

The St. Louis police riot

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The 2011 killing of Anthony Lamar Smith by St. Louis police officer Jason Stockley was an open-and-shut case of police murder.

Smith was a 24-year-old African-American who was driving away from police after they burst in on what they claim was a drug deal. Stockley, who is white, was recorded on a dashboard camera saying, “I’m going to kill this motherfucker, don’t you know it.” Less than 45 seconds later, his partner Brian Bianchi rammed their police SUV into Smith’s car. Video of the incident shows that Smith remained in the car and made no attempt to flee.

Stockley jumped out of the SUV and shot Smith five times. Forensic evidence revealed that Stockley fired the “kill shot” from six inches away. The officer then returned to his vehicle, rummaged through a duffel bag and returned to Smith’s car to plant a throwaway gun on the dead victim. Tests showed the gun had only Stockley’s DNA on it.

In addition to his police-issued handgun, Stockley was carrying his personal AK-47 in violation of official department protocol.

Despite the overwhelming evidence, it took more than four years for prosecutors to charge Stockley. When he was finally arrested on charges of first-degree murder, another year and a half went by until last Friday’s not-guilty verdict, handed down by Missouri Circuit Court Judge Timothy Wilson.

Stockley’s acquittal has sparked a week of largely peaceful protests in St. Louis and the surrounding suburbs demanding justice for Smith and an end to police violence.

The violent and provocative response by riot police, including the “kettling” and mass arrest of protesters and the fascistic spectacle of cops chanting “Whose streets? Our streets!” reveals the real state of class relations in America.

The Trump administration and the capitalist state are seizing on the inevitable outrage provoked by the judicial sanctioning of police murder to legitimize the violence

carried out on a daily basis in working-class communities by the uniformed shock troops of the ruling class. It is only a few weeks since Trump spoke to police on Long Island and encouraged them to be “rough” on detainees.

There was an element of deliberate provocation in the days leading up to the verdict announcement. Anticipating the exoneration of Stockley, city and state officials, Democratic and Republican, all but dared workers and youth to take to the streets, making it clear that dissent would be met with repression.

Tensions were stoked by the announcement a week in advance that the judge had made his decision. The media made wild predictions of rioting. The police were mobilized well ahead of Friday’s decision by Democratic Mayor Lyda Krewson, while Republican Governor Eric Greitens placed the National Guard on alert. The courthouse and city hall were barricaded. Schools were shut down. Businesses were warned to board up their windows and send employees home early on verdict day.

The police have thus far arrested 165 people, even though the protests have been relatively small. The constitutional right to peaceful assembly and free speech has been rendered null and void as police systematically surround and pen in demonstrators, order them to vacate, and then arrest them for failing to disperse.

The ACLU of Missouri filed a lawsuit Monday against the City of St. Louis for unconstitutional police conduct including kettling, using pepper spray and interfering with the filming of police activity.

St. Louis is being used to set a precedent. Under Trump there is to be no handwringing over police murders, no federal investigations, no consent decrees.

Stockley’s verdict came three years and one month after another St. Louis-area cop murdered eighteen-year-old Michael Brown just a few blocks away from where Smith was killed and on the very same street—Florissant Avenue. Brown’s killer, Darren Wilson, was never charged. The Obama administration’s Department of Justice refused to bring civil rights charges against him.

In the aftermath of Brown’s murder and the resulting

protests in Ferguson, the Democratic Party, the Obama administration and newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* shed crocodile tears about his death and called for “healing.” After then-Governor Jay Nixon, a Democrat, called in the National Guard, a number of columnists, politicians and other moralizers made various suggestions: body cameras, better police training, stronger oversight boards, the hiring of more African-American and minority officers and police chiefs, etc., etc.

Three years later the never-ending stream of atrocities continues. The total number of police killings nationally this year is set to surpass last year’s total of 1,116, with 874 killed as of Friday. Getting shot by the police is a real danger for tens of millions of working-class Americans of all races. Just in the past week police shot and killed a white student in Atlanta and a Hispanic man in Oklahoma City.

Neither able nor willing to offer any policies to address the desperate social crisis facing tens of millions of workers and youth, the political agents of the financial oligarchy build up the state apparatus of repression. Now they are giving the police a green light to carry out their death squad activities with impunity.

Both the Democratic mayor of St. Louis and the Republican governor have praised the “restraint” shown by the St. Louis police, and the corporate media have made the police rampage a nonissue. Neither the *New York Times* nor the *Washington Post* has commented editorially on the storm trooper-like behavior of the cops.

Black Lives Matter and pseudo-left proponents of identity politics, including the Democratic Socialists of America and Socialist Alternative, continue to insist that the police violence is simply a question of race and racism. These organizations seek to obscure the fundamental class issues and divide the working class along racial, ethnic and gender lines.

There was a noticeable difference in the approach taken by the St. Louis police to a “White Allies Only” protest Thursday night endorsed by the DSA and Socialist Alternative, indicating the tacit support of the city administration for the racist politics of the event. There were no arrests and the police watched from a distance as demonstrators carried signs reading “Black Lives Matter” and “White Silence = White Violence.”

While racism plays a significant role in the disproportionate number of African-American victims, the daily bloodletting by police in the United States impacts every race and ethnicity. What the vast majority

of the victims have in common is the fact that they are poor and working-class.

The acquittal of Stockley was stained with racism. In his decision, Judge Wilson wrote that “an urban heroin dealer not in possession of a firearm would be an anomaly.” There is little doubt that here “urban” is a euphemism for “black.”

But it is necessary to approach the issue of racism, as all other social questions, from a historical and scientific standpoint. It is not something engrained in “human nature.” It is rather rooted in the very material and oppressive social structure of capitalism, based on the economic exploitation of the working class. It has long served, and continues to serve, as an ideological and political weapon of the ruling class to divide the working class and impede the growth of class-consciousness.

The essential instrument for upholding the interests of the ruling class and suppressing the working class is the state, which, as Lenin explained, citing Engels, consists of “special bodies of armed men,” including the police, prisons, etc. It is the state, not of one race or color, but of one class—the capitalist class.

In his fascistic speech before the UN on Tuesday, Trump felt the need, seemingly out of the blue, to launch an attack on socialism. This reflects the fear within the ruling elite of the growth of anticapitalist and socialist sentiment in the working class. This fear is well grounded.

Mass opposition to war, social inequality and repression is growing. The critical task is the development of a new political leadership to unite the working class across all racial, religious and national boundaries in a common, politically conscious struggle to end all forms of oppression by ending the system that causes it—capitalism.



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