

After the exoneration of Breonna Taylor's killers: The way forward in the fight against police violence

Niles Niemuth
26 September 2020

Once again, demonstrations have erupted throughout the United States in response to a brutal police murder that has been whitewashed by the state. In this case, the popular anger is in response to the announcement Wednesday that there would be no charges against police officers for killing Breonna Taylor in her Louisville, Kentucky home in the early hours of March 13.

The protests come four months after the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota sparked massive multi-racial and multi-ethnic protests over police violence, and one month after the police shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

According to Kentucky's Republican Attorney General Daniel Cameron, who acted as a special investigator in the case and presented evidence to the grand jury, no charges could be brought against the two officers who unleashed the hail of bullets that killed Taylor because her boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, fired first. Walker maintains he was acting in self-defense against police who stormed into the home without identifying themselves.

The only charge in the case is for "reckless endangerment" by one of the police officers, not for shooting Taylor, but for firing bullets that entered another apartment where a family was sleeping. In other words, police have impunity to burst into workers' homes in the middle of the night and kill anyone they find.

Once again, police in riot gear and in heavily armored vehicles have fired tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets at protesters and journalists. Hundreds of protesters have been arrested and brutalized by the police in Louisville and across the country. In Portland, federal police agents, as they have done for most of the summer, aided the police in assaulting protesters Thursday night, firing pepper balls and mace well beyond federal property.

The downtown area of Louisville was placed on lockdown on Monday and a state of emergency declared ahead of the grand jury decision. Kentucky's Democratic governor placed the National Guard on alert, and Louisville's Democratic mayor has implemented a 9 p.m. curfew.

The whitewash of Taylor's murder raises fundamental political issues for the working class in the US and internationally.

The incitement of police violence and the brutal crackdown on opposition is an integral part of the Trump administration's coup plotting. On June 1, Trump seized on the mass protests over the killing of Floyd in an attempt to invoke the Insurrection Act and deploy military forces throughout the United States against domestic opposition. Trump subsequently mobilized federal police in the Department of Homeland Security to kidnap protesters in Portland.

Last month, Trump openly defended 17-year-old militia member Kyle Rittenhouse, who killed two protesters in Kenosha. Earlier this month, Trump praised the targeted assassination of Portland protester Michael Reinhoel, urging his supporters to carry out similar forms of "retribution."

Trump is now attempting to turn the elections, just over five weeks away, into a coup d'état, declaring that he will not accept results that go against him. On the streets of Louisville and other cities, the methods the administration is planning to deploy on and around Election Day are being tested out. These include the mobilization of far-right vigilante organizations and the instigation of violent confrontations.

The Democratic Party responded to the massive eruption of protests following the murder of Floyd by hijacking them and diverting popular anger behind the

politics of race, and ultimately into the election campaign of former Vice President Joe Biden.

Democratic politicians claim that police violence is the outcome of “white supremacy” and “systemic racism,” which can be resolved through the hiring of more minority officers and police chiefs, as well as the election of more black officials. At the same time, Biden and his running mate, Senator Kamala Harris, have made clear their unyielding support for the police, rejecting demands for “defunding the police” and launching a law-and-order campaign in which they denounce protesters as “anarchists” and “arsonists.”

The promotion of the politics of racial division goes hand-in-hand with the effort of the Democrats to prevent any mobilization of the working class that threatens the interests of Wall Street. While Trump is actively plotting a coup, the Democrats are seeking to derail any mass movement against the administration.

The racialist politics of the Democratic Party and the organizations that surround it are aimed at obscuring the basic class issues. The problem of police violence plagues the working class around the world, from South Africa and Kenya to Brazil and the European Union. The persistence of police violence and its global character speak to the nature of the capitalist state and the class exploitation at the heart of capitalist society, which the police, as special bodies of armed men, are tasked with upholding.

There is no doubt that African Americans are disproportionately the victims of police violence. This is a result primarily of the fact that they make up a disproportionate section of the most oppressed and impoverished layers of the working class.

Racism plays a role, and it is well known that fascistic elements are recruited and nurtured in the police forces at the local and federal level. However, the idea that electing more black politicians will solve the problem is refuted by the role of Kentucky Attorney General Cameron, who is African American and a rising star in the Republican Party, in leading the grand jury to its decision. Trump praised his handling of the Taylor case as “fantastic.”

Under President Barack Obama, the first black president, police violence continued unabated. Protests in the wake of the killing of Michael Brown in 2014 were viciously suppressed by police with the aid of the federal government.

Senator Kamala Harris, the Democrats’ first African American pick for vice president, has a long record—first as San Francisco district attorney and then as California

attorney general—of not prosecuting killer cops and defending the state’s overcrowded prison system. Most notoriously, she refused to investigate the 2014 murder of Ezell Ford by Los Angeles police and the 2015 killing of Mario Woods in San Francisco, deferring to local Democratic Party prosecutors who decided not to bring charges against the officers involved in either case.

In line with the narrative in the media that the issue of police violence is one of “trust” between officers and “communities of color”—and a conflict between “white America” and “black America”—is an exclusive focus on police brutality against African Americans, ignoring violence against people of other racial or ethnic backgrounds.

The police shooting of a white 13-year-old autistic boy, Linden Cameron, in Salt Lake City, and the killing of 26-year-old convenience store attendant Hannah Fizer, also white, by a sheriff’s deputy in Missouri have received scant national attention, despite protests by family members and supporters.

Regardless of their race, those who are killed and brutalized are overwhelmingly working class.

The ubiquity of police violence in the US, with approximately 1,000 people killed every year, is bound up with the growth of class tensions and social inequality to unprecedented heights. The police are the state’s first line of defense of capitalist property relations.

The intensity of protests against police violence over the last four months cannot be understood outside of the growing anger and opposition in the working class and among the youth. A social and economic catastrophe is overtaking the United States. Millions are unemployed and face poverty and eviction. The pandemic is raging out of control, as a result of the “herd immunity” policy of both parties. There is growing opposition among teachers and students to the efforts to reopen the schools under unsafe conditions.

Opposition to police violence cannot be quarantined from the broader class issues. The struggle against police violence is the struggle against capitalism, which requires the unification of the working class across racial, ethnic and gender lines to fight for socialism.



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