Minneapolis, Minnesota prepares for murder trial of former officer Derek Chauvin

Anthony Bertolt
3 March 2021

The city of Minneapolis, Minnesota has begun fortifying the Hennepin County Courthouse and the jail in advance of the murder trial of former police officer Derek Chauvin which begins with jury selection on March 8.

Chauvin been charged with second-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter in the murder of George Floyd last year. Chauvin has pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Floyd died after Chauvin pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for more than 8 minutes while two of his partners held him to the ground and third held a growing crowd at bay. The murder sparked mass multi-racial, multi-ethnic protests across the US and internationally after a bystander's recording went viral on social media.

There is extreme nervousness that the trial and its outcome could once again trigger an eruption of social anger in the city. The city has been setting up jersey barriers and fences with razor wire around various downtown government buildings in preparation for mass protests.

Deputy Police Chief Erick Fors reported at a press conference last week that National Guard soldiers will also be deployed throughout the downtown area in the lead up to and during the trial. "They will be providing patrols, a presence and a deterrence in key business corridors," Fors explained about the soldiers' role.

Most of the Hennepin County Government Center will be closed to the public during the trial, save for two "demonstration zones," where protestors will be corralled and kept under the watch of the police.

The audience inside the courtroom will be extremely limited. Only one member Floyd's family will be able to attend the trial in person, Judge Peter Cahill ruled on Monday. The same restriction has also been imposed for Chauvin's family, allowing different family members to be rotated in person. The trial will be live streamed online for those who cannot attend in person.

Judge Cahill decided last month to hold Chauvin's trial separate from that of the other three former officers, Thomas Lane, J. Alexander Kueng and Tou Thao, saying that the "physical limitations" of the courtrooms made it impossible to have four defendants together while following safety guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During a news conference held last Monday, the city of Minneapolis revealed plans for what they termed a "Joint Information System" aimed at sharing "timely and relevant information" with the city's residents as the trials progress. The program is set to target "Black-led" media and radio stations as the city government's channels to convey pro-government and pro-police propaganda throughout the city.

David Rubedor, the Minneapolis director of neighborhood and community relations, stated at the news conference that they had recommended the city hire social media influencers, or individuals who utilize social media platforms to advertise products with lifestyle imagery, to spread "city-generated and approved" messages aimed at combatting misinformation.

Another city spokesperson, Sarah McKenzie, elaborated further on this part of the program, stating that it would aim to create contracts with six social media influencers who are trusted by the African American, East African, Hmong, Native American and Latino communities as a channel for spreading "city-approved messages" about the trial.

The city's plan to use social media personalities as paid propaganda outlets was immediately met with vehement opposition from residents, protest

© World Socialist Web Site

organizations and on social media. The city quickly withdrew the initiative with a half-apology by McKenzie claiming that the intentions were misinterpreted: “The intent really is about keeping everyone in the city safe” and, “I think sometimes when people saw the term influencer, they misinterpreted what the plan was...”

Mark Ruff, Minneapolis city coordinator, stated that the program was meant to publish the developments of the trial on multiple channels for “communities who are not utilizing... the city's website or the other traditional media sources where there'll be disinformation also disseminated.”

Chauvin’s trial will be followed closely by millions of workers in the United States and internationally. In the US, police officers are rarely ever charged or convicted in cases of brutality and murder. In 12,000 cases of police killings from 2005 to 2017, only 80 were charged, and 30 were found guilty. The last major trial in Minneapolis was of former officer Mohammed Noor, who was convicted in 2019 of third-degree murder and manslaughter and sentenced to 12.5 years in prison for the fatal 2017 shooting of Justine Damond.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site