Verdict in Rittenhouse Vigilante Trial Leads to Protest by Left and Jubilation on Right

written by Dan La Botz | November 24, 2021

Kyle Rittenhouse carrying his assault rifle through the streets was not stopped by police.

Kyle Rittenhouse, a 17-year-old vigilante, traveled on August 25 last year from his home in Antioch, Illinois to Kenosha, Wisconsin where he shot and killed two men and wounded a third during Black Lives Matter protests. there was found innocent of all charges on November 19, a verdict leading to outrage and protest on the left and to jubilation and new organizing on the far-right.

The events began on August 23 when Kenosha police, arresting Jacob Blake on charges of sexual assault, tased him and then shot him seven times, leaving him paralyzed. His shooting led to Black Lives Matter protests, some peaceful, some involving window-breaking, arson, and confrontations with the police. A rightwing militia group, called the Kenosha Guard, then put out a call widely circulated on social media for people to come to defend Kenosha from BLM. White men, among them the fascist Boogaloo Boys, started showing up in Kenosha carrying hatchets, baseball bats, and guns.

Rittenhouse, a 17-year-old boy who had previously participated in police cadet programs, responded to the Kenosha Guard by taking an AR-47 assault rifle and going to Kenosha. He took his gun and began to walk the street where he was confronted by white activists from the anti-racist protests. When the men caught up with Rittenhouse, he shot them, killing two unarmed men, Joseph Rosenbaum and Anthony Huber, and wounding Gaige Grosskreutz, who had a pistol. Having shot the men Rittenhouse walked through the streets, his gun across his chest, and though several people told the police that he had shot someone, the police did not arrest him.

Later arrested in Illinois, Rittenhouse was extradited to Wisconsin where he was charged with two counts of homicide, one count of attempted homicide, two counts of reckless endangerment, one count of unlawful possession of a firearm, and one count of curfew violation. He was released on $2 million bail was provided by rightwing lawyer.

The judge prejudiced the case in Rittenhouse's favor. The judge's phone, which rang during the trial, had a ring-tone that played "God Bless America," a song played at rallies of former president Donald Trump. During the trial, the judge dropped the lesser charges of illegal possession of a firearm and violation of the curfew. He also refused to admit prosecution evidence that Rittenhouse had spent time with the fascist Proud Boys.

The defense argued that Rittenhouse had only defended himself against injury or death by his assailants. Rittenhouse claimed that Rosenbaum, the first man he killed, had threatened to kill him, the second man was video-taped hitting Rittenhouse with his skate board, and the third man turned out to have a pistol. The jury believe Rittenhouse's self-defense plea and found him innocent of all charges.

Fox News praised the verdict, which they called was a victory for the U.S. Constitution's Second Amendment that gives people the right to bear arms. Republican Representatives offered Rittenhouse congressional internships. Rightwing militias have been energized by this verdict. There is also a surge in anti-Semitism, since right-wingers argue that Jews control the media which they say worked to convict Rittenhouse.

Black and Progressive organizations and politicians criticized the verdict. Black activists and leftists such as the Democratic Socialists of America and small Trotskyist groups held demonstrations of hundreds Portland, Chicago, and New York condemning the verdict. In New York where I joined the protest, one woman carried a sign reading simply, "You know it's wrong." Another had photos of the two unarmed men killed reading, "It's now open season on civil disobedience and protests."

The Rittenhouse verdict has encouraged and emboldened America's fascists—and they are taking advantage of it. We need a more effective response than we have at present. We need a militant, mass anti-fascist movement.