

The murder of George Floyd and the fight against police violence in the US

Joseph Kishore—Socialist Equality Party candidate for US president
28 May 2020

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) condemns the Memorial Day murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota and demands the prosecution of the police officers who are responsible for his death.

The killing of George Floyd is a horrific crime. Floyd, who was African American, died Monday after being pinned to the ground by four police officers in front of a crowd that was pleading that he be let go. Much of the crime was caught on bystander video and surveillance cameras.

One video shows officer Derek Chauvin, who is white, forcefully pressing his knee into Floyd's neck for several minutes as the 46-year-old pleads for his life, crying out "I can't breathe" and "You are going to kill me!"

Floyd was detained after a call from a local shop that he had attempted to use a forged ten dollar bill. The store owner later told media that he did not know if Floyd even knew if it was forged. Police rushed to the scene, seized Floyd, pulled him from his vehicle, handcuffed him, and then held him in a chokehold until his body went limp.

The three other officers who helped restrain Floyd have been identified as Thomas Lane, Tou Thao and J. Alexander Kueng.

While the official police report stated that Floyd resisted arrest, surveillance video released Wednesday by a local restaurant owner makes clear that he did not struggle at any point as he was taken out of his car and handcuffed by police.

Despite his death being a clear murder in broad daylight without any justification, as of Wednesday evening Chauvin, Lane, Thao and Kueng remain free men. They were suspended without pay by the police department and then fired by Democratic Mayor Jacob Frey in response to popular anger Tuesday.

The killing and refusal to arrest Floyd's killers have generated anger among workers of all races who have taken part in two days of demonstrations.

Thousands of workers and youth, both white and black, turned out Tuesday to protest at the intersection where Floyd was killed and at a nearby police station. Police unloaded round after round of tear gas and non-lethal bullets to disperse the demonstration. Further demonstrations were organized last night in Minneapolis and other cities throughout the US.

The murder of George Floyd is the latest in an unending string of deaths at the hands of US police. So far this year, according to killedbypolice.net, there have been 400 police killings. The number killed every year is more than 1,000.

It has been nearly six years since Michael Brown was shot to death in Ferguson, Missouri (August 9, 2014) and Eric Garner was strangled to death in New York City (July 17, 2014), sparking mass demonstrations against police violence. Some 6,000 people have been killed by police in the intervening period.

No doubt racism plays a role in incidents of police violence. While the greatest number of police killings is of whites, African Americans and Hispanics are disproportionately targeted for harassment, abuse, arrest and incarceration. The Trump administration has deliberately cultivated the most backward and reactionary layers, including among police officers. Trump has proclaimed that he likes watching footage of "rough" treatment of "thugs," and has urged police not to be "too nice."

The source of police violence, however, is not racial antagonism, but class oppression. The unifying characteristic among victims of police violence—black, white, Hispanic or Native American—is that they are poor and among the most vulnerable segments of the

population.

The role of Black Lives Matter and other proponents of racial politics, in claiming that racism is the cause of police violence, is to promote the idea that hiring more black police officers or electing more black politicians will resolve the problem. Inevitably, this means channeling opposition behind the Democratic Party, one of the twin parties of Wall Street and the military. And the epidemic of police violence continues unabated.

This reign of terror raged under the watch of Democratic President Barack Obama and continues under the fascistic Republican Donald Trump. Regardless of whether a state has a Democratic or Republican governor, if the mayor or police chief is black, white, male, female, straight or gay, police killings continue unabated.

It is three years since a Somali-American Minneapolis police officer shot and killed Justine Damond, a white woman, in her back alley and four years since a Hispanic police officer in a nearby suburb killed Philando Castille, an African American man, during a traffic stop which was broadcast live on Facebook.

After a particularly brutal act of police violence is publicly exposed—inevitably because it chanced to be caught on film—the politicians, Democratic and Republican, engage in handwringing and promises of an investigation. Almost always, these investigations fail to lead to prosecutions and convictions.

State power, Lenin noted in his *The State and Revolution*, is composed of “special bodies of armed men having prisons, etc. at their command.” Citing Friedrich Engels, Lenin noted that the state is fundamentally “a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms,” and that the power and violence of the state “grows stronger... in proportion as class antagonisms within the state become more acute.”

With the coronavirus pandemic, these class antagonisms are entering a new stage. The corporate and financial oligarchy, after doing nothing to protect the population, has used the pandemic to transfer trillions of dollars to itself, unanimously endorsed by the Democratic and Republican politicians.

This has been followed by a campaign to “reopen the economy” and force workers to endanger their lives to

pay off Wall Street. At the same time, the ruling elite plans on using mass unemployment and the bankrupting of the state to increase exploitation, slash social programs and impoverish the population.

The conflict between the financial aristocracy and the working class is the fundamental source of the brutality and violence of the state. The same conflict creates the objective foundation for a political movement that can put an end to this brutality: the independent and united movement of the entire working class to take political power into its own hands and put an end to the capitalist profit system.

The Socialist Equality Party is spearheading this fight. Join and support our election campaign at socialism2020.org.



To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wswp.org/contact