

Arkansas Legal Lynching Machine

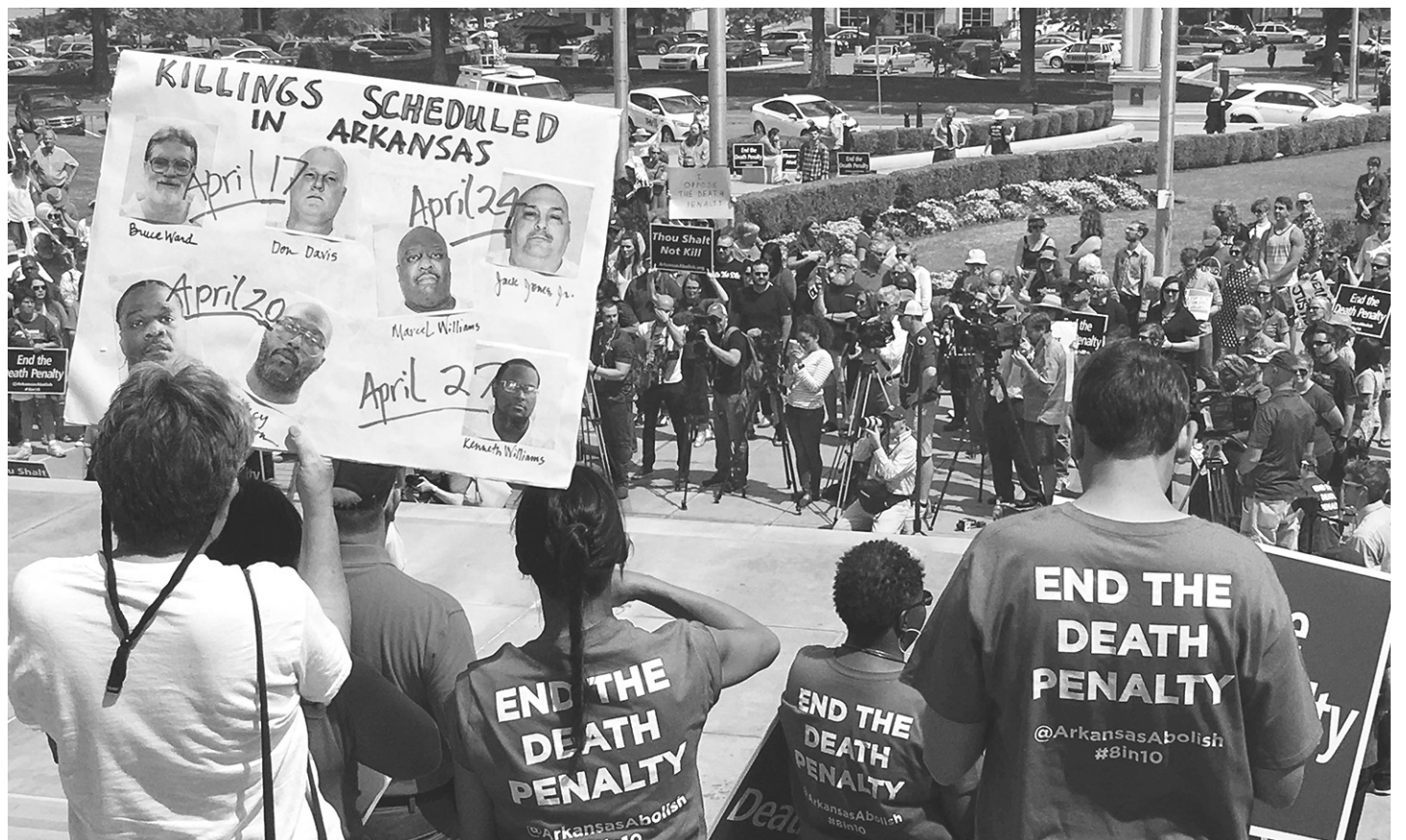
Abolish the Racist U.S. Death Penalty!

In just eight days—from April 20 to 27—the state of Arkansas executed three black men, Ledell Lee, Marcel Williams and Kenneth Williams, and one white man, Jack Jones. Governor Asa Hutchinson had originally ordered eight men to die in the span of eleven days, which would have set a record pace since the Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976. The four men who received stays of execution remain on death row. The pretext for the executions was to beat the clock on the April 30 expiration of midazolam, a component of the lethal injection cocktail for which no alternative is readily available. The real point, however, was to kick-start the machinery of death in a state that had last held an execution in 2005.

The assembly line of death in Arkansas has thrown a spotlight on the depravity of capital punishment—and the racist U.S. ruling class that wields it. Witnesses to Kenneth Williams's execution reported that after injection he lurched forward as many as 20 times; he was observed convulsing, jerking and making sounds that were audible in an adjacent room. The scene recalled the 2014 Oklahoma execution of Clayton Lockett, who writhed in agony for over 40 minutes before succumbing.

Ledell Lee's 1993 conviction for the murder of a white woman had all the hallmarks of a racist frame-up. From a crime scene covered in blood, the only physical evidence linking Lee to the murder was the phony "forensic" identification of three hairs that supposedly came from a black man. The trial judge and the assistant prosecutor were sleeping together. Lee's court-appointed trial attorney presented no alibi, and the attorney at his post-conviction hearing was so drunk, he was taken away for drug testing. From death row Lee told a BBC journalist: "My dying words will always be as it has been 'I am an innocent man'." The Innocence Project and the ACLU fought to get DNA testing of the crime scene's physical evidence. The state refused. Ledell Lee is no more.

Joining an April 14 protest outside the Arkansas Capitol was Damien Echols of the West Memphis Three, who served his own time on Arkansas's death row. Targeted in a "satanic abuse" witchhunt, Echols and his friends were falsely convicted for the 1993 murder of three eight-year-old boys. Echols won his release in 2011 following a huge campaign in his defense, including DNA evidence that confirmed his innocence. On the day of Lee's execution Echols pointed out: "Local pol-



April 14: Demonstrators outside the State Capitol in Little Rock, Arkansas, protest governor's execution drive.

iticians maintain they have never made a mistake, that the system is infallible, and that they have never sentenced an innocent man to die. I know this is false, because for 18 years I sat on Arkansas' death row and waited on the state to murder me for something I didn't do."

As Marxists, we oppose the death penalty on principle—for the guilty as well as the innocent. We do not accord the state the right to determine who lives and who dies. A barbaric legacy of medieval torture, its longevity in the United States is rooted in the origins of American capitalism, which was built on the hideously brutalized labor of black slaves. More than 40 percent of those on death row are black (and another 13 percent Latino). As opposed to the liberals, we do not seek to advise the bourgeoisie on the more "humane" administration of its decrepit rule. Whether it is the death penalty, life in prison without parole or imprisonment in general, we oppose the entire machinery of violence that is the capitalist state.

Nearly 250,000 signed a petition urging Arkansas governor Hutchinson to stay Kenneth Williams's execution. Though a majority of the public still favor the death penalty, support has diminished significantly over the past two decades—a product of the growing number of exonerations of innocent men and women, often the result of DNA testing of evidence. Finding jurors more reluctant to impose capital punishment and frustrated at what they view as the slow pace of executions, prosecutors,

lawmakers and judges have calculated life without parole to be cheaper than the millions of dollars consumed by capital prosecutions and years of appeals. Today, the Trump administration, as part of a broader enhancement of the repressive powers of the state, is seeking to reverse this trend.

Donald Trump rode to the presidency on a "law and order" platform targeting black people and immigrants. An ardent proponent of the death penalty, Trump has called for the execution of "pedophiles." His openly racist attorney general, Jefferson Sessions, has called for lifting formal restraints on the cops, re-igniting the "war on drugs," which promises to throw more black and Latino youth into America's dungeons, and ordered federal prosecutors to seek the maximum sentences for those facing trial.

The first act of Trump's nominee to the Supreme Court, Neil Gorsuch, was to cast the decisive vote against a stay of execution for the men facing execution in Arkansas. Meanwhile, a Republican state senator in Arkansas is calling for the impeachment of a black judge, Wendell Griffen, who issued a temporary restraining order to block the April executions and then took part in an anti-death-penalty vigil outside the governor's mansion on Good Friday. Similarly in Florida, Governor Rick Scott promptly removed all death penalty cases from Aramis Ayala, a black female state's attorney for the Orlando area, who announced on March 16 that she would not seek the death penalty, including for

a man accused of killing a policewoman. After announcing her opposition to the death penalty, Ayala received a noose in the mail.

For its part, the capitalist Democratic Party is no less committed to the death penalty than the brazenly racist Republicans. Under the Obama administration, the number of federal prisoners on death row increased, while the cops wantonly carried out summary executions of black people on the streets.

In Arkansas itself, there were no executions between 1976, when the Supreme Court reinstated capital punishment, and 1990, when legal lynching was reintroduced to the state by William Jefferson Clinton. Since then, 30 men and one woman have been executed in the state. During his run for president in 1992, Clinton left the campaign trail to personally preside over the execution of Ricky Ray Rector, a black man so brain-damaged from a gunshot to the head that he wanted to save the pecan pie from his last meal for later. Clinton's "dog whistle" to racist white voters propelled him into the White House, where he ended "welfare as we know it" and presided over the gutting of affirmative action in education and the mass incarceration of black and Latino youth. As president, he accelerated the racist death penalty with his 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, which gutted *habeas corpus* appeals for death row inmates—a model

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RCP on FBI: “Communists” for Comey

What do Bob Avakian’s Maoist Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and James Clapper, the former Director of National Intelligence, have in common? They’re both up in arms over Trump’s sacking of James Comey. The RCP has gone so far as to *mobilize* rallies, through its “Refuse Fascism” front group, to “protest the firing” of the director of the FBI, declaring it an “ominous” attack on America’s “norms.” That’s right, the FBI of J. Edgar Hoover’s anti-Communist lists and infiltration of anti-Vietnam War activists and leftists, *including the RCP itself*.

The RCP’s stand should arouse nothing but revulsion from black activists drawn to its protests against racist cop terror: While the cops gun down black men and women indiscriminately, the FBI under its COINTELPRO operations carried out targeted assassinations of black militants, including 38 Black Panthers, and framed up countless others. The FBI was instrumental in the bombing of the predominantly black MOVE commune in Philadelphia in



RCP’s contribution to Democratic Party “resistance”: May 11 rally in Oakland, California, protests firing of J. Edgar Hoover’s heir.

1985. Today, and not least under Comey, it conducts surveillance and entrapment campaigns against Muslims, “Black Lives Matter” activists and leftists. The FBI was and is a murderous tool of the ruling class

against all perceived enemies of racist American capitalism.

What could the RCP be thinking? You can be sure it has to do with the Democratic Party. Having reviled Comey for

months for undermining Hillary Clinton, the Democrats are now embracing him as a freedom fighter. After all, he was investigating supposed collusion between the Trump campaign and Putin’s Russia. As Jeffrey St. Clair put it in a scathing commentary (counterpunch.org, 12 May), the liberals “have adopted Comey as a martyr in their Russian witch hunt and have started praising the FBI—an agency literally engineered to prosecute (if not invent) the Red Scare—as a ‘beacon of integrity and independence.’” One-upping their bourgeois allies in the Democratic Party “resistance,” the RCP argues that the Trump regime is illegitimate “not mainly [!] because of potential ties to Russia,” but also because it’s “fascist.”

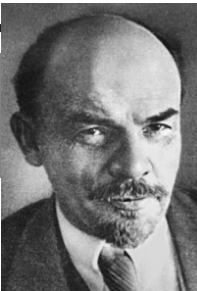
In its May 9 rally leaflet, the RCP’s “Refuse Fascism” calls to “DRIVE OUT THE TRUMP PENCE REGIME!!!” As to the *other* major bourgeois party, the Democrats, mum’s the word. This is hardly new. During the Bush Jr. years, *continued on page 7*



TROTSKY



Lenin’s Struggle for a Revolutionary Government



LENIN

The 1917 February Revolution in Russia overthrew the autocratic rule of Tsar Nicholas II amid the interimperialist First World War. However, the Provisional Government that emerged afterward was capitalist and continued to prosecute the war. Against the petty-bourgeois Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks, whose representatives (such as Victor Chernov and Irakli Tsereteli) joined the Provisional Government, the Bolshevik Party led by V. I. Lenin fought for proletarian revolution to sweep away capitalist rule.

When people speak about “revolution,” “the revolutionary people,” “revolutionary democracy,” and so on, *nine times out of ten* this is a lie or self-deception. The question is—*what class* is making this revolution? A revolution *against whom*?

Against tsarism? In that sense most of Russia’s landowners and capitalists today are revolutionaries. When the revolution is an accomplished fact, even reactionaries come into line with it. There is no deception of the masses at present more frequent, more detestable, and more harmful than that which lauds the revolution against tsarism.

Against the landowners? In this sense most of the peasants, even most of the well-to-do peasants, that is, probably nine-tenths of the population in Russia, are revolutionaries. Very likely, some of the capitalists, too, are prepared to become revolutionaries on the grounds that the landowners cannot be saved anyway, so let us better side with the revolution and try to make things safe for capitalism.

Against the capitalists? Now that is the real issue. That is the crux of the matter, because without a revolution against the capitalists, all that prattle about “peace without annexations” and the speedy termination of the war by such a peace is either naïveté and ignorance, or stupidity and deception....

The conclusion is obvious: only assumption of power by the proletariat, backed by the semi-proletarians, can give the country a really strong and really revolutionary government. It will be really strong because it will be supported by a solid and class-conscious majority of the people. It will be strong because it will not, of necessity, have to be based on a precarious “agreement” between capitalists and small proprietors, between millionaires and petty bourgeoisie, between the Konovalovs-Shingaryovs and the Chernovs-Tseretelis.

It will be a truly revolutionary government, the only one capable of showing the people that at a time when untold suffering is inflicted upon the masses it will not be awed and deterred by capitalist profits. It will be a truly revolutionary government because it alone will be capable of evoking and sustaining the revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses and increasing it tenfold.

—V. I. Lenin, “A Strong Revolutionary Government” (May 1917)

Letter

An Appreciation of Chuck Berry

23 April 2017

To Workers Vanguard,

Chuck Berry (1926-2017) was very nearly the last of the black pioneers of rock’n roll from the 1940s and 50s including Little Richard, Ike Turner, Howlin Wolf and more, who lived, performed and innovated from the time of Jim Crow segregation and lynch law until well into the 21st Century. Chuck’s parents and grandparents on both sides knew their slave-born ancestors and passed on to him their names, relationships and stories.

Like others before him, Chuck bucked his Baptist parents’ opposition to play “the devil’s music”. Consigned to the category of “race music”, he and his fellow rockers were exploited by promoters and recording companies, cheated of the rights to their songs, and later saw their songs covered with far greater commercial success by admiring white American performers and British invaders (Roll Over Beethoven, Sweet Little Sixteen). John Lennon was quoted as saying, “If you tried to give rock and roll another name, you might call it ‘Chuck Berry.’”

Unable to make a living from their recordings, these musicians toured at an exhausting pace, staying in segregated accommodations and playing to segregated audiences. Where there were no hotels for blacks, they slept in their cars and ducked the police. They were virulently hated by politicians and law enforcement when white kids, especially white girls, began to literally dance across the color line, touching the explosive intersection of sex and race under capitalism. From Billie Holiday to Ray Charles, black musicians were targeted for beatings, confiscation of earnings, arrest and imprisonment, typically for sex, drugs and taxes. Chuck was hounded under the Mann Act, once for travelling with a married 17-year old and once with a teen prostitute. He was imprisoned for tax evasion (i.e., failure to set aside money to pay outrageously regressive self-employment taxes).

Chuck built on previous musical advances, including those of Johnny Johnson, T-Bone Walker and Bob Wills, melding blues and country swing with his own style. He was a vivid story teller of the poor man’s experience (Nadine, No Money Down, Memphis Tennessee). He combined his slyly provocative lyrics, signature duck walk and a hard-driving



Alamy

rhythm, “the backbeat, you can’t lose it”. He made the crossover to biracial and teenage audiences, shedding his exploitive managers, signing with Chess Records, and getting a grip on the rights to his songs.

Chuck was prominent among the musicians who boldly broke the color line in performance venues. He was unapologetic, and an icon for the 1960s generation who rebelled against the strictures of family and religion, imperialist war and racial oppression. The Freedom Riders, those who sat in at lunch counters, those who marched against the Vietnam War grew up on his music, knew his songs and his story. The life and hard times of Chuck Berry exemplified the fact that there is no original American music or culture without black music and culture. Beating all odds, Chuck Berry died in bed at his home at the age of 90.

Ruth Ryan

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L.A. Upheaval...

(continued from page 8)

black mayor, the former cop Tom Bradley, just as it made no difference that Obama was the overseer of the plantation of racist American capitalism for eight years. The widespread, interracial outrage over the King verdict demonstrated the possibility of breaking down the divisions that the capitalist rulers wield to further the devastation of lives of the working class and poor. To bring down this racist capitalist system requires the leadership of a multi-racial workers party in which black workers, as the most combative element in the U.S. working class, will play a leading role. The article below originally appeared as a 4 May 1992 WV supplement and is reprinted here from *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 9 (August 1992).

* * *

MAY 3—Even as the first flames leapt into the sky over Los Angeles, accumulated seething anger erupted in cities across the country as word of the racist verdict spread. As L.A. burned, turmoil spread coast to coast. While paramilitary cops, National Guard and U.S. troops occupied South Central L.A., a state of emergency was clamped on San Francisco and Atlanta, the National Guard was called in to Las Vegas, and curfews were imposed in half a dozen cities from Berkeley to Atlanta. In every city which erupted in indignation over this verdict, bitter memories were stirred of the many other victims of rampaging cop terror. The searing image of a lynch mob in blue uniforms sadistically, methodically, repetitively torturing a black man lying helpless on the ground became the symbol of racist police brutality in America. Now the verdict broadcast to the world what black people already know well: there is no justice in the racist capitalist courts. “They’ve been killing us, stomping us, slapping us for years,” bitterly remarked a street gang member in L.A. “And when we get ‘em on tape, they get found not guilty in a system that doesn’t count for us,” added another. “This says it’s open season on black people,” said Jody Earl, a black Angeleno, 33. Ron Boyle, 40, added, “The justice system doesn’t work in America” (*San Francisco Examiner*, 1 May). This conspicuously interracial outburst against the oppressive cops and courts spread so dramatically because of years of grinding poverty and social conditions oppressing Latinos and many whites as well as blacks. Polls show an overwhelming majority of the population disagreed with the verdict absolving the cops who beat Rodney King. One reported that even 47 percent of whites think the rioting is “understandable.” The racist media, while playing over and over pictures of the vicious beating of a white truck driver, hesitated in vilifying the desperate crowds that took to the streets. They whine that “there are better ways” to protest, but it’s obvious that the wave of unrest has at least



George Holliday

Left: Infamous footage of racist cop beating of Rodney King. Right: Spartacists at 9 March 1991 L.A. demo protesting the assault.



WV Photo

focused world attention on the grievances of black America. As demonstrators from Berlin to New Delhi solidarized with the explosion of rage in Los Angeles, and racist rulers from Japan to South Africa scoffed at Washington’s pretensions to world “leadership,” Bush & Co. worry that their “New World Order” could go up in smoke. *America’s rulers know they are guilty, and they’re nervous as hell—as well they should be.* The malicious California governor Pete Wilson—who wants to starve welfare mothers and just ordered the first execution in the state in 25 years—called out the National Guard, at the behest of



AP

LAPD chief Daryl Gates and Mayor Tom Bradley hold press conference as city erupts in rage, 30 April 1992.

black Democratic mayor Bradley. And the haughty imperial president George [H.W.] Bush got on TV with a “get tough” speech announcing that U.S. troops were being deployed. Armored personnel carriers rolled into South Central. It was the Seventh Infantry from Fort Ord, which carried out the invasion of Panama, Marines from the Gulf War, SWAT kill squads made up of FBI, federal marshals and Border Patrol. Now this army of occupation of 30,000 heavily armed troops aims its bayonets at blacks, Latinos and Asians at home. In the face of the police-state occupation of black and Latino L.A. it is necessary to mobilize the power of the integrated union movement. Hours after the cops moved in, the Partisan Defense Committee issued a leaflet demanding that the major unions including longshore, aerospace and city workers must organize work stoppages and mass mobilizations to solidarize with and defend the ghettos and barrios now literally under the gun. We demand: *Cops, troops out of the ghettos and barrios!* After three days in L.A., the death toll exceeded that of the 1965 Watts riots and even that of Detroit in 1967: it currently stands at 49 dead, of whom at least 17 are black, 15 are Hispanic, 8 white, and 2 Asian. The police and press are covering up the numbers of victims of the cops. As CNN reporter Charles Zewe reported from the scene, of the dead “most of those who died were black, most of those who died were shot in confrontations with police.” There were 1,765 reported injuries and 6,345 arrests.

L.A. is “seething with a kind of rage I’ve never seen,” said Zewe. A 52-year-old black man remarked, “Martin Luther King was a waste. His methods have changed nothing.” Black people are being pushed beyond the limit, terrorized by cops and courts, driven out of the industrial workforce, denied decent education and housing. U.S. capitalism has no use for a whole generation of black ghetto youth who were once kept on the bench as a “reserve army of labor.” Now all that awaits them is death—slow death from epidemics of disease, malnutrition and drugs, or fast, in the gas chamber or gunned down on the streets. On points, the U.S. is now worse than South Africa, where they just sentenced a white cop to hang for ordering a 1988 massacre of eleven black people, but the death penalty has been suspended there. The rage of the inner city intersects widespread frustration and disgust extending throughout the population. Particularly in this election year, it is self-evident that both capitalist parties are bankrupt. Meanwhile, the abject betrayal by the UAW tops of even the mainly white, middle-aged Midwest Caterpillar strikers has driven home the need to sweep out the racist, bought-and-paid-for AFL-CIO bureaucracy. The Rodney King verdict has illuminated the whole *system* of American capitalism, built on a bedrock of racist oppression. It cannot be reformed, it must be smashed. The question is how. The situation cries out for revolutionary leadership, to organize the social power of labor and unite behind it all the oppressed in a struggle for state power that gets rid of the whole rotten racist capitalist system and opens the road for genuine emancipation for all.

King Verdict Lit the Match

Day after day, black L.A. watched on TV the “trial” of four of the more than a dozen racist cops involved in beating Rodney King. Once the case had been moved out of L.A. to lily-white Simi Valley, a bedroom suburb for cops and home of the “Ronald Reagan Memorial Library,” it was all over. In Simi Valley they love L.A. police chief Daryl Gates,

the Sultan of SWAT, who earned his spurs as an LAPD commander in Watts in ‘65 and defended his killer cops by “explaining” that blacks just die more often than “normal people” from the choke hold. For anyone trying to get a conviction of the cops (which the prosecution wasn’t), this was “the jury from hell,” as one commentator put it. As his aunt, Angela King, said on TV: “Rodney King is out there on that ground begging for his life, and I’m sure those jurors saw that videotape 1,000 times and felt no remorse.” In contrast to Simi Valley, South Central is 95 percent non-white, equally black and Latino, “a flat plain of poverty and high unemployment” (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 May). A decade ago, ten of the twelve largest non-aerospace factories in the area were shut down, decimating the unionized black workforce. Between 1973 and 1986, the average yearly income of black high school graduates in Los Angeles declined by 44 percent, while Latino earnings fell 35 percent. This is the tinderbox in which the racist verdict in the “Rodney King trial” lit the match. One effect of the rioting was to bring together the warring black and Latino street gangs against the cops. Graffiti on one wall read, “Crips Bloods Mexicans together forever tonite 4/30/92.” The ghetto explosion exacerbated tensions between black residents and Korean merchants (as well as the community of Koreatown just north of South Central). When Jewish shopowners left after the ‘65 Watts riots, the Koreans moved in—and became a lightning rod for plebeian resentments. This was crystallized by the killing of black teenager Latasha Harlins last March, shot in the back of the head by a Korean store owner. Now, caught in a vise, Korean merchants responded to the looting with murderous gunfire, while thousands of Koreans then marched with desperate appeals for “peace and justice.” The racist hostility against Koreans, whipped up by black nationalist demagogues and aspiring black businessmen who want to exploit “their” market, is a poisonous diversion from the real enemy of the black masses.

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4

WORKERS VANGUARD

Death Penalty...

(continued from page 1)

for state laws across the country intended to streamline the road from courthouse to death house.

A Legacy of Slavery

The death penalty stands at the pinnacle of the state’s arsenal of repression—an apparatus consisting of the army, cops, courts and prisons that protects the class rule, property and profits of the capitalist class. While the face of death row is now primarily black and Latino, fighters for labor’s cause have also been targeted for death by the capitalist state: the Haymarket anarchists, labor organizers who fought for the eight-hour day and were put to death in 1877; IWW organizer Joe Hill, executed in 1915; anarchist workers Sacco and Vanzetti, who died in the electric chair in 1927.

While nearly every other advanced industrialized capitalist country has abolished capital punishment (with the notable exception of Japan), its persistence in the U.S. is a legacy of black chattel slavery and the continued oppression of black people. The 20 executions carried out last year, and the ten thus far this year, took place in just seven states. All of them were in the South and most in the former Confederacy, where slaves could be

killed with impunity for “crimes” ranging from insolence toward whites to rebellion against the slave masters.

It took a bloody Civil War to smash slavery. But the promise of black freedom was betrayed when the Northern capitalists ended the period of Radical Reconstruction by withdrawing federal troops, leaving black people impoverished and largely defenseless. With the Ku Klux Klan and other race-terrorist outfits as the spearhead, the white propertied classes subjected black people to legally enforced racial segregation, stripped them of all democratic rights and held them down through terror, especially lynching. The black population was consolidated anew—and remains to this day—as a specially oppressed race-color caste.

Capital punishment in America is a direct descendant of and replacement for the lynch rope. In the 1890s, black people were lynched at a rate of one every other day; in the 1930s, executions took place at the rate of one every other day. A 2015 study by the Alabama-based Equal Justice Initiative noted, “By 1915, court-ordered executions outpaced lynchings in the former slave states for the first time.” In the period between 1910 and 1950, black people made up 75 percent of those executed across the country.

In 1967, amid the mass struggles of the civil rights movement, a de facto moratorium on capital punishment was temporar-

ily imposed. In 1972 the Supreme Court declared the death penalty unconstitutional as practiced and ordered states to rewrite their laws. A mere four years later, the Court gave the green light for the killing machines to resume their grisly work. Eighty-one percent of the 1,452 executions in the last 40 years have been in the South.

The racist application of the death penalty was sanctified by the U.S. Supreme Court in the 1987 case of Warren McCleskey, a black prisoner executed in Georgia in 1991. McCleskey’s attorneys presented an authoritative study detailing that black people in Georgia convicted of killing whites were sentenced to death *22 times* more frequently than those convicted of killing blacks. In rejecting McCleskey’s appeal, the Supreme Court explicitly acknowledged that to accept this premise would throw “into serious question the principles that underlie our entire criminal justice system.” In its callous pronouncement, the Court expressed a basic truth: McCleskey was a victim of the racism that pervades the criminal justice system and the entire American capitalist order.

For a Multiracial Revolutionary Workers Party!

Little expresses the cruelty of capital punishment better in the U.S. than the legislative and judicial contortions to give state murder a humane gloss. The adop-

tion of lethal injection, beginning in the early 1980s, was promoted as a supposedly more humane way of killing prisoners than electrocution. In fact, lethal injection was implemented by Nazi Germany as part of its Aktion T4 “euthanasia” program to dispose of *lebensunwertes Leben* (“life unworthy of life”).

In 2007, the Supreme Court prohibited the execution of a psychotic person unless the prisoner was lucid enough to have a “rational understanding” of the punishment he was about to receive. This is what the courts refer to as “evolving standards of decency.” When capital punishment was reintroduced in the U.S. amid anti-crime hysteria, we noted in “Abolish the Death Penalty!” (WV No. 117, 9 July 1976): “The Marxist attitude toward crime and punishment is that we are against it.... Socialists do not proceed from the standpoint of punishing the offender. Such a vindictive penal attitude is fundamentally a religious rather than a materialist conception of social relations.” Indeed, a humane and rational society may find a need to isolate certain dangerous individuals. This would be done without stigma or cruelty, and with education, medical care, rehabilitation and the goal of reintegration as a productive member of society. This was the approach of the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky that led the October 1917 Russian socialist revolution.

As Marxists, we fight for the abolition of the death penalty. But we also understand that ending capital punishment will not fundamentally change the violently racist and oppressive nature of capitalist class rule. Our aim is to complete the unfinished tasks of the Civil War by fighting for black liberation through socialist revolution. What is necessary is the forging of a class-struggle workers party with a significant black leadership component. Such a party will be built in opposition to both parties of capital and will be dedicated to mobilizing the social power of labor in defense of the interests of all working people and the oppressed. When those who labor rule, the entire apparatus of capitalist state repression will be smashed as part of sweeping away this barbaric system and opening the door to an egalitarian socialist future. ■



ZUMA (left); Keith/Log Cabin Democrat
Bill Clinton signing Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act in 1996 (left), four years after personally overseeing execution of Ricky Ray Rector (above), a brain-damaged black death row inmate.

Most West Coast Asians are among the most miserably exploited people around.

While the bourgeoisie fumed about the “criminality” of looters trucking away goods from broken store windows, by all indications this was a thoroughly integrated affair of downtrodden and impoverished people. This is indeed understandable, but won’t do anything to eliminate the entrenched poverty of America’s inner cities. As we wrote at the time of the 1960s ghetto explosions:

“For the last three summers ghettos across the country have been rocked by elemental, spontaneous, non-political upheavals against the prevailing property relations and against the forces of the state which protect these relations. In no case have they been genuine race riots. The risings have usually been provoked by the police, in the course of ‘normal’ brutalities (Watts 1965) or in an effort to crush a movement which is exceeding the bounds set for it by bourgeois society (Harlem 1964). As the struggle against the police expands, the black street-fighters turn on the merchants and shopkeepers, the visible representatives of the oppressive class society, and smash whatever cannot be carried off. Yet despite the vast energies expended and the casualties suffered, these outbreaks have changed nothing. This is a reflection of the urgent need for organizations of real struggle, which can organize and direct these energies toward conscious political objectives. It is the duty of a revolutionary organization to intervene where possible to give these outbursts political direction.”

—“Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom,”
Spartacist Supplement,
May-June 1967

The point is not to seize articles of consumption but to expropriate the means of production. And that takes a leap in consciousness and organization to do away with the capitalist order.

Riots are an expression of despair, often including ugly incidents of indiscriminate

attacks on individuals who happen to find themselves at the wrong place. In the ’60s, ghetto uprisings were the product of the failure of the civil rights movement to make a dent in the racist conditions in the urban centers of the North. To do so meant going up directly against the Democratic Party—to which the liberal preachers like Martin Luther King Jr. were beholden—and attacking the capitalist economic underpinnings of black superexploitation and discrimination. While avowed revolutionary nationalists like the Black Panther Party were active in the ghettos at that time, today what is most striking is the utter vacuum of black leadership.

There’s a sense among many blacks that they won’t get anything until they burn the place down. But as many have pointed out, after the ’67 riots that devastated black Detroit, it was never built up again. But the deeper truth is that Detroit turned into a ghost town because the auto bosses looted the industry and closed down plant after plant. It’s *the capitalists* who have destroyed the wealth of this country built up by the sweat of the workers. It’s not who’s in the White House but the inexorable workings of an irrational system.

For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

A program for black emancipation must start with the knowledge that the whole system of racist capitalist oppression has got to be brought down. In the ’60s this was taken as a given by militant radical leaders, like Malcolm X and the Panthers, but many were gunned down by the FBI’s murderous COINTELPRO or thrown behind bars, while more opportunist elements joined the Democratic Party. But even the best of these militant fighters failed to understand that the only social force that could eliminate this racist sys-

tem is the integrated working class.

To change the consciousness of frustrated black youth, in the first instance what is required is a powerful struggle for *jobs*. This is not a matter of going hat in hand to lobby (beg) Congress, but of mobilizing the organized labor movement in militant struggle for a shorter workweek at no loss in pay, for union hiring halls with union-run job training and skills upgrading programs to enroll minority youth. In sweatshop havens like L.A., organizing the unorganized can greatly reduce the rampant poverty.

The power of labor, breaking with the tame trade-union bureaucrats, must be brought to bear in the fight for black emancipation, acting as a champion of all the oppressed. For mass organized labor/black defense against racist terror—gun control kills blacks! And the working people must be mobilized politically to defend their class interests. As Spartacist League spokesman Don Alexander said at a May 2 Bay Area

SL educational conference, “From black Democratic Party mayor Tom Bradley to Jesse Jackson and Bill Clinton and Willie Brown and Ron Dellums, the capitalist ruling class and their political representatives are united in defense of white racist ‘law and order’ and in suppressing with cops and troops the burning rage of the masses.” “Workers revolution...that’s when we’ll get *our* justice!”

This generation has grown up without seeing mass social struggle, so many don’t see where the power will come from to accomplish this. There *is* a basis for multiracial unity in this country, but it can never be on the basis of “reforming” a status quo which forcibly keeps one race on the bottom. Not empty appeals for “brotherhood” but the fight to smash capitalist exploitation and oppression can bring the working people of all races together. The key factor in that struggle is the building of a multiracial workers party on a revolutionary program. ■

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(continued from page 3)

No Faith in Catalan Bourgeoisie!

Rajoy's government recently announced that it would prefer to *seal off* the public schools in Catalonia rather than permit their use as polling places in the event the Generalitat tries to hold the referendum. This was followed by an ominous threat to use the Spanish constitution to revoke what remains of the Generalitat's autonomy powers.

[illegible]

But, in fear of the insurgent proletariat, the significant section of the Catalan bourgeoisie that prefers national independence would throw themselves unhesitatingly into the arms of their Madrid counterparts. Ultimately, the capitalist rulers of both the great-power and minority nations will unite in defense of their class privi-



AFP
Joint French-Spanish “anti-terrorist” operation targets Basque-nationalist
ETA in France, near Spanish border, December 2016.

We call on all opponents of national oppression to defend the pro-Catalan independence CUP (Popular Unity Candidacy) against repression from the Spanish state. A number of the 16 CUP mayors and 372 CUP city council members who hold office in Catalan municipalities face trial for flying the *estelada* from town halls and for opening city offices on official Spanish state holidays. Five CUP members have been accused of the medieval-era crime of “insulting the king” for burning photos of Spain’s King Felipe VI during last year’s *Diada*! Since then, the CUP has been targeted by a PP criminalization campaign intended to drive away its supporters.

Laws against insulting the monarchy only serve to strengthen Spain's repressive bourgeois state apparatus, aimed first and foremost against the proletariat. Draconian "anti-terrorism" laws have been harshly and relentlessly used against pro-independence Basques. Herri Batasuna's founding leader was brutally assassinated in 1984 by a GAL (Antiterrorist Liberation Groups) death squad formed under the direction of the post-Franco Spanish government of the PSOE's Felipe Gonzalez.

porters], stating that it is indeed a crime to burn photos of the Madrid monarch! Drop all charges against the CUP nationalists! Madrid: hands off the CUP!

Following the 2008 worldwide Great Recession, the European Union has imposed economic austerity on Spain in return for loans. As a result, youth unemployment in Catalonia today is a whopping 32 percent, the number of those unemployed for more than two years has alarmingly increased, and 11 percent of employed Catalan workers fall below Spain's poverty line. Nevertheless, in the face of Madrid's threats, Puigdemont as well as Màs—who, in fact, administered the EU's austerity measures in Catalonia—go begging for support at the feet of their capitalist class cohorts in the EU. Following his March conviction, Màs declared, "We will appeal in Spain and then take the case to European courts, if we need to." In mid January, Puigdemont (who rules in coalition with the bourgeois-nationalist Republican Left Party) delivered an appeal for EU support for a Catalan independence referendum at a forum held in the EU parliament building in Brussels. The hall was overflowing with...hundreds of Catalan invitees, and was snubbed by EU officials.

Spanish dock workers pointed the way forward when they struck an initial blow against the EU and Rajoy in March. The

The battle is not over. The EU's aim is to eliminate union labor from the ports and slash wages, and the punitive fines against Spain are accumulating to enforce this diktat. The port workers' struggle underlines the nature of the EU as an imperialist cartel bent on imposing ever-greater exploitation on the European working class. Union dockers in many EU countries are today fighting parallel attempts to consign shipboard lashing work to cruelly exploited and non-union seamen from the Third World. Harbor workers in Germany and some of the other EU countries whose ports also violate EU "free enterprise" regulations may soon confront EU-led attacks on their unions, especially if these regulations succeed in Spain.

Populists and Social-Chauvinists Oppose Catalan Independence

This chauvinist outlook is also shared by the fake Trotskyists of Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Left), followers of the late British pseudo-Trotskyist Ted Grant, who have recently signed a unity statement with Peter Taaffe's Committee for a Workers' International, which is affiliated with Socialist Alternative in the U.S. Their constant pledges to

WORKERS VANGUARD

fight “for the right of self-determination” of Catalonia and the Basque Country notwithstanding, Izquierda Revolucionaria is actually *opposed* to the independence of the oppressed nations of Spain. Thus, in a 2014 pamphlet (“¡Por el derecho a la autodeterminación, por el socialismo!”) devoted to the national question in Catalonia, the Spanish Grantites declared: “The task of the workers movement, there as here, in Euskal Herria and Catalunya, in the Spanish state as a whole and in Europe, is not to build new states and erect new borders, but to build socialism on a global scale.” Behind this sweet talk of “socialism” is a chauvinist program.

Genuine Trotskyists are for independence here and now, without making the socialist revolution a precondition, while understanding that the struggle for national liberation is a motor force in the fight for workers rule. Not so Izquierda Revolucionaria, which counterposes to the call for independence for Catalonia and the Basque Country the call for a “Federal Socialist Republic” *of Spain!* So much for “self-determination”! And what could the arch-reformist Izquierda Revolucionaria possibly mean by “socialism”? While they spill much ink preaching “class independence” vis-à-vis the *Catalan* bourgeoisie, to them the bourgeois populist and chauvinist Podemos is nothing less than a lever “for socialist transformation”! (*El Militante* online, 3 February).

The U.S.-based Internationalist Group (IG) acts as a tool of the Castilian bourgeoisie. The IG in fact supports the national oppression of Catalans, without



AFP

Striking Spanish coal miners protest in León, northern Spain, May 2015.

even pretending to support the right of self-determination. Arguing for the sacred unity of Spain, the IG wrote:

“But not only is Catalonia the richest part of Spain, whose bourgeoisie wishes to stop subsidizing poorer southern regions; not only would independence mean separating off one of the most militant sections of the working class; but much if not most of the industrial workers do not speak Catalan, many coming from Andalucía.”

—“For a Scottish Workers Republic in a Socialist Federation of the British Isles” (September 2014)

The IG concludes that it’s *Catalan independence* that would “discriminate” against

Spaniards! The oppression of an entire nation by the *Castilian* bourgeoisie is not a concern for these “Grandeess of Spain.” According to the IG, on account of its historic class-consciousness and militancy, the Catalan proletariat has foresworn any right to ever fight to liberate itself from the Castilian yoke. The IG implicitly supports the privileges of *castellà* and ignorantly denies the fact that the majority of workers in Catalonia speak Catalan, while in passing portraying Catalans as cheap and racist—the current chauvinist propaganda of the PP.

The independence of Catalonia would greatly advance the struggle for indepen-

Continuing the divide-and-rule machinations of the British colonialists, India’s capitalist rulers undermine the struggles of the working class by fostering deep divisions along religious, caste and national lines. Hindu upper-caste supremacy is rife, as is the brutal oppression of women and of Muslims. One of the worst communalist massacres of recent times took place in the state of Gujarat while Modi was chief minister in 2002; Hindu-supremacist thugs organized by his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) massacred 2,000 people, chiefly Muslims. In the wake of the fight to unionize Maruti Suzuki’s Haryana plants in 2011, the company opened a new plant in Gujarat, which Modi had turned into a showcase for low-wage foreign investment.

The government’s “Make in India” program aims to extend the “Gujarat model” throughout the country by means of brutal exploitation and ever-deeper attacks on workers’ rights and working conditions. The connection was made clear in a 2013 High Court ruling, which, in denying bail to the Maruti Suzuki workers, stated: “Foreign direct investment is likely not to happen due to fear of growing labour unrest.” But it is not just Modi’s BJP that is a bitter enemy of the working people. The drive to make India a cheap-labor center for the imperialists began under successive governments led by the Congress Party, which pushed a program of cutting tariffs and social spending and privatizing state-owned companies. Indeed, when the frame-up of the Maruti Suzuki workers began, Congress controlled both the Indian and Haryana state governments, and continued to do so until 2014.

dence of the Basque Country, and that of their respective conationals on the other side of the French border. It would shake up monarchial Spain, whose unity the IG respects so much, and would strike a blow against the EU imperialist consortium, which the IG also respects very much.

In determined opposition to the vile great-power chauvinism of such pretend-ers to Trotskyism and on the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution led by Leon Trotsky and V.I. Lenin, the International Communist League again emphasizes the class-struggle perspective that was key to the October 1917 victory of the workers in the Russian prison house of peoples:

“The Marxist solution of the problem of democracy is for the proletariat to *utilise all* democratic institutions and aspirations in its class struggle against the bourgeoisie in order to prepare for its overthrow and assure its own victory....

“In our civil war against the bourgeoisie, *we* shall unite and merge the nations *not* by the force of the ruble, *not* by the force of the truncheon, not by violence, but by *voluntary* agreement and solidarity of the working people against the exploiters. For the bourgeoisie the proclamation of equal rights for all nations has become a deception. For us it will be the truth that will facilitate and accelerate the winning over of all nations. Without effectively organised *democratic* relations between nations—and, consequently, without freedom of secession—civil war of the workers and working people generally of all nations against the bourgeoisie is *impossible*.”

—V.I. Lenin, “Reply to P. Kievsky (Y. Pyatakov)” (August-September 1916)■

Working-class struggles against the manufacturing giants have continued. In February 2016, some 4,000 workers at a Honda motorcycle plant in the nearby state of Rajasthan waged a strike with strong parallels to the Maruti Suzuki fight. Some 500 contract workers and the union president were dismissed for organizing a union. Both permanent and contract workers went on strike together when a supervisor physically attacked a contract worker, and were met with police repression. Struggles have also taken place in other areas, including the southern auto hub around Chennai.

Our perspective is the building of a revolutionary Marxist party in India, forged in the course of struggle. Such a party—section of a reformed Trotskyist Fourth International—would fight for proletarian unity and class independence from all wings of the capitalists. It would struggle against all manifestations of caste and national oppression, religious communalism and the subjugation of women, while championing the cause of the hideously impoverished peasant masses.

The French CGT, South Korean KCTU, Indian NTUI and Japanese Zenroren union federations have issued a joint declaration on April 7 demanding, “Release the Maruti Suzuki 13 Now.” As proletarian internationalists, we urge other trade unions and working-class organizations in the U.S. and internationally to support the fight of the Maruti Suzuki workers. Messages of support can be sent to the MSWU’s Provisional Working Committee at marutiworkersstruggle@gmail.com.■

India...

(continued from page 8)

sentenced to life—was subjected to caste-based slurs by a supervisor and suspended. The union demanded his reinstatement; and in the aftermath of an altercation instigated by management, a suspicious fire broke out in which several people were injured and a manager died. The union had absolutely no involvement in the death of this manager, whom they described as pro-worker.

The Maruti Suzuki bosses had set up the provocation by bringing hundreds of “bouncers” (company thugs) dressed in workers’ clothes into the plant. Evidence about the origin of the fire disappeared, the attendance register was supposedly destroyed and closed-circuit TV cameras were switched off. The company then moved to crush the union by shutting the plant for several weeks, bringing in police to occupy it and providing lists of union activists, nearly 150 of whom were arrested. Some 546 permanent and 2,000 contract (temporary) workers were thrown out of their jobs. When the case finally came to court, 117 of the workers were acquitted. Eighteen others received prison terms, but most were released as they had already served more jail time than their sentences while awaiting trial. Reinstate all victimized workers!

The Japanese-controlled automotive company and the Haryana state government have worked together to destroy the MSWU. Importantly, the union has fought to unite permanent and contract workers,

demanding permanent jobs for the latter and an end to the whole cheap-labor contract system. As of 2012, more than three-quarters of the plant’s workers were contract workers, many of them drawn from impoverished rural areas. Such workers earn much less than permanent workers while having no job security.

Despite relentless state repression, the MSWU has not been crushed. Some 30,000 Maruti Suzuki workers staged a one-hour protest strike immediately after the court verdict, even though they were threatened with the loss of eight days’ pay and, in the words of a union statement, “The entire Gurgaon and Manesar areas have been turned into Police camps.” Several days later, thousands of workers rallied in protest in Manesar. On April 4-5, workers from various unions protested on behalf of the Maruti Suzuki militants in hundreds of cities, industrial centers and rural areas.

The Gurgaon-Manesar area is known as the “outsourcing capital of the world.” General Motors, Ford, Suzuki, Honda and other automotive companies have set up manufacturing plants there and elsewhere in India, where some 7.6 million workers are now employed in auto and components manufacturing. Maruti Suzuki’s factories make roughly half the cars sold in the country, underscoring the potential power of its workforce. While numerically small relative to the rural population, it is the Indian proletariat that has the social power to lead the peasant masses and all the oppressed in a fight to break the shackles of capitalist exploitation through socialist revolution.

is over Russian “meddling” in the elections, hacking of DNC emails and ties to Trump—all *without the slightest shred of evidence*. Hacking foreign governments is the stock in trade of all spy agencies; the U.S. rulers are especially devoted to this pursuit. And when it comes to “influencing” elections—i.e., bloody coups, outright invasions and “regime change”—the U.S. imperialists are second to none.

It is immaterial whether the DNC hackers were mobilized by Vladimir Putin or the tooth fairy. The real attack on the electorate begins with the rigged nature of bourgeois democracy—where voters choose which representative of the capitalist system will oppress them—and includes the increasing assaults on black voting rights, as well as the anti-democratic Electoral College.

Democrats, liberals and reformists like

the RCP complain that Trump is exceeding his presidential prerogative. In fact, it is in the nature of the imperial presidency to have a strong executive with virtually unfettered powers. In a May 15 article online, the RCP decries Trump’s attempt to “remove the slightest independence” for the FBI and to bring it under “air-tight control.” Under the four-decade reign of J. Edgar himself, the FBI had plenty of “independence” as it carried out nefarious acts in the interest of the bourgeoisie.

From the standpoint of the working class and oppressed, political crises within the ruling class are not a bad thing. We welcome popular erosion of trust in the phony facade of democracy behind which the bourgeoisie conceals its dictatorship. At the same time, Marxists are not indifferent to questions of bonapartism and demand the fullest possible defense and

extension of democratic rights, the better to organize the proletariat around its own class program against the capitalists and their state. For its part, the RCP joins hands with the Democratic Party as it scrambles to refurbish its credentials and those of the American imperialist order.

For over a decade, the RCP has subjected its membership to lengthy sessions learning in more depth than is humane the thoughts of Chairman Bob Avakian. Having emerged from its studies, the RCP has landed with a spectacular splat in the camp of the class enemy and, this time, not simply of its parliamentary spokesmen *but of its secret police*. One can safely say that the RCP represents the lunatic fringe of the pro-Democratic Party reformist left. Their pledge of allegiance to bourgeois rule is the real scandal. Let us hope it will be one from which Avakian & Co. do not recover.■

WORKERS VANGUARD

This Racist Capitalist System Has Got to Go!

L.A. Upheaval 25 Years Later

We reprint below a 1992 *Workers Vanguard* article written as flames of outrage burned in Los Angeles over the racist acquittal of the cops who savagely beat black motorist Rodney King. The arrogant rulers and their kept media mouthpieces branded the L.A. upheaval a “race riot.” But that uprising and the protests that broke out from coast to coast were, in an elemental way, an eruption of the pent-up fury of America’s poor, minority and working people against growing joblessness, poverty and all-sided misery. State repression by the enforcers of this devastation was swift and bloody as the government dispatched an army of National Guard troops, Marines and federal agents—a force larger than that deployed in the 1965 U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic.

When the King verdict was announced, the Partisan Defense Committee, a legal and social defense organization associated with the Spartacist League/U.S., issued an April 30 statement urging:

“The working class must not allow the black population to be isolated—the powerful L.A. unions such as longshore, aerospace and city workers should organize work stoppages and mass mobilizations to solidarize with and defend the black community as the LAPD looks to spill more blood to ‘celebrate’ their racist victory over Rodney King.”

It is a measure of their prostration before the capitalist class enemy that the union



McKoy/L.A. Times

Cop threatens protesters in downtown L.A. on 29 April 1992, the first day of uprising following acquittal of LAPD thugs who beat Rodney King.

misleaders did nothing to mobilize such actions.

Twenty-five years later, the conditions that sparked the L.A. upheaval are worse. Since 1992, large swaths of the black population have been forced out of the city, many to less expensive outlying desert cities. Meanwhile, South Central (renamed South L.A.) remains littered with vacant lots. L.A. has become an epicenter of homelessness in the U.S., the majority chronically unemployed black people. Parts of the city resemble a Third World

country with the destitute forced to peddle their wares on the sidewalks in a desperate struggle merely to survive.

The sadistic attack on Rodney King by the notoriously racist LAPD was not unusual. What was unusual at the time was that it was captured on videotape. Today, as the roll call of black people killed at the hands of the cops continues to mount, it is all too common to watch chilling videos of their bodies being shot through with police bullets—Oscar Grant, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Laquan McDon-

ald. There is the occasional trial or Justice Department inquiry, but the killer cops are routinely exonerated.

In 1992, the paramilitary forces of the L.A. cops—with their armored personnel carriers, battering-ram tanks, “Blue Thunder” helicopters and SWAT teams—were the cutting edge of an all-out police war on black people, immigrants and the poor. Today, the LAPD is heralded as a model of police reform in the bourgeois press, which points to its recruitment of black and Latino cops, “community policing” programs and the widespread use of body cameras. Proclaiming that the notorious legacy of LAPD chief Daryl “Choke Hold” Gates, who headed the department in 1992, has finally been erased, one purported authority on the cops argued that the LAPD has been given “back to the people of Los Angeles” (*Los Angeles Times*, 18 April 2010).

What the cops have given back to “the people” over the past two years is the highest number of civilians killed by any police force in the country!

No amount of reforms will change the reality of racist cop terror. These thugs in blue are doing what they are hired, trained and paid to do: enforce the rule of a capitalist system rooted in the brutal exploitation of labor and the forcible segregation of the majority of black people at the bottom of society. It made no difference 25 years ago that L.A. was run by a

continued on page 4

13 Union Militants Sentenced to Life

Free Maruti Suzuki Union Leaders!

India

In an attempt to crush the most militant union in India’s fast-growing auto industry, a judge in the north Indian state of Haryana sentenced 13 activists in the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU) to life in prison on March 18. Along with more than 100 others, these workers faced transparently bogus charges, including murder and attempted murder, in connection with the death of a company manager five years ago. The public prosecutor argued for the death penalty, railing that they had committed crimes against Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s “Make in India” campaign, which aims to attract foreign investment by promising a cheap, submissive labor force. All trade unions and supporters of workers’ rights must demand: Freedom for the Maruti Suzuki class-war prisoners!



Verma/Hindustan Times

Left: Framed-up union leaders after sentencing, March 18. Right: Workers hold strike rally at Maruti Suzuki plant, southwest of Gurgaon, India, October 2011.



AP

At the time of the arrests, the MSWU was engaged in a fierce battle for union recognition at a Maruti Suzuki auto plant in the Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt near Delhi. Twelve of the 13 workers

were leaders of the union. In opposition to an existing company union, the workers waged several strikes, including sit-ins, starting in 2011. The frame-up grew out of a series of provocations staged by

management in July 2012, shortly after the company had been forced to formally recognize the MSWU. On July 18, a *dalit* (“untouchable”) worker—one of the 13

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