One year since the police murder of George Floyd

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One year ago today, on May 25, 2020, George Floyd Jr. was murdered by Minneapolis police in broad daylight, as police officer Derek Chauvin compressed his knee into Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes. Floyd pleaded for his life, repeatedly exclaiming, "I can't breathe!" as he was handcuffed face down in the street and bystanders begged police to stop.

Protests following Floyd's death quickly expanded from local unrest in Minneapolis to an upsurge of global protests demanding an end to police brutality. The demonstrations were multiethnic and multinational in character. Protests were recorded on every inhabited continent in over 2,000 cities and towns. In the US alone, an estimated 15 to 26 million people participated in the demonstrations at some point, making them the largest in US history. Workers occupied the streets of the largest cities, and protests spread to numerous smaller, mostly white, rural towns as well.

While the immediate spark for the mass demonstrations was outrage over the epidemic of police murder in the United States, it expressed deeper social processes. The killing of Floyd took place at a critical point in the spread of the global coronavirus pandemic.

After handing trillions of dollars to the banks in late March, the ruling class was engaged in a systematic campaign to force workers back to work. At the same time, the response of the ruling class to the pandemic had enormously intensified the protracted decline in living standards for workers and youth, crushing levels of debt, and the extreme growth of social inequality.

The brutal response to the protests, spearheaded by the Trump administration, expressed the fear of a broader social explosion. Cities imposed curfews, while the White House and more than 30 states activated over 96,000 troops from the National Guard and other military agencies. Police rioted and rampaged throughout US cities, overseen by Democrats and Republicans alike.

The response of the Trump administration was an attempt to stage a presidential coup. One week after the murder, Trump delivered his Rose Garden speech in which he threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act to deploy the military on domestic soil, warning governors that it was "a movement" that had to be "put down."

The Democrats, on the other hand, while supporting the police crackdown, intervened to hijack the protests and direct them along racialist lines. According to the Democrats and their pseudo-left affiliates, police murder had nothing to do with class. Rather it was a question of "systemic racism," for which not the police as a state institution but the population as a whole was to blame. This was a highly publicized and well-funded campaign, with corporations donating tens of millions to organizations such as Black Lives Matter.

Undoubtedly, racism plays a role in many police killings. The most backward and vicious social elements are cultivated within the ranks of the "special bodies of armed men" who are tasked with defending the interests of the capitalist ruling elite.

However, the disproportionality with which racial minorities are killed is explained above all by the high level of poverty among racial minority groups. The common thread that links the overwhelming majority of people killed by police is that they come from poor or working class backgrounds, regardless of their race.

In the year since Floyd's murder, more than 1,000 people have been killed by police, of whom the plurality were white. White people account for the largest number of individuals killed by police every year.

On Monday, nearly one year to the date of Floyd's

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death, a newly published video from Tennessee shows officers at the Marshall County jail kneeling on a hogtied man's back for nearly four minutes. William Jennette, a 48-year-old white man, died during the encounter on May 6, 2020, just days before police murdered Floyd.

In the video, police are heard taunting Jennette as he pleaded with officers that he could not breathe. He is heard shouting, "Help! They're going to kill me!" and yelling that he could not breath. One replied, "You shouldn't be able to breathe, you stupid bastard." The Marshall County Medical Examiner's Office ruled Jennette's death as a homicide, but a grand jury declined to charge any of the officers involved.

Jennette's horrific death went unprobed by the capitalist media at the time because his death—caused almost in exactly the same manner as George Floyd—does not fit the narrative that police violence is an issue of systemic racism ingrained in American society. The *New York Times* and other major media almost never report the police murder of white workers and youth.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained, the effort to racialize police brutality, to the point where white victims are ignored, only serves to mask the class issues behind the epidemic of police violence in America.

The effort to cover up the class issues is aimed at blocking what is required to oppose police violence: its connection to the development of a movement in the working class uniting workers of all races, ethnicities and nationalities. This is the only foundation for opposing inequality, oppression and all expressions of backwardness—including the promotion of racism by the ruling class to divide workers against each other.

The prevalence of police violence in the United States is the product of a society riven with class antagonisms, characterized by unprecedented levels of social inequality. The concentration of wealth in the hands of the upper echelons of society has increased massively over the past year, with 412 new billionaires created in 2020.

What has changed in the last year? The Democrats—now in control of the White House and both chambers of Congress—have promised workers reform, yet police continue to murder people at the same rate since 2013, an average of three people every day. The inflated George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020, which would ostensibly introduce policies to hold law enforcement accountable, has lost all momentum in Congress and is set to miss President Joe Biden's Tuesday deadline to pass a police reform bill.

The Biden administration is demonstrating once again that the Democrats, no less than the Republicans, are ruthless defenders of the capitalist state and its police.

Another development, however, has also emerged—the initial growth of explosive working class opposition to the policies of the ruling class, in the form of struggles of auto workers, educators, health care workers, steel workers, miners and other sections of the working class striving to break free of the control of the corporatist trade unions.

The pandemic has had an enormously radicalizing impact on the consciousness of workers and youth of all races and nationalities. It is this social force, mobilized on a socialist program, that is the real basis for opposition to the epidemic of police murder in the United States.

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