

Eight minutes and 46 seconds: Theses on the Police and White Supremacist Killings of African Americans in America

Hari Kumar, 3rd June 2020

The working class of America faces a triple crisis at this moment. The first is the police murderous violence that continues against the African-American people. The second is the on-going uncontained epidemic of the COVID-19 in the USA, which affects hardest the same vulnerable members. Finally is the on-going economic crisis where the economy of the USA has faltered at least since the 2008 financial crisis. It is difficult to disentangle each strand. This article focuses upon the most immediate crisis: *that of the intense and life-threatening crisis for African-Americans in the United States today*. The long aftermath of slavery, is a legacy still not fully acknowledged by the predominantly white ruling class of the USA.

1. What happened?

On May 25, 2020 Mr. George Floyd – an African American man - became the latest victim of racist murder by racists in police uniform.¹ This time the deed was done in Minneapolis, where four police officers arrested Mr. Floyd. Three of them calmly watched as their fellow-officer, Derek Chauvin murdered Floyd:

“George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, after a deli employee called 911, accusing him of buying cigarettes with a counterfeit \$20 bill. Seventeen minutes after the first squad car arrived at the scene, Mr. Floyd was unconscious and pinned beneath three police officers, showing no signs of life... Derek Chauvin, the officer who can be seen most clearly in witness videos pinning Mr. Floyd to the ground. Mr. Chauvin, who is white, kept his knee on Mr. Floyd’s neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds... Our video shows that Mr. Chauvin did not remove his knee even after Mr. Floyd lost consciousness, and for a full minute after paramedics arrived at the scene. The three other former officers, Thomas Lane, J. Alexander Kueng and Tou Thao — all of whom can be seen.. participating in Mr. Floyd’s arrest.”¹

On a later bystander’s video, which went viral, numerous citizens are heard begging Chauvin to let Mr. Floyd go. Even more heart-rending, early on in the long 8 minutes 46 seconds – Mr. Floyd himself is heard desperately saying “I can’t breathe”. For about 2 minutes before Chauvin lifted his knee from Floyd’s neck, he had been motionless. Mr. Floyd’s death was followed at bewildering speed by an intense chain reaction. Yet Chauvin was well known to the police department and the City as a violent man:

“Excessive force complaints against Minneapolis officers have become commonplace, especially by African-American residents. One of the officers involved in Mr. Floyd’s death, a 19-year veteran of the department identified as Derek Chauvin, 44, had several complaints filed against him, three of which led to reprimands for his language and tone. Mr. Chauvin shot a man who was trying to grab an officer’s gun in 2008, according to The Pioneer Press.

¹ ‘8 Minutes and 46 Seconds: How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody’, By Evan Hill, Ainara Tiefenthäler, Christiaan Triebert, Drew Jordan, Haley Willis and Robin Stein June 1, 2020; *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html>

He was also present at two other shootings, one of them fatal, but it was unclear if he fired his weapon in those cases, according to Communities United Against Police Brutality, a local organization advocating police reform.”²

The initial city response to Floyd’s was obfuscatory, to say the least. All four officers were fired, but not arrested:

“In a statement following the Monday night incident, the Minneapolis Police Department said they were responding to "a report of a forgery in progress" and claimed Floyd's death was caused by an unspecified "medical incident." Shortly after video of the incident emerged and spread rapidly across social media, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey announced the firing of four officers who were on the scene.”³

Democratic party notables including Senior Senator Amy Klobuchar for Minnesota, mildly called merely for an “investigation”. Only after considerable public agitation, and the Floyd family insistence on arrests, – was Chauvin finally arrested. Even then he was charged with 3rd degree murder and not 1st degree murder. At time of writing (June 3rd), the other three co-murderers were finally to be charged – again finally the Minnesota state bowing to mass pressure.

2. The Immediate backdrop

The searing history of American capitalism’s use, exploitation and repression of Black American people, cannot be adequately summarized here. It is frankly impossible to recite all victims by name, certainly we will never know the true number, as so many were un-recorded. But here we indicate some relevant immediate issues.

i) Nation-wide injustice not legally remediable through the secretive ‘Grand Jury’

The systematic legalized lynching of black men in particular – although black women are also victims as Breonna Taylor⁴ and others⁵ – has repeatedly sparked anger. With Floyd’s murder, a huge wave of demonstrations and protests was ignited. This has precipitated a further unmasking of the USA state hypocrisy on race. On top of the events above, President Trump – has by design fanned racist hatred. He quoted an infamous bigoted Southern police chief.

² Matt Furber, John Eligon and Audra D. S. Burch, ‘Minneapolis Police, Long Accused of Racism, Face Wrath of Wounded City’, *NY Times*, May 28, 2020

³ Jake Johnson, ‘A Disgusting Display’: Police Fire Rubber Bullets, Stun Grenades, and Tear Gas at Demonstrators Protesting Killing of George Floyd,’ *Common Dreams*, May 27, 2020, <https://www.commondreams.org/news/2020/05/27/disgusting-display-police-fire-rubber-bullets-stun-grenades-and-tear-gas>

⁴ Associated Press, ‘Attorney: Breonna Taylor ‘Executed’ by Police in Her Home’, *New York Times*, May 20, 2020’

⁵ Kate Abbey-Lambertz, ‘These 15 Black Women Were Killed During Police Encounters. Their Lives Matter, Too’, 02/13/2015, HuffPost US, https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/black-womens-lives-matter-police-shootings_n_6644276?ri18n=true

The similarity of events to the New York police murder of Mr. Garner – is astounding – down to the cry “I can’t breathe”. No officer in the 2014 New York case has even to today, been convicted of murder.⁶ In Mr. Garner’s case, a secret ‘Grand Jury’ refused to even indict the responsible police officer.⁷ In fact the whole Grand Jury process depends upon how aggressively the State or city prosecutors argue for a case to be criminal:

“Grand juries determine whether enough evidence exists for a case to go forward to a criminal trial, either before a jury or a judge. By law, they operate in secret and hear only evidence presented by prosecutors, who also instruct the grand jurors on the law. Defense lawyers are barred from speaking. For a decision, 12 jurors who have heard all of the evidence must agree.”⁷

The American Bar Association⁵, and many progressive organisations⁶ have long called for reforms, for example saying at a Subcommittee hearing in 2000:

“On behalf of the American Bar Association...
The grand jury is a unique body in our legal system. It possesses awesome powers: The grand jury's work is conducted in secret... Courts do not generally supervise its work closely....
But the grand jury has also come under increasing criticism for being a mere "rubber stamp" for the prosecution without adequate procedural safeguards. Critics argue that the grand jury has largely lost its historic role as an independent bulwark protecting citizens from unfounded accusations by the government.”^{8,9}

We noted Amy Klobuchar above. As a Hennepin County Prosecutor - she refused to file charges against police officers, preferring to use the secretive Grand Jury approach:

“Over eight years beginning in 1999, the city of Minneapolis paid \$4.8 million in legal settlements related to 122 police misconduct incidents. And police officers and county sheriffs were involved in 29 civilian deaths. Klobuchar, however, chose not to criminally charge any fatalities involving law enforcement. Instead she routinely put the decision to a grand jury, a process widely criticized for its secrecy and for mostly allowing the police version of events. Klobuchar also didn't take on any of the misconduct claims. The mother of a black teenager who was shot and killed by police in 2004 begged Klobuchar to file charges against the officer instead of presenting the case to a grand jury.

"The grand jury is a way of hiding that the prosecutor is not giving the full information of guilt to the grand jury," Tahisha Williams Brewer wrote to

⁶ Andy Newman, 'The Death Of Eric Garner, And The Events That Followed,' *New York Times*, Dec. 3, 2014; <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/12/04/nyregion/04garner-timeline.html>

⁷ J. David Goodman and Al Baker, 'Wave of Protests After Grand Jury Doesn't Indict Officer in Eric Garner Chokehold Case' 3 Dec 2014; <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/04/nyregion/grand-jury-said-to-bring-no-charges-in-staten-island-chokehold-death-of-eric-garner.html>

⁸ Constitutional Rights And The Grand Jury, Hearing Before The Subcommittee On The Constitution Of The Committee On The Judiciary House Of Representatives, One Hundred Sixth Congress, Second Session July 27, 2000, Serial No. 114; http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/judiciary/hju67333.000/hju67333_0.htm#91

⁹ <http://grandjuryresistance.org/reformlinks.html>

Klobuchar at the time. "I want this process out in the open, where everyone can observe it and make sure that it is fair to my son."

Klobuchar did not directly respond to Williams Brewer and proceeded to present the case to a grand jury, which found the shooting was justified."¹⁰

Plainly the legal system is stacked against blacks and African-American victims, and the working class. Long ago, in 'The German Ideology' Marx and Engels warned that the law is only the expression of the will of the ruling class, it becomes the law of state; and it then becomes simply a reflection of the ruling class's economic and social relations;

"The individuals who rule in these conditions - leaving aside the fact that their power must assume the form of the *state* - have to give their will, which is determined by these definite conditions, a universal expression as the will of the state, as law, an expression whose content is always determined by the relations of this class, as the civil and criminal law demonstrates in the clearest possible way."¹¹

ii) African-American Response to Institutional Injustice

Minneapolis itself has a long history of police violence against African Americans:

"The city has been rocked by officer-involved shootings in recent years and subsequent protest. In 2015 two Minneapolis police officers faced no repercussions for shooting and killing Jamar Clark a twenty-four-year-old black man. In 2016 police killed Philandro Castile, thirty-two-year-old black man, in nearby Falcon Heights, an encounter that was captured on social media and received national attention. A jury ultimately acquitted the officer who took Castile's life."¹²

But this is beyond Minneapolis, it is a pan-USA struggle, one pitting the black working class against the police. African-Americans have not been silent over the USA in the last 50 years. As Hinton points out, blacks populations have adopted a repetitive resistance, nearly always precipitated by police violence:

"These types of uprisings have been a nearly perennial occurrence in the United States for more than fifty years. In the month following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., black uprisings erupted in more than 125 cities, leading to 50 deaths and more than 15,000 arrests. In the years that followed (1968–72), at least 960 segregated black communities witnessed 2,310 separate incidents of what journalists and state security officials described as "disturbances," "uprisings," "rebellions," "melees," "eruptions," or "riots." As in Minneapolis today, this type of collective violence almost always started with contact between residents and the frontline representatives of the state—the police—and then quickly moved to other institutions."¹¹

¹⁰ Tom Scheck, Brandt Williams, Nikki Pederson, 'As prosecutor, Klobuchar let grand juries decide police-involved fatalities'; 25 March, 2019. SC Times <https://www.sctimes.com/story/news/local/minnesota/2019/03/25/prosecutor-klobuchar-let-grand-juries-decide-police-involved-fatalities/3266193002/>

¹¹ Marx and Engels, 'The German Ideology', 'The Leipzig Council: III Saint Max; II Law'; Volume 5 of CW Ibid; p. 329; or at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01b.htm>

¹² Elizabeth Hinton, 'The Minneapolis Uprising in Context'; *Boston Review*, May 29, 2020, <http://bostonreview.net/race/elizabeth-hinton-minneapolis-uprising-context>

The American ruling class recognise accurately enough the potential menace to them. But their solution has been to increase policing. More – they have militarised the police with intimidating equipment and ‘riot control training’. As Hinton correctly points out, this misses the fact that at least a portion of the response of the street is mischaracterized as ‘criminal’ – rather than the ‘political violence’ it is:

“ In fact, U.S. cities had been beset with black rebellion since the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Federal policymakers and officials blamed this earlier period of disorders (and the hundreds of millions of dollars in property damage it caused) primarily on the behavior of young black men. They sought to address it as a criminal problem, launching the War on Crime and passing the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, which incentivized increased local policing and surveillance of black urban areas, as well as formal “riot control” training. However, a proper understanding of sixties-era urban rebellion—and similar rebellions now—depends on our ability to interpret it not as a wave of criminality, but as a period of sustained political violence.”²

3. Disproportionate effects of the COVID 19 pandemic upon Black workers

We will not dwell too long here, on the on-going decimation of the COVID-19 virus upon the most vulnerable black sections of the American working class. It is enough to make three points. First that there has been an ‘excess’ burden – meaning higher death rates and rates of infection – in the African American population than other sections of the American population.^{13 14}

“In Illinois, 43 percent of people who have died from the disease and 28 percent of those who have tested positive are African-Americans, a group that makes up just 15 percent of the state’s population. African-Americans, who account for a third of positive tests in Michigan, represent 40 percent of deaths in that state even though they make up 14 percent of the population. In Louisiana, about 70 percent of the people who have died are black, though only a third of that state’s population is.

Initial indications are that doctors are less likely to refer African-Americans for testing when they visit a clinic with symptoms of Covid-19, the disease caused by the virus. Since the disease can progress quickly, researchers say, a disparity in testing can lead to considerably worse outcomes.”¹⁵

¹³ Linda Villarosa, L. Kasimu Harris, ‘A Terrible Price: The Deadly Racial Disparities of COVID-19 in America. *New York Times*, April 29, 2020; <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/29/magazine/racial-disparities-covid-19.html?searchResultPosition=16>

¹⁴ Michael Barbaro, Adizah Eghan, Alexandra Leigh Young, Sydney Harper and Luke Vander Ploeg, and edited by Lisa Chow; ‘Why Is the Pandemic Killing So Many Black Americans? Racial disparities in the death rate contradict the claim that the novel coronavirus is “the great equalizer.” May 20th, 2020; NYT <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/20/podcasts/the-daily/black-death-rate-coronavirus.html?searchResultPosition=24&showTranscript=1>

¹⁵ John Eligon, Audra D. S. Burch, Dionne Searcey and Richard A. Oppel Jr. ‘Black Americans Face Alarming Rates of Coronavirus Infection in Some States’, April 7, 2020 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/07/us/coronavirus-race.html>

Second this has a relationship to the overall higher rates of poverty and ill-health in this most vulnerable section of the class.¹⁶

Finally, the notorious lack of adequate health care coverage was designed to maximize the disastrous effects of COVID. As long time reformers – Woolhandler and Himmelstein comment, a change is possibly coming, precipitated by the post COVID crisis:

“Although the COVID-19 crisis demands urgent action, it also exposes the imprudence of tying health insurance to employment, and the need for more thoroughgoing reform. A trickle of families facing the dual disaster of job loss and health insurance loss can remain under Washington's radar. However, the current tsunami of job and coverage losses along with a heightened risk for severe illness demands action. A decade ago, Victor Fuchs forecasted that “National health insurance will probably come to the United States after a major change in the political climate—the kind of change that often accompanies a war, a depression, or large-scale civil unrest.” Such a major change may be upon us.”¹⁷

Meanwhile, the coronavirus rages on. Now with more than 100,000 Americans dead, and more than 40 million unemployed officially.¹⁸

4. The Economic Crisis facing the divided USA Ruling Class

This has been dealt with in several analyses including our own.¹⁹ One that especially takes into account the COVID-19 health crisis is that of Michael Roberts.²⁰ We cannot reiterate the many, basically concurring analyses, in depth here. However perhaps it is worth restating what does not get adequate attention, that there is a battle for supremacy inside the USA ruling class.

What is this all about - It cannot be denied. After all, the intense warfare between the Republican party wing of the capitalist class, and the Democratic wing, is pretty unusual. This is a war taking place between those representatives of finance capital primarily, and representatives of old industrial type capital (oil, gas etc). This has a corresponding political war between the main parties. We identified Trump as a representative of the old industrial capitalists.¹⁹ We believed he would try to ‘re-shore’ industrial capital, and prepare a trade war against both the European Union and the Chinese state. So far the effort to bring manufacturing industry back to the USA – so-called ‘re-shoring’ – has

¹⁶ Macinko J, Elo I, 'Black-white differences in avoidable mortality in the USA, 1980-2005.'; J Epidemiol Community Health. 2009 Sep;63(9):715-21.

¹⁷ Woolhandler S, Himmelstein DU. Intersecting U.S. Epidemics: COVID-19 and Lack of Health Insurance. Ann Intern Med. 2020 Apr 7:M20-1491

¹⁸ NYT Katie Glueck, Joe Biden Laces Into Trump for Fanning 'Flames of Hate', <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/02/us/politics/joe-biden-philadelphia-protests.html>

¹⁹ Hari Kumar, 'What is Behind Trump – Is There Method Behind His Madness? Finance Capital and Industrial Capital – An Evolutionary History'; 2019; <http://ml-today.com/2019/08/18/trump-finance-capital/>

²⁰ Michael Roberts, 'A war economy?'; March 30, 2020; The Michael Roberts Blog; at: <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2020/03/>

been not been hugely successful to date.²¹ But a renewed attempt has been launched by Trump, invoking the critical shortage of medical protective equipment.

5. The People's Reaction To Floyd's Murder – Black and White and Brown
Demonstrations began the day after the murder, on Tuesday May 26th. The outpouring of people on the streets of America's cities, was and remains - a deep roar of rage and anguish. This was a largely spontaneously roar. It found expression in chants of 'I Can't Breathe', and the older chant of "Black Lives Matter".

Most recently, a speech by **Tamika Mallory** expressed vividly the "state of the emergency for black People. Black people are dying". Mallory was a previous co-organizer of the 2017 Women's March, and a 'Black Lives matters' advocate. Her views on the widely viewed video referenced here, have resonated deeply – and clearly represent those of the African American people.²²

It is crucial to understand, that while this rage was primarily voiced by the African-American part of the people - it was loudly echoed by non-blacks - including many of white background. Many immigrant organisations have signed solidarity statements.²³ Such solidarity is an expression of recognizing today, the validity of Marx's dictum:

"In the USA, every independent workers movement was paralysed as long as slavery disfigured a part of the republic. Labour in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin."²⁴

Almost all of the marches and demonstrations had one immediate central demand – arrest the 3 other police officers – who had simply and calmly watched - as Chauvin murdered Mr. Floyd. The cry was 'One down, three to go!' On June 3rd they won that demand. But of course the protesters were also saying at a more fundamental level, no more state-sanctioned police killings of African-American people.

6. Working class core content

In the standard press, one issue that Marxists will recognise quickly, is that class is *relatively* minimized. Only latterly has it had any attention, as the eruption of black anger rises. Because the black population are one of the most disadvantaged people in the USA, there is an overlap with class and poverty. Now even the most 'standard of USA media are forced to recognize this to try to understand the protests. For example, just today, there are some compelling graphics carried by CNN.²⁵ We show one of these below.

²¹ Patricia Cohen, "Many Jobs May Vanish Forever as Layoffs Mount With over 38 million U.S. unemployment claims in nine weeks, one economist says the situation is "grimmer than we thought." New York Times; May 21, 2020 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/21/business/economy/coronavirus-unemployment-claims.html?smid=em-share>

²² Tamika Mallory Speech; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V17uvc8-e7g>

²³ Asian Minnesotans Against Racism & Xenophobia Collaborative, 'Open Letter to Community: A call for unity and solidarity in the face of violence'; May 29, 2020; <https://caalmn.org/api4georgefloyd/>

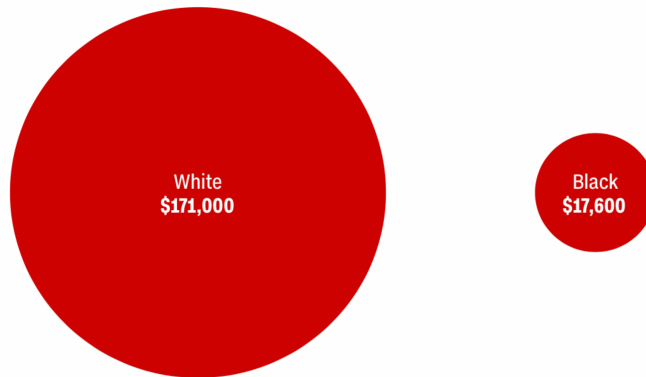
²⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol 1; Pelican edition Tr Ben Fowkes London 1976; p. 414.

²⁵ Tami Luhby, 'US black-white inequality in 6 stark charts'; CNN; at: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/03/politics/black-white-us-financial-inequality/index.html>

We understand that ‘wealth’ as described by the CNN is not the same as a Marxist definition of class. But it bears enough validity for our purposes here. It cannot be forgotten that the fundamental division in USA society is that of class.

White families have substantially more wealth than black families

The median net worth of white households is about 10 times the median net worth of black households.



Note: Figures are for non-Hispanic whites and non-Hispanic blacks

Source: Federal Reserve Survey of Consumer Finances, 2016
Graphic: Curt Merrill, CNN

That is why there has been such a resonance to the manifest injustice here:

“Scrawled across several buildings, alongside “Black Lives Matter,” was another slogan: “Eat the Rich.”...

“The anger being felt is not just the deep injustice of police brutality,” said Saru Jayaraman, who has for years organized for fair wages for tipped workers (<https://onefairwage.com>). Those workers, she said, are now being told that their wages aren’t high enough to qualify for state unemployment insurance — at a time when large corporations are getting millions in aid. Anger boiling over now, she said, is also about “the injustice of the corporate control of our democracy and the 1 percent really benefiting off the fruits of their labor.”²⁶

7. Smearing the demonstrators.

The protestors are mis-characterised in a section of the press, and certainly by the Republican party, as being mainly violent and as looters.

But the vast majority of the protesters and demonstrators are undoubtedly peaceful in their intention. The slanders against the vast majority by most of the media should be viewed with skepticism. The issue of violence was repeatedly used by the USA State to

²⁶ Emily Badger, June 2, 2020, Beverly Hills, Buckhead, SoHo: The New Sites of Urban Unrest’, *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/02/upshot/george-floyd-protest-cities-inequality.html>

smear the demonstrators as a whole. But the issue at heart is the absent of attempt to show justice, resulting in an intense frustration.

Mallory was very eloquent on this. While it is better to actually hear her say this out loud (see the video ¹⁹) as she says it – her isolated stark words are searing enough:

“We cannot look at this as an isolated incident. The reason why buildings are burning, is not just for our brother George Floyd. They are burning down because people here in Minnesota are saying to people in New York, to people in California, people in Memphis, to people all across this nation that “Enough is enough!” We are not responsible for the mental illness that has been inflicted upon our people time and time by the American government, by the institutions and those people who are in positions of power. I don’t give a damn if they burn down ‘Target’. Because ‘Target’ should be on the streets with us, calling for the justice that our people deserve... Young people are frustrated and instigated by the people you pay., You are paying instigators to be among our people out there. To be throwing rocks, and breaking windows, and burning down buildings. And so young people are responding to that. They are enraged. And so there is an easy way to stop it. Arrest the cops. Charge the cops! Charge all the cops. Not just some of them. ... Do your job. .. DO what you say what this country is supposed to be about the land of the free for all. It has not been free for Black people, and we are tired. Charge the cops - all of them. Charge the cops in every city...” ¹⁹

In case anyone is mystified about why the supermarket chain ‘Target’ is singled out,

“But the company has long been associated with police surveillance and Minnesota Police Department’s treatment of black and low-income residents of the city... In 2004, the company made a \$300,000 donation to the city to install CCTV throughout the downtown area. Target also established the “SafeZone” program that same year to help the police department with surveillance logistics. Target has a number of similar law enforcement programs in more than 20 cities in the U.S., though its first police partnership was in Minneapolis, where the retailer’s headquarters are located.” ²⁷

8. Deliberate inflammation and infiltration

As we repeat, the vast majority of protesters were and are peaceful. But the actions of agent-provocateurs should not be minimized. There is concrete evidence for this.

Even the Minnesota Attorney General has questioned the activity of suspected agent-provocateurs. ²⁸ In another example, the video referenced here, shows “A group of young white men beat a non-white protester in Minneapolis as protests raged across the city, disturbing video obtained by *VICE News* shows.” ²⁹ Such incidents are bad enough.

²⁷ Aaron Mak, ‘Target Has A Long History With The Minneapolis Police’; May 29, 2020. ‘Slate’ at <https://slate.com/business/2020/05/targets-long-history-with-minneapolis-police.html>

²⁸ Roman White, ‘Minnesota Attorney General Suggests Auto Zone Starters was ‘Provocateur’; May 29, 2020; *The Source*; <https://thesource.com/2020/05/29/minnesota-attorney-general-suggests-auto-zone-riot-starter-was-provocateur/>

²⁹ Tess Owen, Roberto Daza, and Amel Guettatfi, “3 Young White Guys With a Machete Beat Up a Nonwhite Protester in Minneapolis”, May 31 2020, 7:09pm; https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/qj48qv/3-young-white-guys-with-a-machete-beat-up-a-nonwhite-protester-in-minneapolis

There is now also well-documented evidence of an active infiltration by members of the extreme right. A more systematic background of the infiltrators into the fully legitimate reaction is seen in an investigative report by 'bellingcat'.³⁰ Now admittedly the crazed politics of the far Right are difficult to get a grasp upon. And it seems at first, counter-intuitive that these movements, which are racist at core, would glorify a dead African-American. But in their vehement attacks on 'big government' – even a dead African-American is hailed as a fellow-victim. If this seems doubtful, consider this:

“On the Facebook page, Big Igloo Bois, which at the time of writing had 30,637 followers, an administrator wrote of the protests, “If there was ever a time for bois to stand in solidarity with ALL free men and women in this country, it is now”.

They added, “This is not a race issue. For far too long we have allowed them to murder us in our homes, and in the streets. We need to stand with the people of Minneapolis. We need to support them in this protest against a system that allows police brutality to go unchecked.”

The commentary from 'Bellingcat' – says:

“In a United States made even more unstable by a contentious presidential elections season, and the social and epidemiological effects of COVID-19, every protest or street battle and its aftermath will carry the potential for serious acts of violence. As protests over the death of George Floyd heated up in Minneapolis on May 26th, members of so-called 'Boogaloo' groups across Facebook considered it a call to arms. Memes were churned up that day, adding George to the movement's list of martyrs.”

Nonetheless, the mass of the demonstrators have themselves – policed and resisted – against provocateurs and looters. There are countless reported incidents of this. This makes absolute sense. A veteran of demonstrations in Egypt during the heady days of the Arab Spring, had this as advice to offer to the Floyd marchers:

“The easiest and most futile-feeling, time-consuming, and infuriating to deal with are the troublemakers. They will exist in every protest, even the most well-organized one, because opportunists are fostered by capitalism and indoctrinated from birth to seek their own benefit.”³¹

Of course the biggest 'trouble-maker' is the President of the USA – who actively seeks to incite mayhem. His now notorious tweet: “When the looting starts, the shooting starts,”

³⁰ Robert Evans and Jason Wilson, 'The Boogaloo Movement Is Not What You Think'; May 27, 2020; at <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/05/27/the-boogaloo-movement-is-not-what-you-think/>

³¹ Ahmed Nada, "Some Words of Advice for our Comrades in the Streets"; 31 May 2020; at *Cosmonaut*; <https://cosmonaut.blog/2020/05/31/some-words-of-advice-for-our-comrads-in-the-streets/>

was widely interpreted as an incitement to violence. It originates from a racist Southern policeman in the 1960s during the Civil Rights marches.³²

9. The Militarized Response – Tear gas, Mounted Police National Guard and army mobilization – The Armed State

If ever there remained illusions of how democratic the USA was, especially under Trump - the sight of the armed might of the USA state might dissolve them. Frederick Engels described the state as “a public force of armed men, but also of material appendages, prisons and coercive institutions of all kinds”³³ Trump is showing that to be true. He has already deployed some 20,000 National Guardsmen in at least 29 states. Some state governors (including Minnesota’s Tim Walz) have declined the offer of military police. Trump is threatening to over-rule them and send in troops, using an Act dating from 1878:

“Trump has the authority, however, to deploy the military to states under the Insurrection Act, which would represent a dramatic escalation of Trump’s executive authority and likely spark pushback from state and local officials. While the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 prohibits the domestic use of military for law enforcement purposes without specific congressional authorization, the Insurrection Act gives the president authorization to do so under certain circumstances, according to legal experts. The Insurrection Act has been invoked dozens of times in the country’s history, most recently during the 1992 uprising over the Los Angeles police officers’ beating of Rodney King.”³⁴

Rodney King is another instance of police brutality that younger militants may not know about:

“March 3, 1991 — Rodney King is pulled over by California Highway Patrol officers for speeding on a Los Angeles freeway. King, who later admitted he tried to elude authorities because he had been drinking and was on probation for a robbery conviction, pulled off the freeway and eventually stopped his car in front of a San Fernando Valley apartment building. At that point, Los Angeles police officers took charge of the traffic stop. George Holliday... videotaped the scene, filming four white officers beating and kicking the black motorist dozens of times, including after he was on the ground...Holliday turns over the video to a local TV station.”³⁵

³² Rebecca Shabad, ‘Where does the phrase ‘When the looting starts, the shooting starts’ come from?’, NBC News, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/where-does-phrase-when-looting-starts-shooting-starts-come-n1217676>

³³ Frederick Engels, *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* ‘IX. Barbarism and Civilization’; at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/ch09.htm>

³⁴ Candice Bernd, ‘As Trump Threatens to Send Military Into Cities, Some GIs Refuse to Comply’ *Truthout*; June 3 2020; <https://truthout.org/articles/as-trump-threatens-to-send-military-into-cities-some-gis-refuse-to-comply/>

³⁵The Associated Press: ‘Rodney King riot: Timeline of key events’; April 26, 2017; <https://apnews.com/fa4d04d8281443fc8db0e27d6be52081/Rodney-King-riot:-Timeline-of-key-events>

Despite a graphic and horrifying video made public, the four officers were acquitted by a jury. This sparked huge protests in which Los Angeles saw the deaths of 63, and 2,383 injuries. The Army National Guard, and the US Army, and the US Marine Corps were deployed by Republican President George H W Bush the first.

Already more than just the National Guard have been deployed. To seize a photo-opportunity and '*his domination of the streets*' - Trump and his lackey Attorney General William Barr concocted a plan. They ordered a violent dispersion of protesters opposite the White House by many varieties of federal controlled troops:

“After a weekend of protests that led all the way to his own front yard and forced him to briefly retreat to a bunker beneath the White House, President Trump arrived in the Oval Office on Monday agitated over the television images, annoyed that anyone would think he was hiding and eager for action. He wanted to send the military into American cities, an idea that provoked a heated, voices-raised fight among his advisers. But by the end of the day, urged on by his daughter Ivanka Trump, he came up with a more personal way of demonstrating toughness — he would march across Lafayette Square to a church damaged by fire the night before.... In Washington, Mr. Barr was in charge of the federal response and an alphabet soup of agencies had contributed officers, agents and troops to defend the White House and other federal installations, including the Secret Service, the United States Park Police, National Guard, Capitol Police, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Marshal’s Service, the Bureau of Prisons, Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement.”³⁶

Alongside hitting out at peaceful and law-abiding protesters and demonstrators, an unrestrained attack has been launched on journalists covering the protests.³⁷ Ultimately both national guardsmen and army are composed of alienated working class people. Some of these know their true allegiance and are refusing to deploy:

“Veterans and GI rights organizations told *Truthout* that dozens of GIs are reaching out to assess their options... Some National Guard and active-duty GIs are refusing to deploy to U.S. cities rising up against police-perpetrated killings, saying no to complicity in the repression of the American populace and that they have not been properly trained in riot response or de-escalation tactics on domestic soil.”³⁰

³⁶ Peter Baker, Maggie Haberman, Katie Rogers, Zolan Kanno-Youngs and Katie Benner. Videos by Haley Willis, Christiaan Triebert and David Botti. ‘How Trump’s Idea for a Photo Op Led to Havoc in a Park’; *New York Times*, June 2, 2020; <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/02/us/politics/trump-walk-lafayette-square.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage>

³⁷ Nick Waters, ‘US Law Enforcement Are Deliberately Targeting Journalists During George Floyd Protests’, May 31, 2020; <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/americas/2020/05/31/us-law-enforcement-are-deliberately-targeting-journalists-during-george-floyd-protests/><https://www.bellingcat.com/news/americas/2020/05/31/us-law-enforcement-are-deliberately-targeting-journalists-during-george-floyd-protests/>

10. Reformist solutions have not worked so far – What is left?

Reformism – whether of the Republican or Democratic strands (including Obama) – appears to ignore the root problem, and either criminalises it or offers mere plabum responses:

“Policymakers and officials, from Richard Nixon’s War on Crime to the bipartisan War on Drugs to Donald Trump’s embrace of “Law and Order” politics, have consistently sought to manage the material consequences of socioeconomic problems (e.g., urban decay and drug abuse) with more police, more surveillance, and, eventually, more incarceration. We as a nation still fail to reckon with the wisdom (Martin Luther) King prophetically offered toward the end of his life: that only “social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention. There is no other answer. Constructive social change will bring certain tranquility; evasions will merely encourage turmoil.”³⁸

Regrettably, the voice of Dr. Martin Luther King was not heard. And after all – capitalism will not hear such words, as it would not be capitalism otherwise.... Indeed the more far-sighted capitalists (including Jamie Dimon chief executive of notorious J.P.Morgan firm of financial wheeler-dealers³⁹) recognize there must be changes if the system is to survive. But again : “capitalism would not be..... etc”!

Lenin still speaks to us, un-fashionable though this might sound to some. He said this amongst other things, that we could recognize a revolutionary situation by three criteria:

“What, generally speaking, are the symptoms of a revolutionary situation? We shall certainly not be mistaken if we indicate the following three major symptoms: (1) when it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule without any change; when there is a crisis, in one form or another, among the “upper classes”, a crisis in the policy of the ruling class, leading to a fissure through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes burst forth. For a revolution to take place, it is usually insufficient for “the lower classes not to want” to live in the old way; it is also necessary that “the upper classes should be unable” to live in the old way; (2) when the suffering and want of the oppressed classes have grown more acute than usual; (3) when, as a consequence of the above causes, there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses, who uncomplainingly allow themselves to be robbed in “peace time”, but, in turbulent times, are drawn both by all the circumstances of the crisis *and by the “upper classes” themselves* into independent historical action.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Elizabeth Hinton, ‘The Minneapolis Uprising in Context’; *Boston Review*, May 29, 2020, <http://bostonreview.net/race/elizabeth-hinton-minneapolis-uprising-context>

³⁹ Dominic Rushe, “Covid-19 a ‘wake-up call’ to build fairer society, says billionaire JP Morgan boss”; *The Guardian* May 19, 2020; Covid-19 a ‘wake-up call’ to build fairer society, says billionaire JP Morgan boss | *JP Morgan* | *The Guardian*; May 19, 2020 1:04 PM <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/may/19/jamie-dimon-coronavirus-fairer-society-jp-morgan-ceo>

⁴⁰ V. I. Lenin, ‘The Collapse of the Second International’ *Works*, Moscow 1974, Volume 21, pages 205-259; or at, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/csi/ii.htm>

We are fulfilling much of this check-list now. While Trump huffs and puffs about further trade wars, thus far he has not succeeded:

“Nothing has reversed the decline of the county’s manufacturing base. From January 2017 to December 2018, it lost nearly 9 percent of its manufacturing jobs, and 17 other counties in Michigan that Mr. Trump carried have experienced similar losses,”⁴¹

The crisis of the COVID-19 shortage of Personal Protective Equipment, was the dramatic back-drop of a further push by Trump on this matter:

“President Trump rattled Wall Street when he demanded U.S. firms move production out of China. But many have already taken steps to do so, and, in earnings calls just over the past month, dozens of executives have signaled plans to further diversify their supply chains amid the intensifying trade war. On Aug. 23, Trump took to Twitter, ordering American companies to “immediately start looking for an alternative to China” and build more products in the U.S. In doing so, he cited the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) — passed in 1977 to deal with an “unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, or economy of the United States.” The president’s threat unsettled investors, sending stocks to session lows on a day when the Dow Jones Industrial Average shed more than 600 points.”⁴²

“The Trump administration is “turbocharging” an initiative to remove global industrial supply chains from China... The US Commerce Department, State and other agencies are looking for ways to push companies to move both sourcing and manufacturing out of China. Tax incentives and potential re-shoring subsidies are among measures being considered to spur changes, the current and former officials told Reuters.... “There is a whole government push on this,” said one. Agencies are probing which manufacturing should be deemed “essential” and how to produce these goods outside of China.”⁴³

Capitalism is unable to solve its problems. It lurches from one crisis to the other. The objective factors of at least a pre-revolutionary situation are manifest. But the subjective factor – a revolutionary party – is absent in the USA.

Conclusions:

Capitalism in America is confronted not only by its own internal problems that it cannot solve. It is also confronted by at least two major rival imperialists powers. One is that of China – its main threat. But the European Union, if it can sort out its own internal

⁴¹ Michael Tackett, Trump Promised a Manufacturing Renaissance. What Happens in 2020 in Places That Lost Those Jobs? *New York Times*, June 24, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/24/us/politics/trump-manufacturing-jobs-2020.html>

⁴² J.R.Reed, ‘President Trump ordered US firms to ditch China, but many already have and more are on the way’; Sep 4 2019; CNBC News; <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/09/01/trump-ordered-us-firms-to-ditch-china-but-many-already-have.html>

⁴³ Trump administration pushing to rip global supply chains from China: Officials; **MSN**, PRESS TV; 5/4/2020; Trump administration pushing to rip global supply chains from China: Officials PRESS TV 5/4/2020

problem, is another. There is little doubt that Trump is itching to install a military style clamp down. The indications are that there is enough of a crisis that sections of the US capitalist class would support him. The problem facing the working class and its supporters is that there is no viable organised Marxist-Leninist party to fight for a socialist path. Decidedly, Biden and the Democratic Party is not that. While it is obviously preferable to the Trump option, it is far short of what is needed. What is needed is a determined party both in theory and practice. There are starts – as in the *Red Phoenix*⁴⁴ - but there needs to be far more to consolidate the start.

⁴⁴ <https://theredphoenixapl.org>