

Protests over police violence enter third week in St. Louis

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Protesters in St. Louis, Missouri unfurled a banner at the Cardinals-Brewers baseball game Friday night in Busch Stadium with a rendition of the Cardinals' mascot and the words: "Stop Killing Us."

The group, which had purchased tickets for the game, was quickly escorted out of the stadium by police. The protesters subsequently joined almost 200 others gathered at Kiener Plaza, with police watching from nearby, before marching to the intersection of Broadway and Walnut. Once again riot police violently attacked protesters.

Local activist Reverend Darryl Gray was arrested after police sprayed him with a chemical agent and another activist, Calvin Kennedy, was shot with a taser. Police later confirmed "at least" two arrests were made.

Friday's events were the latest in a string of protests sparked by a not-guilty verdict in the murder trial of former St. Louis officer Jason Stockley, handed down more than two weeks ago on September 15.

Stockley, who is white, shot and killed Anthony Lamar Smith, who was black, in 2011, after a high-speed chase in which Stockley was recorded saying he intended to kill Smith. The verdict was viewed by many as a mockery of justice due to the overwhelming evidence brought against Stockley which included multiple videos of the murder, an audio recording, and DNA evidence suggesting that the officer planted a gun.

The city is still seething over the non-guilty verdict. Protests have been held nearly every day since the announcement. The reaction from the political establishment has been to allow the police department to terrorize the demonstrations with unrestrained force. Police have used mace, pepper spray bullets, and tasers against the largely peaceful protesters. So far over 120

people have been arrested. The unhinged behavior of the police force has been fully supported and at times encouraged by local Democratic and Republican politicians.

Their endorsement of the police force was taken a step further late last week when the St. Louis Board of Aldermen, the legislative body of the city, proposed a resolution, sponsored by Democratic Aldermen Joseph Vaccaro of the 23rd Ward and John Coatar of the 7th Ward, to commend "the men and women of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department for their steadfast dedication to safeguarding the wellbeing" of city residents. The board declined to vote on the measure and instead referred it to a committee.

The Democratic mayor of St. Louis, Lyda Krewson, cancelled town hall meetings the week immediately following the announcement of the verdict, saying that the town hall was "taking place on the streets this week."

Krewson rescheduled the event for last week, likely in the hopes that the outrage would have subsided. In the end the mayor opted for lower level elected officials to lead the rescheduled "town hall" last Thursday. Organizers of the town hall meeting left an empty chair at the front of the room for Krewson to draw attention to her absence.

After the contentious meeting many attendees headed back into the streets for another evening of protest, blocking the intersection of Washington and Tucker on the outskirts of downtown St. Louis. Busloads of police in riot gear arrived shortly afterwards and formed a line on Tucker blocking Washington Avenue—the same intersection where police "kettled" protesters on Sunday, September 17 which led to over 80 arrests for "failure to disperse." Organizers dismissed the protest

before any conflict with police took place.

In the midst of this weekends' events a list of demands was circulated on social media which call for Krewson to resign, interim police Chief Lawrence O'Toole to be fired, and St. Louis Circuit Judge Timothy Wilson, who is set to reach mandatory retirement age at the end of the year, to be removed.

While the demands are not explicitly tied to any particular group, they are very much in line with demands promoted by Black Lives Matter and other groups who present the police violence as solely a product of racism. This presentation conceals the nature of the state and distracts attention from the fundamental questions of social class that are at the root of the relentless exercise of police brutality and murder.

Racism, of course, exists and may be a factor in many police killings. Black people are targeted for police attack in numbers disproportionate to their share of the population. But the facts themselves demonstrate that the scourge of police violence and murder is not limited to blacks or minorities, but extends to workers and youth of all races and ethnicities, especially the poorest and most vulnerable sections of the working class.

The resignation of Krewson, the firing of interim police Chief Lawrence O'Toole or the removal of Wilson will not do anything to anything to address the continued existence of capitalism, the economic and political system which produces racism and oppresses the working class of all races.



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