

The police murder in Charlotte, North Carolina

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22 September 2016

Hundreds of people took to the streets Tuesday night and again on Wednesday in Charlotte, North Carolina, to protest the latest horrific police killing in that city, and the 839th death at the hands of US policemen this year.

Large numbers of police were bused in Tuesday to seal off the neighborhood near the University of North Carolina-Charlotte after groups of protesters began to break windows of police cars, blocked traffic on Interstate 85 and broke into a Wal-Mart store. Police officers decked out in riot gear again confronted angry protesters Wednesday, firing tear gas. At least one person was shot on Wednesday night, with officials claiming he was not shot by police.

The confrontation in North Carolina's largest city is another expression of the seething social tensions in America, driven by an economic crisis that has produced record levels of long-term unemployment, poverty and social need, while real wages remain below the level of a decade ago, before the 2008 Wall Street crash.

The spark in Charlotte was the shooting death of 43-year-old Keith Lamont Scott, gunned down in broad daylight. Police arrived at the parking lot where Scott, a father of seven, was waiting to pick up his son at a school bus stop, looking for another man who had an outstanding warrant.

Witnesses say that Scott was holding a book when he got out of his car and was shot four times by the police. Charlotte Police Chief Kerr Putney claimed that Scott was armed with a handgun and refused repeated police orders to hand over the weapon. The police have so far refused to release body camera videos of the shooting, and no cellphone video has yet emerged to show what really happened.

From a legal standpoint, however, even the police

version of events does not justify the use of deadly force. It is legal in North Carolina to carry a weapon openly, and if Scott had a gun, as police claim, they had no right to demand it without probable cause of a crime being committed.

The killing of Scott is only the latest in an unending stream of horrors. Indeed, the shooting in Charlotte is the third highly publicized police killing in the past week alone. First came the killing of 13-year-old Tyre King in Columbus, Ohio on September 13, followed by the killing of 45-year-old Terrence Crutcher in Tulsa, Oklahoma on September 16, and then Scott on September 20.

The fact that all three victims were African-American has been used to reinforce a racialized narrative of police violence as predominately one of white cops killing black men and boys out of ingrained white racism.

Whatever role racism may play in particular police killings, it is not the fundamental issue. Here, the circumstances behind the killing of Scott are revealing. The police shooter, Brentley Vinson, is African-American, as is the police chief, Kerr Putney. The mayor of Charlotte is a woman, Democrat Jennifer Roberts. The police officer in Tulsa, moreover, was a woman.

Of the 25 people shot to death by the police in the past week, beginning with Tyre King, at least half were white, according to the grisly tally kept by killedbypolice.net. Of the 702 people shot to death by police this year, according to a database maintained by the *Washington Post*, 163 were black men, about 23 percent of the total. Whites made up roughly half the victims, while Hispanics, Native Americans, Asians, black women and people of mixed race made up the balance.

What nearly all the victims of police violence have in common is that they are part of the working class, and usually its poorest layers. Their deaths are a consequence of the basic social function of the police, as the armed bodies of men who defend the wealth and privileges of the financial aristocracy against the lower orders.

The Charlotte killing and disturbances have been followed with the usual political homilies from government officials and presidential candidates.

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump tweeted that “the situations in Tulsa and Charlotte are tragic,” but he has consistently sided with the police in such situations while denouncing protests against police violence as tantamount to terrorism. He demanded an “immediate end” to the mass unrest in Charlotte.

Hillary Clinton, the Democratic presidential candidate, issued a statement Tuesday calling the fatal shooting of Terrence Crutcher “unbearable” and “intolerable.” She added a tweet on Wednesday morning, “Keith Lamont Scott. Terence Crutcher. Too many others. This has got to end. -H.” Such professions of concern coming from an arch-warmonger and candidate of Wall Street are about as unconvincing and insincere as every other comment that comes out of Clinton’s mouth.

As for the Obama administration, in its final months it appears to have given up any effort to vary its responses to tragedies and horrors. Attorney General Loretta Lynch—who is African-American, like both the shooter and the victim in Charlotte—warned against protest that “turns violent” and repeated the standard mantra of the Obama administration, that the events in Charlotte “have once again highlighted—in the most vivid and painful terms—the real divisions that still persist in this nation between law enforcement and communities of color.”

Such statements are an insult to the intelligence, given that both the policeman and the man he shot were of the same “communities of color.”

The truth is that the shooting showed the river of blood that exists in American society, separating the ruling class from the vast majority of working people. That river runs right through so-called “communities of color,” separating the tiny privileged layer at the top, like President Obama and Attorney-General Lynch,

from working-class men like Keith Scott and Terrence Crutcher.



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