

“The rich are concerned with keeping their power and keeping the race thing going”

American workers voice support for mass protests against police brutality

Evan Blake
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The mass, multiracial and multiethnic demonstrations that have erupted across the US and internationally in response to the police murder of George Floyd are quickly becoming the most powerful protest movement in American history. Demonstrators have courageously defied the increasingly dictatorial moves by the Trump administration, with tens of thousands protesting following Trump’s threat to deploy the military in any city he chooses.

The central strategic questions facing demonstrators are how to broaden their struggle as widely as possible and the need to maintain its political independence from the procorporate Democratic Party, which can only be accomplished through the mass mobilization of the entire working class and the development of a revolutionary leadership. As the Socialist Equality Party (US) noted in its statement Monday:

The working class—upon which the functioning of society depends—has the power to stop the assault on democratic rights, create a massive political movement to drive Trump from power, break the back of the corporate-financial oligarchy and begin the restructuring of economic life on a socialist basis.

There is broad sympathy for the protesters within the working class, with the vast majority of protesters being working class youth of every race and ethnic background. During a march through parts of New York City Tuesday, nurses and other health care workers across the city stood on sidewalks to cheer on passing protesters. In Minneapolis, nurses finishing their hospital shift joined the protests to treat rubber bullet and tear gas injuries.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with a cross-section of American workers, including workers at UPS, Fiat Chrysler and Amazon, a transit worker in Washington, D.C., and a teacher in Pittsburgh. All of the workers voiced support for the protests, while denouncing the criminal response of the Trump administration and the brutal police crackdown against the demonstrators.

Fiat Chrysler workers in Detroit

“The murder of Floyd is a metaphor for a system that is putting pressure on us so we can’t breathe until all the life is sucked out us,” a young

worker at Fiat Chrysler’s Sterling Heights Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit, Michigan told the WSW. “The crisis we face is not about a particular race. It’s about the way the system continues to exploit workers and strip us of our rights so the rich capitalists can control every aspect of our lives.

“It doesn’t matter whether you are flipping burgers at Burger King, are a barista at Starbucks, a cashier at CVS or a production operator at Chrysler. We all have the same problems. Trump wants to become a dictator and use the military as his private militia. The Democrats claim they are for us, but they aren’t. They want to shut people up as soon as possible too.

“But what about the rights of the common working people? The working class should have our own party. We’re not the megarich, but we make the products and create all the wealth. So we should be entitled to say where that wealth goes.

“Race has always been used to divide us. But this is a multi-race, multi-age movement, and it’s becoming a class movement. We have to take the anger and energies of these protests, communicate and discuss solutions and speak the truth. We have to be aware of those who want to distract and pit us against each other. These are times to help those in need, not to step over each other but to get in line together and fight.

“In the protests, you are standing next to someone who feels exactly the way you do. With that power, they can’t conquer us. My generation doesn’t care about race. I work with all types and races of people in the plant. We don’t care who is Jewish, who is Catholic or whatever. If we have common ground, then we stand together. The rich are only concerned with keeping their power and positions safe and keeping the racial thing going.

“The demonstrations are now growing in other countries, like France and New Zealand. That is great. We have multimedia platforms to connect and broadcast. Earlier generations did not have this access, and we have to capitalize on the internet, which is always a day or two ahead of the news. Clearly their capitalist system is set in stone, and we can navigate and unite against it.”

Another Fiat Chrysler worker, at the Jefferson North Assembly Plant in Detroit, commented on the protests: “I think it goes to show how people are tired of racism and of the disparity between classes. It’s not just black people. Everyone is fed up.”

The autoworker added, “I think workers are fighting to be heard and listened to, not just passed over. We have to become united and stay united.”

Amazon workers in Baltimore

An Amazon worker from Baltimore, Maryland spoke about the wave of protests and the outlook of the younger generation. “Kids today don’t have it like we did earlier in our lives. There’s more diversity now. They learn how to respect people.

“Donald Trump acts like he can do whatever he wants,” the worker said. “He’s going to pay for it.” He noted that the Democrats have put forward African American politicians, such as Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, to denounce the protesters as violent.

“They want to divide the protests based on race. It’s the easiest way to control people. The kids aren’t going for that. They’re intelligent, and they have access to a lot more resources of information.”

Another Amazon worker in Baltimore said, “It’s not acceptable to be abused by a badge-wearing police officer. It’s happened to me before in my own home. My fiancée at the time was yelling at the cop to let me breathe.

“I’m encouraged by all the people taking a stand. Trump’s actions against the protesters were idiotic. Amazon employees have to take a stand. We must have rank-and-file committees and cut the ruling class off at the knees.”

UPS worker in Fremont, California

Dylan, a UPS worker in Fremont, California, is furious about the murder of George Floyd. “If people didn’t protest,” he said, “the officer probably wouldn’t have been charged. He probably won’t be locked up for more than a year and some months.”

Dylan, who is white, created shirts that he gave out to family and friends who are also protesting. He explained his support for the protests, saying, “I see how black people get treated. I’ve been mistreated by the police too. I’ve been beaten up twice by the police, and it’s just awful, especially when you’ve done nothing wrong. I know what that feels like. I hate the police. They are messing people up. It’s more of a poor thing, than a race thing. It’s poor people who get screwed.”

He agreed with the need to turn the fight against police violence to the broader working class, stating, “It’s important for the working class to be involved with every issue like this. More working class people need to be involved. We’re the ones who run everything. If we stopped working, nothing would work, and nothing would stand.”

Transit worker in Washington, D.C.

A transit worker in the Washington, D.C. area noted that the Declaration of Independence states, “All men are created equal.” He added, “We know that’s not true in practice. I knew two of the people who were framed in the Central Park 5 case [in New York City]. They were from my neighborhood.”

Speaking about the efforts to use race to divide the protesters and claims by proponents of identity politics that black people have always been alone in the fight for democratic rights, the transit worker said, “White people have stood with us in all important fights. There was the Underground Railroad, there was John Brown. White versus black: it’s all an effort to divide us, while Congress is letting Donald Trump get away with these things.”

Public school teacher in upstate New York

A retired teacher from the Buffalo, New York area attended the protest in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Saturday with her two college-aged daughters, saying, “It was something we wanted to take part in, add our voices to, as all of us shared in the horror of witnessing the murder of George Floyd.”

Commenting on the unending police violence in the US, she said, “The police no longer consider it necessary to give even the pretense that they are here to protect people, that they will respect people’s right to a trial, or that they are concerned about the lives of those they take into custody. Nor are they worried about there being any consequences for their brutality. They understand the Trump administration’s message that cops will be protected at all costs. The police are inculcated with the belief that they are fighting an enemy on American soil, that enemy being the working class!”

She described the Pittsburgh protest as composed of “mostly youth, and it was noteworthy that no single race predominated. There were blacks, whites, Hispanics, and others, all standing and chanting in solidarity with one another.”

At a certain point, the police and National Guard began launching compression grenades and teargas into the crowd, causing protesters to flee and regroup elsewhere. As with the police violence against protesters across the country, “There was no violence on the part of the protesters, so their attacks were completely unjustifiable,” the teacher commented.

She noted, “As curfew approached, the Guard began assembling into military formations, as they were going to move in against the protesters. As we began to clear out, we noted the courage of youth, walking with determination into the area of the protests rather than away.”

Commenting on the Trump administration’s increasingly dictatorial moves, she said, “The right to assemble and peaceably protest is being stripped away. Protesters are already being subdued by militarized police forces and the National Guard. Trump’s illegal invocation of the 1807 Insurrection Act to use the military against legal protest movements and civilians exercising their constitutional rights demonstrates that we are quickly moving towards martial law and a military dictatorship.

“The continued protests demonstrate that the working class, especially youth, have no intention of allowing this to happen. Although escalating police brutality has been the catalyst for these protests, the true meaning of them is the need to remove from power the capitalist class and its endless attacks on the working class. The ultimate aim of the protests is to create a society that meets the needs of the mass of people, including the right to employment, education, health care, housing, and the end of environmental degradation and endless warfare.”



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