

Seattle councilperson Kshama Sawant targeted by defamation lawsuit for calling police “murderers”

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Kshama Sawant, a Socialist Alternative member who was first elected to the Seattle City Council in 2013, is the target of a defamation lawsuit filed by police after she publicly denounced two officers for murdering Che Taylor, a 42-year-old African American man, in February 2016.

The Socialist Equality Party opposes and denounces the police-led legal attack on Sawant. The SEP has clear and well documented political disagreements with Sawant and Socialist Alternative. However, the defamation lawsuit, filed in August by officers Scott Miller and Michael Spaulding, is an attempt by powerful sections of the political establishment to block any criticism of police, who killed 38 people in Washington state in 2017 alone.

The defamation complaint claims Sawant ruined the reputations of the two police officers because she was “publicly pronouncing these officers ‘murderers’ and referring to the shooting as a product of ‘racial profiling’” during a February 25, 2016 demonstration that followed the shooting. The police complaint denounces Taylor, the victim of the shooting, as “a violent felon and rapist.” The complaint also asserts that the two officers’ careers were “stymied” by Sawant’s criticisms.

Police shot Taylor while executing a warrant against another man, claiming Taylor reached for a weapon during the encounter. Prosecutors refused to file charges against the police shooters, a move which Taylor’s family denounced. Between 2005 and 2014, only one police officer in Washington has been charged with a crime in state courts, though 213 people were killed by police during that time.

Sawant said the shooting was “a blatant murder at the

hands of the police.” For this, she was denounced by the editorial board of the *Seattle Times*, which demanded she apologize. Sawant has filed a motion to dismiss the lawsuit, citing qualified immunity as an elected official.

The lawsuit is an effort to chill criticism of police murder under conditions in which officers kill over 1,000 people each year. It is an attack on the basic democratic right to free speech.



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