

Democrats use Tyre Nichols' funeral to push token police "reform"

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On Wednesday February 1, Tyre Nichols, a beloved son, father, brother and 29-year-old Fed Ex worker, was laid to rest in Memphis, Tennessee.

Nearly a month ago, on January 7, the African American photographer was on his way to his mother's house after capturing the sunset when he was surrounded and assaulted by multiple Memphis police officers for an alleged traffic violation.

As of this writing, five cops, all African American, involved in the killing of Nichols have been fired and charged with multiple felonies, including second-degree murder. On Monday, the Memphis Police Department announced two more police officers were being investigated for their "actions and inactions" on January 7, with possibly more charges coming. Also on Monday, the Memphis Fire Department confirmed three personnel, including two emergency medical technicians, had been fired for failing to properly assess Nichols' condition upon arriving at the scene.

Prior to Wednesday's event, several news networks estimated that as many as 2,500 people would attend, but icy winter weather conditions caused the funeral to be delayed for several hours and appeared to have lessened in-person turnout. The funeral, held in the large Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church, was broadcast on C-SPAN and carried by major television networks.

Among those in attendance were family members of other African Americans killed by police in the last decade, including the family of George Floyd, the mother of Eric Garner, and the mother of Breonna Taylor, Tamika Palmer.

Prominent Democratic politicians in attendance included Vice President Kamala Harris; former Mayor of Atlanta Keisha Lance Bottoms, now a top official in the Biden administration; and Democratic Texas

Representative Sheila Jackson Lee.

In their eulogies, family and friends remembered Nichols as a "beautiful person," who was sensitive, compassionate, easy-going and an all-around "solid dude." One of Tyre's sisters, Keyana Dixon, recalled how polite her younger brother was, even as he was brutalized by the police. "He was polite, he asked them to 'please stop,'" Dixon said through tears.

In his remarks, Rodney Wells, Tyre's stepfather and co-worker, spoke passionately in defense of all victims of police violence. "We have to fight for justice. We cannot continue to allow these people (referring to the police) to brutalize our kids."

Rodney ended his comments with a call for "Justice for Tyre" and "Justice for all the families that lost loved ones through the brutality of the police, or anybody."

In contrast to the family and friends of Nichols, major Democratic Party politicians and their operatives who spoke at the event sought to channel mass social anger at the latest killing of an unarmed worker behind reactionary racial politics, the dead-end of police "reform" and the Democratic Party.

The beating of Nichols by five black cops has significantly challenged the racist narrative of police violence.

In the killing of Nichols, not only were the police officers who beat him black, 60 percent of the Memphis police are African American. The police chief, who created the SCORPION task force unit in 2021 that killed Nichols and terrorized the working class residents of Memphis for over a year, is herself African American.

This, as the *World Socialist Web Site* has stressed, confirms that police violence is a class question. While racist and backward attitudes are cultivated in police

departments in the US and internationally, the police exist not to enforce a racial caste system but to protect the wealth and property of the financial oligarchy.

While minorities, particularly Native American and African Americans, are disproportionately killed by the police, the overwhelming majority of victims are poor and working class, and a plurality are white.

These inconvenient facts, however, did not stop Reverend Al Sharpton, a 2004 Democratic presidential candidate and creator of the National Action Network, from repeatedly claiming that Nichols' killing at the hands, boots, fists, batons and tasers of five black cops was an example of racism and that there were "two justice systems" based on skin color.

Sharpton said Nichols' death showed that the police do not have the "same manners on the white side of town" as they have on the "black side of town," adding that had Nichols been "white," the police "would not have beat him that night!"

Rewriting the history of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to serve the political agenda of the Democratic Party, Sharpton claimed that King sacrificed his life so blacks could assume positions of power within the capitalist state.

"When Dr. King went to the mountain top, he could see Barack Obama... and Kamala Harris... and black police chiefs," Sharpton yelled.

King was assassinated under the watchful eye of the Federal Bureau of Investigation on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, as he was fighting for sanitation workers as part of the Poor People's Campaign.

While he was not a Marxist, King was critical of capitalism, and he fought for economic, social, racial and political equality. He was also staunchly against the Vietnam War. Yet Sharpton asserted that King, who famously denounced the US government in a 1967 speech as the "greatest purveyor of violence today," would have been supportive of Obama, the first president to be at war all eight years of his presidency and the originator of "terror Tuesdays."

In addition to lying about King's legacy, promoting racial division and obfuscating the class character of police violence, speakers, beginning with Vice President Kamala Harris, claimed that the police, under conditions of skyrocketing inequality, daily mass shootings and an increasingly militant working class, would be capable of "reform" via the George Floyd

Justice in Policing Act of 2021.

After boasting that she was the co-author of the bill, the former "top cop" of California demanded that "Congress pass it. Joe Biden will sign it. We will not be denied, it is non-negotiable."

Sharpton, who gave the eulogy for the funeral, likewise said that the way to "change the system" was to pass the legislation.

In addition to the fact that the House is now controlled by the increasingly fascistic Republican Party, and therefore the legislation stands virtually no chance of passing, the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which stalled in the Senate after being passed in the House in 2021, would do nothing to curb unending police killings.

In fact, the bill would provide hundreds of millions of dollars in grants to police departments around the country to hire and train more "SCORPION-style" units.

The 2021 version of the bill included a provision that would allow the attorney general to disperse \$100 million in grants each year, from 2022 to 2024, for the Community Oriented Policing Services, or COPS program.

These funds, the bill notes, would be used to "recruit, hire incentivize, retain, develop, and train new, additional career law enforcement officers or current law enforcement officers who are willing to relocate to communities where there are poor or fragmented relationships between police and residents of the community, or where there are high incidents of crime."

The police, just like the capitalist system, are incapable of reform. Ending police violence and creating a global society based on social need, not the defense of private property and profit, is only possible through the unification of the international working class, made up of all races, against the capitalist system.



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