

The whitewash of Tamir Rice's killing and the fight against police violence

Niles Williamson
13 October 2015

It has been nearly one year since a police officer shot and killed 12-year-old Tamir Rice while he was playing with a toy gun in a neighborhood park in Cleveland, Ohio. Criminal charges have yet to be brought against either of the officers involved in the killing: the shooter, Timothy Loehmann, and his partner, Frank Garmback.

This weekend the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's office published on its web site two supposedly independent reports which both conclude that the police murder of Rice was "objectively reasonable."

The reports are transparent efforts to deny the obvious. Surveillance video shows that the police officers rolled up to the young boy in their squad car and opened fire in less than two seconds. Rice, who was struck once in the stomach, was left by the officers to bleed on the ground without any first aid for at least four minutes. He died the next day at the hospital.

The reports, prepared by a former FBI agent and a current district attorney at the request of the prosecutor, Thomas J. McGinty, were presented to a secret grand jury that has been impaneled to decide whether or not to bring charges against Loehmann and Garmback. The outrageous decision by McGinty to selectively release reports favorable to the officers has all the markings of an attempt to whitewash the crime and condition public opinion for an exoneration.

The likelihood of Rice's killers being charged with a crime and put on trial is extremely low; if they are brought to trial, the odds of a conviction are even lower.

While police killings are a more than daily occurrence in the United States, with most going unreported in the media, prosecutions and convictions are extremely rare. A report by the *Washington Post* earlier this year found that, over the past decade, only

54 officers have been charged for a fatal shooting. Of these, only 11 have been convicted. In the last three years alone, nearly 3,000 people have been killed by police.

Among the most notable exonerations in recent months was the decision by a judge in May to acquit another Cleveland, Ohio police officer, Michael Brelo, of manslaughter charges in the deaths of two unarmed individuals who were killed in a barrage of more than 130 rounds fired into their car. Last month, a local prosecutor announced that Pasco, Washington police officers would not be charged for gunning down an unarmed immigrant worker, Antonio Zambrano-Montes, in February.

These actions followed the decisions not to charge Darren Wilson, the police officer who killed Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in August 2014, and Daniel Pantaleo, the cop who choked Eric Garner to death in July of the same year.

The latest developments in the Rice case fit into a definite modus operandi of the ruling class as it seeks to tamp down social discontent in the face of unrelenting police violence.

After a police officer commits a horrific killing, public outrage finds expression in mass protests in which justice is demanded in the form of a trial and conviction. Democratic Party politicians make disingenuous statements of concern for the deceased and promise to make serious changes that will rein in the police violence. Finally, efforts are made to prepare public opinion to accept the exoneration of the killer cop, and the killing goes on.

In instances where protests threaten to escape the control of the Democratic Party and its auxiliary organizations, the state has responded with brutal repression—as in the military-style lockdowns in

Ferguson following the killing of Michael Brown and in Baltimore, Maryland this spring after the killing of Freddie Gray.

The Obama administration has played a key role in this process. The administration has given the green light for police killings to continue apace, refusing to bring civil rights charges in multiple cases and intervening on behalf of the police in every police brutality case brought before the Supreme Court. While there has been talk about addressing the militarization of local police forces, nothing in fact has been done to limit the military grade equipment held by police departments, including combat rifles, armored vehicles and drones.

At the same time, the protests and popular anger over police violence have been actively channeled behind the Democratic Party through the intervention of groups like Black Lives Matter and other proponents of identity politics. The function of these organizations has been to obscure the fundamental class questions at stake, insisting that the issue of police violence is entirely a matter of racism.

They claim that police violence can be opposed by appealing to the Obama administration or hiring more black police officers. They ignore the fact that the majority of victims of police violence in the US are white, and that the regularity of police killings is not altered by the racial composition of either the police or the politicians who preside over them.

In fact, the unending series of police killings has much deeper roots. It is the festering sore of a society riven by social inequality, presided over by a ruling class that wages unending war abroad and is increasingly utilizing the methods of war to deal with social tensions within the country. The police are a critical instrument of the corporate and financial elite in the defense of its social system, capitalism.

If one conclusion can be drawn from the experience of the last year of police killings and protests, it is that the Democratic Party and the purveyors of racial identity politics have proven to be a dead end for the working class in the fight against police violence.

Young people are angry and outraged by an increasingly unbearable situation and are looking for a way to fight. They understand that a society that seeks to justify the police murder of a child and hundreds of others is morally bankrupt and completely irrational.

The experiences with police violence and the response to mass protests over the last year have made it clear to a growing number of youth and workers that the fundamental question of police violence is one of class. As one worker in Ferguson recently told the WSWs, “It’s not about black or white, it’s about rich or poor and everybody that’s at a certain income level, we need to get together.”

To fight against police violence, this widespread class sentiment must be given conscious political form. Opposition to the brutality of the state must be connected to the growing struggles of workers of all races, throughout the country and internationally, against the relentless attack waged by the corporations and the banks. It means the political unification of the entire working class, on the basis of a revolutionary and socialist program, against the Democratic and Republican parties and the capitalist system they defend.



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