

Statement on the Ongoing Rebellion



Minneapolis is burning and the fire is spreading across the country.

George Floyd was murdered on May 25 by the Minneapolis Police Department. He was killed by Derek Chauvin, an officer who has murdered innocent people in the past and gotten away with it. Chauvin put his knee and full weight on Floyd's neck during an arrest for alleged check fraud. Floyd was not resisting arrest. In the video of his murder, Floyd can be seen saying, "I can't breathe", followed by the haunting image of the officers lifting his limp body off the pavement.

Rage breaks through calluses that have grown thick to protect inner life from routine external trauma. Anger fills our bodies. The story of George Floyd's death is like so many others we have heard before. The authorities have done very

little to correct the problem of unarmed black and brown men and women being killed by police. Ordinary people realize that justice for George Floyd is up to them, and understand that means taking to the streets.

Since Floyd's murder, Minneapolis has been ablaze. Crowds of thousands have gathered, setting buildings on fire, destroying police cars and getting into skirmishes with the cops. On the night of Thursday, the 28th, a police station near where George Floyd was murdered was overwhelmed by protesters and set on fire. An image of Marx's words, spray-painted on the outside of a store, went viral, reading, "When our turn comes, we shall not make excuses for the terror."



These protests have spread to more than 140 cities in the United States. Countries around the world have also organized Black Lives Matter protests. In Greece, protesters set fire to the US embassy

in solidarity. The police in the US have become increasingly violent as the protests have gone on. In many states, the National Guard has been activated, and curfews have been imposed. Thousands have defied these curfews. In Washington DC, the protests outside the White House were so powerful that Trump had to retreat to his presidential bunker for safety. New footage of police brutality emerges almost daily but the movement is showing no sign of slowing down. More than 10,000 people have already been arrested.

Conservatives and some liberals have condemned this property destruction, which they see as violence. They believe that this fight should be one of peaceful moral persuasion. Trump has called the protesters "thugs", and has threatened them with violence, tweeting, "when the looting starts, the shooting starts." Twitter flagged this post for violating its policy against glorifying violence. Trump's deadly incitement is not just aimed at police, but at far-right militias who may take it on themselves to attack demonstrators.

Trump's barbarism aside, the deeper point is that this rioting became inevitable when the main solution put forward to the regular killing of black and brown people was that they act respectable and polite to the police. Instead of addressing the root causes of police

violence, the authorities have done nothing, and we are told to be patient and to win through slow peaceful persuasion.

But this is a rigged game. American capitalism was built on the backs of black people brought here against their will. As Malcolm X famously said, “you can’t have capitalism without racism.” Racism was the justification for enslaving an entire group of people based upon the color of their skin in order to use their free labor. This free labor was the fuel that powered the motor of early capitalism. Racism has been used for centuries as a tool to divide the working class, giving white workers a stake in defending the system that oppresses them through tiny privileges denied to working class people of color.

It is important to note that much of what was labeled as opportunistic looting was in fact driven by a need for supplies to treat people hit with police weapons such as pepper spray. The economic crisis has also deprived many of the ability to get a hold of basic resources, and this was another factor that was driving this “looting”. Besides, what is taking some small items from a store for personal use compared to the \$434 billion American billionaires have added to their pockets during the pandemic? That is the true crime.

The Mayor, Jacob Frey, has called for the officers involved in the death of George Floyd to be prosecuted. The officers have already been fired and Derek Chauvin has been taken into police custody. While calling for an end to the property destruction, Frey said that he understood the anger of the city’s residents, even going so far as to say that the “symbolism of a building cannot outweigh the importance of life.”

While this is a step forward from the long history of mayors stonewalling and supporting their racist police forces, it is important to remember that his response did not occur in a vacuum. It took years of on-the-ground organizing and action, from Ferguson to Black Lives Matter, to shift the conversation so radically that it even affects elected officials. It is an important reminder of the kind of action needed to affect social change. The fact that the officers were fired immediately, that Derek Chauvin was arrested, has had his charges increased, and that the other three officers have now been charged, is all further evidence of this. The demand to defund the police, which would have seemed outlandish a few weeks ago, has now entered mainstream conversation. This shift illustrates the power of this movement.

In an impressive act of solidarity, Minneapolis bus drivers have refused to transport police to demonstrations, or act as police vans bringing arrested demonstrators to precincts. Their union has backed them up, with Amalgamated Transport Union president John Costa stating on Thursday “As our members – bus drivers – have the right to refuse work they consider dangerous or unsafe during the pandemic, so too Minneapolis bus drivers – our members – have the right to refuse the dangerous duty of transporting police to protests and arrested demonstrators away from these communities where many of these drivers live.”

ATU Local 1005, the union’s chapter in Minneapolis and St. Paul, issued a letter of solidarity with the protesters, calling for “a new Civil Rights Movement ... that is joined with the labor movement.”

“ATU members face racism daily. Our members live in and work the neighborhoods where actions like this happen, and where this took place, now watched in horror across the globe,” the local’s letter said. “Police brutality is unacceptable! We say ‘NOT ONE MORE’ execution of a black life by the hands of the police. NOT ONE MORE! JUSTICE FOR GEORGE FLOYD!”

NYC transit workers followed suit, refusing to transport those arrested at protests for the cops. Transit Workers Local 100 tweeted the following: “TWU Local 100 Bus Operators do not work for the NYPD. We transport the working families of NYC, all TWU Operators should refuse to transport arrested protestors.”

The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA-CWA), UNITE HERE, United Food and Commercial Workers-Latinos (UFCW-Latinos), National Nurses United (NNU) and United Steel Workers (USW) have all issued statements condemning George Floyd’s murder. The USW’s statement read: “At moments like these, we in the labor movement cannot be silent and must express our collective outrage over these brutal murders.”

The state is trying to put the lid back on the pressure cooker after it has exploded but protests against the killing of George Floyd will continue. Discontent with the racist state, economic collapse, and the inequity of the pandemic are all merging. We are seeing the beginnings of a rebellion.

See you in the streets.

The Real Looters

In this abridged version of a longer article found on our website, Marie Edwards unpacks the U.S. government's economic policy response to the coronavirus crisis, explaining how each stimulus package has benefited the wealthiest few in society while the rest of us brace for a new Great Depression.

“Protesters criticized for looting businesses without forming private equity firms first” ran the headline in the Onion. It would be funnier if it weren’t so true.

Rebellions and protests are raging in towns and cities in reaction to the killing of George Floyd at the hands of police, exposing the brutality of the systemic racism in this country. This is of course coming on top of an economy in free fall, and with the covid-19 virus unleashed onto the world. A look at the economics side will show who is really responsible for looting this country, to the tune of trillions of dollars.

To start with, COVID-19 has not affected everyone equally, hitting the working class harder, and minority workers hardest. This can be seen from the mapping of cases in New York City, to the rise in cases in rural areas, where Black and immigrant workers in food processing plants are especially hard hit.

The so-called “recovery” since the 2008 recession had already accelerated the growth inequality, while creating new millionaires and billionaires. In the first month of the covid crisis, even the (mostly underpaid) jobs created in that decade of “recovery” have all been lost.

Following stay-at-home orders, an already fragile economy jumped off the precipice. Official unemployment figures as of the time of writing are 42.7 million, or over 25% of the workforce. Again, this is disproportionately affecting minorities, with Black unemployment now standing at 50%. All of these figures spell out years of unprecedented immiseration for millions of people in this country and around the world.

In response to this unparalleled crisis, the government made clear that their priorities were to save Wall Street, the corporations and the banks, and let whatever anemic trickle reach the masses. In fact, the transfer of wealth to the already filthy rich is jaw-dropping in its scope and brazenness. With various inventive methods to deliver sums in the trillions of dollars to the corporate and financial sectors. It amounts to a jaw-dropping transfer of trillions of dollars to the corporate and financial sectors, and already filthy rich through a brazen array of inventive methods. Beyond the direct stimulus packages, and hidden within them are more tax breaks for the rich, with the Treasury Department lobbying another \$3 trillion in their direction and the Federal Reserve using every tool at its disposal to save Wall Street.

Disguised as a rescue package for the American people suffering from an unprecedented economic meltdown, the barely sufficient, means-tested one-time \$1,200 stimulus check was simply a sop to get through the real meat of the bill. In keeping with this xenophobic administration, this payment only applied to those with a social security number, thereby excluding the great number of undocumented immigrants who are most in need of it. However, the \$600 extension of weekly payments on top of unemployment benefits has

been life-saving for many. Unfortunately, it only applied to those who held an on-the-books job. Ironically, the unemployment benefits have often been larger than many salaries, inadvertently exposing how low wages are for a great number of workers. This also explains why the next relief package has not materialized. Realizing that workers would rather stay home than face unsafe and often deadly conditions at work, the administration has balked at the idea of extending unemployment to ensure a return to work.

Furthermore, the legislation did not guarantee paid sick leave and health coverage for most workers. Millions of people whose health insurance was tied to their jobs are now facing the fear of enormous hospital and doctor bills should they fall sick. A better case for Medicare for All could not be made!

Big corporations and small businesses were given more than a third of the \$2.2 trillion package. Small businesses getting hammered by the shutdown were supposedly offered a lifeline of \$377 billion under the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) to help pay bills and keep their staff. But the oil refineries, construction and real estate, chain restaurants got there first, and sure enough the money had dried up before the mom-and-pop shop could even set foot in a bank.

As for corporations, they did even better with their monstrous share of the pie. The Federal Reserve Bank, turning to the same playbook from the 2008 Great Recession, used the billions from the stimulus package as leverage to lend - indiscriminately as it turned out - to all companies and corporations that came begging for more! In addition, an even more egre-

gious provision of the Act included tax breaks costing an estimated \$195 billion over 10 a ten year period, a special benefit to a grand total of 43,000 taxpayers.

On April 29, Jared Kushner appeared on Fox TV, the very day the number of dead due to COVID-19 equaled the total number of American dead in the Vietnam war, and boasted about having “achieved all the different milestones that are needed. This is a great success story.” The real success story for Kushner and his ilk was the spectacular rebound on Wall Street — “a joyful thing to see” gasped the Wall Street Journal!

It is clear by now that inaction and denial of the approaching danger by this government made the crisis infinitely worse than it should have been. Much of the human devastation we see was avoidable. The course the government chose to follow ensured even more misery. The U.S. has ample resources to ensure that no one goes hungry or loses their homes or health insurance, especially at a time when interest rates are so low or even veering into the negative. Preserving jobs on the contrary would be a boon to the economy helping to keep the wheels of commerce turning. Yet, clearly what we saw instead was another enormous transfer of wealth to the rich, in so doing, emptying out the coffers to then demand brutal cuts to “balance the budget.”

House Democrats put on a big posturing show with the passing of the HEROES Act (another misnomer!) on May 15 containing many life-saving measures for millions of desperate people. Knowing full well it had zero chance of passing the Senate, it is no more than “a messaging bill” to be publicly set against the Republicans’ mean-spirited actions.

Mitch McConnell categorically stated there would be no extra money for the states in spite of these extraordinarily dire times, preferring to see them go bankrupt. This is simply a ploy to renegotiate union contracts and pension funds, and in general to slash the multiple programs run by states. It would then pave the way for the privatization of even more services. This drive to privatize is also seen in the assault on the Post Office which is being refused the financial boost needed to weather this crisis.

The pandemic is providing a cover for the administration to pursue their all-out assaults on the country, be it in revoking all regulations that interfere with their profits, blocking all asylum claims at the southern border, breaking unions, or in appointing federal judges to set up a judicial body that will rule in their favor.

This is why we should be getting ready to fight back against all the disasters capitalism is ready to inflict on us. The rebellion taking place in over 500 towns and cities at the moment show that we won’t take this lying down. Even before this uprising against racism, thousands of workers have taken part in workplace actions. Union and non-union workers are involved in strikes, walkouts and protests, in poultry and meat processing plants and fruit packing; in fast food restaurants, among bus drivers and sanitation workers, in nursing homes and garment workers producing PPE, and of course healthcare workers daily risking their lives.

These actions need to be built on, and every victory must be celebrated and amplified as a way to move forward. We might emerge from this momentous crisis totally shell-shocked, but we should be

resolved that the only way to rid ourselves of this barbaric system — which will lead to the destruction of life on this planet if left unchecked — is to organize a fight back with a working class flexing its muscle. After all, we are seeing (and being told repeatedly) right now how it is the workers who are “essential” to running this system. The bosses are mere parasites, gorging on the profits we generate. We should gain the confidence that we, the working class can indeed run this world. And we will run it for the benefit of all, not for the profits of the few.

Faced with a national uprising against racism, Trump attacks Antifa to deflect anger

Iannis Delatolas reports on Trump’s plans to make Antifa illegal and the underlying causes of this anti-racist rebellion, including the COVID-19 pandemic and a bipartisan inability to deal with the health and race crises in the US.

Trump, in the hopes of deflecting anger against the racist murder of George Floyd and the pandemic crisis, used his address to the nation on Monday night to threaten the movement and attack the left. Having been forced to spend two nights in the bunker over the weekend due to protests and clashes outside the White House, Trump emerged from it and Tweeted that he would declare Antifa a terrorist organization. The White House was under siege by protestors as teargas was used to clear the way for Trump’s photocop in front of a church on Sunday.

Antifa is an umbrella term for various radical anti-fascist activists

and groups, and not an organization. Antifa and anti-fascist protests have kept the far right and thugs like the “Proud Boys” off the streets across the country. Trump’s threat was meant to encourage his far right and racist base. And true to precedent, Trump has been eager to call on the far right to use violence and bullets against the left. Trump’s declaration of Antifa as domestic terrorism may be legally baseless. But in the real world, it is an attack on the multi-racial movement that is driving the rebellion against the racist police and the horrific murder of George Floyd, another innocent Black man, at the hands of the racist cops. The fact that Antifa may be designated as a terrorist organization, while the Ku Klux Klan is not, says a lot about what the US ruling class considers dangerous.

In this context, Trump’s statements have two functions. It is a call for even more aggressive repression of the movement by police, National Guard, and even the military. It is also an appeal to the far-right and the fascists to take the initiative to come out and attack the movement and the left overall. And by singling out “Antifa,” Trump is attempting to signal that the state will clear the way for the independent far-right to act. Shortly after Trump’s tweet, Florida congressman Matt Gaetz tweeted in response. “Now that we clearly see Antifa as terrorists, can we hunt them like we do those in the Middle East.”

The Law and Order President

Yesterday in his speech from the White House, Trump threatened to bring out the National Guard in DC effective immediately. He also threatened to bring in the United States Military if the governors did not call out the National Guard to contain the demonstrations.

Despite the explicit threat of the use of force coming from the White House, last night the clashes and the riots were even more widespread and violent. They even reached the working class borough of the Bronx where I live in New York. Tear gas and concussion grenades were fired as protestors faced off with the police.

The barbaric murder of George Floyd that was filmed in its entirety by outraged and shocked bystanders has sparked a nationwide rebellion. There is no other way to describe what is happening. It is an uprising with protests in 140 cities and the National Guard has been activated in 21 states. We have had protests against police killings in the past, but what is different this time around is that the demonstrations are much angrier, confrontational, and more multiracial. These two characteristics are what makes this unstoppable wave of protests a real threat, not just to Trump, but to the entire political status quo in the US.

Underlying Causes

This rebellion comes in an era of growing inequality, and on the heels of the defeat of the Bernie Sanders campaign. And the COVID-19 crisis still rages on. In two months of the pandemic, more people have died in the US than died in the whole duration of the Vietnam War, and the deaths are not evenly distributed. It has left Black and Latino working class New Yorkers decimated. The rate of deaths for Black people has been double that of the general population; the working class neighborhoods have been hit the hardest; and the mostly undocumented workforce the city depends on were left to fend for themselves in “essential” services. Living in overcrowded apartments, with no health coverage and under threat

of arrest and deportation by ICE, many immigrants did not seek medical help. Neither did they qualify for the \$1,200 stimulus payment. So the few that have jobs were not able to stay home, making them and their families vulnerable.

Compare this to how empty the affluent and mostly white areas of New York are, as the rich fled to their posh residences in the Hamptons and their country homes. In fact, as they drove in their SUVs to their second homes, they caused a crisis of supply in the working class communities in Long Island because they used their wealth to hoard essentials, leaving the local community vulnerable. This inequality, laid bare by the pandemic, is partly what fuels the rebellion on the streets.

COVID-19 exposes all the failures of US capitalism. It has highlighted the gap between the rich and the poor, institutional racism, and the lack of any healthcare coverage for 27 million workers. It has revealed the inadequacy of the existing healthcare system that can still throw jobless workers and working class families into debilitating debt. As unemployment has reached 20% and those out of work number 38 million, millions have lost their health care coverage. The COVID-19 tests, as limited as they were, were free, but if someone had to be hospitalized they would have to foot the bill or get hit with overwhelming copays in a time of mass unemployment. At the same time, the government gave massive bailouts to the corporations with the stimulus package. The rich looted public money and threw some crumbs to the rest of us.

This rebellion is angry and sustained in a way that other police brutality protests over the last few

years have not been. This is because it runs deeper than George Floyd. It is about the structural racism in US society, shown clearly through the pandemic, and a bipartisan political inability for either major party to deal with the crisis. Millions of people were looking to the Sanders' campaign with optimism and hope for solutions to these issues before the pandemic reached the US. Both the ruling class management of the pandemic and reaction to the rebellion are raising important questions about the Democrats.

In New York, Governor Cuomo was seen as a hero compared to the Trump circus during the worst days of the pandemic. But Cuomo is not our friend. During Cuomo's political career he has spearheaded cuts to healthcare. He mentioned that 20,000 hospital beds were lacking at the start of the pandemic in March, but not that that is the number of beds that were slashed in the last 20 years in New York. And Cuomo is responsible for a lot of these. As the pandemic was killing thousands of people in New York State, Cuomo continued implementing Medicaid cuts. The people who need Medicaid the most are the poorest and workers in poor health. Precisely those who were hit the hardest by COVID-19, the inner city Black and Latino poor working class with pre-existing health problems, rely on Medicaid for life saving care. This barbarity even in the height of the COVID-19 crisis shows the twisted logic of capitalism and has not been lost on the minds of millions of people across the country. During the pandemic, people's daily concerns and needs have been ignored as the rich loot public funds.

United Movement

The government's inaction and callousness has been compared to the early days of the AIDS epidemic as the Reagan administration stood by watching people die without lifting a finger. This was until Act Up came onto the scene and over years of very militant and confrontational demonstrations not only forced the government to take action, but also shifted public opinion.

Trump's statements (perhaps ineptly extreme) are also part of a strategy to split the movement on the streets. The statements by Mayors, Governors and Police Chiefs, on both sides of politics, about "outside agitators" is an attempt to counterpose peaceful protesters and "rioters.". The media emphasis on looting is a way to make people afraid to participate, delegitimize the rebellion, and get people to side with police repression. But it was the rebellion that forced the speedy firing of the cops and arrest of Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis—even if that is not enough to get justice.

After Eric Garner's cries of "I Can't Breathe" and death by chokehold, it took five years of protests just to get his killer fired from the NYPD, and he was never prosecuted. Police around the country now are scared of massive opposition and defiance, reacting both with faux sympathy (the kneeling and statements of solidarity with right to protest) and with violent reprisals—sometimes from the very same police.

We need the movement to be united if we want to keep winning. The ruling class is terrified of that. Trump's threats against the movement are dangerous. But with so many having already entered the streets around the country cry-

ing "Black Lives Matter," his attempts at repression and division could blow up in his face. Veteran and GI rights organizations are already reporting queries from GIs and National Guard members who want to refuse to be sent into US cities against these demonstrations. Going forward, we need continued solidarity and organization of opposition.

Government Repression

Most commentators are saying that Trump's statement designating Antifa as a terrorist organization has no legal standing. There are extreme legal repercussions for being a member of, or supporting, a designated "foreign terrorist organization," entailing loss of many civil liberties, but there is no legal standing for a domestic one. The US Patriot Act did expand the state's legal powers to investigate terrorism, including "domestic terrorism," and made it easier to seize related assets, but it did not create a new crime of "domestic terrorism." Besides the problem of a legal definition of "Antifa," there is no official list of domestic terrorist organizations.

But legal technicalities are not the main point. Attorney General William Barr's statement the same day as Trump's read: "The violence instigated and carried out by Antifa and other similar groups in connection with the rioting is domestic terrorism and will be treated accordingly." This, combined with Trump's statement that "The violence and vandalism is being led by antifa and other radical left-wing groups" suggests, despite the legality, a ramping up of the targeting of left groups and individuals by the FBI and other repressive arms of the state.

Trump's tough Law and Order speech yesterday is history repeat-

ing itself. And the last time we saw riots and clashes anywhere on this scale was in the late 1960's when Nixon campaigned under a similar Law and Order policy. Nixon also declared war on the left and the Black Panther Party paid a heavy price when the FBI declared war on its militants.

In the last week, we have seen a popular uprising that shows no signs of stopping. In the midst of the pandemic and its aftermath, the demonstrations are very inspiring. A multiracial and united movement is taking to the streets in hundreds of cities. There are several more protests planned across New York City today. Curfews will be defied and clashes will take place, just like yesterday, and this will be reflected nationwide.

Labor Solidarity

There have been very important interventions by workers in this rebellion such as bus drivers refusing to collaborate with the police to transport arrested protestors, as we saw in Minneapolis and New York. The Minneapolis school board has ended its relationship with the police, finally getting them out of schools. We have also seen encouraging statements by National Nurses United and several education unions, including PCS at New York's City University standing with those "rising up and bravely demanding that racial terror...must end." Unions including the United Steel Workers, USW, IATSE, AFA-CWA, UNITE HERE, UFCW-Latinos, and others are also standing in solidarity with Black lives.

If labor union involvement continues to grow, it will help to guarantee the longevity of this movement by raising demands to defund the racist police, abolish ICE, and create jobs instead for all those recently unemployed. They could also exercise their strength by challenging Trump's menaces, the far right threat, and by taking on the US capitalist class' barbarism and greed. Socialists and others on the left should participate in this tremendous movement, fight against racism, and push further to a society where racism and the repressive police force are smashed once and for all.



Join us for our next national meeting: Black Lives Matter: From Uprising to Organizing



THURSDAY, JUNE 11, 2020 AT 8 PM – 9:30 PM

With Michael Brown (Black Lives Matter activist, Los Angeles)

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