

North Carolina cop who shot man in back will not be charged

Shannon Jones
1 December 2016

In a decision that is provoking widespread anger and disgust, the Charlotte, North Carolina police officer who shot 43-year-old Keith Lamont Scott on September 20 will not face charges according to local prosecutors. R. Andrew Murray, the prosecutor of Mecklenburg County said the officer “acted lawfully” when he shot Scott.

Scott, who suffered a fatal bullet wound to the back, was stopped by police outside an apartment complex in Charlotte’s University City neighborhood. Police claimed they saw Scott with a weapon. However, video of the shooting shows Scott with both hands at his sides when officer Brentley Vinson fired four shots, killing the man.

Both Vinson and Scott are black. The killing of Scott set off days of angry protests in Charlotte that were met with a militarized response by authorities, including the imposition of a midnight curfew and the mobilization of the National Guard. One young man, 26-year old Justin Carr, was shot during the protests under murky circumstances.

Police initially refused to release video of the shooting, but backed down in the face of continuing protests. Before the release of the video, police claimed that Scott had “something in his hand and pointed it at the officer.” In fact video footage showed Scott calmly walking backwards, his hands at his sides, in a non-threatening manner.

Following the shooting police released pictures of a gun and an ankle holster. They claimed that the gun was loaded and had Scott’s fingerprints on it. None of the videos showed Scott getting out of his car with a gun in his hand, something all four officers at the scene claimed they saw.

In an audio recording of the shooting Scott’s wife can be heard pleading with officers not to fire and insisting

that he was unarmed. A protest against the prosecutor’s decision was planned for Wednesday evening outside police headquarters. Charlotte police said they were mobilizing all their special units, including riot squads.

Through their attorney, Justin Bamberg, Scott’s family said they were profoundly disappointed in the prosecutor’s decision. “That does not mean that this officer’s killing of Keith Scott was right. All that means is that under the view of the DA’s office, it wasn’t criminal. And those are two completely different things,” Bamberg said.

The decision not to prosecute the officer who shot Scott is the latest in a series of legal travesties related to the police killing of workers and young people, who, in a large number of cases have been unarmed. According to the Washington Post, 875 people have been fatally shot by cops so far this year.

One study found just 41 police officers charged in relation to shootings between 2005 and 2011. That compares to many thousands recorded as “justifiable homicide.” The Charlotte case follows the exoneration of the New York City police officer that killed Eric Garner in 2014, and the recent dropping of charges against Baltimore cops involved in the murder of Freddie Gray.

The same day that Charlotte authorities exonerated the cop involved in the shooting of Keith Lamont Scott, a judge in South Carolina ruled that a jury could consider a lesser charge of manslaughter in the well-publicized case of a white police officer who shot an unarmed black man in the back after a traffic stop. A bystander caught the horrifying incident on his cell phone camera, exposing cops’ attempted cover-up of the brutal killing.

Under South Carolina law murder is defined as the unlawful taking of life with malice. South Carolina has

the death penalty, but since the prosecution is not alleging aggravated circumstances the maximum term the officer could face would be 30 years to life. Manslaughter is the unlawful taking of a life without malice, and carries a significantly lower prison term of 2 - 30 years.

Former North Charleston officer Michael Slager is charged in the April 2015 shooting death of Walter Scott. The unarmed man fled after being pulled over by Slager for a minor traffic infraction. Prosecutors said Scott likely fled because he was behind on child support and feared arrest.

Closing arguments were expected Wednesday afternoon. The jury heard 55 witnesses and visited the crime scene. They also viewed the bystander video several times.

For his part Slager testified, in contradiction to the video evidence, that Scott grabbed his stun gun and came toward him. "I felt total fear," he claimed and said he fired until "the threat was stopped." The video footage clearly shows Slager shooting Scott in the back as he fled.

With the wave of police violence showing no signs of abating, the administration of president-elect Donald Trump, the most right wing and anti-democratic in American history, is set to take office in January. Trump has stated his unconditional support for the police and his hostility to those involved in protests against police shootings promising to "restore law and order and justice in America."

Trump recently interviewed Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke for possible appointment to the post of Homeland Security Director. The fascistic Clarke called protests against Trump that erupted after the election the work of "radical anarchists" that needed to be "quelled."

In an interview with Fox News he spoke of "lawlessness and the need for law and order in the American ghetto and cities like Chicago."

In a 2015 radio interview he called for the arrest of those Americans who evinced sympathy for terrorism and their incarceration in offshore prison facilities such as Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. He estimated that up to one million would be jailed under his proposal.

Clarke oversees a brutal law enforcement regime in Milwaukee. One prisoner, Terrill Thomas, died of dehydration in the Milwaukee County jail. Prison

authorities cut off water to his cell and he was heard begging for water in the days before he died. Four people, including a newborn baby have died in the jail since April.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact