

## Commentary on the George Floyd killing and current crises

Roma, 7/6/20 Piazza Del Popolo

It seems to me that, particularly at this unprecedented moment in human history – with the survival of the human race at stake in the coming decades due to the climate catastrophe and the continual increase in nuclear weapons – and now a pandemic caused directly by the inherent market logic – that we'll need to start looking seriously at getting to the root causes of these interconnected crises and not only the surface outcomes, work to see more clearly these inherent interconnections and work to get beyond them. Getting beyond will not be a desire, it will be a necessity if we are to survive as a species this century. As all of this is interrelated it will also be necessary to avert in the here and now the tragedies we saw in Minneapolis a few days ago.

George Floyd, as in countless other individual high profile cases preceding this, was the object of a casual public execution by the state's foot soldiers. How can we prevent this reoccurring from now on? Why was this man in the desperate position of having to pass around counterfeit cash in the first place? Why was he stopped in the first place? Do the so-called law enforcement individuals standing around while the execution was carried out happen to reflect a society that bears witness to these events on a daily basis and does nothing? How about activists, how and to what extent have we been educating, getting educated and organizing in recent years and decades to try to connect the dots on the issues which plague us and which murdered George Floyd, as they murdered Eric Garner, Breonna Taylor, Sandra Bland, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin and innumerable others, just to mention a few recently.....

Surely, it can't be just a few bad apples on so-called police forces. Surely it can't be solely the indifference of the (mostly white in the US) masses, including people considered activists. Surely it can't simply even solely be societal racism as the only root of tragedies such as this which unfold over and over and over again, transcending decades, political administrations and geography.

Elite mainstream corporate media are dutifully carrying out their historical role of obfuscating realities, straight up lying, dealing with incidents and issues in a vacuum with no context, essentially manufacturing consent. This includes the printed word, notably the New York Times, Washington Post, il Corriere della Sera and many others across the west. This religious like zeal for the status quo and the strict setting of boundaries on criticism and dissent is perhaps more striking in scholarship (where there is more time and resources for reflection and hence less excuse) where, for example, it took centuries – literally centuries – for simple recognizable facts, for anyone with a brain functioning, to enter into any place even tangential to mainstream scholarship – such as the fact that the “modern” western economy – indeed much of the “modern” world economy – have as its foundation centuries of free labor provided to the white global north through the toil of African slaves in North and South American and the Caribbean. (Indeed, Haiti alone, an island prior to French domination of enormous natural wealth, provided most of the basis for the modern wealth of France, to take one case.) The US needs no mention, with slave labor providing the cotton, the oil of its day, as the primary driver of the industrial revolution. Great works of research in just the last 20 years, such as those of Gerald Horne, Edward E. Baptist and Douglas A. Blackman, among others, have richly illustrated this. What took them so long? Mostly white western scholars over the centuries, basking in untold and unprecedented privilege, haven't been able to tell us anything as remotely interesting and instructive as it would have been to simply speak to an African American in the Jim Crow south, an African American incarcerated today or an African American growing up in poverty...or any working class African American. To liberal intellectuals this is anathema.

About the Jim Crow south, which lasted a century just until a few decades ago, we as societies like to think of it as a self contained problem, contained geographically, put down to local southern governments and plantation owners, and deemed as largely a legal crisis. It doesn't sit well with many to face up to the

fact that we've indeed had textbook fascism in the US. Just that those of us with white skin living then didn't experience it, so it's wiped out of history. Much of it went on then, while the US north and Europe turned a blind eye to the roots and cures— as they still do — provided great inspiration to European fascism and Nazism, the latter whose miscegenation laws did not even go as far as those which existed in the US south. Inspiration for Nazi Germany wasn't limited incidentally to Jim Crow, they found it at the origins of American history in the myth of the master Aryan anglo-saxon race(not at all limited to the KKK), where most of the so-called founding fathers, the new world aristocracy including Jefferson, found it of the highest nobility to set up a so-called anglo-saxon society, exterminate the indigenous population and enslave Africans in order to carry forward their more perfect union of quelling democracy in its constitution and practices and engage slave labor as the basis of the political economy. Indeed, police forces were largely born in this period as slave patrols and out of fear of slave rebellions.

So, can the tragedies of vicious structural and institutional violence, discrimination, and poverty be averted through legislation alone? Through voting alone? Well, let's take a look. We're coming up on 60 years — 60 — since the passing of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts in the US. What's the tally on progress for African Americans since then? Some responsible scholars today happen to believe and document that the gains made have now been wiped out for the most part. That the victories gained were legal in nature, fallible in a myriad of ways and subject — as all else in society — to the whims of economic and state power — and blunt force.

In 40 years now of neoliberalism — capitalism returning to its natural, predatory state — so called modern economies, with most of the burden falling on the working class as usual — have seen their debt explode to unprecedented levels while worker security has plummeted, wages have stagnated or fallen, the cost of living has shot through the roof - all of these hugely more impactful on African Americans - and society's been forced to live on credit to maintain the illusion of the life — the so-called “American dream” (for whites, mostly white males) — of previous generations, even now with two adults working in a household. This is where the looting takes place — the hollowing out of domestic economies by multinationals, investment banks through their loyal servants in governments. African Americans, to the extent that they were able to participate in any if any at all of these gains from the post war period to the 70s, saw their fragile wealth all but eviscerated after capitalism imploded yet again in 2008. They've been the group hardest hit, by far. This period also saw the rise in the prison industrial complex, where, through straight capitalist logic — previously public institutions were privatized and blacks came to be seen as even more of a superfluous population than they previously had been. A superfluous population which can't in poverty or near poverty generate much wealth for the upper classes, multinationals and banks but can indeed generate \$50,000 annually laboring for free for those same institutions while incarcerated. (Remember the 13th Amendment does not prohibit slavery while incarcerated).

Populations of color as seen as superfluous, indeed the “unpeople” unfit to enter history, as Orwell put it, are not limited to the US. Indeed this largely defined the US and European historical role in the world over the previous few centuries, in their so-called “relations” with the global south through military colonialism, its previous dominant form, and through its current preferred form exacerbated in the neoliberal years of investors' rights globalization and financialization of the world economy, facilitated by multinationals and investment banks, and carried out by so-called international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, the latter two deemed as de facto branches of the US State Department, the Pentagon and high tech US capitalist industry. Where is the spending on healthcare, education, a green economy, poverty, community wealth funds, etc etc? Could it have something to do with the so called “defense budget” (read “offense”) utterly dominating the federal budget of the US and of the world, (the US spends more than the next 10 countries combined) funneling trillions into racist domination of the globe through illegal wars and illegal economic sanctions? Does the enormous amount of military equipment finding its way ever more into police departments across the US have anything to do with this? The tactics the police are using? What are the implications economically, politically, socially, culturally, psychologically of this titanicly bloated offensive military spending on the part of the US the world

over? Who suffers the most from this reality? We know the answer to that – African Americans.

The continent of Africa alone has been subject to some of the most vicious forms of imperialism and military and financial colonialism ever seen on the part of Europe and the US, continuing to this very day. The whole creation, indeed, of a “3rd world” was a western creation undergirded by capitalist domination hand in hand with deep structural racism, creating the lives we enjoy in the global north at the expense of poverty never before seen in world history, particularly in Africa, as well as the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Latin America.

The US, founded on the effective genocide of indigenous peoples as well as the bondage, enslavement and structural oppression for centuries of blacks, again continuing to this very day, has never dealt with its history and this is revealed in the starkest terms in what happens currently on a day to day basis right before our eyes.

While not holding a candle in terms of impact compared to the white misleadership class – the black “misleadership class” in party and electoral politics, the term coined by great African American scholars Cornel West and Glen Ford among others, some of the very best around from any background, is one of the many legacies of this failure to confront the true nature of the vicious, racist and dominant state capitalist system, structural violence and poverty inflicted on African Americans and the intrinsic connections between them – one cannot survive to current degrees without the other – which set the foundation in the political economy both inside the US and worldwide.

I’m afraid it seems we won’t be able to vote or legislate our way out of these various inherently interconnected messes of racism, economic disasters and pandemics. This seems to be clear at this point in history. We’re going to have to start thinking about different ways of organizing our political economies. There’s a titanic chasm between the street protest and the electoral politics waiting to be filled. Namely, day to day, week to week regular collective educational and organizational initiatives. The labor movement was instrumental in this in the early part of the last century. Economic elites and their enablers in government are busy and unrelenting in their organization for what kind of society they’d like to see, transcending electoral cycles and taking an understandably integrated approach interrelating all issues. It’s a one-sided class war. Where are we? Both demonstrations and voting can be positive, but neither ever could or now can create the changes needed to vanquish police violence, racist military violence around the world on the part of the US and economic violence which has created poverty and inequality the likes of which have never been seen both inside the states and around the world. Remember the so-called “best and brightest” in politics, “business” and academia brought us economic collapse, illegal war after illegal war, environmental catastrophe, and structural racism with no end in sight...and no solutions are being offered. There are many models to look at for inspirations, ideas and critiques don’t lack, either in the past or now. Take a look at the Jackson, Mississippi cooperatives. The models set forth by organizations such as the Democracy Collaborative. The Mondragon cooperatives in Spain, the Preston model in the UK. What must be done is not an academic exercise. What seems to be missing is the collective will to educate and organize. What the world will look like in a few years without this will may be beyond words.

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This is not an academic article but commentary on current crises. For sources on anything said here, or any comments, contact me at: [orswelle@hotmail.com](mailto:orswelle@hotmail.com)

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