



Stand up against police terror and the racist system!

ML King Day is a time to recall the brave struggle of the 1950s and 60s which brought down the cruel Jim Crow system, legal discrimination and segregation. There were more opportunities for jobs and education and more social programs started. But despite these advances, special persecution of black people by the police and the courts has persisted. And capitalist austerity has undercut economic gains.

So the struggle lives on, searching for lessons from the past and inspired by present racist outrages. There can be no comfort when police kill black people on any pretense. What peace can exist when a corrupt grand jury system frees murderous cops? Even when their crimes are caught on videotape! Michael Brown (unarmed and surrendering), Tamir Rice (12 years old playing in a park), Eric Garner (videotaped being strangled to death for allegedly illegally selling a few cigarettes), Ezell Ford (a non-threatening mentally-ill man in Los Angeles). The list of victims could go on and on. It's a list going back through history of working class and poor people, and especially the black and Latino poor. It's part of the plague of racial profiling and mass incarceration aimed against the worst-off victims of the capitalist economy.

Taking the fight to the streets

The black masses have risen in protest along with white and other non-white workers and students. They are sick of the ongoing racism of the capitalist cops and courts. They want change now, not when the supposed anti-racist politicians get around to it. Marches and rallies have spread across the country. And the movement's tactics have increasingly disdained being confined to the polite and non-disruptive forms acceptable to the bourgeois establishment and its official "anti-racist" leaders.

On Dec. 3 the masses of New York City brought parts of the city to a halt when a grand jury freed officer Pantaleo who strangled Eric Garner. Thousands occupied the Brooklyn Bridge, Times Square and Union Square. Demonstrators poured into the main streets gathering wide approval from honking motorists. Ten days later 30,000 marched to the NYPD headquarters.

In Ferguson, MO, (near St. Louis) where Brown was gunned down, protesters confronted the police day and night. Black and white demonstrators responded angrily to police tear-gassing and mass arrests, setting some cop cars on fire.

There have been weeks of non-stop anti-racist actions in the San Francisco Bay Area. Highways were occupied, and activists have chained themselves to cars of the BART regional transport system. "die-ins" blocked streets.

High school and even grade school students have marched out of school in some cities.

In the Oakland, CA area and some other major cities, groups are

following police on foot, tracking and recording their behavior despite police objections.

On Dec. 31, a crowd of protesters active in Ferguson poured through the doors of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department declaring they were serving an eviction notice and removing the police from power because of their brutality and their role as a "militarized occupation force...complicit in mass incarceration of black and brown citizens...[and] imposing blight on our communities under the guise of protecting and serving."

Rather than bow to the authorities, activists have increasingly found tactics to turn up the heat on the cops, courts and politicians.

Class politics and the anti-racist struggle

It's natural the bourgeoisie isn't pleased when the masses fail to crawl before their every command. The banks, the corporations and other wealthy live off the misery of the workers and poor. Both Republicans and Democrats serve the capitalists. The justice system does too. This system as a whole is behind the murders, not just random police thugs. Even the liberal capitalist politicians are not immune.

The liberal Mayor of New York, Bill de Blasio, is an example. He is white with a black wife and taken some measures against police racial profiling. But he has never given up support for the "broken windows" policy which was directly responsible for the death of Eric Garner who was strangled for allegedly selling some loose cigarettes. "Broken windows" began under reactionary Republican mayor Rudolph Giuliani and continued under conservative billionaire Bloomberg.

Why does de Blasio cling to it? The idea behind the policy was to cut crime by arresting poor folk for any petty crime they committed or may commit rather than provide jobs and better living conditions that would reduce crime. It's a banner for capitalist austerity, one which makes politicians of both parties salute for fear of offending the corporate bosses.

Beyond the black bourgeoisie

If the fight against racism is confined to what is acceptable to the predominately white bourgeoisie it will suffocate. Obama's presidency is the best example. He carries out austerity measures rather than providing jobs and social programs that would help black workers and poor. He set the one year record for deporting Mexican immigrants. Rev. Al Sharpton and much of the black bourgeoisie nonetheless stand beside Obama or other Democrats like de Blasio.

The masses are the life of the recent protests. But the black bourgeoisie would channel that energy into support for pro-capitalist politics that subverts anti-racism. Organize new mass organizations, unconcerned with limiting themselves to what the capitalists want. Fight the racist system! ■

South African workers on the march

The struggle against apartheid electrified the world. The white racist rulers thought they were all powerful, but majority rule came to South Africa in 1994.

But just as the victories of the civil rights movement haven't ended economic oppression, the historic fall of apartheid didn't end it in South Africa. The African National Congress came to power, but it embraced market fundamentalism and abandoned the economic promises of the famous Freedom Charter for land, work, houses, and education for all. So did the South African Communist Party. ANC and SACP leaders have linked up with the rich white capitalists, become millionaires themselves, and preside over one of the most unequal societies in the world.

So millions of black people still live in shacks, the schools are grossly inferior, and a quarter of the population is officially unemployed. The great poverty has led to struggle, and the ANC-led government has tried in vain to stomp it out. On August 16, 2012, police slaughtered dozens of striking black miners at Marikana. But the strike wave continues. Last year there were major strikes including a five-month mining strike and a four-week strike of 200,000 metalworkers at over 10,000 workplaces.

Right in the center of this action is the largest union in the country, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), which has a third of a million members. It fought apartheid in the old days, and it still defends the workers' interests today. This has led it recently to denounce the ANC's pro-capitalist policy. In retaliation, two months ago on November 8 the ANC and SACP leaders prevailed on the COSATU trade union federation leadership to expel NUMSA.

No matter! NUMSA has refused to back down, and it is committed to organizing even more workers.

NUMSA is also seeking to unite workers with community activists in a United Front to fight neo-liberalism, poverty, and inequality.

Moreover, NUMSA has called for the building of a Movement for Socialism, in preparation for building a truly socialist party. The ANC and South African CP can't be said to be socialist, and NUMSA is calling for a reconsideration of what socialism really is.

NUMSA activists have support from many other workers and unions. The COSATU Central Executive Committee had to act by itself to expel NUMSA rather than setting the matter before a COSATU Congress.

South African workers will not be cowed down! May their struggle inspire militant workers around the world. ■

All eyes on Greece!

On Sunday, January 25, Greek voters will elect a new parliament. Syriza (the Coalition of the Radical Left) is leading in the polls. And it is committed to ending austerity.

Unemployment, wage cuts, and hopelessness is rampant in Greece. Even the medical system has collapsed, and malaria again haunts the country. Yet the European bourgeoisie and bankers are

insisting that yet more workers should starve, and yet further cuts be made in social programs.

All the establishment parties back austerity, including the Greek socialist party, PASOK. The workers of Greece are desperate and fed up with PASOK, whose popularity has fallen to single digits. PASOK is as bad as the Democratic Party here; it is no alternative to the present Conservative ruling party. It's a new party, Syriza, formed in 2004, that is posing the challenge to austerity.

Syriza promises to end austerity and gradually restore the cuts. This is what the people want. But Syriza believes the European Union officials and bankers will agree to renegotiate the government debt. It hopes they can be forced to be reasonable, but when have the capitalists ever been reasonable? Besides, the relentless Eurobourgeoisie fears that if they renegotiate the Greek debt, they will have to renegotiate the Spanish, Portuguese, Irish, Italian and other debts too.

So, if Syriza wins the election with a large enough margin to form a government, a major confrontation will be in the making. Are people or interest payments to be protected? All Europe will be watching. But what will Syriza do if it can't get other governments and the Eurobankers to go along? Will it rally the working masses in favor of more radical steps than renegotiation? Or will the Greek workers need to build a stronger party, with a clearer orientation towards the class struggle?

This is a critical moment for Greece, and for workers across Europe. Down with austerity! Support the Greek people! ■

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