

Klan Rally in Memphis and White Supremacists Conference: Tennessee Cities Focus of Anti-Racist Demonstrations

Klan rally in Memphis and white supremacists conference in Dickson met with protests

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In the state of Tennessee two gatherings have drawn attention to the fact that racist ideology and practice are alive and well inside the United States. The cities of Memphis, the state's largest, and in Dickson, in the central region of the state, were the gathering points for the Ku Klux Klan and a white supremacist group known as American Renaissance (AmRen) which held gatherings on March 30 and the weekend of April 5-7 respectively.

Memphis was the scene of a Klan rally in downtown on March 30 ostensibly designed to protest against the renaming of three parks which honored the legacy of slavery and the Confederacy. Confederate Soldiers, Jefferson Davis and Nathan Bedford Forrest Parks have been a source of embarrassment and tension in Memphis for decades.

Now with a majority African American population, a Black mayor and other high-ranking officials of color, pressure has been mounting in recent years to rename the parks. In response to this inevitability, a North Carolina-based section of the Ku Klux Klan applied and was granted a permit to hold a rally inside the city.

Anti-racist demonstrators in Memphis mobilized over 1,500 people to challenge the Klan. Although the protests against the Klan remained peaceful with only one reported arrest during the day, the crowd made it clear that the racists were not welcome in the city.

The parks were named after figures who were leading personalities in the splitting-up of the U.S. during 1861-1865 in a failed effort to maintain the economic system of slavery. Jefferson Davis was the president of the Confederate States of America, 11 states which seceded from the Union.

Nathan Bedford Forrest was a wealthy southerner who earned a fortune in the trade in enslaved Africans during the mid-19th century in Memphis. During the Civil War, Forrest served as a general with the Confederacy and is said to have been responsible for the infamous Fort Pillow Massacre in southwest Tennessee where hundreds of Africans and Union soldiers were slaughtered and later driven to their untimely deaths.

After the defeat of the Confederacy in 1865, Forrest is credited with founding the Ku Klux Klan in Middle Tennessee. The organization has engaged in over a century of terrorism against African Americans and other people who they have deemed a threat to the notions

of white supremacy.

Anti-Racists Demonstrate Outside White Supremacist Conference in Dickson In Dickson, the so-called American Renaissance group held its annual conference. The state of Tennessee denied anti-racists several permit applications to hold mass demonstrations outside the event.

Demonstrations took place at any rate and denounced the messages put forward by the racists. The conference was held at Montgomery Bell Park over the weekend of April 5-7.

This was the second straight year that American Renaissance has gathered at the park in Dickson. The list of speakers at the conference included Klan members, neo-Nazis, holocaust deniers, anti-immigrant activists and other assorted fascists and racists.

According to Julia Casteel of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), "It is clear that the state stands solidly on the side of white supremacy. They granted a permit for a known white supremacist terrorist organization, AmRen, to hold their conference and they have repeatedly denied all of our permit requests to protest racist attacks on our park." (fightbacknews.org, April 4)

These events in Tennessee took place around the 45th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who was killed in Memphis on April 4, 1968. King was in Memphis to support African American sanitation workers who were on strike for recognition as a collective bargaining unit with the city.

Despite the existence of an African American president in the White House and thousands of elected officials of color around the U.S., racism and national oppression appears to be escalating. African Americans and other nationally oppressed communities are disproportionately impacted by the economic crisis through high rates of home foreclosures, evictions and joblessness.

Poverty rates are also rising among the oppressed nations, particularly involving women. Police brutality and killings have risen in recent years with high profile cases of abuse in Maryland, California, New York, Michigan and Ohio.

Inside the U.S., racist organizations function openly and are granted permits to hold rallies and conferences. When anti-racist demonstrations are held more police attention is focused on suppressing such activity through bureaucratic methods and brute force.

Attention has been focused as well on possible links between the recent murder of a Kaufman County, Texas district attorney and his wife and white supremacist prison gangs. These murders follow the killings of an assistant district attorney and a prison administrator earlier in the year.

All of these officials are supposedly linked with a racketeering investigation targeting over 30 members of a white supremacist organization based in the Texas state prisons. One suspect was killed in a shoot-out with Texas authorities just two days after the murder of the prison official.

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