

Police Killings of African Americans: Black Friday Demonstrations Say “No Shopping as Usual”

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Important time period for retail profits in the United States challenged by anti-racist protests

All across the United States from Chicago, Minneapolis, San Diego, Cincinnati, Portland, Seattle, Burlington, etc., thousands took to the streets demanding an end to the police killings of African Americans.

In Chicago the Magnificent Mile was the target of demonstrations in the Loop, where like in other cities and suburbs, the capitalist retailers encourage mindless consumption during the period between late November and the beginning of the year.

Advertising agencies expend tremendous resources to encourage workers and oppressed peoples to enter the shopping fray offering purported “deals” on electronic merchandise, a substantial portion of which are marketed to children and teenagers. Major firms in the United States gauge their performance during this season as a barometer of the viability of the capitalist system overall.

Despite these monumental efforts by retailers, sales were down for the “Black Friday” and holiday weekend. Corporate media outlets that advance the notion of consumer confidence as a key aspect of the strength of the U.S. economy, reported the decline in revenue although attributing it to factors such as early shopping and online purchases.

According to Reuters press agency, “Data from analytics firm RetailNext showed overall sales for both days fell 1.5 percent on flat customer traffic, while average spending per shopper dropped 1.4 percent. Preliminary data from ShopperTrak showed sales at stores totaled about \$12.1 billion on Thursday and Friday. The company said it is an ‘estimated decrease from last year’ but did not give the percentage decline due to an internal change in the way it calculates data. Last year, it reported sales of \$12.29 billion for the same period.” (Nov. 28)

Corporate Spokespersons Attempt to Explain Away Declines

Obviously with a rising population and the often touted recovery translating into lower sales during the premiere time for showcasing new merchandise does not bode well for the future of capitalist retail markets. These results indicate that there are other factors which are leading to the fall in sales and consequent profits.

Numerous social media groups and individual pages advocated for a refusal to shop on Black Friday and that the day should be turned into one of protest. Nonetheless, this phenomenon was not taken into serious consideration by the corporate media when providing explanations for the declining performance.

The same article cited above goes on to say “The data highlights the waning importance of Black Friday, which until a few years ago kicked off the holiday shopping season, as more retailers start discounting earlier in the month and open their doors on Thanksgiving Day. Both firms said that despite the fall in sales over the two days, the performance must be interpreted as a good one for retail stores because sales held up amid rising competition from online shopping and were better than expected due to pent-up consumer demand and lower gas prices.”

Even capitalist publications such as Forbes report that the real measure of economy viability must take into consideration the size of the labor force and the labor participation rate. Since the beginning of the 2008 Great Recession the so-called “recovery” has been weaker than any such occurrence after the conclusion of World War II.

The size of the labor force has been almost flat over the last seven years. At the same time the labor participation rate is at its lowest in nearly forty years. This is a more accurate measure of the nature of the labor force than the current 5.0 percent jobless rate reported during the first week of November.

Forbes stated on November 30 that “Since the 2008 recession, the U.S. Civilian Labor Force has grown at an average annual rate of only 0.35%. In comparison, after the recession of 2001, the labor force grew at an average annual rate of 1.41%.”

Since the stock market crash of early 2000, described as the bursting of the “tech-boom”, the labor participation rate had peaked. Over the last decade-and-a-half, there has been a steady decline in this factor attributed as well to the Great Recession which triggered tens of millions of lay-offs and job eliminations.

The financial journal also noted in the same report in reference to the participation rate of workers within the economy that “it began a steady decline, which accelerated when the financial crisis began in 2008. As of October 2015, the Labor Force Participation Rate was 62.4 percent. We would have to go back 38 years to October 1977 to find a rate this low. A declining rate indicates that more individuals are dropping out of the job market.”

The National Question, the Labor Market and the Continuing Economic Crisis

Within the context of over one-third of the labor force being in a non-participatory status, a large segment of this population exists among African Americans. Even though the broader unemployment rate is tabulated at 5 percent, among African Americans in general it is officially 9.2 percent.

The latest unemployment figures among African-Americans were for October 2015 issued by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This jobless rate did not change since the month of September making it nearly twice the number of the national average.

African-American teenagers between 16-19 years old are plagued with a jobless rate of 25.6 percent, which officially declined from 31.5 percent in September. African American women over 20 are unemployed at 8.1 percent, constituting an increase from 8.0 percent in September. African American men over 20 are jobless at 9.2 percent level, an increase from 8.9 percent the previous month.

Forbes says “If the labor force is the economic engine, consumer spending is the fuel.”

Nonetheless, this mouthpiece for the status-quo continues to advocate the same failed policies of lessening regulations and lowering taxes for the ruling class although these measures have created an even wider gap between rich and poor as well as Black and White income and wealth levels.

These statistics indicate that recession level conditions exist within the African American communities. Therefore, this provides another factor in the rising anger against institutional racism and national oppression as manifested through mass demonstrations and urban rebellions such as in Ferguson and Baltimore during 2014 and early 2015.

In both Minneapolis and Chicago tensions reached enormous levels after the shooting of five protesters outside a police station in the former, and in the Windy City, where daily demonstrations have taken place demanding the firing of the police commissioner and chief over the video of the blatant killing of a 17-year-old last year.

Demonstrations during the initial weekend of the holiday retail season were in part carried out as solidarity actions with the people of Chicago and Minneapolis. In addition the spreading of anti-racist rallies, sit-ins and ideological struggles on university and college campuses led by African American students contributes immensely to a social atmosphere of defiance and immediacy.

One year ago in the aftermath of the rebellions in Ferguson and the subsequent expansion of the Black Lives Matter movement which began in 2012, African Americans and their allies escalated their demonstrations by marching into shopping malls disrupting business and blocking highways and thoroughfares to illustrate the urgency of the crisis of police abuse and killings and the refusal of the state apparatus to take remedial actions.

These manifestations will continue and expand due to the fact that the federal government and the capitalist ruling class has no plans for the African American people and other oppressed nations inside the U.S. beyond increased militarized repression and mass incarceration. A fundamental transformation of the political and economic system is the only hope for addressing these concerns and providing sustainable solutions.

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