

Protests against police killing of frontline worker Breonna Taylor escalate in Louisville, Kentucky

Dominic Gustavo
30 May 2020

Hundreds of demonstrators protested Thursday outside Metro Hall in downtown Louisville, Kentucky, demanding the charging and arrest of the police officers involved in the killing of 26-year-old emergency medical technician (EMT) Breonna Taylor. Demonstrators chanted “no justice, no peace” as the crowd continued to grow. They were met by police in riot gear, who fired smoke bombs and tear gas into the crowds and could be seen grappling with protesters. At least 7 people were injured by live gunfire.

The protests continued throughout the day and into the evening Friday, with demonstrators marching through downtown Louisville and blocking intersections chanting “I can’t breathe,” the last words of George Floyd, a 46-year-old African-American man who was killed Monday by police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His death, caught on bystander video, has sparked four nights of angry protests against police violence across the United States.

Taylor, who was also African-American, was shot dead by police in her home on March 13. The Louisville Metropolitan Police Department (LMPD) officers were serving a “no-knock” warrant as part of a narcotics investigation. According to a complaint submitted on behalf of Taylor’s mother, Tamika Palmer, the police burst into the apartment without announcing themselves.

The legal brief goes on, “The Defendants then proceeded to spray gunfire into the residence with a total disregard for the value of human life. Shots were blindly fired by the officers all throughout Breonna’s home and also into the adjacent home, where a five-year-old child and a pregnant mother had been

sleeping. Breonna was shot at least eight times by the officer’s gunfire and died as a result.” No drugs were found in the apartment.

None of the three policemen—LMPD Sgt. Jonathan Mattingly and officers Brett Hankison and Myles Cosgrove—have been charged in the killing of Taylor. However, Kenneth Walker, the boyfriend of Breonna Taylor, was charged with first-degree assault and attempted murder of a police officer. Walker had fired back at the police with his own gun, believing it to be a home invasion. One policeman was struck in the leg.

The police claimed that they announced themselves before breaking into the apartment with a battering ram. But Taylor’s family members and neighbors maintain that the police never announced themselves and that the two believed they were facing a home invasion.

Two months after the murder, and in response to the wrongful death lawsuit filed by Taylor’s family, Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer, a Democrat, was forced to comment publicly on the case for the first time, writing on Twitter: “The Breonna Taylor case is currently under investigation. Therefore, expansive comments are not appropriate until all the facts are known.”

Fischer stated that the LMPD was conducting an internal audit and the results would then be announced publicly. Such internal audits routinely accept police officers’ accounts of events and are often used as means to whitewash cases of official criminality.

On Tuesday, state prosecutors were compelled to drop all charges against Walker. Commonwealth Attorney Tom Wine, who had asked the judge to dismiss charges, told ABC affiliate WHAS11: “There is no amount of cocaine, heroin, marijuana...worth the life

of a human being, whether it's a civilian or police officer."

Also this week, Taylor's lawyers obtained a recording of the 911 emergency call placed by Walker on the night of his partner's shooting. The recording undermines the LMPD's story that Walker fired on police after they identified themselves. In the heart wrenching call, Walker can be heard calling out to Taylor, whom has just been shot nearly a dozen times by police. "I don't know what is happening. Somebody kicked in the door and shot my girlfriend," Walker states to the police dispatcher on the other end of the line.

The dropping of charges against Walker comes in the midst of the nationwide explosion of popular anger against police brutality. Mass protests in Minneapolis have spiraled out of the authorities' control, culminating in the burning of the Third Police Precinct building Thursday. President Donald Trump responded by threatening to deploy the National Guard to shoot protesters.

The senseless killing of Taylor, who had been working on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, has likewise provoked widespread anger and condemnation. A certain parallel can be drawn between her case and that of Floyd. In the case of Floyd, the 4 officers involved have been fired, a largely symbolic action meant to stave off popular unrest, much like the dismissal of charges against Kenneth Walker. Additionally, Derek Chauvin, the police officer shown on video putting his knee on Floyd's neck, has been arrested and faces charges of third-degree murder and manslaughter.

The authorities clearly hope to neutralize the growing upsurge of anger by the use of these symbolic gestures, but thus far they have been unsuccessful. The demonstrations in Louisville and Minneapolis have been mirrored all over the United States. As of this writing, protests have taken place in New York City; Ypsilanti, Michigan; Columbus, Ohio; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Pensacola, Florida and Los Angeles, California.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit: