemic of police violence. The Obama administration presided over the continued militarization of police forces while ensuring that nothing was done to prosecute officers who perpetrated violence.

Since the election of Trump, the Democrats have entirely ignored the ongoing wave of police killings. They have worked to suppress and divert all manifestations of social opposition to the Trump administration behind a reactionary and militarist agenda of aggression against Russia, a further redistribution of wealth to the rich, and the destruction of democratic rights.

A significant factor in the efforts to censor the Internet, spearheaded by the Democratic Party, is concern that police killings and abuse videotaped on smartphones have become national and international issues through distribution on social media platforms. Facebook is now changing its newsfeed to limit the reach of content from news sources outside the so-called “mainstream,” with the aim of preventing the expression and propagation of opposition to police violence and social inequality.

Opposition to police violence within the United States cannot be separated from opposition to war, social inequality and the capitalist system. With wealth concentration rising to levels without historic precedent, the ruling elite relies on the police to enforce inequality.

And as the Pentagon prepares to wage war abroad on an unprecedented scale, the ruling class is preparing for war at home. The concept of “Total Army” has been coined to embrace the innumerable and growing connections between the police, border patrol, immigration agents and the military—a single apparatus of war and repression.

The ruling class is well aware that it faces its greatest

danger within the United States, in the form of the growth of working-class struggle and the development of a mass movement against capitalism. It is only through the building of such a political movement that the reign of police violence can be ended.



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