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Killings by Chicago Cops Stir Anger

Sam Stoker

July 30, 2008

Sam Stoker is in Chicago and plans to continue filing reports on the largely underreported rash of police shootings in the Windy City. A version of this first report was originally published in Socialist Worker.

CHICAGO- A recent rash of police-involved shootings, which has left five people dead in the city in the past two weeks, sparked a small, but resolute, protest against police brutality and killing on June 28.

The protest convened in a south Chicago neighborhood at the exact location where Chicago police fatally shot Devon Young, a 26-year-old black man, in the back of the head on June 14.

Young was the second of eight men to have been shot by Chicago police in the past two weeks; five of the shootings were fatal and three resulted in injury. All eight men were people of color.

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Protesters, outraged by the shootings, marched through several south Chicago neighborhoods, passed out flyers, and encouraged people to come out of their homes and onto the streets.

“This is the same system it was in the slave days,” one participant said. “The only way we can have justice is to come together and rise up.”

Outraged by what they said is an exploitative and genocidal system that is still killing the black community, participants marched to a police station where members of the community, and some of the victims’ families, spoke vehemently about the killings.

“Don’t turn your back on Chicago police, they’ll shoot you,” said Ashunda Harris, whose nephew Aaron Harrison was killed by Chicago police in 2007. Harris’ statement refers to news reports that Chicago police have shot five of the eight men in the back.

Several police officers, who had been standing outside the front doors of the police station, retreated inside after Joy Cooper, 9, picked up the microphone and demanded that police look at, and think about, the hundreds of names of victims of police shootings listed on a large black banner protesters were holding. “How does it feel?” she said. “With all these names right here and you can’t look them in the eye.”

The increase in police shootings coincides with Chicago Police Department efforts to combat violence in some Chicago neighborhoods, where violent crime has increased in recent months.

However, the increased police presence and recent shooting rampage has done anything but make citizens feel safer.

“There are serial killers loose in the streets of Chicago,” said Hank Brown, referring to the CPD. “We cannot let this go unanswered.”

If the increased police presence thus far is any indication of things to come, police violence could get much worse on the streets of Chicago in coming months. On June 24, a CPD press release made known the department’s “Summer Safety Plan,” which announced intentions to deploy 70–80 additional cops to support patrol efforts in “challenged” districts, send helicopters

to patrol city parks and beaches, and to deploy SWAT teams in “Battle Dress Uniform” to “violence zones.”

In addition, “Roadside Safety Checks” will include random vehicle inspections and on weekends “Roll Calls” will make the police presence known by the sounding-off of sirens and flashing of blue lights.

“We might as well start fighting,” said Hope Suber, mother of Kevin Suber, who Chicago police shot in the back of the shoulder the same day as, and just a few blocks away from, Young. “We’re going to be scared either way.”