

In a hail of gunfire, Washington D.C. police kill man in moving vehicle

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10 September 2021

Residents are outraged after a Washington D.C. Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) shot and killed 27-year-old Antwan Gilmore in late August.

Officers claimed to have found Gilmore unresponsive inside a vehicle at Florida and New York avenues at 2:45 a.m. on August 25 with a gun tucked in his waistband. Police claim further that when they tried to wake him, Gilmore drove forward, prompting officers to fire ten rounds into the moving vehicle which rolled several blocks and struck a tree. Gilmore was taken to a hospital where he was pronounced dead.

The department released body camera footage, but a ballistic shield carried by the wearer obstructs much of the view. A video taken by a bystander shows at least eight officers surrounding the vehicle with guns drawn. The video shows the vehicle lurching forward and then accelerating; at which point the police open fire.

In a press conference, MPD Chief Robert J. Contee III conceded that firing into a moving vehicle was in direct violation of department policies and that the firearm was found still tucked into Gilmore's waistband where it was originally seen. Contee then tried to deflect from the obvious responsibility of the police for Gilmore's death and endangering the public, saying, "It's unfortunate that we have to come face-to-face with armed gunmen in our community. It makes the communities unsafe; it makes officers unsafe."

While there was an outstanding arrest warrant for Gilmore, officers were completely unaware of this when approaching him, and nothing in Gilmore's past nor immediate actions could justify his summary execution. By all accounts Gilmore was not threatening anyone, and was likely not even fully conscious when he was shot.

The killing comes just a month after Contee ranted against policies that "coddle violent criminals" and

demanded greater funding for the police at the expense of social services. While circumstances have compelled him to be more restrained and announce an investigation, there can be little doubt how his officers interpreted his statements.

For her part, D.C.'s Democratic Mayor Muriel Bowser offered her condolences to Gilmore's family and likewise promised an investigation. Such perfunctory statements, done for public consumption, mask Bowser's unwaveringly pro-police record as mayor. Several weeks prior to Gilmore's death, Bowser had requested the Democratic Party-controlled city council add an additional 170 officers to the MPD and funnel \$10 million more into equipping them.

Gilmore's death provoked a series of protests across the city. On September 4, a multiracial crowd shut down intersections, chanted his name and demanded an independent investigation into Gilmore's death and the prosecution and jailing of the officer responsible. They recounted their friendship with Gilmore, describing him as friendly and generous. One of his friends told NPR that Gilmore inspired him to go back to school and finish high school.

The marchers also stopped outside of the home of George Watson, who was fatally shot by police after he was seen on his balcony with an air-soft rifle a week after Gilmore was killed. Watson, likely in the middle of a mental health crisis, pointed the gun at police officers when they arrived at his apartment; the police responded by shooting him multiple times. One officer was wounded non-fatally, and Contee could not say whether it was due to Watson firing his air rifle.

The *Washington Post*, speaking for sections of the Democratic Party close to the US state, released an editorial nervously demanding "answers" over the egregious shooting. The editorial board cited a Twitter

comment by Democratic DC Council member Janeese Lewis George that contrasted the MPD's violent response to Gilmore, who was African American, with their de-escalation of a "white domestic terrorist in a truck threatening to blow up the Capitol with a bomb" in early August.

The *Post* is worried that the MPD's summary execution of Gilmore and others will undermine the Democratic Party's ability to posture as the more "pro-police" party in Congress. The Democrats have appealed to the military, intelligence agencies, and police forces as the supposed defenders of American democracy in the wake of the January 6 fascist-led coup on Capitol Hill, where insurrectionists in army gear swearing allegiance to Republican president Donald Trump attacked police security forces in their siege of Congress.

The Democrats' main concern is that any precipitous action by either themselves or Trump's Republican Party could galvanize working class opposition which could break free of their political control as ever larger sections of the police are openly gravitating to the far right.

The criminal killing of Gilmore has also exposed the futility of attempts to reform the police, and the complicity of the Democratic Party in their continuing attacks on the working class. Only an independent movement of the working class toward socialism can bring about justice for Gilmore and end the epidemic of police murder.



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