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It's Racism Stupid!

Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin

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In one of my columns about racial profiling and the Michigan police, a white “radical” wrote in “chastising” me about referring to this form of police harassment as “Driving While Black”, since he said that he as a white male had on occasion been stopped by the cops himself because of his “long hair.” He also went on to say that I should concentrate on “class politics”, instead of “mere racial issues.” Since I didn’t want to answer him in a personal letter, frankly didn’t have the inclination to engage in this discussion with yet another smug white middle class “radical”, I decided to do it in my column.

I think that many white people just don’t understand just how serious this matter is, nor how racism really plays out in the lives of Black people, in relationship to authority and the state. Black people have been shot and killed because of racial profiling and other forms of racial harassment. They are in prison in massive numbers because of the low quality of life and lack of decent employment in this country. Black babies die from infant mortality at 3rd world levels, because of the lack of proper nourishment. Further, these Black people are forced to live in racial and economic ghettos, within which many die or suffer from preventable diseases for years. Their communi-

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ties are impoverished and underdeveloped due to conscious denial of community development funding by the government. In other words, they are an oppressed people, not just individuals harassed because of their clothing, the way they talk or dress, although there is no question these things can play a part in an individual case.

But, racism and police brutality go much deeper than the surface appearance of Black people. The fact that it is the government itself which protects these racist cops, even when they commit the most horrendous murders should tell us all something, that and the fact that disproportionate numbers of Black people are the ones being killed, not white men with beards, wearing tie-dyed shirts, or pony-tails. It just ain't the same, my friend! We are not talking about personal prejudice by some dumb white guy who just doesn't "like" Black people, but systematic racism by the state, national oppression, as some social scientists call it, even "internal colonialism" by others. Hey, the cop himself does not act as an individual, but rather as an agent of the state, a hired gun. Now everyone claims to understand this intellectually, but Black people are being brutalized in the real world, not in theory.

In speaking about any class issues in the United States, an understanding of white supremacy and economic inequality must go hand-in-hand. Most white "radicals" want to neatly put "race issues" over in one neat category, and then "class issues" in another. We'll call this "vulgar radicalism" because it is totally not based on any social or political understanding of the problem. The US working class has never been monolithic, there has always been a dual tier economy of poor oppressed workers of color on the bottom, and better paid and treated whites standing on top of and benefitting from their misery. I don't just mean the bosses either, as many so-called "radicals" like to claim, when they talk mythically about some so-called "aristocracy of labor."

In a country with a history of racial genocide, racial slavery, and other forms of racialized oppression, it is chauvinism and political opportunism of the worst sort to call for peoples of color to blindly follow behind some corrupt white dominated political or social movement to liberate themselves. This has been a problem for Labor, Socialist, Anarchist, and other radical movements for decades. They have a White, middle class understanding of this race and class oppression as mere "prejudice", and see the problem as a simple matter of making "those Blacks" see that they should just "follow us". This idea of the "white working class hero" is really dangerous and delusional, sliding into racism itself.

With an epidemic of police crimes, and now that the prison system is being used to confine huge number of poor Black and non-white peoples, it is treachery and escapism to refuse to acknowledge that this is happening because of America's legacy of racism, and because this capitalism political and economic system is deteriorating. It is funny how in the United States, most whites have an obliterated consciousness when it comes to racism, they see it as an adjunct to something else, whether economic theory or religious dogma. The questions of internal power dynamic (of which racism is a part) are reduced to a group of Wall Street economic overlords or owners of industry, to which we are all *equally* disposed and exploited. Again, any economic analysis cannot be based on the white European experience alone, rather than the United States America as a nation-state. To me, this is part of where they always go wrong...using mechanical analysis to explain everything. I ain't buying it, the cops ain't stopping the cars of Black folks cause they are just oppressing "everybody alike".

It's racism, stupid, get your head out of your butt!