

Still Protesting After All These Years

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On Wednesday, June 4, I joined thousands of marchers in Kitchener, Ontario, the town in which I live, to protest racism and police brutality. I have, in the last few years, participated in local events in support of Palestinian self-determination and justice; freedom for the Kashmiris, and for international justice for all when I addressed the Kitchener commemoration of the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Previously, when I lived in the United States, first in New Jersey, and then in Florida, I participated in demonstrations against the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

I am a long-time member of World Beyond War, an international organization whose goal is the end of all war. I serve on the boards of several human rights organizations. When does this end? I am not a young man; if I stretch the truth just a bit, I can still say I am middle-aged. I am, of course, just one person, but shouldn't the efforts of millions of people around the world have brought significant progress to society by now?

Certainly, I am not sufficiently naïve to think that these efforts should have ushered in a Utopian world. I am old enough to remember Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the various civil rights marches in the decade of the 1960s. I also remember the shocking brutality with which demonstrators, especially people of color, were subjected to by government forces. The scenes I am seeing in the news today are no different.

Through at least the first half of the twentieth century, lynchings of Black people by whites were common, and, if investigated at all, seldom resulted in prosecution. The belief that the victims were, after all, 'only' Black people seemed to make it somehow acceptable. All this was supposed to change with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; however, laws do not change attitudes, and as long as those in power are only interested in the selective enforcement of laws, things remain the same.

The election of Barack Obama to the presidency in 2008 was seen by many, naively, as a major milestone in race relations in the United States. Some people, incredibly, even said that this was evidence that racism no longer existed in the country!

But what has changed?

Seven years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, President Richard Nixon inaugurated the so-called 'war on drugs', a racist, trillion-dollar boondoggle that plagues the nation to this day. People in inner cities, many of them Black and brown, who are caught with small amounts of marijuana or cocaine, receive severe, long-term sentences. Upper middle-class whites with the same amounts of illegal substances, if they are caught at all, may receive a

fine and probation. And the police cannot usually be found in middle-class, or even poor, white neighborhoods, harassing white people who are doing nothing more than walking down the street, standing in front of a building awaiting a friend, or otherwise going about their business. The Black experience is far different.

The term 'white privilege' has been defined in many ways. Concisely, it might be seen as having no additional barriers due to skin color. Yes, many white people are born into poverty and remain in poverty all their lives, but that is not due to efforts they make being thwarted because of the color of their skin. White privilege plays out in so many ways. Whites are not profiled by the police; although I can only offer anecdotal evidence, I am happy to do so. Never once have I been stopped while walking or driving and asked about where I'm going, where I've been, or if I have drugs in the car. I have been stopped because I was speeding, inadvertently went through a red light, or was driving with an expired registration. In each case, the police officer who stopped me was patient and polite.

In predominantly Black or brown neighborhoods, residents do not have the same experience. Police officers and agencies proclaim that they harass people in those neighborhoods to prevent crime; if they know the cops are watching, they won't break laws. This, of course, is a smokescreen, enabling the so-called law enforcement officers to act on their racism under the guise of doing what's good for their victim.

At one demonstration a few years ago, I don't even remember now what it was for, I saw a woman carrying a sign reading "Why do I have to keep protesting this s*it?" It is a question we all must ask as we make another picket sign and march against the newest shocking injustice. What are we, as concerned world citizens, doing wrong? In the U.S., which, despite all evidence to the contrary, proclaims itself a model democracy, we are told that voting is the way to bring about change. Is it? When two parties that are almost mirror images of each other dominate the air waves, preventing the many legitimate third-parties from having any chance even to be involved in debates, let alone be listed on the ballot, voters are generally faced with voting for the lesser of two evils. That's a devil's choice, since the lesser of two evils is still evil. Both parties are beholden not to the voters, but to their real constituencies, the corporate and foreign government lobbies that finance their campaigns.

Voting can only be effective if voters can actually vote. Republican efforts to suppress the vote, especially in neighborhoods inhabited mostly by the poor and people of color, who usually vote Democratic, have been successful. So the idea that voting is some panacea to bring about change beneficial to the people is simply a fairy tale.

If voting isn't a viable agent for change in the United States, what is?

The rot of the system runs deep, and a complete revamping is needed. There must be recognition that what works for the people of Arkansas and Alabama may not be pleasing to the people of New York and California, and vice versa. It must be acknowledged that when one candidate loses the popular vote and still becomes president, the idea of democracy is simply a farce. And if one candidate receives 45% of the vote, and his/her opponent 55%, that means that 45% of voters have no representation.

The Party for Socialism and Liberation offers a [10-point, common sense platform](#). The Republican and Democratic Parties seek to marginalize it, because their corporate-owned cheerleaders know that they would have no chance should the voting public be familiar with

it.

Other nations have successfully introduced alternative forms of government, and their people benefit. The U.S. must cease its awkward and unsuccessful attempts to lead, and follow other nations as they have given the power back to the people.

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