

# The protests against police murder: The way forward

**Statement of the Socialist Equality Party (US)**

**15 June 2020**

The three weeks since the Memorial Day murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis have seen an eruption of mass protest demonstrations throughout the United States and in countries on every continent.

This mass movement is still in its initial stages. It has not yet assumed, in a political and programmatic sense, a distinctly working class and socialist character. The slogans that it raises are, at this point, of a broadly democratic character, centered on the issue of police brutality.

The political forces that are presently dominant are drawn from the more affluent sections of the middle class as well as from the ruling elite, with close ties to the political establishment. They seek to impose upon the protests a racialist narrative and orientation, and thereby prevent the emergence of the critical class issues underlying the widespread social anger and opposition, which, if raised, would pose a serious threat to the capitalist system.

Nevertheless, this movement is of immense objective significance. It marks the end to a lengthy period of political reaction. For the last four decades, the ruling class has engaged in unrelenting class warfare. The efforts of the working class within the United States and internationally to resist this offensive were undermined by the treachery of the old Stalinist, social democratic and avowedly pro-capitalist labor and trade union bureaucracies, and the bankruptcy of their national reformist programs.

The reactionary ruling class offensive, which dates back to the 1980s, was intensified in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1991. These developments were hailed by the ruling elites as the ultimate and irreversible triumph of capitalism. The specter of a socialist alternative to capitalism, it was proclaimed, had been finally vanquished.

The launching of the Gulf War of 1990–91 marked the beginning of three decades of unrestrained imperialist neo-colonialism and militarism. Since the proclamation of the War on Terror in 2001, there has not been one day during which the United States has not been at war.

Domestically, the principal feature of the last three decades has been the growth of a staggering level of social inequality. Social programs have been ripped up, wages slashed and entire

industries dismantled to fuel the unrelenting rise of the stock markets. The three richest Americans hold more wealth than the bottom half of the nation's population. This, too, is part of a global process. The world's billionaires possess greater wealth than the poorest 4.6 billion people on the planet.

The inevitable by-product of social inequality is the breakdown of democratic forms of rule. The massive concentration of wealth creates social tensions that cannot be reconciled through traditional democratic channels. The violence employed by the capitalist state against the working class—and, especially, its poorest and most vulnerable sections—assumes an ever more brutal form. The homicidal practices of the police are only the most naked expression of class violence. The public strangulation of George Floyd, for all its horror, was just one of one thousand killings carried out by police on the streets of the United States every year.

A protracted period of social and political reaction signifies the forcible and artificial suppression of social and economic contradictions. The degree to which these contradictions have been suppressed also determines the intensity of the eruptions that follow. The demonstrations within the United States and throughout the world are only the initial indications of the anger that has been accumulating among masses of people.

The character and scope of the demonstrations reflect not only the boiling over of popular anger. They also reflect the impact of objective developments in the economic and technological foundations of modern society. Against the backdrop of political reaction, the process of economic globalization and the emergence of the internet and related forms of communication have far-reaching revolutionary implications.

These interrelated processes have intensified the essential contradictions between the ossified system of national states and the reality of a global economy. Moreover, the process of globalization has created the basis for a unified, international movement of the working class against capitalism. The possibility of the global unity of the working class is not a utopian vision. Its concrete realization arises from the existing conditions of global capitalist production.

As early as 1988, the International Committee of the Fourth International anticipated this. It wrote, in *The World Capitalist*

## *Crisis and the Tasks of the Fourth International:*

It has long been an elementary proposition of Marxism that the class struggle is national only as to form, but that it is, in essence, an international struggle. However, given the new features of capitalist development, even the form of the class struggle must assume an international character. Even the most elemental struggles of the working class pose the necessity of coordinating its actions on an international scale.

The movement against police violence is multinational, multiracial and multiethnic. It arises on a global scale because the contradictions driving it are fundamentally international.

The ruling class is terrified of the consequences. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a leading imperialist think tank, warned earlier this year: “We are living in an age of global mass protests that are historically unprecedented in frequency, scope and size.... Citizens are losing faith in current leaders, elites, and institutions and are taking to the streets in frustration and often disgust.”

Such is the character of the protests over police violence. As always, the representatives of the ruling class seek to corral and direct the movement back into safe channels.

The aim of the racial sectarians is to deflect attention from the police as an instrument of the capitalist state and the front-line guardians of *class rule*. Moreover, the efforts to impose a racial narrative on the demonstrations are contradicted by their obviously multiracial, multiethnic and multinational character. One study carried out by a sociologist at the University of Maryland found that whites made up 61 percent of protesters in New York, 65 percent of protesters in Washington, and 53 percent of protesters in Los Angeles. Polls, moreover, have recorded overwhelming support for the protests against police violence among Americans of all races.

Opposition to police violence cannot be quarantined from the broader class questions. The demonstrations protesting the murder of George Floyd are taking place in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exposed the social chasm that divides the corporate financial elite from the working class. It does not detract from the anger provoked by the murder of George Floyd to call attention to the fact that over 115,000 Americans have died of the coronavirus infection during the last three months. It is now being publicly stated by health authorities that 200,000 people will fall victim to the infection by the end of the summer. It is more than probable that the actual death toll will be significantly higher.

The number of deaths is the direct consequence of the failure of the Trump administration and its predecessors to prepare for a pandemic that scientists had been predicting for the last 20

years. The refusal to allocate appropriate resources was the outcome of the crassest profit-driven calculations. Even worse, once the pandemic was under way, the principal concern of the ruling elite was to exploit the health emergency to orchestrate yet another multi-trillion-dollar bailout of the corporations and Wall Street financial interests. Once the CARES Act was passed in late March, the government abandoned even its minimum effort to contain the virus.

Instead, the political establishment—Democrats and Republicans alike—took up the demand for a speedy “reopening” of the economy.

A full scale economic and social catastrophe is overtaking the United States. More than 20 million people are unemployed, but there are no social programs being prepared to counteract the devastating impact on the lives of the working class and substantial sections of the middle class. In fact, the specter of impoverishment is being exploited to accelerate the back-to-work movement. The Trump administration and allied congressmen are declaring that they oppose an extension of the \$600 weekly supplement to unemployment benefits because such payments “disincentivize” workers to return to unsafe factories and other production facilities and workplaces.

Anger is mounting in the working class. It is becoming increasingly evident that the fight against the pandemic and its consequences must lead toward a political confrontation with the Trump administration, the reactionary corporate-dominated two-party system, and capitalism.

When Trump spoke of the need to suppress the protest movement before it gets out of control, and sought to initiate a military overthrow of the Constitution, he had in mind the very real prospect of a massive eruption of action by the working class, including strikes that paralyze the economy, make the continued functioning of his administration impossible, and raise the question of the transfer of political power to the working class.

The Socialist Equality Party, in collaboration with its political co-thinkers in the International Committee of the Fourth International, directs its activity toward raising the political consciousness of the working class, establishing its independence from those parties and leaders who represent the interests of capitalism, aligning its activity as a class with the objective logic of events, and directing the protests against the injustice of George Floyd’s murder and similar incidents of police brutality into a mass movement, led by the working class, for socialism.



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