

The execution of Sonya Massey: Police violence continues unabated in the US

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Bodycam footage was released Monday showing the police execution of Sonya Massey, a 36-year-old black woman, in her Springfield, Illinois home in the early morning hours of July 6. The brutal murder has sparked widespread shock and anger, with demands being raised once again for the end of police terror in the United States.

Massey had called the police to report a suspected prowler outside her home, hoping they would show up to help her and secure the area. Instead, as the video shows, two deputies entered her home and, in the course of a brief interaction, Sangamon County Sheriff's Deputy Sean Grayson murdered her in cold blood.

Unarmed and calm throughout her interactions with the officers as she moved a pot of boiling water from her stove at their instruction, Massey quipped, "I'll rebuke you in the name of Jesus," in response to what she thought was a joke from Grayson about the water supposedly being a threat. Instead, Grayson responded aggressively, declaring he would shoot Massey "in your f**kin' face."

Within a matter of seconds, as an apologetic Massey cowered behind her kitchen counter, the deputy did just that, shooting the woman three times, once in the face. As she lay dying on the kitchen floor, Grayson instructed his partner not to bother with first aid, as he had delivered a "head shot." The still unidentified deputy eventually provided aid and Massey was taken to a hospital where she was pronounced dead.

Massey's former partner and father of one of her children reports that police initially told him that a neighbor had killed her and that at the hospital they told nurses she had killed herself. Police audio obtained by the *Guardian* confirms that someone who is likely one of the deputies at the scene falsely told a dispatcher Massey's wounds were "self-inflicted."

Grayson has been fired by the Sheriff's Department and was indicted by a grand jury on July 17 on five criminal charges: Three counts of first-degree murder, one count of aggravated battery with a firearm, and one count of official misconduct. He is currently being held in the Sangamon

County jail without bond pending a trial. It has yet to be seen if charges will be pursued against his partner.

A move by prosecutors to charge a killer cop is exceedingly rare, with approximately 98 percent never facing criminal charges and many getting away without even a hint of internal departmental discipline. There is extreme nervousness within the ruling class that, four years after the nationwide protests triggered by the Minneapolis police killing of George Floyd, and amid an intense political crisis, Massey's murder could be the spark for a renewed outpouring of mass anger against police violence and social inequality less than four months before the November elections.

Despite nearly four years of an administration run by the Democrats, who promoted illusions among protesters in the election of President Joe Biden and Kamala Harris—hailed as the first black, Asian American and woman vice president—there has been no easing of police violence and funding for the militarization of the police has only increased.

According to Mapping Police Violence, there have been at least 722 people killed in the US so far this year, through July 9, close to four every day. While every year over the last decade has seen more than 1,000 people killed, the total annual number of victims has been rising, and this year is on track to be the deadliest on record.

Responding to the release of the video of Massey's killing, Harris, now the Democrat's presumptive nominee for president following Biden's decision Sunday to step aside, feigned sympathy for Massey's family, while hailing prosecutors for bringing charges against Grayson. The Democrats are now promoting her record as the "top cop" in California, where she was a Bay Area prosecutor and then attorney general for six years, as one of her leading qualifications to take on Donald Trump, who was convicted of 34 felony charges in May.

Harris declared:

Our thoughts are also with the communities across our nation whose calls for help are often met with suspicion, distrust, and even violence. The disturbing footage released yesterday confirms what we know from the lived experiences of so many—we have much work to do to ensure that our justice system fully lives up to its name.

For his part, Biden said:

When we call for help, all of us as Americans—regardless of who we are or where we live—should be able to do so without fearing for our lives. Sonya’s death at the hands of a responding officer reminds us that all too often Black Americans face fears for their safety in ways many of the rest of us do not.

Such statements are entirely hollow and hypocritical. Biden’s proposed “George Floyd Justice in Policing Act,” a tepid reform package co-authored by Harris when she was in the Senate, has stalled in Congress, while billions in funds originally earmarked for COVID-19 pandemic relief have been funneled to police forces across the country. The Biden administration has coordinated with local police forces to oversee the violent crackdown on student protests against Israel’s genocide in Gaza. More than 3,100 students and other protesters have been arrested or detained in the crackdown on campuses across the US since April.

Noting Biden’s absurd statement after the attempted assassination of Trump that “there is no place in America for this kind of violence or for any violence,” Socialist Equality Party candidate for president Joe Kishore remarked in a statement on X/Twitter:

In fact, as the police murder of Sonya Massey in Illinois once again demonstrates, the American state is permeated with violence. Every year, the police kill well over 1,000 people, on one pretext or another. The United States is alone among advanced capitalist countries in maintaining the barbaric institution of the death penalty.

The violence of the state at home is inextricably connected to the role of American imperialism as the principal instigator of violence in the world. The number of people killed by US-led and US-backed wars over the past 30 years, from the invasions of

Iraq through the genocide in Gaza, number in the tens of millions.

Later this week, Biden and Harris will meet with the mass murderer and war criminal Benjamin Netanyahu in connection with his address Wednesday to a joint session of Congress. Their crocodile tears for Sonya Massey notwithstanding, they will reassure the Israeli fascist leader of the Democratic administration’s continued support for genocide and ethnic cleansing in Gaza. US ruling class complicity in the slaughter of defenseless civilians on a massive scale must find its internal reflection in ever more savage levels of state violence against the working class at home.

The reign of police terror is also bound up with the completely oligarchic character of US capitalist society, with more billionaires by far than any other country alongside mass poverty and levels of inequality that have not been seen for more than a century.

Despite the efforts of Biden and the Democrats to present police violence as primarily a racial issue and promote identity politics to divide the working class, the reality is that it is a social phenomenon that overwhelmingly affects the working class, the poor and the most vulnerable in society, regardless of their skin color or ethnicity. While African Americans are killed at a disproportionate rate, the largest number of victims each year are white.

The question of police violence and how to end it is a class question. While the Democrats and Republicans promote the myth that the police exist to “protect and serve” the entire population, with a few wrinkles that can be ironed out with more training and funding, in reality, they are armed forces created to enforce inequality and protect the property interests of the ruling class. The police operate as roving gangs and death squads on behalf of the capitalist state whose target is the internal enemy: the working class.

The solution to this unending wave of murder and mayhem lies not in nonexistent reforms but in the abolition of the police through the united political mobilization of the working class to overturn the capitalist system and end social inequality through the establishment of socialism.



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