



Racist justice system frees Trayvon's murderer

"No Justice, No Peace!" is the cry of demonstrations across the country since the "not guilty" verdict for George Zimmerman, the vigilante murderer of black teenager Trayvon Martin. This outrageous verdict was not just the product of some jurors but of the capitalist justice system itself. The racist nature of the justice system remains regardless of whether the Republicans or Democrats rule. Nor has it disappeared because there's a black president and attorney general. So it is up to the masses of all nationalities to again rise up against the injustice of the system.

Some of the details of the murder of Trayvon will remain unknown. Nevertheless the general picture is clear. Zimmerman habitually phoned the police about black people whom he arbitrarily decided didn't belong in his community. Zimmerman identified Trayvon as black. Zimmerman described whoever he thought was guilty of dubious activity in his neighborhood as "these assholes [who] always get away". He carried a loaded gun as part of his "community patrol" though the patrol was not supposed to confront anyone. Trayvon Martin was doing no wrong travelling from a convenience store to the residence where his father was. Zimmerman tailed him in his vehicle and ran after him. Against the advice of a police dispatcher Zimmerman left his vehicle to pursue Martin.

There is little question that Zimmerman was racial profiling. His "mixed race" background or having black acquaintances doesn't change this. His pursuit and false and racist assumptions about Martin led to the contact between the two. Wherever Martin ran, Zimmerman followed. Confronted in this way Trayvon Martin eventually stopped trying or could not escape. There was a brief fight as Trayvon rightfully defended himself against the armed and unknown assailant. In this fight, Zimmerman picked up some minor injuries, none of which could have disabled him from defending himself. Zimmerman nevertheless shot Martin to death. Whatever details are missing, all the above means Zimmerman got away with murder.

Zimmerman's lawyers contended that, despite having only minor injuries, Zimmerman was pinned to the ground by Trayvon and was helpless to defend himself except by shooting Martin. They had a martial arts instructor testify what a weak person Zimmerman was and that despite a year of martial arts training he was not yet qualified to throw a punch! But even accepting the scenario of Zimmerman's lawyers, the "helpless" Zimmerman was strong enough and free enough to draw his gun from his holster, free enough to contact the front of Martin's sweatshirt and free enough to somehow shoot directly at Trayvon's heart, killing him instantly.

The only thing Zimmerman's lawyers can really prove is that Zimmerman had some minor injuries. The defense story is the physical confrontation started with Trayvon attacking first and then pinning Zimmerman to the ground and beating him. Some witnesses did testify Zimmerman was pinned and being punched by Trayvon. Other witnesses said Zimmerman was on top. But how did the fight wind up on the ground? The defense claims Trayvon knocked Zimmerman down. But there's no evidence of that. What if Zimmerman instigated the fight by drawing his gun in the earliest moments of the fight or even before that? That would be at least as plausible as the defense story. That could be another legitimate reason for Trayvon to vigorously defend himself in addition to being stalked by an unknown armed man. It also may explain how Zimmerman was able to have his gun in his hand. It's certainly more plausible than the defense explanation that he somehow grabbed it while he was completely helpless underneath Trayvon. What's cer-

tain though is the murder of Trayvon prevented his views being told.

Self-defense laws for Zimmerman, no rights for Trayvon

There should be laws that protect citizens from criminal charges for merely defending themselves from an attacker. But the "stand your ground" laws and other laws in Florida make it easier for those like Zimmerman to escape criminal charges and convictions no matter what actions they take in the name of self-defense. Under "stand your ground" a person who thinks they might suffer serious harm or death in any public place need no longer even try to retreat from their perceived peril. They can just shoot and kill and have an added incentive to do so since the murdered person cannot offer testimony against the killer.

"Stand your ground" language was included in the instructions given the jury in the Zimmerman case. Even so, three of six jurors were considering convicting Zimmerman of some charges. A much more reasonable self-defense law may well have assisted the prosecution although a conviction still wouldn't be guaranteed.

Whatever the personal beliefs of the jurors, the judge's instructions not to consider anything before the first blow, as well as her statements telling the jurors to not consider race as an element of the incident between Zimmerman and Trayvon, and the laws themselves, could not but have tipped the field in favor of Zimmerman. Anyone with a fair mind would have at least called into consideration the entire events the night of the murder. What about considering Zimmerman's profiling, his hunting down of Trayvon, Trayvon's reasonable action faced with an armed stalker, and his right to self-defense? Trayvon was the one hunted down and if the right of self-defense is at stake, Trayvon, the victim, deserved to be considered a million times more than the man who hunted him.

The racist nature of the justice establishment

Some say that if Zimmerman listened to the police request not to pursue Martin, Trayvon would still be alive. Maybe. The history of the local police toward black people shows that if they had encountered Trayvon alive, he might still have been in jeopardy. No one knows for sure what would have happened in that case.

But when Sanford police apprehended Zimmerman they let him go! They said they believed Zimmerman's shaky story of self-defense and couldn't charge him because of the "stand your ground" law. Meanwhile, the police never bothered to contact the best witness to the event, Rachel Jeantel, a black teenage friend of Trayvon who was on her cell phone with Trayvon seconds before the murder. She had the most solid information on the incident which indicates Zimmerman's guilt. The police may have been reluctant to kill Trayvon themselves but sanctioned a vigilante murder. Indeed it took six weeks of nationwide protests for state authorities to charge Zimmerman.

But this is nothing unusual for the local cops. The police chief when Zimmerman murdered Trayvon, Bill Lee, Jr., eventually got fired because of his handling of the case. A year before Lee's firing the previous police chief got canned because a lieutenant's son attacked a homeless black man. No arrest took place after the son was interviewed, and eventually the son turned himself in because his attack surfaced on YouTube. In 2005, a police volunteer and the son of a former veteran of the Sanford police shot to death a black teen-

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ager in an apartment complex they were hired to guard (sound familiar?). At least this time they were charged. But a judge threw out the charges for lack of evidence!

While the local authorities and state authorities had to be prodded into even investigating the murder of Trayvon seriously, what was the stand of Obama? He spoke after the trial. He called attention to the historic plight of black people in the US and present indignities. He said maybe there should be a review of “stand your ground” laws and even hinted that Trayvon may have had the right to defend himself in the situation. Very well. But what does he think of the Zimmerman verdict? He praised the judge! This is the judge who instructed the jurors that they should follow the “stand your ground” laws, that they should consider none of the circumstances prior to the actual physical fight itself, and that they should ignore the issue of race in this incident! And Obama warned those who engage in protest to behave themselves. Above all else he advocates the “rule of law”, that is, the rule of racist and capitalist law. This is not surprising given the administration’s Homeland Security authorities instigating violent crackdowns on Occupy Wall Street protests in various cities over the past couple of years. It hardly needs mentioning that the Republicans consider Obama’s meek stand against racism to be reckless militancy.

The failure of the capitalist establishment to provide justice for Trayvon is part of a whole system where justice is denied to workers in general but even more seriously to the black masses. Racial profiling is not just a habit in a little Southern town. It has long been a well-known policy of the police forces across the country with well-known scandals in New York City and other major metropolitan areas. So are arbitrary police shootings of supposedly “suspicious” blacks and Latinos.

The relative lack of economic opportunity and education among the black masses feeds discrimination in the justice system, and the lack of justice in the system reinforces the economic hardships. With legal opportunities to earn a living more restricted, crime expands. So does targeting by police. Tougher laws are written for the minority community which is unjustly blamed for being “lawless”. An example is the drug laws with stiffer punishment for drugs used more in black communities compared to similar drugs elsewhere. The number of drug arrests in the black communities is disproportional to equal numbers of drug users elsewhere.

What chance is there for a poor black person hauled before the courts? There is a whole history of police manufacturing evidence and falsely testifying behind their shiny badges. The black defendant is stuck with an overworked public defender without proper resources or time for a sound defense, and so true lawbreakers and the innocent alike are processed through the courts, plea bargain and fill the jails. Any worker or poor person can face this problem, but the racism of the authorities and the more poverty within the black community creates rampant discrimination. A huge percent of poor blacks are crushed by this system.

A number of other laws are particularly aimed at the black and minority communities. Many states are out to limit black voting rights through new voter ID laws and other methods that will make it particularly hard for blacks and others to vote. The blatant racist laws remindful of Jim Crow are coming back.

The racial discrimination in the justice system is also shown by the treatment of undocumented immigrant labor. Millions of “illegals” from Mexico provide cheap labor for the capitalists on farms, construction, services, etc. But they have no access to the justice system at all unless they’re arrested or deported. Meanwhile various states are passing laws to step up harassment by the police on illegals or citizens whom they arbitrarily decide look like illegal immigrants.

Amid the hysteria about terrorism, the US justice system has also been carrying out relentless discrimination against Middle Eastern looking people or whatever region the government has targeted as a terrorist haven.

These are just some of the examples of the racism that remains well-embedded in the US justice system.

The racism of the justice system is itself a product of capitalism. The capitalist austerity measures are taking a harsh toll on all workers, but the sections of the workforce already in worse conditions are being driven into the ground. The racist justice system assists the capitalists because the less rights for workers, the easier come the profits, and the more certain sections of the workforce can be singled out for special oppression, the harder it is for the workers to unite for a struggle to defend themselves from the capitalist exploiters. Whether it is Obama or Congress we are talking about the ruling political parties are tied to the capitalists. And because of their loyalty to the capitalists the racism in the justice system either intensifies or, at best, is alleviated in the slowest and most minor ways.

It’s only through the force of the workers and poor of all nationalities banding together for struggle that conditions improve. It took countrywide protests just to get Zimmerman put on trial though the capitalist justice system again failed to produce a just verdict. Powerful mass actions are needed against all facets of the racist justice system.

But some of the main organizers of the recent protests like Rev. Al Sharpton are misleading the anti-racist movement by diverting it into faith in Obama and similar Democratic Party politicians who are carrying out the austerity measures of the capitalists. Sharpton ignores that Obama is carrying out austerity measures. And he pretends capitalist austerity has nothing to do with the reactionary and racist police, laws, court decisions, etc. Instead Obama and Sharpton use the trial to proclaim the justice system worked except that maybe the “stand your ground” laws need change.

Workers and activists need a different orientation in order to strengthen the struggle against racism and the racist justice system. We must connect the struggle against racism to the fight against capitalist austerity which feeds bodies into the racist justice system. This must be a fight based on mobilizing the rank-and-file workers, not the sellout union leaders tied to the Democrats. We need to expose the basic connection between the racism of the justice system and capitalism itself.

We should reveal the complicity of Republicans and Democrats in maintaining the racist nature of the justice system because of the repressive laws they make or maintain, their tolerance or encouragement of police misconduct, and the militarization of the police. We must work to break any illusions that the mere overthrow of “stand your ground” laws or other minor changes will break the racist nature of the justice system.

There should be participation in mass struggles no matter if the leaders have reformist views. But anti-capitalist views on the struggle for racial justice should be spread there. Organizing independently from the reformists should be carried in the workplaces, communities, schools, etc. Protests need not wait on the Sharptons and other reformist apologists for Obama. The forms of protest should not be confined merely to what the bourgeois establishment considers proper, but to whatever will be most effective and in step with the level of organization, consciousness and willingness of the participants.

The more workers of all nationalities rally against racist injustice aimed at their most oppressed sections, the stronger will be the overall class struggle. <>

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