



Black Butte Center for Railroad Culture

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BBCRC Statement on Police Violence and the Murder of George Floyd

The Black Butte Center for Railroad Culture (BBCRC) roundly condemns the police murder of George Floyd, the latest atrocity in a long and sordid history of police brutality against poor and working people, especially among people of color.

The police forces and their authorized use of deadly firearms got their start in the US in the 1830s. Big cities recruited officers to protect the property and the transport of goods of large businesses. In the South, the primary policing institutions were set up to chase down runaway slaves and quell slave revolts. Later, after “emancipation,” these forces generally were charged with enforcing segregation and the disenfranchisement of freed slaves. Post-slavery police forces were often infiltrated and outright controlled by the Ku Klux Klan. In both the North and South the police were created with the intent to preserve the wealth and privilege of the elite. From the start, it was intrinsic that the police be violent, racist, and oppressive.

When workers began to organize as industrial society took hold mid-century, the police forces naturally took the side of the emerging wealthy industrialists. Cops were used to infiltrate unions and break strikes. State police forces in the early 20th century were founded largely to break strikes and protect corporate property. Railroad workers in particular would come under fire from the police forces nationwide in hundreds of strike actions. Likewise, those who rode the rails have traditionally been the victims of police brutality. Police enforced so-called “vagrancy laws” to indiscriminately arrest and incarcerate tens of thousands of hoboes, tramps and other transient laborers. They were often sent to work camps with deplorable conditions to labor under harsh conditions, often overseen by brutal police guards. And when migrant workers attempted to organize into the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the police were a willing tool of the corporate interests to suppress these efforts, beating, arresting, and jailing thousands.

As an organization dedicated to the men and women who have historically worked upon and ridden the rails, the BBCRC is unequivocally opposed to this long and disgraceful record of police brutality, violence, and racism. We join with Black Lives Matter, the Poor People’s Campaign, anti-fascists, numerous other community organizations, and many labor unions – including rail unions BMWED and SMART-TD – in condemning police violence, and all forms of racism, bigotry, and discrimination.

Specifically, the BBCRC supports the following:

- 1- A dramatic reduction in funding for police forces nationwide, with funds freed up directed towards community-led solutions, housing, health care, education, employment and desperately needed social services.
- 2- Creation of an independent inspection body to investigate police misconduct, holding cops accountable for abusive practices such as the use of excessive force and racial and bias-based profiling.
- 3- Certification and licensure of all police officers from all police forces.
- 4- An end to the ability of police officers to move from agency to agency after committing offensive behaviors.
- 5- A refocus of police resources on training, de-escalation and community building.
- 6- Adoption of the “absolute necessity” doctrine of lethal force.
- 7- Retraining of police officers to productive and useful employment as social workers, psychologists, counselors, etc. to assist in community development.
- 8- The creation of “living wage” jobs, universal health care, adequate housing, equal access to education and guaranteed employment for all.
- 9- “Community control” of police forces, with residents having the power to hire and fire.
- 10- A complete demilitarization of the police force.