

Kenosha judge shields right-wing extremist killer Kyle Rittenhouse during his murder trial testimony

Kevin Reed, Tom Carter
11 November 2021

On Wednesday, right-wing extremist vigilante Kyle Rittenhouse took the stand at his own trial for murdering two people and seriously injuring a third during anti-police violence protests in Kenosha, Wisconsin on August 25, 2020.

During the testimony by the far-right gunman, Kenosha Circuit Court Judge Bruce Schroeder intervened repeatedly to block questions that would have undermined the right-wing narrative being presented by Rittenhouse and his defense team, according to which Rittenhouse was acting in “self-defense.” This included an extraordinarily hysterical outburst where Judge Schroeder yelled, “Don’t get brazen with me!” at Kenosha Assistant District Attorney Thomas Binger, following a defense motion for a mistrial.

Defense attorney Mark Richards called Rittenhouse to the stand in the morning and proceeded to present a carefully rehearsed series of questions and answers, during which Rittenhouse couched his testimony in the jargon of police officers. At one point, he claimed, “I stopped the threat from attacking me.”

During questioning by Richards, Rittenhouse said he shot his first victim, the unarmed Joseph Rosenbaum, four times in the Car Source parking lot because he “came out from behind the car and ambushed me.”

Throughout the trial, Judge Schroeder has excluded all the evidence of Rittenhouse’s political and ideological motivations. The prosecutors have been ordered not to mention or allude in any way to what motivated Rittenhouse to show up in Kenosha during mass protests against the brutal police shooting of Jacob Blake, a 29-year-old black man, by Kenosha police officer Rusten Sheskey two nights earlier.

In fact, Rittenhouse traveled from his hometown of Antioch, Illinois to Kenosha on that night armed with a loaded AR-15-style assault rifle to join a group of armed far-right vigilantes who brandished their weapons at the protesters.

Fully immersed in far-right politics, Rittenhouse was a supporter of the reelection campaign of then-President Donald Trump, went on police ride-alongs and wore an Army-green T-shirt and paramilitary boots. He responded to a post on Facebook by the Kenosha Guard which called for armed civilians to patrol the streets of the city during the anti-police violence protests.

Two weeks before the shooting, Rittenhouse openly declared that he wished to shoot people he saw coming out of a CVS store, who he believed were shoplifting. “Bro, I wish I had my f—ing AR. I’d start shooting rounds at them.”

Rittenhouse is an associate of the Proud Boys, a violent far-right paramilitary organization closely tied to Trump, and which was implicated in the January 6 coup attempt. After posting bail following the killings in Kenosha, Rittenhouse attended a celebration at a pub where he was caught flashing “white power” signs at a meeting with top Proud Boys leaders.

The judge has ordered that the jury will not hear any of this evidence, and prosecutors are forbidden from even suggesting that such evidence exists. In addition, the judge has ordered that the victims of the shootings cannot be called “victims” but that they can be called “looters” and “rioters.”

Rittenhouse who was 17 years old at the time and could not legally possess a firearm in the state of Wisconsin, killed Joseph Rosenbaum and Anthony

Huber, whom he shot at close range by firing a .223 caliber round into his chest, and injured Gaige Grosskreutz with a bullet that struck his upper arm.

While his own attorney was questioning him about the events leading up to the shooting, Rittenhouse, who has been rehearsing his testimony for months, attempted to give the impression of someone hysterically sobbing, but he was not able to produce any actual tears. Judge Schroeder helped to bolster the credibility of this performance by solemnly excusing the jury and pausing the trial.

The prosecutor began the cross-examination of Rittenhouse by suggesting that he was tailoring his explanation of what happened to what had already been introduced in the case. Judge Schroeder abruptly excused the jury and launched into a diatribe against the prosecutor. Supporting a claim by the defense that Binger was “commenting on my client’s right to remain silent,” the judge said, “this is a grave constitutional violation” and “is not permitted.”

Later, during the same exchange, Judge Schroeder affirmed that Rittenhouse’s “attitude” and “beliefs” were off-limits for questions. When Binger, the prosecutor, responded that the rulings were “before the defendant’s testimony,” Judge Schroeder interjected, “Don’t get brazen with me!”

The dispute referenced an earlier September 17 ruling by Judge Schroeder that Rittenhouse’s boast that he would “start shooting rounds” at people he believed were shoplifting was off-limits, together with Rittenhouse’s public appearance last January with the leading members of the Wisconsin branch of the fascist Proud Boys. The judge rejected the prosecutor’s arguments that Rittenhouse’s testimony had opened the door to the admission of this evidence.

If there were any doubt where Judge Schroeder stands politically, during the afternoon session when his cell phone rang during court, his ring tone was “God Bless the USA” by Lee Greenwood, a country music singer-songwriter who has performed the song at far-right political rallies, including the inauguration ceremonies for Donald Trump in 2017.

Rittenhouse has been championed by Trump and the Republican Party as a national hero who was merely acting in “self-defense.” The media has more or less accepted the far-right framing of the case as one of whether Rittenhouse “felt threatened” when he shot

and killed his victims.

This framing turns reality upside down. If anyone had a right to self-defense, it was the Kenosha protesters, who were being menaced by an armed right-wing extremist vigilante with a loaded assault rifle. In one encounter, a man accused Rittenhouse of pointing his loaded assault rifle directly at him—a reckless and dangerous act in itself, an extreme provocation, and an implicit death threat.

If Rittenhouse is acquitted, it would set a dangerous precedent. It would effectively provide legal sanction for fascist vigilantes to march into future left-wing protests with impunity, terrorize protesters at gunpoint, and open fire whenever they “feel threatened.”

In this regard, there is a political logic to the campaign to lionize Rittenhouse. In the wake of the largest protests in American history, and in the midst of a growing strike wave, sections of the American ruling class see violent, paramilitary and fascistic organizations such as the Proud Boys as necessary to help suppress the growing working-class insurrection against capitalism.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact