

Anti-racist protests expand in response to Trump's army of thugs

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Eighty-eight years ago, on July 28, 1932, the U.S. military attacked Black and white

military veterans in a Bonus Army demonstration demanding relief from the hunger wrought by the Great Depression. The attack has parallels to Trump's use of federal troops to try to stop the Black Lives Matter uprisings of 2020.

In 1924, World War I veterans were given bonus certificates that would earn interest and be redeemable in 1945. But the Great Depression hit in 1929 and soon the many thousands of WWI veterans and their families were living in desperate and deep poverty. The idea of redeeming those bonus certificates early started to catch on.

The cauldron where the idea simmered and became a demand and then a powerful movement was the city of Portland, Ore. Organizing meetings in Portland led to a national movement that demanded the early release of the funds.

In 1932, 43,000 veterans and their families from every corner of the country converged on Washington, D.C. Although the U.S. Army that they served in had been segregated, Black and white veterans and their families traveled together and then set up camps together in and around the U.S. capital to demand their money.

A bill was proposed in Congress to give the veterans their bonuses. It was defeated mainly because of racism. Some U.S. senators spoke out against it on the Senate floor using openly racist language.

In late June, the police attacked and killed two Bonus Marchers. The Bonus Army still stood strong, stuck together and returned to the camp they had been driven from. Under the command of Gen. Douglas MacArthur, who viewed the Black and white unity as a communist plot, Maj. George Patton (later the infamous Gen. Patton) carried out a brutal attack with soldiers on horseback, using teargas and batons that injured 55 veterans and caused the death of a young boy.

The Bonus Marchers had captured the imagination of millions who followed the progress of the march and the camps every day in the news. The wide support from

the entire working class turned to outrage over the idea that the military would attack poverty-stricken veterans. The determination of the veterans and the support of the working class led to the passage of the GI Bill in 1944. To the government, the threat of this movement hadn't been about the money. It was the fact that Black and white veterans and families were organizing and fighting together.

Fast forward to today. Desperate to defeat the Black Lives Matter movement, the Trump administration has assembled and dispatched an army of federal agents and private mercenaries. The use of the federal agents as domestic police was regularly used in the past to put down strikes — the Homestead, Pa., massacre in 1892; the Ludlow Massacre in 1914; and so on — and against civil rights uprisings in the 1960s. Lyndon Johnson deployed U.S. troops in Detroit, Chicago and Baltimore. The hiring of paid mercenaries employed by companies that are descended from Erik Prince's infamous Blackwater "rent-a-thug" company to try to break up this historic working-class uprising recalls the days of Pinkerton's mercenaries employed for bloody union busting starting with the Homestead massacre. In the face of the militant and united movement that has raged for more than two months, Trump and others in his administration are as alarmed as President Herbert Hoover was facing the Bonus Army in 1932.

But Trump's new army of thugs has only added to the anger and determination of the anti-racist movement. By the weekend of July 25-26, federal agents had been sent to Portland, Ore.; Seattle; Chicago; Albuquerque, N.M.; Washington, D.C.; and Kansas City, Mo. The federal thugs wore no name tags or badges, drove rented minivans and grabbed protesters off the street. In Portland, they conditioned the release of detainees on a requirement that they stay away from the Black Lives Matter demonstrations.

Trump further threatened to extend what amounts to a federal troop occupation to Detroit, New York City and Philadelphia. But instead of melting away, protests

immediately grew in the cities that were already occupied by Trump's army. Tens of thousands gathered at solidarity protests in Seattle, which became another battlefield. Forty-five protesters were arrested there. Demonstrations also grew in Los Angeles; Austin, Texas; Baltimore; Atlanta; New York City; Chicago; and other cities.

Injuries to protesters from "non-lethal" projectiles illegally aimed at their heads, the murder of a protester shot and killed in Austin, videos of protesters being violently thrown to the ground by groups of cops, and photos posted across social media of teargas wafting through the air that made one city indistinguishable from another characterized the weekend. In spite of all of this police repression, protests only continued and grew.

Demonstrations had already been happening for weeks in major cities and even many small towns across the U.S., and local police forces had already been employing many of the same brutal tactics — meting out brutality, carrying out mass arrests, and using tear gas and "non-lethal" ammunition ever since protests broke out in response to the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis cops on May 25.

The police repression didn't stop the movement and neither did Trump's army. George Floyd's murder, so close on the heels of the murders of Breonna Taylor and Ahmed Arbery, came to symbolize centuries of terrible violence against Black and Brown lives in the U.S., came to symbolize thousands of lynchings, thousands of innocent people sentenced to prison by racist judges and juries. His murder was the straw that broke the camel's back. The breadth and endurance of this united uprising has shaken the capitalist class in the U.S.

All power to the people! Smash racism and jail killer cops! Federal troops out of our cities!

