

US Campaign against Racism, Police Violence and Poverty

Charleston Days of Grace to Mobilize Thousands on Labor Day Weekend

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Organizing is continuing for the Charleston, South Carolina “Days of Grace, Love’s Work is Justice” which will be held over Labor Day Weekend on Sept. 5 to 6 in commemoration of the nine Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church parishioners killed on June 17 by a white racist as well as the police killing of Walter Scott in North Charleston two months before in early April.

Special tribute will be paid to state senator and church minister, Rev. Clementa Pinckney, who was gunned down by Dylan Roof, a white supremacist who was photographed with confederate flags and wearing the insignia of the former racist apartheid and settler colonial regimes in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and the Republic of South Africa. Roof had sat among the attendees of a bible study for one hour when he stood up and said he had to kill African Americans because they were assaulting white women and taking over the United States.

This event is being coordinated by the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) Local 1422, which has engaged in numerous labor actions over the recent period.

In a statement posted on the ILA website it says “Guns inflicted the fatal wounds of April and June, but racism, poverty and the politics of rancor and discord have long inflicted grave wounds on the State’s poor and most vulnerable people. This Labor Day, people of faith and conscience will come together in Charleston to remember our fallen friends and to reflect on the racism and hatred that lay at the root of their deaths, as well as the violence that tears away at the fabric of our communities.”

In addition to being a center in the struggle against racism, Charleston has been a focal point for a burgeoning worker’s movement lead by African Americans. Since the days of slavery, the African population in South Carolina has been a source of labor exploitation by the ruling class and the resistance to injustice.

African American workers are seeking to link the escalation in police and vigilante violence against the community with the need to rejuvenate the movement for jobs and living wages. A protracted struggle to remove the confederate flag from the state capitol building in Columbia culminated in the aftermath of the Mother Emanuel massacre when thousands demonstrated demanding that the symbol of slavery and racism be taken down.

According to Leonard Riley Jr., Vice-President of the ILA Local 1422, “There is a feeling that the people of good will need to be heard in this moment. The removal of the Confederate flag was a hopeful sign that the state is ready to move forward. But we need to back that up

with policies that make this a better state to live in for everyone” (Charleston Post & Courier, Aug. 21)

Riley also noted that “Nearly 70 organizations have joined the call for a march and strategy conference ... to help build a more fair, tolerant and peaceful South Carolina.” These endorsing and sponsoring groups include churches, student organizations, social clubs and civil rights activists.

Thousands of people from the local area and from around the U.S. are expected to travel to Charleston over this Labor Day weekend for the gathering.

On Sept. 5, a demonstration and rally will be held in downtown Charleston. The action is scheduled to start at Wragg Square and then march to Mother Emanuel and finally ending in Marion Square.

After the demonstration and rally a conference will convene that afternoon beginning at 2:00pm. The conference continues the following day Sept. 6. (daysofgracecharleston.org)

Focus on Police Violence

In addition to the massacre at Mother Emanuel, just several weeks before, Walter Scott, who was gunned down April 4, the 47th anniversary of the martyrdom of Martin Luther King, Jr., by a white police officer Michael Slager after a traffic stop in North Charleston, rallied the community against law-enforcement violence against the people.

“We have to heal and we have to do better,” Riley said. “That’s the challenge we face, and that’s the mantra of this call to action.”

Scott was stopped supposedly for a traffic violation and was shot repeatedly in the back by Slager. A Dominican worker walking through the area videotaped the killing on his cell phone capturing a horrendous crime which is all too common on the streets of the U.S.

Due to the video documentation of the killing and the mass demonstrations taking place throughout the country surrounding police misconduct, the officer was arrested and charged with murder. It remains to be seen if he is actually convicted and receive sentences commensurate with his crimes.

This event comes amid an escalation in demonstrations and rebellions against racist violence and economic exploitation directed towards African Americans. The two largest rebellions over the last year have taken place in the southern states of Missouri (Ferguson and St. Louis) and Maryland (Baltimore City).

Anti-Racist Activities Come Under State Scrutiny

Ruling class forces and law-enforcement agencies are concerned over the rising militancy and intolerance for racism among African American youth and workers. Consequently, efforts are well underway to neutralize the growing struggle to end police violence against the people.

Allegations have been recently made that the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and other organizations have come under surveillance by the state. Such charges were made in

Charleston, when BLM was one of the first groups to protest against the killing of Scott demanding that his killer be arrested and prosecuted.

Black Lives Matter Charleston organizer Muhiyidin d'Baha told the Charleston City Paper that they had to enforce "a no-cameras policy at its meetings after the Scott shooting when newcomers started showing up and snapping pictures." (Aug. 21)

We were aware that there were new people coming into the meetings that were asking a bunch of questions," d'Baha said. "We were aware that there were people coming into our initial meetings right after Walter Scott that were just taking pictures.(Aug. 21)

This same activist continued stressing "These things were definitely happening and definitely scared people away with the knowing or not knowing of who was behind these cameras and what their intention was. There was a lot of fear, and there's still a lot of fear, among the people that need to rise up right now."

The Charleston City Paper reported that "Recently released emails from North Charleston city employees show that the actions of protest groups including Black Lives Matter Charleston were being monitored by the S.C. Law Enforcement Division (SLED) and the American Red Cross, both of which sent emails to city staff informing them about upcoming organizational meetings and the arrival of Ferguson, Mo., residents at a hotel in Summerville. D'Baha says he does not know if the newcomers at the meetings were working for a law enforcement agency, but the effect of their presence was palpable."

These efforts by law-enforcement agencies are clearly being coordinated on a national level due to the current atmosphere prevailing in many cities throughout the U.S. Unrest broke out recently in St. Louis City after the police killing of 18-year-old African American Mansur Ball-Bey.

A heavy police presence and the use of teargas and pepper spray triggered the stoning of police and the burning of an abandoned building and a vehicle. Demonstrations are also continuing in nearby Ferguson where the first anniversary of the death of Michael Brown ignited further demonstrations and civil unrest.

Until the federal government addresses the police brutality and killings directed against African Americans and other oppressed people, these demonstrations and rebellions will likely grow and become more militant and politically directed against the state and the corporate ruling interests.

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