In one of my columns about racial profiling and the Michigan police, a white “radical” wrote in “chastising” me about referring to this form of police harassment as “Driving While Black”, since he said that he as a white male had on occasion been stopped by the cops himself because of his “long hair.” He also went on to say that I should concentrate on “class politics”, instead of “mere racial issues.” Since I didn’t want to answer him in a personal letter, frankly didn’t have the inclination to engage in this discussion with yet another smug white middle class “radical”, I decided to do it in my column.

I think that many white people just don’t understand just how serious this matter is, nor how racism really plays out in the lives of Black people, in relationship to authority and the state. Black people have been shot and killed because of racial profiling and other forms of racial harassment. They are in prison in massive numbers because of the low quality of life and lack of decent employment in this country. Black babies die from infant mortality at 3rd world levels, because of the lack of proper nourishment. Further, these Black people are forced to live in racial and economic ghettos, within which many die or suffer from preventable diseases for years. Their communi-
ties are impoverished and underdeveloped due to conscious de-
nial of community development funding by the government. In
other words, they are an oppressed people, not just individuals
harassed because of their clothing, the way they talk or dress,
although there is no question these things can play a part in an
individual case.

But, racism and police brutality go much deeper than the
surface appearance of Black people. The fact that it is the gov-
ernment itself which protects these racist cops, even when they
commit the most horrendous murders should tell us all some-
thing, that and the fact that disproportionate numbers of Black
people are the ones being killed, not white men with beards,
wearin tie-dyed shirts, or pony-tails. It just ain’t the same, my
friend! We are not talking about personal prejudice by some
dumb white guy who just doesn’t “like” Black people, but sys-
tematic racism by the state, national oppression, as some social
scientists call it, even “internal colonialism” by others. Hey, the
cop himself does not act as an individual, but rather as an agent
of the state, a hired gun. Now everyone claims to understand
this intellectually, but Black people are being brutalized in the
real world, not in theory.

In speaking about any class issues in the United States, an
understanding of white supremacy and economic inequality
must go hand-in-hand. Most white “radicals” want to neatly
put “race issues” over in one neat category, and then “class is-
ues” in another. We’ll call this “vulgar radicalism” because it
is totally not based on any social or political understanding of
the problem. The US working class has never been monolithic,
there has always been a dual tier economy of poor oppressed
workers of color on the bottom, and better paid and treated
whites standing on top of and benefitting from their misery. I
don’t just mean the bosses either, as many so-called “radicals”
like to claim, when they talk mythically about some so-called
“aristocracy of labor.”