



USA: Kenosha shootings show need for self defence

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In Kenosha, Wisconsin, at 5.00 pm. on Sunday, 23 August, Jacob Blake was shot seven times in the back whilst getting into his car, by a police officer, Rusten Sheskey. Blake's three children were in the back seat of the car and witnessed the whole horrific event. Miraculously, he survived but the shots severed his spinal cord and he is paralysed from the waist down, probably for life.

As if this was not enough, after being taken to hospital in a critical condition, still fighting for his life, officers handcuffed him to his bed, though he had not been charged with any crime. The would-be killer, on the other hand, has been suspended on full pay and not yet charged with anything. The usual impunity enjoyed by killer cops could well be seen again.

Like the killing of George Floyd on May 25, the Kenosha Police Department is hereby signalling that they rule the city with no respect whatsoever for the legal equality of citizens, particularly people of colour. Nothing it seems will stop these 'legalised' lynchings.

Naturally, in the context of the renewed Black Lives Matter movement since Floyd's murder, this triggered several nights of militant street protests, in which vehicles and the Kenosha County courthouse were set on fire. Police met demonstrators with tear gas and pepper balls. As usual, Republicans denounced the violence of the demonstrators, but not that of the police, while Democrats and the older 'official' community leaders appealed for peace. Faced with such a blatant example of injustice, how can there be peace?

Showing just where he stood, the Democratic Mayor, John Antaramian, called in heavily armed riot police with several large Bear Cat armoured police vehicles equipped with Long Range Acoustic Devices, that is, ear-splitting sirens, and firing rubber bullets.

The Democratic Governor of Wisconsin, Tony Evers, sent in the state's National Guard, declared a state of emergency, and even welcomed Trump's offer to deploy federal officers to the city. This, despite Trump's repeated smearing of Democratic states and cities for the disorder entirely provoked by the killer cops. In addition, Joe Biden has spinelessly condemned 'violence on the right and on the left'. All this is more proof of the uselessness of this second party of Wall Street to the oppressed and the working class.

As the news of the uprising spread, heavily armed white supremacists, the Kenosha militias and Proud Boys, mobilised to the streets of the city, acting as de facto police auxiliaries. Video shots exist of policemen exchanging friendly conversations with them, offering them water, with one officer saying through a loudspeaker, 'We appreciate you guys, we really do'.

One of the militia sympathisers, 17-year-old Kyle Rittenhouse, shot and killed two protesters; Anthony Huber, 26, and Joseph Rosenbaum, 36, both unarmed, and wounded a third, Gaige Grosskreutz, a volunteer street medic. Rittenhouse was allowed to leave the scene by police officers, with his AR15 assault rifle slung across his chest. He was subsequently arrested miles away at his hometown, Antioch, Illinois.

Immediately, prominent Trump supporters rushed to his defence. Paul Gosar a Republican member of the US House of Representatives from Arizona, tweeted, '100% justified self defense. Do not try to take a weapon away from a man or

bear the consequences? and followed this up with the threat, "The criminals here: Kenosha local government that allows the riots, burning and looting night after night. Armed citizens defending themselves will fill the vacuum".

In a television interview on the night of Blake's shooting on Fox News, the US Attorney General, William Barr, declared that some of the Democratic representatives who questioned him at a congressional hearing two weeks ago were revolutionaries seeking to overthrow American capitalism, in league with terrorists.

The day before the Kenosha killings, a couple from St. Louis, Missouri, who had threatened a peaceful Black Lives Matter protest passing by their mansion, appeared on videos as speakers at the Republican National Convention endorsing Trump's message that the BLM protests are a threat to the American way of life against which they must be ready to defend themselves, automatic weapons in hand.

Then, after the killings, Fox News host Tucker Carlson posted on Twitter, "How shocked are we that 17-year-olds with rifles decided they had to maintain order when no one else would"?

Trump is increasingly centring his campaign on claims that America faces a sinister far left conspiracy, for which Joe Biden and Kamala Harris are just puppets. In an interview for Fox News, he claimed that plane loads of violent Black Lives Matter demonstrators were being flown around the country, paid for by a cabal of rich people, "People that you've never heard of. People that are in the dark shadows" and that, "they are people who are controlling the streets".

Trump is echoing a campaign being waged by QAnon, a bizarre right wing conspiracy theory website. He has also floated the same racist "birther" lie he supported against Obama, that Kamala Harris was not born in the USA. It seems he will stoop to any such filth to motivate his arch reactionary base.

True, in "normal" times, that is, times of capitalist stability, such ideas would have been dismissed as the ravings of the lunatic fringe. But now, with the US facing not only the onset of a major economic downturn, a climate catastrophe and the Covid-19 pandemic that has been so criminally mismanaged by the Trump administration, but also the trade war he has picked with capitalist China, such ideas seem reasonable to a maddened middle class.

Trump has effectively indicated that he will maintain this "strategy of tension", with the aid of the police and his far right auxiliaries, right up to the election. If he loses, he will refuse to recognise the result, declaring it to have been fixed. Win or lose, American workers, people of colour, feminists, gender activists are facing a conflict unseen for many years, the germs of an American fascism.

Trump took to Twitter claiming he had spoken to Wisconsin's Democratic governor, Tony Evers, and would be sending "federal law enforcement and the National Guard... to restore LAW and ORDER!" He has added that he will visit Kenosha on September 2 to oversee this. And, to add to his provocation, he has defended Rittenhouse, brazenly tweeting that the double killings were in self-defence. "I guess he was in very big trouble ... he probably would have been killed."

It is fervently to be hoped that antiracists, antifascists and people of colour from far and wide, suitably protecting themselves against the fascists and the cops, will give him a warm welcome.

Finally, this all underlines the urgent need for the progressives involved in the mobilisations, white as well as black and other people of colour, to build their own party, independent of the Democrats. It needs to be a party not just for electioneering but active on the streets, in the communities and in the workplaces. It needs to be a party whose militant spearhead can drive the white supremacists and fascists back down the sewers from where Trump has summoned them.

In the present political crisis, unequalled since the 1960s and 1970s, we need to be saying;

Keep up the demonstrations, nationwide, against police murders and Trump and his racist supporters.

Police off the streets of our cities ? No funding for repression

Bring all killer cops to justice: end their impunity

Self-defence is no offence ? the oppressed have the right to bear arms.

Build a united front of resistance, including organised labour, and lay the basis for an independent workers' party with a socialist programme.

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