

The murder of Daunte Wright and the class issues in the fight against police violence

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13 April 2021

Tuesday marked the third night of expanding protests over the police murder of 20-year-old Daunte Wright in Brooklyn Center, a suburb of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Protests began shortly after Wright was killed during a traffic stop Sunday afternoon and spread across the country Monday, from New York City to Portland, Oregon.

Wright, a young father, was unarmed when he was shot dead. He was killed by Kimberly Potter, a 26-year-veteran officer and head of the Brooklyn Center Police Union, who fired a single shot into his chest. Wright's mother, Katie Wright, told reporters that her son's body had been left on the ground by the police. "Nobody will tell us anything. Nobody will talk to us... I said please take my son off the ground."

The killing comes amid a renewed upsurge of popular anger over police violence following the release of video of police officers in Virginia assaulting a black Army lieutenant during a traffic stop in December last year and the murder of a 13-year-old boy by Chicago police at the end of March.

It also comes during the trial of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin for the murder almost one year ago, on May 25, 2020, of George Floyd. Floyd's killing, caught on bystander video and posted online, sparked mass multiracial protests across the US and internationally demanding an end to racism and police violence.

Tensions have remained high in the Minneapolis area since last year's protests, with the ruling class extremely nervous over the reaction to the Chauvin trial. In preparation for the Chauvin trial, the government center in downtown Minneapolis was fortified with fencing, concrete barriers and razor wire. The National Guard has been deployed to checkpoints and is on standby for rapid response to protests.

Demonstrators who gathered near the site of Wright's shooting and outside the city's police station Sunday were met by riot police who fired tear gas, pepper balls and rubber bullets. National Guard troops were quickly dispatched to back up the police. Police arrested 40 people during protests Monday night, many for violating a 7 p.m. curfew imposed on the broader Twin Cities region.

Brooklyn Center police were quick to declare that the shot fired by Potter into Wright's chest was an "accidental discharge" after she mistook her gun for her Taser. Potter can be heard screaming "I'm going to tase you" on body camera video before opening fire and exclaiming, "Holy shit! I shot him." Potter was placed on paid administrative leave before resigning from the force on Tuesday.

Potter, who has a long experience on the force, was serving as a training officer at the time of the shooting, making it unlikely that she would mistake her gun for a Taser. A similar argument of "Taser confusion" was put forward by police in an effort to justify the 2009 killing of Oscar Grant in Oakland, California.

Wright is the sixth person killed by Brooklyn Center police since 2012. The city paid out \$490,000 to settle seven police misconduct cases between 2007 and 2017. The state of Minnesota has recorded 207 police killings in the last two decades, for an average of nearly one death per month. Nationally, the epidemic of police violence has maintained its pace in 2021, with nearly three people killed every day.

This unending wave of police violence has continued day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year no matter who is in power, Democrats or Republican. Police violence is a feature of the capitalist system, a social and economic order which exploits the labor of the working class to the benefit of a small

minority at the top of society.

The daily brutalization of working-class communities and youth is not a racial issue but a class issue. The protests that have erupted over Wright's murder must be developed as a class movement. There are already growing expressions of opposition, with the development of strikes for better wages and working conditions by miners at Warrior Met Coal in Alabama, steelworkers at ATI in Pennsylvania and among graduate students at Columbia and New York University in New York City.

At the same time, the development of opposition to capitalist exploitation has to be tied to opposition to police violence. Workers must not stand by and allow the police to kill with impunity. The militarized police forces that harass and kill individuals will be turned against the entire working class.

Minnesota has a powerful tradition of class struggle, in which bitter experiences were made with the police, from the strikes by iron miners in the early 1900s, to the Minneapolis General Strike of 1934, when workers led by socialist union organizers successfully fought off the police and corporate goons, to the bitter battle by Hormel workers from 1985 to 1986. The police and the National Guard always side with the bosses, operating as strike breakers by protecting scabs while beating and killing workers.

Despite the claims of the Democratic Party and Black Lives Matter—which promote increased racial diversity, civilian oversight and the use of bodycams—the police have proven themselves impervious to reform. Popular demands to “defund the police” have been rejected by the Democrats, with President Joe Biden calling for increased funding and funneling \$33 million in military equipment to the police in his first few months in office.

While Vice President Kamala Harris, the former “top cop” of California, tweeted Monday that “our nation needs justice and healing,” the epidemic of police violence continues the same as it did under President Donald Trump. The rhetoric may have changed, but the reign of police violence remains the same.

The protests over Wright's murder express genuine outrage over police violence and the daily brutalization of the population. Social tensions have erupted after a year of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has killed more than 576,000 Americans and disrupted the lives

of millions. Meanwhile American society has only grown more unequal, with the richest increasing their wealth by \$4.1 trillion while millions were thrown out of work, forced to subsist on handouts or return to work in factories, warehouses and schools where the virus is spreading.

It is this historic level of social inequality that the police are tasked with defending. The Democrats, while supporting the police and implementing crackdowns on protests, as in Minnesota, have promoted the narrative that police violence is fundamentally a race issue, seeking to divide workers, who are the primary victims, against each other.

If anything can be drawn from the last period of protests over police violence, it is that they cannot remain isolated or diverted down the path of middle-class racial identity politics. The broadest sections of workers must lend their support to the demonstrations against Wright's killing, and the protests must be infused with an understanding of the class issues involved. The police are an institution that operate to protect the interests of the capitalist class and defend the state from the working class.

The lessons of the class struggle must be drawn. Protests are not enough. Opposition to police violence must be linked to the broader issues confronting the working class, from social inequality to the coronavirus pandemic, which is being allowed to ravage workers and their families in the interests of the rich. The fight to end police brutality means taking up the fight to end the capitalist system and establish socialism in the United States and internationally.



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