

America's unending reign of police terror

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Four years after the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri by police officer Darren Wilson sparked mass popular outrage over police violence, the daily onslaught of police killings in the US continues. Through the end of July, at least 720 people have had their lives taken by the police this year, averaging more than three deaths every day.

At the current pace, 2018 will be among the deadliest years on record for police killings in the US. Nearly all these killings pass under the radar of the national media. Those especially egregious incidents that are captured on video garner a few obligatory seconds on the nightly news before being dropped.

In one of the latest fatal encounters, 25-year-old Daniel Hambrick was shot in the back and killed, as he ran from a traffic stop on July 26, by 25-year-old Nashville, Tennessee police officer Andrew Delke. Hambrick was African American, Delke is white.

Initial reports indicated that Hambrick was killed during a traffic stop after he emerged from the car armed with a gun. The police justified the killing by publicizing the fact that Hambrick had a long record of criminal convictions.

With no police bodycam or dashcam footage immediately forthcoming, Hambrick's killing passed with little notice outside of local media. Vigils and protests were held by family and friends demanding justice and an end to police killings. Hambrick was fondly remembered as "Dan Dan," a young man who cared deeply for his family and was looking forward to starting a new job this month.

This week, the lies of the police were exposed when surveillance video was released by the district attorney showing that Delke shot Hambrick in the back as he fled, sparking national outrage.

Hambrick's death is one of an unending string of police murders, beatings and assaults that are part of daily American life. And workers and youth of all races and ethnicities are the victims.

In May, 20-year-old Cody Reynolds, who was white, was gunned down by a Royal Oak, Michigan police officer. Though Reynolds was unarmed, no charges have been filed against the police. Thurman Blevins, Jr. was shot down in a hail of police bullets in Minneapolis as he fled from police down an alley in June. Prosecutors announced last month that there would be no criminal charges.

On top of the approximately three killings every day, workers must bear the indignity of harassment, beatings and assault. On Monday, an off-duty police officer in Cincinnati, Ohio Tasered an 11-year-old girl accused of shoplifting, sending 50,000 volts of electricity through her body. Earlier this month, horrific video emerged of a police officer violently beating a homeless woman at Detroit Receiving Hospital; both the officer and the woman are black.

Police violence and abuse is an expression of a malignant social and economic system, characterized by unending war and extreme social inequality, which infects the state apparatus and all its institutions. The state is not a neutral body, but an instrument of class rule. As class tensions increase, as the viability of the social system becomes ever more tenuous, the bodies of armed men that exist to maintain this social system become that much more brutal.

The violence carried out by the police cannot be separated from the increasingly fascist operations of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Customs and Border Protection agencies—the separation of children from parents, the construction of concentration camps, the kidnapping and deportation of immigrant workers.

The police are part of a "total army" that includes the intelligence agencies and the armed forces, which are playing an ever more direct role in domestic affairs, including through the provision of arms and training to the police themselves. As Trump has unleashed Gestapo-like agents on immigrant communities, the

Democrats uphold the torturers and criminals who head the CIA, FBI and NSA as the supposed guardians of democracy.

Whatever their tactical differences—centered on matters of foreign policy—the entire political establishment, Democrat and Republican, defends the police forces of the state and is preparing to use them against growing social opposition in the working class. For this reason, the issue of police violence, like domestic spying and opposition to war, has been entirely excluded from political debate or discussion. It is a non-issue in the 2018 US midterm elections.

It is the fundamental class character of the state that the purveyors of racial politics work to ignore and cover up. Four years after the killing of Michael Brown, what has come of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and its calls for the hiring of black police officers and police chiefs, its toothless accountability and oversight boards? Nothing—except perhaps a few positions within the state apparatus for the sections of the upper middle class for which BLM speaks. They have seen the mass protests against police violence as something to suppress and channel behind the Democratic Party, while serving as a springboard for their own careers.

While racism plays a role in some police killings, and in the brutal measures directed against immigrants, this is entirely subordinate to the role of the state as an instrument of class rule. It is not a matter of making the police more racially diverse or electing more African American prosecutors. Decades of racially integrated police forces have illustrated quite starkly that black cops can be just as vicious, corrupt and murderous as their white counterparts.

The fight against police violence is a class question. It must be connected to the struggles of every section of the working class, from the fight by teachers for better funding for their schools and salaries, to the fight of UPS drivers and Amazon warehouse workers for better working conditions and living standards.

The resolution passed by the Socialist Equality Party last month, “The Resurgence of Class Struggle and the Tasks of the Socialist Equality Party,” states: “The SEP is spearheading the fight to arm the developing objective working class movement with an uncompromising revolutionary strategy and perspective. It is fighting to connect struggles against

declining wages, attacks on health care and the destruction of public education to opposition to the assault on immigrant workers, police brutality, the destruction of democratic rights and the danger of world war.”

I am running for Congress in Michigan’s 12th district as a member of the SEP to mobilize workers and youth behind a socialist, internationalist and anti-imperialist political movement to take state power and reorganize economic life on the basis of social need instead of private profit. I urge you to join the SEP and, wherever you live, support and take part in the SEP campaign in Michigan.

To get involved and donate to the campaign of Niles Niemuth for Congress, visit niles2018.com.

Niles Niemuth

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