

Hundreds of thousands stage multiracial demonstrations against police violence in a powerful show of working-class unity

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party (US)
30 May 2020

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality welcome and support the multiracial, multiethnic demonstrations of thousands of working people and youth that have swept the country in response to the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. These demonstrations—which are taking place in the midst of the pandemic despite the serious risks involved—are a powerful and inspiring manifestation of a deep-rooted commitment to the defense of democratic rights, hatred of fascistic police and the Trump administration, and a profound commitment to the unity of all sections of the working class.

On Friday night, thousands continued their protest in Minneapolis, in defiance of a curfew imposed by the state government. Outside of Minneapolis there were significant protests Friday in Houston, Texas, Floyd’s hometown; Atlanta, Georgia, where protesters forced their way into the headquarters of CNN; New York City, where dozens were arrested after being attacked by police, and protesters have reportedly overrun police precincts in Brooklyn; Lexington and Louisville in Kentucky, where protesters also demanded justice for Breonna Taylor, who had been killed by police in March; Washington, D.C., outside the White House, which temporarily went into lockdown; Fort Wayne, Indiana, where police fired tear gas to disperse the crowd; and Las Vegas, Nevada, where protesters shut down traffic on the Las Vegas Strip.

There have been demonstrations of hundreds and in many cases thousands of people in San Jose, California; Boston, Massachusetts; Chicago, Illinois; Omaha, Nebraska; Detroit, Michigan; Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Kansas City and St. Louis in Missouri; and many other cities throughout the country.

This expanding movement has been triggered by the brutal murder of George Floyd, but it gives expression to mounting anger over social inequality, poverty, mass unemployment, the destruction of the social safety net, and wars without end. The desperate situation confronting the working class has been intensified by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

State and local governments have responded with a massive police mobilization. In Minneapolis, the Democratic Party governor of Minnesota has mobilized hundreds of National Guard troops, which began to deploy throughout the city yesterday. In Georgia, the National Guard was deployed to Atlanta late Friday

night after the governor declared a state of emergency. Police in other cities have attempted unsuccessfully to suppress demonstrations with tear gas and rubber bullets.

On Friday, in an attempt to contain protests, Minnesota state officials announced that they had arrested and charged, on the lower-level offense of third-degree murder, Derek Chauvin, the cop who kneeled on Floyd’s neck until he was strangled to death. The other three cops involved, however, still remain at large. Already, malicious justifications for the actions of Chauvin are being advanced, including the claim that Floyd’s death was not the product his brutal arrest but “underlying health conditions” and “potential intoxicants.”

Trump took to Twitter late Thursday to denounce protesters as “THUGS” and threaten a violent military intervention. “Any difficulty and we will assume control, but when the looting starts, the shooting starts.”

This quote repeated the infamous phrase used by the racist Miami police chief Walter Headley in 1967 to signal a violent crackdown of the mass protests of blacks against racist police violence. Trump’s threat is not idle. Late Friday night, the Associated Press reported that the Pentagon has ordered the Army to ready several active-duty military police units to deploy to Minneapolis.

That Chauvin’s brutal crime occurred in Minneapolis is no accident. Last October, Trump delivered a speech at the Target Center in downtown Minneapolis dedicated to praising cops and denouncing socialists and the “radical left.” Police officers donned shirts with the slogan, “Cops for Trump” at the rally and waved banners reading, “Law & Order vote Trump.”

“The respect we have for law enforcement is unbound,” Trump declared at the time. What was meant by “unbound” respect was made clear by the head of the Minneapolis Police Federation Bob Kroll. He said, “The first thing President Trump did when he took office was... to start, let cops do their job, put the handcuffs on the criminals instead of us.”

The White House was actively involved in the organization of the heavy-handed efforts of the Minneapolis police to suppress the protests. Early Friday morning, cops carried out a provocative arrest of a media team with CNN, which is frequently denounced by Trump, as they were broadcasting live. The action was calculated and intended to send a message to Trump’s opponents

within the media and to the population at large.

Trump's tirades are aimed at soliciting the support of the police and military, on the basis of fascistic and anti-communist appeals. His denunciation of protesters as "thugs" stands in contrast to his praise of right-wing fascists who have staged heavily-armed protests at state capitals in recent weeks demanding an end to measures aimed at containing the coronavirus pandemic. They were encouraged by Trump's calls to "liberate Minnesota," among other states.

As always, the Democratic Party's response is to issue hypocritical phrases about the "tragedy" of the latest police murder while doing everything it can to ensure that the underlying economic, political and social issues are covered over. Joseph Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, released a statement on Friday declaring the murder of Floyd an "act of brutality" for which the American people—and, particularly, white people—are responsible.

"With our complacency, our silence, we are complicit in perpetuating these cycles of violence," Biden said. "Nothing about this will be easy or comfortable, but if we simply allow this wound to scab over once more without treating the underlying injury, we'll never truly heal. The very soul of America is at stake."

The murder of George Floyd and countless other atrocities were not carried out by "we," the American working people, but by the police, an instrument of the state.

The police are not a cross section of American life. They are recruited from the most reactionary sections of the lower-middle class and politically backward workers and trained to hate and despise the poor and oppressed. They are a hostile occupying force in every working class neighborhood in the country. Many police recruits have served tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, where they became inured to violence and death.

Increasingly, the police, funded with \$100 billion every year, have been integrated into the military, armed with the most advanced weaponry, and developed into paramilitary organizations. Every year, 1,000 people are killed by police in the United States. A disproportionate number of those killed are African American. But police violence targets workers and poor people of all races and ethnicities, and the plurality of those killed are white.

While the Trump administration is systematically promoting police violence, the Democrats are implicated in state violence against working people. Police killings continued unabated under the Obama administration, which sided with police on every occasion where cases came before the Supreme Court.

In the case of Minneapolis, the mayor is a Democrat, as is the governor. Amy Klobachar, the former Democratic Party presidential candidate, was the prosecutor for Hennepin County who protected the police and opposed their prosecution for misconduct, including in a previous case involving Derek Chauvin himself.

For the past 50 years, the Democrats have specialized in the promotion of racialist politics—the insistence that the fundamental division in American society is between "white America" and "black America." The politics of race has been used to argue that the solution to social problems, including racism, is to be found in

hiring more black police officers and electing more black politicians. However, over these 50 years, the conditions of black workers have deteriorated, social inequality has reached record levels and police violence has intensified. In many cities, including in Minneapolis, police violence is overseen by black police chiefs or black mayors.

The eruption of mass demonstrations of workers and youth of all races triggered by the brutal murder of Floyd has given expression to a tremendous social solidarity, which belies the racial narrative. It is not a question of black against white, but the working class against the rich. This is a tremendous step forward.

The demonstrations mark a new stage in the development of the class struggle.

The very rapid development and spread of this movement is connected to the broader social and political crisis in the United States and internationally. The entire response of the ruling class to the coronavirus pandemic—its refusal to take any measures to protect the population, the handout of trillions of dollars to the rich, and now the homicidal back-to-work campaign as the pandemic spreads—has laid bare the oligarchic character of society.

An unprecedented catastrophe confronts tens of millions of workers and youth who have been thrown out of their jobs, face losing their homes, and confront the worst economic and social crisis since the Great Depression. Even as the pandemic continues to spread throughout the country, the Trump administration is spearheading a homicidal back-to-work campaign, hoping to use mass social distress to force workers to endanger their lives and the lives of their loved ones to pay for the handouts to the rich.

How shall the death of George Floyd be avenged? What is the way forward?

The fight against police brutality must be fused with the growing movement of the working class against unsafe working conditions, mass unemployment, social inequality and mass poverty. It is a fight against the capitalist system and for socialism.

The development of this struggle requires the independent political mobilization of the working class, in opposition to the Democrats and Republicans.

It is especially critical for workers and youth to understand that they are engaged in a battle that is global in scope. Establishing the unity of workers in the United States requires solidarity with the struggles of workers of all nationalities and ethnicities. A crucial element of this strategy entails uncompromising opposition to the brutal treatment of all migrant workers within the United States.

In carrying forward this fight, the question of political program is decisive. Those who agree with the analysis and strategy advanced in this statement—who recognize the necessity to fight for socialism and put an end to the capitalist system—should support our election campaign and join the SEP. We urge young people to join our youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact