

UK Labour government prepares for state repression using acquittal of police officer over death of Chris Kaba

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The acquittal this week of Metropolitan Police officer Martyn Blake of murder for the killing of Chris Kaba in 2022 is being used to push for the police to be given what amounts to a license to kill.

Kaba, aged 24, who was unarmed, was shot dead by a single bullet to his forehead by Blake in London's Streatham Hill district on September 5, 2022 after a police pursuit.

Kaba's killing sparked protests against the police in London and other cities, including Manchester, Cardiff, Brighton and Southampton.

In the hours after the verdict—following the decision by the judge in the case to allow the media to issue details about Kaba's past—the TV and broadcast media went into overdrive with the prepared message that Kaba was a criminal who got what was coming to him.

All the claims made by Blake and his defence that he had to shoot Kaba as there was an imminent danger to the life of his Met colleagues, who faced being run over or dragged under the wheels of the car Kaba was driving, were repeated ad nauseam.

But these claims were all refuted in court by the prosecution.

- Following a chase, police vehicles in a narrow drive fully boxed in the Audi A8 Kaba was driving. Once boxed in, just 13 seconds later Kaba was shot dead.

- Blake, after exiting his own marked police car to confront Kaba, saw Kaba's futile attempts to ram cars trying to escape. In video footage, Blake is seen running away from Kaba's car, to the back of a parked van, and round the back of his own car. Blake ended up by the side of the police BMW and aimed his rifle at Kaba's car.

- Blake claimed in court that despite not being able to see the scenes in front of him due to his concealed position, he could hear the revving of the engine of Kaba's car, tyre screeches and the Audi moving at "great" speed.

- But whatever attempts Kaba made to escape, as he

rammed several police vehicles, no-one was in danger as the car was proven in court not to have travelled any faster than 12 mph.

- When asked by the prosecution, Blake could not point out which officers' lives he feared for in extensive video footage of the incident.

That is why Kaba's criminal history is now being focused on to legitimise what was a police execution.

However, Blake did not even know that it was Kaba driving the car. He was stopped because the Audi he was driving was believed to be linked to a firearms incident the previous day and an automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) marker had been placed on it. A briefing provided to officers prior to their shift on September 5 on the Audi being potentially associated with a firearms incident naturally made no reference to Kaba.

Once the jury delivered its perverse verdict and acquitted Blake, a slew of ready-prepared commentaries on Kaba's background was poured out, as the judge lifted all reporting restrictions in place during the trial—following a legal case won by the Metropolitan Police.

The *Guardian* led with "Chris Kaba shot man in club and was alleged core member of London gang". The *Telegraph* ran: "Chris Kaba was a violent gangster who gunned down rival days before he was killed". And the *Times*: "Inside Chris Kaba's criminal past: from knives at 13 to gangland guns".

This was backed up with the release of video of Kaba shooting a man once in the leg while in Oval Space nightclub in Hackney, August 30, 2022, and shooting him again in the leg once outside as he tried to escape.

But evidence of Kaba's involvement in criminal activity in the days leading to his death should have led to his arrest and trial, not his murder when he posed no serious threat to anyone and had not even been identified.

As the BBC noted, once reporting restrictions were lifted, "Three other men have already been convicted over their

involvement in the Hackney nightclub shooting and are in prison.

“During their trial, Mr Kaba was named by the judge as the gunman. The judge said Mr Kaba shot the man once in the leg while on the nightclub dance floor, and once outside as the man tried to escape.

“In April the three defendants were sentenced to 10 years, nine years, and five years and six months respectively.”

Such concerns for the rule of law now count for nothing in ruling circles.

Conservative leadership contender Robert Jenrick has made the killing of Kaba and the “right” of the police to shoot to kill central to his campaign. Jenrick declared Blake a “hero” and said his prosecution had “endangered the public... We must back our brave police officers, and not drag them through the courts for making split-second decisions.”

This narrative of a “brave” cop prosecuted for holding the line against a tide of criminality, and demands for no such actions ever being taken again by prosecutors, was prepared immediately following Kaba’s death. The jury in the case was rightly not made aware of Kaba’s background, but the police and forces within the state clearly decided this was the ideal case on which to campaign against further prosecutions for the murder of civilians.

Blake was initially granted anonymity, after being formally charged with murder in September 2023, and was known only as NX121. But his charging immediately led up to 300 armed Met police officers—out of 2,500—to hand in their guns in protest. They were backed by the then Tory government, with Home Secretary Suella Braverman stating on X, “We depend on our brave firearms officers to protect us from the most dangerous and violent in society... They mustn’t fear ending up in the dock for carrying out their duties.”

Following Blake’s acquittal, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley declared, “No police officer is above the law, but we have been clear the system holding police to account is broken. I worry about the lack of support officers face for doing their best, but most of all I worry for the public. The more we crush the spirit of good officers, the less they can fight crime.”

The Labour government, which within weeks of taking office has already created a “national standing army of specialist officers” able to deal with riots, made initial moves to accede to the demands of the police.

Home Secretary Home Yvette Cooper confirmed in Parliament Wednesday, “When officers act in the most dangerous situations on behalf of the state, it is vital that those officers and their families are not put in further danger during any subsequent legal proceedings. We will therefore

introduce a presumption of anonymity for firearms officers subject to criminal trial following a police shooting in the course of their professional duties, up to the point of conviction.”

Rowley immediately embraced the “crucial” reforms, claiming that “Over many years” there had developed “a culture where our officers are increasingly more worried about a skewed, imbalanced system than they are the dangerous criminals they face on the streets”.

What is the reality behind claims of such fears among police?

Since 1990, a total of 83 people, have been fatally shot by the police in England and Wales. Kaba joins the nearly 2,000 (1,906) people either shot or tasered to death by police, or who otherwise died in their custody. INQUEST notes that of all these cases, just 12 murder or manslaughter prosecutions have ever been brought relating to on-duty police officers. Of these, only one on-duty police officer—in relation to the tasing death of ex-footballer Dalian Atkinson—was found guilty of manslaughter in 2021; and none for murder.

Measures to place the police above the law are in preparation for them taking on the working class, as the Labour government rolls out its agenda of savage austerity and support for genocide and war.

The police already have already made extensive use of their sweeping powers to implement state surveillance of anti-Gaza genocide protests and against climate activists and to carry out mass arrests. In future the violence involved in suppressing social and political discontent will be stepped up. That is why workers must reject the cynical campaign claiming that the state must be made more dangerous to confront a few criminals, and take a determined stand in defence of democratic rights.



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