

Homeless man killed by Amtrak police in Philadelphia

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An unarmed 45-year-old homeless man was killed Wednesday morning, July 18, by an Amtrak police officer at Philadelphia's 30th Street train station. The shooting occurred two weeks prior to the arrival of thousands of delegates, politicians, lobbyists and media personnel attending the Republican National Convention, to be held in Philadelphia. Many will pass through 30th Street station, which is Philadelphia's stop on the rail line serving the Northeast Corridor between New York City and Washington DC.

Robert Brown was shot by 12-year Amtrak police veteran Dennis Kelly. Workers at the 30th Street station said Brown was well known in the area because he had been finding food and shelter at the station for several years. Witnesses said that prior to the shooting Brown had been wandering through the station shouting obscenities and at one point shoved a little boy out of his way.

According to one witness, when the Amtrak police ordered Brown to leave, he screamed, "I'll leave when I get ready." As crowds of commuters watched, there was a 10 to 15-minute standoff during which Brown was surrounded by Amtrak officers. The homeless man raised a metal chair over his head, prompting an officer to shout, "Don't make me shoot you!"

Brown replied, "Go ahead and shoot me. I don't care."

When Brown lunged at an officer with the chair, Kelly drew his .40-caliber Glock handgun and shot him in the abdomen. Brown landed face down in front of a McDonald's restaurant in a pool of blood.

Witness Glenda Langley said, "We all screamed. Everyone screamed, 'You didn't have to shoot him!'" Brown was handcuffed and placed on a stretcher. He died on the way to the hospital.

The killing of Brown comes six days after the violent

arrest of carjacking suspect Thomas Jones by Philadelphia police. In that arrest, captured live on television and shown on videotape all over the world, officers kicked or punched Jones a total of 59 times in 28 seconds. The beating follows a pattern of racism and brutality for which the Philadelphia police have been known since the days of Police Commissioner and then Mayor Frank Rizzo.

On the evening of Tuesday, July 18 residents of the Francisville section of North Philadelphia held a stormy meeting with Police Commissioner John Timoney. Chanting "Where's the gun! Where's the gun!" the angry crowd demanded that Timoney fire the officers involved in the beating. The police continue to claim that Jones carried a gun, as justification for the beating, but have not been able to produce one. Residents were incensed that police had fired some 45 shots in their neighborhood in the attempt to capture Jones. Timoney said, "I don't blame people for being upset," but said it would be unfair to fire officers without a thorough investigation.

As of July 18, 22 police officers involved in the chase and apprehension of Jones had been assigned to non-street duty. The spent shell casings recovered at the scene of the shoot-out in Francisville have been analyzed and all have been determined to be 9mm—the standard caliber of police Glock pistols.

Another heated controversy in the aftermath of Jones's beating has been the appearance of a T-shirt at the 24th and 25th police precincts. Reportedly made by a police officer and selling briskly at \$10 a piece, on its back the shirt has the headline from the *Philadelphia Daily News*, "Welcome America," with a photograph of the gang of cops beating Jones. On the front of the T-shirt is a police badge with the words "RNC [Republican National Convention] Welcoming

Committee.”

In response to this new provocation by the police, about 50 clergy from across Philadelphia announced plans to hold an interfaith rally Sunday night, July 23 at a North Philadelphia church. Philadelphia NAACP President J. Whyatt Mondesire said of Sunday's rally, “We want to symbolize through the broader public, both African-Americans as well as whites, the outrage, the disgust that many people feel about this beating. The outrage is not just shared by black Philadelphians; it's shared by a lot of Philadelphians of a variety of skin colors.”

Meanwhile, organizers of various protests directed toward the Republican convention have appealed for calm from city officials and police. Matt Ruben, a spokesperson for Philadelphia Direct Action Group (PDAG), said, “We are not engaged in terrorism.... We are not asking that we be allowed to run amok. But if people engage in nonviolent, peaceful protests and direct action, they should not pepper-spray us and beat our faces in.” Ruben said police were “demonizing” protesters and creating a “specter of terrorism.”

PDAG has planned protests on each day of the convention: Monday, July 31, against the gutting of the welfare system; Tuesday, against abuses by the justice system; and Wednesday against globalization. Thursday is dedicated to protests at area detention centers in support of people who were arrested during the preceding three days.

The largest rally is scheduled for Sunday, July 30 on Philadelphia's Benjamin Franklin Parkway. It is being organized by Unity 2000, made up of a coalition of 120 organizations, including the AFL-CIO.

Another controversy is developing in regard to the RNC protests. Democratic Mayor John Street has denounced as “completely out of context” statements attributed to him in a 2,000-word article in the yet to be released August issue of *George* magazine. In the interview, given last April, Street is quoted as saying, “I have strong feelings about First Amendment stuff. But we've got some idiots coming here. Some will come, say whatever little obnoxious thing they want to say, and go home, but some will be coming here to disrupt, to make a spectacle out of what's going on. They're going to get a very ugly response.” The article compares these comments with Street's own history as a community activist and black nationalist during the

1960s and 70s.

Meanwhile, two unions representing 14,000 white-collar and blue-collar city workers have announced they will go on strike July 25 if new contract agreements are not reached with the city. They have been working under contract extensions since June 30. Union leaders say the city's wage offer and its demand to consolidate four city worker health plans into one are unacceptable.



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