

City and police prepare for Republican Convention

## Philadelphia rally demands prosecution of cops for televised beating

**Tom Bishop**  
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About 1,000 angry Philadelphia residents attended a rally July 23 to demand the prosecution of police officers involved in the beating of carjacking suspect Thomas Jones 10 days earlier. The beating, in which Jones was kicked or punched 59 times in 28 seconds, was videotaped by a local television news helicopter and broadcast around the world. Those attending also expressed outrage at the firing of 45 shots in a residential neighborhood in the initial attempt by police to apprehend Jones and the July 18 killing of a mentally ill homeless man, Robert Brown, by Amtrak police at Philadelphia's 30th Street Station.

The rally, called by the Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity, filled North Philadelphia's Morris Brown A.M.E. Church to capacity; 200 people sat in the basement and another 300 stood outside. The audience was about 80 percent black and 20 percent white. Family members of Thomas Jones and Robert Brown attended.

Speakers said the community would not accept Police Commissioner Timoney's repeated statements that the investigation will take a long time. The Rev. Vernal E. Simms Sr., president of Black Clergy of Philadelphia, and other speakers called for a march on Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne M. Abraham's office. Abraham is notorious for absolving police of charges of brutality. She has repeatedly spoken out nationally in support of the death penalty and for the execution of political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal.

The speakers list was dominated by local clergymen and black Democrats, including clergy from the Hispanic and Korean community, Muslim ministers, two leaders of the Pennsylvania legislative Black Caucus, Jerry Mondesire, president of the Philadelphia NAACP, Martin Luther King III and Rev. Al Sharpton. Several speakers spoke both in the church and then to the crowd outside with a bullhorn. No city politicians attended.

As the featured speaker, Sharpton gave his standard stump speech calling for the unity of "all faiths" against police brutality. While he endorsed the march on Lynne Abraham's office, neither Sharpton nor the other speakers made any criticism of Democratic Mayor John Street, whose standard

response to demands for prosecution of the cops has been, "I have complete confidence in Police Commissioner Timoney."

Earlier in the day, supporters of the police action in the Jones beating held a rally at City Hall. In attendance were about 500—not thousands as reported by one local television station—police officers and their families, bikers and supporters of local right-wing talk show host Dom Giordano. Giordano said he organized the rally "to show that we support the police, we support what they do every day." Many in attendance wore T-shirts calling for the execution of Mumia Abu-Jamal and held up signs with Abu-Jamal's picture and the slogan "Fry him now!"

Meanwhile, Philadelphia city and police harassment of organizations preparing for demonstrations during the Republican National Convention (RNC) continues. On July 22 city building inspectors shut down a Center City art studio where activists have been building floats and puppets as demonstration props. Even though city records showed the building passed its most recent inspection and had no outstanding code violations as of December, the inspectors claimed the building was a fire hazard. Three hours after activists had removed most of the materials for banners, posters, puppets, props, as well as computer files, aides for Mayor Street's office intervened and had the studio reopened.

"It should never have happened," said Matthew Hart, director of the art studio, Spiral Q. "People were totally terrified and disrupted, not knowing if we were going to be arrested, not knowing anything, and I'm sure it's not over." Several activists compared the inspection to a mass preemptive arrest of activists in Washington, DC in April, the night before scheduled protests against the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

The day before, a police spokeswoman acknowledged that police had been photographing those attending organizing meetings for demonstrations during the Convention. Lt. Susan Slawson, commander of the Police Public Affairs unit, had stated early in July, when activists wanted to identify individuals taking photographs, that any such activity by police would violate formal curbs on police intelligence-gathering "and we are in no way violating it." After reporters for the

*Philadelphia Inquirer* informed department officials that car registration records showed that a car used during one surveillance was owned by the Philadelphia police, Slawson said, ““I wasn't aware that we were doing surveillance. Everybody else knew. I didn't check into it before I made the comment.” Slawson refused to say whether the surveillance was still going on or who had authorized it.

A New York City-based civil rights group has complained in a letter to New York police that a Philadelphia police officer photographed demonstrators during a May 1 rally in Manhattan. Philadelphia commanders have confirmed that officers traveled to New York City for May 1 rallies, as well as to demonstrations in Washington, DC and Seattle as part of intelligence gathering for the GOP convention. Slawson refused to say whether Philadelphia police had, in fact, photographed protesters in New York.

Activists have condemned a police document which claims demonstrators will race-bait police. The Training Bureau document, “RNC Information for Officers,” warns police: “Professional agitators are going to be here from around the world and their goal is to make you do the wrong thing, especially involving the use of force. They will harass and curse at you, criticize your race, sex, height, ancestry, and anything else to make you lose your temper.” Activists charge that police officials use this strategy to prejudice their officers—particularly African American officers posted at barricades—against demonstrators.

Activists have also released a July 18 memo from Pennsylvania Council of Children Youth and Family Services, seeking vacant beds for about 1,000 children of protesters who may be arrested during convention demonstrations. Council Director Letty D. Thall said in the memo, “The City is concerned that the arrests of protesters ... will necessitate the need to place the protesters' children in temporary care until their parents are released.”

“We're certainly not planning or anticipating major arrests or major placement,” said Alba Martinez, commissioner of the city's Department of Human Service, “This is just a matter of being prepared.” Cheri Honkala, head of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union, which plans a march of some 5,000 people on July 31 even though the city denied its request for a permit, said some parents feared the city would use the occasion to initiate child-welfare investigations or reopen old files on parents. Honkala charged it “appears to be the newest strategy in a growing string of tactics aimed at intimidating poor families from exercising their democratic and human rights.”

City officials have reopened the Holmesburg Prison in Northeast Philadelphia, which was closed in 1995, to hold arrestees if there are mass arrests. The prison has 200 cells, each capable of holding several people.

On July 20 the *Philadelphia City Paper*, a community newspaper, reported the arrest of six young people July 4 for

trespassing on the roof of a parking garage under construction in West Philadelphia to watch holiday fireworks. The six, who describe themselves as looking “like punks” or dressing “weird,” but not wearing political slogans, were held for 24 hours. The article stated detectives brought them into an interrogation room one at a time for questioning. Even though the six stated they had not attended such events, the detectives repeatedly questioned them about the planning meetings for Republican Convention demonstrations.

Twenty-eight-year-old Robert Thompson said he was asked if he knew what had happened in Seattle during the World Trade Organization meeting in November. When Thompson replied he was not there, the police asked, “What do you think of the police response?” Detectives asked Thompson how he felt about “the police system” in general. After the interrogation, the six were taken to a Philadelphia District Court where they were charged with trespassing and conspiracy.

AFSCME District Council 33, which represents 11,000 blue-collar workers, reached a tentative agreement with the city for a new four-year contract July 25. The contract, which will be voted on by a mail ballot, reportedly contains wage increases of between 2 percent and 3 percent for each year. Faced with the prospect of tons of trash piling up during the Convention and demonstrations and strikers picketing Convention events, the city made a major concession—by today's standards—when it gave up its central demand that the health plans of four city unions be consolidated into one.

Talks continue with AFSCME District Council 47, which represents 3,200 city white-collar workers. District Council 47 President Thomas Paine Cronin charged that by organizing the separate settlement international and state union officials and the leadership of District Council 33 had undermined his union's position.



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