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Step Up the Opposition to Police Violence and Impunity



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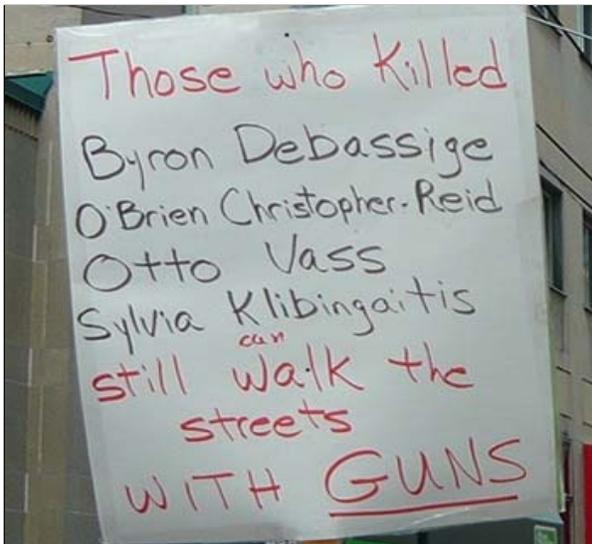
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Unprecedented Verdict in Police Killing of Sammy Yatim

Step Up the Opposition to Police Violence and Impunity

Ontario Political Forum condemns the verdict rendered in the trial of Toronto police officer James Forcillo for the shooting death of 18-year-old Sammy Yatim. Forcillo was found not guilty of murder and manslaughter yet guilty of the "attempted murder" of Yatim, the young man he killed on July 17, 2013 on a Toronto streetcar. Legal experts are perplexed by the verdict which relates to six gunshots fired by Forcillo after Yatim had already been killed by his three earlier gunshots for which he was not found guilty of anything.



Police violence and killings and particularly racist police violence are time and time again covered up in Toronto and the perpetrators are repeatedly given the green light to act with impunity. This was the case with previous killings such as those of national minority youth like Yatim, Jeffrey Reodica, Andrew Bramwell, Faraz Suleiman, Wade Lawson and others, as well as of people suffering from mental illness including Otto Vass, Lester Donaldson, Edmund Yu, Sylvia Klibingaitis and more recently Andrew Loku on July 7, 2015. In all those cases the police were cleared of any wrongdoing. The ongoing police killings have solicited more and more outrage from the people, who have

organized mass demonstrations with the demand for an end to police violence and impunity.

In the case of Sammy Yatim, the facts were so blatant and evidence so clearly demonstrated the brutality of the killing that the state was forced to bring charges against Forcillo. Video footage taken at the scene by civilian witnesses played a key role in compelling the Police Special Investigation Unit (which typically exonerates police officers for shooting and killing civilians on the basis of having insufficient evidence to lay charges) to conclude that charges could be laid against the officer. The video footage clearly showed that Yatim, alone in an empty streetcar and surrounded by well-armed police, posed no imminent danger to anyone least of all the police.

Media report that this is the first time in Canada that a police officer has been convicted of a criminal offence in relation to the killing of a civilian in the line of duty. A compromise had to be reached giving the appearance of accountability in which the offender is punished without delivering any punishment for the killing itself. The verdict is unacceptable because it covers up what is really going on with police and police violence. Far from seeing that justice is done the verdict in fact gives a green light for more killings.

During cross examination, the prosecution asked Forcillo why he had not put more effort into de-escalating the situation to avoid violence. The police officer responded that pulling out his firearm in response to Yatim's knife was "a form of de-escalation." Police records revealed that Officer Forcillo has in fact drawn his weapon "about a dozen times" in the last three and a half years, more often than is the norm. It had been flagged by the police brass but nothing was done to rein in the officer.

The trial itself brought to the fore more disturbing features of Canada's legal system. Police officers who were present at the shooting and were called to testify were accused by the prosecution of "circling the wagons" and lying to protect their fellow officer. Yet Justice Edward Then dismissed the prosecution's accusation and even made light of it, instructing the jury to disregard the prosecution's claims on the grounds that "police are as likely or not to tell the truth as any other witness." This is a serious concern if the judge hearing the case considers perjury acceptable, let alone by the police.

Police lying under oath is actually a common affair. A 2012 *Toronto Star* study showed police officers were frequently caught lying under oath in order to have charges dismissed. What does that say to society about the relationship between the courts and police, and of the courts and

police to the state? More to the point, what does that say to the police? Is it not a green light to act with impunity?

Another disturbing aspect of the trial was the defence's insistence that Forcillo was only doing what he was trained to do -- shoot to kill in order to defend himself and others from further danger, and that is it wrong for the state to take a police officer to court for ostensibly doing what he has been trained to do.



The unacceptable verdict and the compromise it represents underscore the fact that the police are not there to serve and protect as they are supposed to. In fact, they kill those who need their protection the most. Canadians are asking why it is that the police are so afraid of ordinary people that they are prepared to pull the trigger without provocation. Canadians are demanding an end to police violence and impunity, while the Canadian state of the rich is shoring up its police forces, providing them with more arbitrary powers and more and more military-grade weaponry to use against the people.

The problem confronting the people is what to do when the rich and their governments and courts legitimize police acting with impunity and violence against them? In the face of this reality, Canadians must step up the fight against police violence and impunity, against state-organized racism and for a society which provides the rights of the people with a guarantee.

(With files from Toronto Star, CBC.ca)



Militarization of Police Forces to Terrorize the People



Police line at G-20 summit in Toronto, June 26, 2010.

The Toronto Police Service is about to equip frontline police officers with military-grade semiautomatic armour-piercing assault rifles, the same type used by Canadian Armed Forces and special tactical units. Reports say that at least three patrol cars in each of Toronto's 17 police

divisions will be equipped with the C8 assault rifles starting in May.

The rationale given for equipping municipal police with military-grade assault rifles would be ludicrous if it did not have such serious implications for the people. One police spokesperson said these weapons can also be used as part of a de-escalation strategy. Then there are the academic experts like Carleton University criminologist Darryl T. Davies who argue that "in the 21st century police are increasingly facing the threat of confrontation with criminals and terrorists who are equipped with high-powered assault rifles" against which standard police-issue pistols and shotguns are no match.

Arming municipal police forces with military-grade weaponry is increasingly the trend in Canada. The manufacturer of the C8 assault rifles, Colt Canada says police forces across Canada have been buying the weapon. Peel and York Region police forces have been using C8 assault rifles since 2014 and Durham Regional police since 2012. The Department of National Defence (DND) also markets surplus military equipment to police forces across Canada. DND reports that since March 2015 it has received requests from 63 separate organizations, including the Durham Police Service, for C8 assault rifles.

Another disturbing fact that has come to light is the use of dum-dum bullets by Toronto Police. Dum-dum or hollow-point bullets are designed to cause maximum damage by expanding the "wound channel" upon impact. In this regard a letter to the *Toronto Star* in December 2015 states:



"These bullets are banned in warfare by Declaration 3 of the Hague Convention of 1899, but it seems are quite acceptable for use against our own citizens. The following excerpt from *Wikipedia* on the topic is insightful:

"During the Hague Convention of 1899, the British delegation attempted to justify the use of the dum-dum bullet by pointing to its utility when putting down colonial unrest. Barbara Tuchman writes that, 'Developed by the British to stop the rush of fanatical tribesmen, the bullets were vigorously defended by Sir John Ardagh against the heated attack of all except the American military delegate, Captain Crozier, whose country was about to make use of them in the Philippines.'"

The direct experience of the people of Canada is that increasingly the police act as a paramilitary force for the state and are used to terrorize the citizens, especially those who are organizing to affirm their rights -- the Indigenous peoples, the workers, students, anti-war and environmental activists and others. These new weapons will be used against the peoples' forces and in the face of this, it is imperative that the people continue to stand together and not permit anyone to be targeted.



Stop Paying the Rich! Increase Funding for Social Programs!

Health Care Workers and Allies Affirm Health Care as a Right



Queen's Park, February 1, 2016

More than 400 health care workers and their allies participated in a militant rally at Queen's Park on February 1 while the Ontario Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs hosted pre-budget hearings inside the legislature. It was the sixth and last of such actions organized by the Ontario Health Coalition (OHC) with the support of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) and the Ontario Common Front. Previous rallies took place in Hamilton, Windsor, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and Ottawa.

The actions focused on the deteriorating condition of public health care in the province caused by the austerity agenda of the rich and carried out by the Wynne Liberals. The participants denounced the ongoing privatization of public health care, cuts to services aimed at balancing health care budgets, and the creation of a health care crisis in Ontario to justify further privatization in the name of efficiency and accountability.

Natalie Mehra, the Executive Director of the OHC, pointed out that after nine consecutive years of Liberal under-funding, privatization and cuts to services, Ontario has the dubious distinction of having the lowest per capita investments in health care of all the provinces and territories. She demanded that funding be restored so that Ontarians can have access to highest quality health care where and when they need it.



A "parade of shame" followed her intervention which showed the extent of the cuts to health care in various communities across the province and the consequences to the people living there. People are having to wait longer and longer for surgery including for critical surgery; patients are discharged from surgical wards as soon as possible and families are being burdened with their care; and in smaller communities like New Liskeard people are having to travel to larger centres to get the appropriate medical treatment. These and all other violations of the rights of Ontarians to health care were highlighted and opposed.

Chris Buckley, President of the OFL noted that the Liberals and their austerity agenda have caused great damage to the people of the province by creating insecurity for all the working people. The wrecking of the manufacturing sector, the loss of good jobs, the rise of seasonal and part-time work, the loss of pensions and benefits and the brutal prospects facing young workers are matters of concern for the labour movement and the whole society, he pointed out. Buckley called on the participants to continue to organize and hold the Wynne Liberals accountable, pledging that the OFL will lead this opposition.

Carol Baker, Co-Chair of the Ontario Common Front, called on everyone to step up the political fight for "the Ontario we want" and bring an end to the austerity agenda of the Liberal government. This agenda has resulted in a small group of rich doing very well at the expense of the well-being of the working people, she noted. This situation is unacceptable and unsustainable, Baker said. She called on everyone to step up the fight for health care, good jobs, living wages and working conditions and other basic rights that will uphold the security and dignity of working people.







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