

Detroit Cops On Shooting Spree

Fifth Estate Collective

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In America's big cities in the 1960s, white police forces patrolled black ghettos like an occupying army. Detroit took the lead in integrating its cops, and now also has the highest percentage of female officers in any big U.S. city. Yet this "modern" department has proven to be one of the most lethal in the country for its people. (See Detroit Seen in this issue).

Malice Green was not anomalous. In 1980, Cuban political prisoner Jose Iturralde was released from a Havana jail and joined the Mariel boatlift to Florida. Iturralde managed to escape Cuba alive, but jumped from a socialist frying pan into the fire of the U.S. police state. This veteran of Castro's prison system spent time in various Federal detention centers and by 1987 arrived in Detroit. One year ago, homeless, crack-addicted, and unarmed, he was shot to death by two black cops. Seven bullets were pumped into Iturralde from high-powered police semi-automatic pistols (one cop initially lied about firing his weapon, then had to recant when ballistics tests proved otherwise).

The killers, members of the corrupt "gang squad," were acquitted of criminal charges in April, claiming Iturralde screamed at them in Spanish and acted as if he had a gun. The TV and newspapers reported uncritically the police version which had Iturralde practically commit suicide by putting his hand in his pocket and running towards men he knew to be gang squad thugs.

Such "explanations" completely ignore institutional problems in the Detroit Police Department. According to the Police Foundation, a Washington-based research group, Detroit leads the nation in number of firearms discharged by its cops and the number of citizens killed or wounded in police-related incidents. Further exploration by the press of this situation (including another shooting death last summer of an unarmed black man by a black cop) as a systemic problem in the D.P.D. having little to do with race would obviously not serve the interests of the ruling elites. Law enforcement agents come in different colors and genders, but remain generic state terrorists.

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