

“Pigs and Capital” by Lawson Bridges (he/they)

ABSTRACT. *As public support for Black Lives Matter grew in the spring and summer of 2020, the public outcries for justice for the victims of police brutality led many to look into the history of policing. This research into how policing developed from the colonial city guards and slave patrols into the militarized police force of today has revealed how the institution of policing was made for the protection of capital.*

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Pigs And Capital

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Abstract

As anti-police sentiment continues to grow in America, the question of ‘do the police serve in the interest of capital?’ began to grow more and more intriguing. With mass movements of people standing against the institution of policing such as Black Lives Matter, the history of policing needed to be examined for the answer to be found. The police are tools of the state to maintain whatever property relation that currently stands whether it be purely financial or racialized in whatever manner that is ‘needed’ to maintain the relationship. Whether it’s during the colonial period, the modern period or the now post-modern period, the police were used in this maintenance of property rights even when it means committing violence against unarmed civilians. With the state being very much in favor of continuing policing, both the state must be abolished along with the police in order for the cycle of violence to be ceased.

Introduction

As the years goes on, the institution of policing has never been as questioned as it is today. This feeling of righteous hatred towards the police has come to a head with the ritualistic killings of black people by the police during the COVID-19 Pandemic. With these killings happening in the bleakest of times, questioning of the motives behind these killings began to take place. This questioning has led to an upturn in liberatory and abolitionist politics as well as upturn in the doubting of the very institution of policing itself. With these beliefs of abolition and reformation resurfacing and my own anarchist politics blossoming, the question of ‘do the police serve in the interest of capital?’ was fully cemented. Whether looking at the origins from the South or the North, property was always at the forefront of the police’s goal of protection. When

those who questioned private property rights started to organize against such structures, the police were used to maintain these property relations. With the capitalist relationship of private property being safeguarded by the police (including its primogenitors), the police have always acted in the interest of capital.

The Predecessor

Before the history of policing in America can be fully examined, the predecessor to American nonsense must be examined as its colonial mother, Britain, was also instrumental in the process of the creation of policing. In the 1800s, the British ruling class was in shock of the severity and proximity of the French Revolution as they feared the excitement of the revolution would inspire the English workers to do the same (Whitehouse, 2014, pg. 3). With the Industrial Revolution being in full effect uprooting the peasant class and transforming them into the proletarian class, the antagonisms between the newly formed proletariat and the bourgeois elements, the antagonisms that manifested needed to be stifled with force (Osterweil, 2020, pgs. 137-138). At the height of these class antagonisms in 1829, property crime was at an all-time high and in order to maintain the property of the bourgeois elements Parliament began to implement the tactics used in colonial Ireland to London in the form of the Metropolitan Police (Williams, 2015, pgs. 81-82). The institution of policing in the British empire was made out of the template of colonial rule for the protection of the property of the bourgeoisie and its many strains of property owners (from factory owners to landlords). The police were used to monitor the activities of the poor and working class as well as to intimidate those who were ‘criminal’ (Whitehouse, 2014, pg. 4). These early beginnings of the police from America’s predecessor are built on the terms of class and the maintenance of class relations in capitalist society. The

measures taken by the British government were instrumental in the development of policing as it gave a template for those who stopped ‘crime’ against property. With Britain as an example, American policing would take a similar route to their own development of policing, but the source of anxiety will come from the enslaved rather than the proletariat.

Slavery and Policing

With the American experience being shaped by the history of slavery, so does the institutions that popped up over time within the United States. As such, the development of policing was inevitably tainted by this predominant institution. The specific form that would be infused into policing were the slave patrols. From the rural slave patrols terrorizing and brutalizing the enslaved to the City Guards that controlled the urban space, the transition from the largely (though for South Carolina service in the slave patrols was required by law) voluntary slave patrols into the government provided ‘protection’ was formed out of the need to control the urban wage-earning slaves (Whitehouse, 2014, pg. 10). Due to the economy in the urban areas (especially port cities like Charleston) not being suited for the land-intensive industry of agriculture and were on the midst of industrialization, slaves were either rented out to factories or directly owned by the factory owners themselves. This deviation in the hierarchy between master and slave allowed the urban enslaved more mobility than their rural counterparts as the wages they earned were slowly building up both social and material capital. With the newly found wages and mobility, the enslaved began to build their own communities within Charleston that gave them an escape from the oppressive white society and all the structures that it held (Osterweil, 2020, pg. 147). With White America being just as anxious towards black people and their own spaces, the tactics and organization of the slave patrols were deployed in these newly

formed communities to ‘keep the peace’ by monitoring and controlling their activities with raids and curfews as well as terrorizing anyone they caught. Though the South was very directly influenced by slavery in its development of policing, the North wasn’t free from this blight in its own development of policing.

Unlike the Southern cities, the Northern cities had a quickly expanding population especially New York City. This was due to the industrialization that was taking place required more and more hands to operate the machinery needed to produce whatever commodity was demanded at the time. This need for workers was met from three sources the established WASP New Yorkers, the Irish immigrants, and the enslaved and free Black people. The competition for the meager wages that were offered created both tension and solidarity as riots of both reactionary and revolutionary character were happening simultaneously during the lead up to the establishment of the New York Police Department (Whitehouse, 2014, pgs. 8-9). Both Black and Anti-Black riots were common in the post-colonial era as the laws pertaining to slaves were contested by Black New Yorkers, though the riots that followed usually failed, and anti-Black sentiment led to whites rioting and destroying Black structures (Osterweil, 2015, pgs. 141-142). At the same time, workers (white and black) began to strike by rioting in a wave of unrefined class consciousness from 1825 to 1828, although the taint of racism still bobbed its head from now and then with the ravaging of Black structures (Whitehouse, 2014, pg. 9). The epidemic of rioting New Yorkers led the local government to reform the Watch from a group of drunken guardsmen to what would become the NYPD. The newly forming class consciousness that began to form in the early years of industrialization would lead to even greater strides to repress such events.

Workers and Strikes

As industrialization began to spread further and further throughout the United States, industrial unionization was right behind it. The conditions created by industrialization were fertile ground for working class organization to take place as the gap between the poor workers was growing evermore wider with the factory owners and landlords that hoarded the wealth the workers created while given only pittance for their ever-tiresome daily tasks. These malformed conditions lead workers to form unions to obtain more favorable working conditions such as an 8-hour workday. The way these better working conditions were fought for was through the usage of strikes even at the refusal of the support of the conservative leaders of unions, such as the Knights of Labor, for the strikes to take place (Brecher, 2020, pgs. 52-53). The movement for the 8-hour workday erupted onto the stage with the general strike of 1886 being held in the industrial centers such as Chicago. In Chicago, on May 1st, concessions were being made in great strides as shorter working hours and, in some cases, increased wages were being won by workers of all strides, but the papers were foretelling a bloody event that occurred only two days later (Brecher, 2020, pg. 60). On May 4th, more and more workers joined the strike, the police fired upon a crowd of strikers, that were trying to stop scabs from working, killing four strikers and seriously wounding many others. This caused the laborers to gather later that day to protest police brutality and at the Haymarket rally, where anarchist leaders were giving speeches appealing to workers to take up arms. As the Haymarket rally was beginning to end and a gaggle of cops showed up ordering the rally to disperse, a dynamite bomb went flying and exploded amongst the cops, this gave the cops an excuse to fire upon the crowd killing a demonstrator and wounding many others (Brecher, 2020, pg. 61). Whether the bomb came from the crowd itself or not (it's still a highly debated topic to this day), the police took the opportunity to act in an equally horrific manner and

dispersed a crowd of unarmed workers with the unrestrained force at their disposal. The police acted in their role to keep the workers within the confines of the labor market with the full support of the state to maintain the relationship (Tyner, 2016, pg. 71). They used their monopoly on violence to curtail those that tried to obtain better working conditions and who advocated for a better society. With the Haymarket Massacre being not even a day old, the immigrants and anarchists that participated in the rally would be the newest target for the police.

Immigrants and Anarchists

Though an anti-immigrant sentiment has always been held within America, especially towards Eastern Europeans and Jews, the nonsense that followed the Haymarket Massacre cemented not only anti-immigrant sentiments but against Anarchism as well. Days after the bombing, the strike being thoroughly demoralized, the police arrested 8 anarchist leaders, who had no connection to the bombing, 4 of the leaders were executed by hanging, one committed suicide and the remaining three were pardoned years later (Brecher, 2020, pg. 63). The paranoia that had led to the deaths of these anarchists wouldn't stop there as anarchists began to use the 'propaganda of the deed' (political violence against an individual in power to act as a catalyst for a revolution) to try and start a revolution. Fleeing from the Old World and the repressive monarchist governments of Europe, the immigrants that came were in search of a promise of freedom but were met with another repressive system. Jewish immigrants were the first to this realization as they have always dealt with governments labelling them as criminal. With the skills acquired in their time in both America and Europe, as well as being more politically literate, more and more Jews began to identify as anarchists and join and influence unions (Zimmer, 2015, pg. 30). However, anarchists weren't unified as they were still in argument over

the effectiveness of the ‘propaganda of the deed’, but the debate would come to a quick agreement after the attempted assassination of Henry Clay Frick by Alexander Berkman. Frick was the target of assassination due to his hiring of the Pinkerton’s to break the strike, which ended with dead and injured workers, Berkman was trying to rile up the workers with this revolutionary act but ended up making a great excuse to crack down on such beliefs (Zimmer, 2015, pg. 31). As the rising fear of anarchism and its otherness was becoming well-documented by the state, the laws were made in the early 20th century to combat ‘anarchists’, whether they were or not. The police and the Border Patrol were used to raid these urban neighborhoods of ‘criminals’ to stop both crime and ideology (Bavery, 2018, pg. 2). These raids are a way to not only control the area but control the edges of allowed political thought. The state’s reaction against the anarchists was just one reaction against those who threatened not only the state’s power but the power of markets. The power imbalance rampant throughout America’s history from the colonial period all the way up to the 20th century wouldn’t disappear.

Modern/Post-Modern Policing and Social Control

Throughout America’s history the issue of power has been a constant throughout the years as the American state has maintained its power even with the dissatisfaction with its governance resembling more like hatred. The hatred towards both state and police is felt more intensely by Black people than almost every other group in America. Forced into substandard living standards with rotting infrastructure around them, the situation is made even more detested with the factor of policing of ‘high crime’ areas (Logan and Oakley, 2017, pgs. 4-5). The reasoning why the policing of Black and ‘high crime’ areas is almost synonymous is due to the poverty inflicted upon the Black community due to centuries of economic and racial oppression.

This poverty is essential to the survival of capitalism as a boss can always just replace a worker with another even worse off. With the creation of poverty also comes the maintenance of the impoverished, especially with the advent of neoliberal economic thinking infecting every institution in modern world, as those in poverty are ignored and are blamed and therefore are deserving of punishment the police and the state deem worthy (Reiner, 2010, pg. 29). The punishment that follows this logic are the numerous deaths by the hands of the police. From 2000 to 2013, in Oakland, California, 117 people were fired on by police, 88 were struck by bullets, 19 unarmed people were shot, 9 of which were struck in the back and appeared to be fleeing, and 39 were killed (Rodriguez, 2020, pg. 10). This is only in one city but the amount of people that were killed and on the spot for a crime they may not have committed is quite despicable. When looking at national mortality rates cause by police it reflects the history of slavery as those most likely to be murdered by the police are non-Hispanic Black men and are three times more likely to be murdered than their non-Hispanic White counterparts (The Lancet, 2021, pg. 7). The reflection of slavery comes in the targeting of Black men by the police as it has been a constant throughout America's history for a Black man to be killed by a cop. By killing those in poverty and more likely to be impoverished, the police maintain the hierarchies that were formed centuries ago.

Conclusion

With policing being a relatively new institution in the brief span of human existence, it isn't a surprise that it developed alongside the formation of capitalism. Policing is a tool of both state and capital as it was formed during the formation of what became capitalism during the Industrial Revolution. The shock of the social upheaval that was taking place within Britain

would give way to a force that was given access to the state's monopoly on violence like the army but was also in control of the space the workers lived in. The control and surveillance that came with the Metropolitan Police was exactly what was needed to keep the existing structures standing. This experiment would prove quite beneficial for the state and capital as it would spread out from London to New York that had its own problem in the form of riots every year. Although the premier form of protection of capital in America came in the form of slave patrols as their sole purpose was to keep human property within the jurisdiction of the owner and keeping the social control of white America over the enslaved both within and outside of the rural area. The protection of human property was not the only form of police serving capital as the police were and are always at the forefront of the terrorizing of striking workers as Haymarket made it quite clear the police are always ready to gun down innocent if given enough reason to do so. This extends to anyone that questions both the necessity of the state and capital as the police will always be there to make sure that a person isn't harboring any 'illegal' ideas. To say that police serve in the interest of capital is an understatement as they have become an integral part in the continued existence of capital and therefore are too attached to be considered entirely separate entities. Without the police being hand in hand with the state and capital, both concepts would've been thrown to the wind as revolutionary ideas would have overcome such oppressive governance.

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