

George Floyd murder trial verdict: a first victory for mass action

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Derek Chauvin was found guilty on all counts in the murder of George Floyd on April 20, 2021. So obvious was his guilt, and brazen his defence, that if he had not been convicted the social explosion would have been incalculable in its consequences. It is a victory for his family, and for Black Lives Matter supporters and antiracists in the USA and in many other countries. But it is only a first step in tackling the country's racist police.

Chauvin was found guilty of second- and third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter, but its importance is that it was no isolated outrage. The verdict comes nearly thirty years since the acquittal on April 29, 1992, of Los Angeles police officers who beat Rodney King in one of the most savage cases of police brutality. The acquittal of these officers kicked off an uprising in Los Angeles. It also comes almost seven years after the Ferguson Uprising that began on August 10, 2014, after the killing of Michael Brown at the hands of police officer Darren Wilson.

The murder of George Floyd saw a nationwide uprising unfold. Marches and protests occurred in every state. There was a broad coalition that included people of every ethnic and racial background. In many ways, this diverse array of people is what led to the trial of Derek Chauvin and the verdict itself. With that said, it was clear, based on the scale of National Guard deployments, that the capitalist class was preparing to put down further protests.

The uprising saw police officers testify on the stand against Derek Chauvin. The motive was clear. Testify that Chauvin was a 'bad cop.' In doing so, they sought to muddy the waters. 'Derek Chauvin was a bad cop, but not all of us are bad.' That was their message. Nothing could be further from the truth. The sheer number of killings of black and brown people at the hands of police shows their racist character. The terror and brutality unleashed on protesters last year and into this year shows the nature of policing.

Police exist to protect the billionaire class and their politicians, their ownership of the factories, officers, hospitals where we, the working class generate their profits. They are an unreformable front line of the inherently racist and corrupt system, which daily oppresses and exploits us and for which 'American democracy' is merely a facade. The same system that workers in Bessemer attempted to organize against when voting for a union at their Amazon warehouse workplace but which Amazon was able to use to frustrate what should be the right of every worker to exercise without fear of dismissal.

The bourgeoisie and their state seek to stop the uprising, recently ignited by the deaths of Daunte Wright and Adam Toledo at the hands of police. They hope that this one guilty verdict will convince us that change within the system works; that we can see police officers who routinely engage in brutality and terror brought to justice. This is far from the truth. Since the trial of Derek Chauvin began, the New York Times

reports that 64 people have died at the hands of police officers. The overwhelming number of their victims were black or Latino men and women. None of these officers has been brought to justice.

Chauvin exists as a "bone" thrown to appease us. Already the bourgeois media paints this as a "turning point". A turning point from what? The murderers of Adam Toledo and Daunte Wright are still free. The officers who brutalized us last year are still on the streets. One guilty verdict does little to change the situation. Police racism will not stop because one cop is found guilty. In fact, without the courage of the bystanders who videoed the nine minutes and 29 seconds murder of a pinioned and handcuffed George Floyd, repeating "I can't breathe", without the citywide, nationwide and then worldwide response, there can be no doubt that this one case when a cop killer lost his impunity would never have occurred.

OK, now Joe Biden has called George Floyd's death "a murder that occurred in the full light of day", and promised, "It can't stop here" and called for a moment of "significant change". He has pointed to the "George Floyd Justice in Policing Bill", now before the Senate, challenging Republicans to pass it. In fact, Democratic Party presidents, governors, and mayors have been watching this happen time after time throughout their political lives. They have ignored countless mass protests and, worse, often slandered them as lawless rioters and looters.

The George Floyd Bill would ban racial profiling; ban chokeholds and no-knock warrants for police searches; ensure use of police body cameras; create a National Police Misconduct Registry, demand reporting on police use of force. It would "reform", not abolish, police officers' "qualified immunity" from civil prosecution. Of course, these obscene actions and impunities should be abolished. But they will not even go near to halting the reign of terror that police forces wage in communities of black and other people of colour and all working class people fighting for their rights.

The demonstrators last summer who shouted, "abolish the police" and called on their elected representatives at state and city level to defund them, were right in that the country's police forces are not a defence of citizens against criminals or genuinely anti-social actions. They cannot be reformed by the above checks and restrictions. The reason is simple; they are not under control of the citizens of the communities in which they serve, they are not drawn from the classes and communities they are supposed to protect and, above all, they are not democratically answerable to them for their actions. They are a militarized, heavily armed, occupying force.

Once again, as BLM demonstrators pointed out, huge resources are spent on their weaponry, including armoured vehicles. Meanwhile, our housing, schools and hospitals are neglected, and unemployment is rife. And so-called petty crime is still used by the police to excuse their car stops and unannounced break-ins into people's houses, like that which led to the killing of Breonna Taylor.

Poverty and the illegal drug trade are a real cause of much of the so-called petty crime, certainly petty when compared with the massive corruption and tax evasion of the super-rich, but of course not in its effects on ordinary people. Yes, we do need to be protected against genuine anti-social criminals, as well as the uniformed forces of "lawlessness and disorder". But for that we need defence forces working within, and under the democratic control of, our communities. If this were the case, then the levels of crime would be massively cut.

We need to recognise that only mass action by the working class and all the oppressed together can bring about real change. We can do this by continuing with the exposure and resistance to police killing, by showing continued solidarity to protesters in Minnesota and Chicago. We must organise the self-defense of our communities and of workers fighting for their rights. In doing so, we must replace today's police forces with workers' and black and Latino community self-defense.

This must draw in all organizations that embody the power of the working class, like the trade unions, but also the local chapters of the country's largest left wing party, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Together, they must call for everyone out on the street and out of their workplaces on May Day.

Let this guilty verdict, a victory won by our uprising in solidarity with the many lives lost to the police, prove a catalyst for even greater and more permanent victories over racism and the capitalism that spawns it.

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