

PEOPLE'S NEWS #1

JUSTICE FOR CHARLES BROWN --- THE RIGHT TO SELF-DEFENSE

Charles Brown is a 19-year old Black man who has been convicted by a jury with no Blacks on it and sentenced by the racist judge, Riordan, to 30 to 110 years in prison. His "crime" was to shoot and wound two police in self-defense. We say self-defense because Charles is a young Black man who didn't back down when he was threatened and harassed by the police. Instead he defended himself and his rights.

Charles did not just suddenly start shooting, like the police and newspapers would like us to think. The truth is that he had been harassed and threatened with his life by the same two police that were shot, Avila and Johnson. The truth is that Charles was reacting to the long history of police harassment in South Broadway and all other poor communities, where the police are used to divide and intimidate us, and to make it hard for us to unite against 75% unemployment, bad housing, poor schools, and lousy city services.

It is time to tell the facts of the story from Charles' side--our side--which is the side that the newspapers and the courts deliberately leave out. We can unite and resist their railroad of Charles (and the many others) if we stand up and speak out together, the way Charles was trying to do alone. If we don't unite, one by one we will be victims. Together, united, we stand strong.

THE REAL FACTS OF THE CASE

Charles' family has been harassed over the last 10 years by the police breaking-in to "search" their home over half a dozen times under some pretense or other. For a while it seemed like every time there was a crime in the city, they would hassle the family. But, there were never any charges and convictions.

Two weeks before the shooting, a lot of things started coming down on Charles. The police took him under "protective custody" with drinking as the excuse. Then they tried to get a woman whose purse was snatched to identify him, but she didn't. Later they would charge him with the robbery of the Ram store, but they had to drop these fake charges because Charles had witnesses who proved he was working. These witnesses later had to leave town for safety.

On the day before the shooting, the two police, Avila and Johnson, hassled a group of young people at Killer Park for ID's. Charles refused saying, "What do you want my ID for? You know who I am. You arrested me the other day." They tried to arrest him for refusing to show his ID, but Charles ran and got away. Avila almost got hit by a car trying to run after him. From then on, the police turned on their siren and flashed lights to race after him every time they saw Charles on the street. They even tried to run him over several times.

That night police in fatigues were again hassling people, this time at Dennis Chavez. Charles and some others got away, but four brothers were beat up by the police. A police car was seen waiting most of the night in an alley outside Charles' house. Witnesses to what happened that day were not allowed to testify in court, and have all been sent to jail or left town for safety.

On the day of the shooting, Charles heard that the police were out to "get him". When he got home, a police car was flashing its searchlight on his house. Charles went out and a little later, he and a friend were standing on the sidewalk talking when the police drove by. The police stopped and called his friend over. When

Charles' friend left, the police shouted something like, "Brown, get over here." Charles walked over. He says one of the police reached for his gun and started to get out of the car. Afraid for his life because of the threats, Charles put his foot against the door and shot to defend himself. A witness near the scene was put in jail after the trial, because he testified for Charles. Right after, Charles went home and asked the APD operator to stay on the line and to send a Black officer because he wanted to surrender. Gangs of police showed up, but no Black officer was ever sent. The newspapers reported twice that Charles "vowed to shoot more." This is very hard to believe, because: 1) His gun was found on the roof where he had thrown it so police wouldn't have an excuse to kill him, 2) He gave his address and asked for a Black officer to turn himself in. Many items in the papers, which are from police reports, are unclear, contradictory, and downright untrue.

Three days later, one of Charles' brothers was accused of a robbery. Three police took him downtown, then brought him to his home and broke in to "search". They didn't find anything, but two of them beat him up while Johnson, one of the wounded police, watched. Back downtown, they smashed his head in the elevator. A few days later he was released for lack of evidence.

Three weeks later two of Charles' brothers were chased into a neighbor's house by police with guns drawn. Again one of them was Johnson.

Charles was not singled out by the police. This long history of harassment, the ID hassles, fake arrests, break-ins, beatings are happening every day in South Broadway and barrios. Next week, next month, the police will just decide to get someone else.

JUSTICE FOR CHARLES BROWN

Charles' first trial lasted a day and a half and ended in a hung jury. His lawyer a public defender, argued that Charles had acted in self-defense, that the police behave in South Broadway very differently from the way they behave in the Heights and richer neighborhoods, that poor people feel they must defend themselves from the police. At the second trial, the judge, Riordan, wouldn't allow any testimony about harassment and threats by the police, so that a jury with no Blacks on it came back after 20 minutes with a guilty verdict. Riordan gave the maximum sentence: 30 to 110 years. Whites, even hired killers, have gotten shorter time.

FIGHT FOR A NEW TRIAL

Charles' conviction is now up for appeal. If the appeal is upheld, we must fight together to win an acquittal based on self-defense at the new trial. If it is not upheld, we will fight to carry the appeal to higher courts. Whether Charles receives a new trial---WHETHER POOR PEOPLE IN SOUTH BROADWAY CONTINUE TO BE HARASSED, THREATENED AND RAILROADED---will depend on us to unite and fight for the right to self-defense in Amerika.

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