Justice for George Floyd

Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group

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The United States is aflame with rage over the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on 25 May. A cop who had arrested him over a minor crime knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes, killing him. Starting in Minneapolis, demonstrations have spread nationwide, often linking up with local grievances against police violence and racism.

George Floyd's murder didn't come out of the blue. Police in Minneapolis and surrounding suburbs, like many others in the US, are key instruments in violently imposition of the racist social order that enables capitalism. Their anti-Black racism is infamous, inflicting countless daily humiliations and injustices. Even in the last few years, it resulted in the murder of Jamar Clark in 2015 and Philando Castile in 2016. Both previous cases provoked angry mobilisations, but the murderers of Clark were never charged and the cop who killed Castile was acquitted. Minneapolis police have enjoyed impunity when they kill a Black man, while the quick arrest and conviction in 2017 of a Black Minneapolis cop for the murder of Justine Damond, a White woman, in 2017 stands in stark contrast.

Protests began in Minneapolis the day after the murder and gradually escalated as the news, including videos taken by witnesses, spread. As well as growing, they got angrier. People reflected on the injustice of it, considered how it could have been them – or it could well be next time – and remembered the failure of the capitalist law either to hold police murderers responsible or to prevent subsequent murders. The increasingly violent police response to the demonstrations provoked growing resistance amongst Black people in Minneapolis and their supporters. The highlight of the resistance so far has been the capture of the 3rd Precinct Police Station, which was torched after the cops evacuated it.

By the weekend of 30 and 31 May, demonstrations had spread to hundreds of cities across the United States. A number of them were quite militant. Police tactics varied considerably, all the way from symbolic solidarity with the demonstrators to unprovoked attacks on peaceful assemblies or even passers-by, journalists or people observing from the front porch of their own homes. At some demonstrations, police did both in quick succession. In Minneapolis, police were bent on revenge for losing their station. In Washington on Monday, Trump announced he was calling in the military. As this article was being written, demonstrations were ongoing and the situation was still in flux.

Police violence in the US and the community rage against it cannot be divorced from the economic situation. Black people, economically segregated into low income ghettos, suffer dispro-

portionately from unemployment, precarious employment and poverty wages. The coronavirus pandemic has caused mass unemployment in the US, far more than Australia (unemployment hit 14.7% in April there and will go higher in May). Further, the economic response to the pandemic has concentrated on aid to corporations, not households. And the pandemic itself has killed mainly Black and other minority people in the US. When universal moral outrage meets a generalised economic grievance, a social explosion is the result. The murder of George Floyd provoked the outrage, but the coronavirus crash provided the grievance.

Here in Australia, Aboriginal people have similar stories of police violence and racism. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody reported in 1987, but governments since then have cherry-picked the recommendations, ignoring the most important. And deaths have continued. Joyce Clarke was shot by cops last year. So was Kumanjayi Walker. Cameron Doomadgee was bashed to death in 2004. Tanya Day died in Castlemaine Police Station last year while in "protective custody". David Dungay was asphyxiated in gaol in 2015. His last words were "I can't breathe." These, as well as Ms Dhu, Mr Ward, Wayne Fella Morrison and more are the result of the need to protect a capitalist system built on genocide and dispossession. Australia, like the United States, is a crime scene.

The Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group believes it is the duty of Anarchists everywhere to join demonstrations against police brutality and racism that are arranged locally and to help the affected communities defend themselves against police violence. And the affected communities have the primary role in determining the issues and deciding the demands. In Australia, this means supporting indigenous organisations engaged in struggle over deaths in custody. It is not the proper role of Anarchists to initiate violence at rallies on these issues, but instead to do everything in our power to ensure that, when the police start it, they lose. Collectively, these thugs in blue need to be taught a lesson. Individually, they need to be convinced to get honest jobs.

More, though, needs to be said. While demonstrations against racist police murder are totally justified, and their militant defence against police attack is necessary, they are insufficient. We need a more effective way of striking back than to pit our bodies against their tear gas, capsicum spray, riot gear and armoured vehicles. If this is the limit of our tactics, we will eventually be driven off the streets by the weight of overwhelming violence. But there is another way.

Bus drivers in Minneapolis and New York have refused to transport police to demonstrations or to transport arrested demonstrators to police stations. The Minneapolis Federation of Teachers issued a statement condemning the murder of George Floyd, as has the Atwood Centre, which organises Amazon warehouse workers locally. These actions are the tip of the iceberg of workers' power: the ability of workers to take action in the workplace that cuts off the flow of profits or directly deprives police of the ability to use murderous violence. This needs to be built on.

The most effective response to racist cop terror is the action of organised workers. Murder by police should be responded to by a one-day general strike by all workers in the city concerned, organised through their local labour council (the day of the funeral would be an obvious occasion). All unions should have standing policies of non-cooperation with the police at demonstrations and the supply of tear gas, capsicum spray and other instruments of chemical warfare should be banned when police are engaged in violent suppression of a protest movement. And lastly, all police "unions" should be kicked out of the labour movement.

Why should workers do this? It's not just because it's morally right. The fight against racism is also in the clear material interests of the working class. To be able to win even the simplest bread

and butter issue, workers need solidarity. The working class needs to be able to unite. Racism, though, is the number one weapon the capitalists use to divide the working class. White workers in the US might have relative privilege over Black workers, but racism has weakened working class organisation so much that real wages are virtually unchanged since the 1970s. The racism of white workers benefits the bosses, not themselves.

To achieve a principled stand against police violence, battle needs to be waged against the craven bureaucrats who preside over the current labour movement. In the US, they are a subordinate part of the Democratic Party, while here in Australia, they are the the key backers of the Labor Party. In both countries they have, for most practical purposes, given up the use of the strike and waged ever more pathetic and unsuccessful campaigns via other means in their place. Their poisonous politics of class collaboration have resulted in decades of job destruction, erosion of conditions and, now, wage cuts. They are no more fit to win on bread and butter issues than they are to fight against racism.

The main task of Anarchists, therefore, is the same as always. We need to build rank and file organisation in the workplace and turn the union movement into fighting organisations. While our duty at the moment is to join the front lines defending indigenous people here and Black communities in the US, we must remain aware that our victory can only be achieved on another field. The fight against racism can only be won in the workplace. And the fight against racism will only be won when the working class make a revolution against capitalism.

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