

Second rally against police killing of Toronto youth

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About 300 demonstrators marched to Toronto Police Headquarters on Tuesday afternoon to denounce last month's police killing of 18-year-old Sammy Yatim. It was the second public protest against the killing since the youth was gunned down by Constable James Forcillo on July 27. The shooting of the teenager, who had emigrated from Syria several years ago, was captured on the video camera of bystander Marcus Grupp and broadcast widely. Currently, the video has been seen by more than a million viewers on YouTube.

The video shows Yatim standing beside the driver's seat in a stationary and empty streetcar, holding an object in one of his hands. Three police officers with guns trained on the lone individual stand several meters outside the front doors and repeatedly shout, "Drop the knife!" Yatim takes no hostile action and retreats a few steps into the streetcar.

Twenty-three seconds into the video, one of the three officers tells Yatim, "If you take one step in this direction... [inaudible]." Seconds later, after the officer shouts, "Don't move," Yatim walks toward the front doors and the policeman fires three shots at him. Separate video from a security camera appears to confirm that Yatim crumples to the floor essentially prostrate after being struck by the initial salvo, whereupon, after a brief pause, the officer fires six more shots at him. The scene is then flooded with police officers.

One policeman then approaches the still motionless Yatim and, for good measure, tasers him.

Before the police arrived, the youth had reportedly produced a small knife and ordered the passengers and the driver off the streetcar. Several witnesses stated that his genitals were exposed. By all accounts, at the time of his killing, Yatim was in a state of heightened emotional stress, though no evidence has surfaced

indicating that he ever intended to physically harm anyone. What is patently clear is that police made no effort whatsoever to de-escalate the situation.

Since the shooting, labour and civil rights groups have called for an independent investigation into the killing. With outrage palpable across large sections of the city's population, Toronto police chief Bill Blair announced the appointment of retired Ontario judge Dennis O'Connor to assist in an internal police review of use of force practices. The announcement was a transparent effort to diffuse growing anti-police sentiment already exacerbated by mass police brutality at the 2010 G-20 summit in Toronto that was also caught on numerous videos. O'Connor is a tried and tested damage-control troubleshooter for the ruling establishment, having presided over whitewashes of the Walkerton, Ontario, water contamination scandal in 2000 and the "render for torture" case of Maher Arar in 2004. In any case, numerous other inquiries, investigations and reports have from time to time been produced over the years to dampen public outrage against police abuses with no lessening of police malfeasance.

As is standard procedure, the province's Special Investigations Unit (SIU) is also examining the Yatim killing. This so-called "arms-length investigative body" has a long history of absolving police officers of all wrongdoing. In the past five years, they have investigated 44 deaths of people in Toronto who died during an encounter with the police (15 by police shooting). Only one charge was ever laid, and no convictions have been attained. In the 23-years history of the SIU only six charges have ever been laid province-wide amongst thousands of investigations. In the current case, Constable Forcillo has not yet been charged with any offence and has been suspended with

full pay. Most SIU investigators are former police officers.

Andre Marin, the province's ombudsman, has cast further doubt on the entire SIU process: "The cooperation of the police with an SIU investigation is an exception and not the norm. When you hear the police say, 'Oh, we always cooperate,' it rings hollow". Marin went on to state that evidence the police forward to investigators should be left "untampered". In a related matter, so egregious and numerous have been the instances of police lying under oath while testifying in courts of law that provincial Crown attorneys this past spring were instructed to issue a public report of any such behavior that they observe. Defense attorneys, however, have yet to receive a similar mandate.

Prior to the Tuesday march, several family members of individuals shot dead by police in previous incidents spoke at a press conference. The mother of a police-shooting victim in Kitchener denounced the police chief's announcements as mere "tokenism". "We're actually in a David and Goliath battle here", she said. Ruth Schaeffer, another mother of a man gunned down by police, pointed out that as a result of findings in numerous previous police shootings, "all the recommendations that need to be put in place to safeguard the life of Canadian citizens are sitting in print for anybody who is interested to implement. I believe that it is a mark of a democracy how many of our own people are killed by our own state".

The lavish budgets and salaries of police forces across the country, the passing of draconian legislation that criminalizes dissent, and the impunity afforded to law enforcement officials all serve definite political aims. Under conditions of mounting social inequality and working class opposition to the austerity programs being implemented by the representatives of the ruling class, these well-equipped and lethal bodies of armed men are being groomed to serve as ruthless enforcers of the status quo.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with a number of protesters at the Toronto rally. Ricardo Lamour, a young worker from Montreal, said, "We had the same situation happen in Montreal a couple of years ago with Freddy Villanueva. He was shot three times and killed by a cop who is now part of the city SWAT team instead of being in jail or out of a job. People had riots

in north Montreal, and they gave us a public inquiry, but since it took so long to come to any conclusion, people kind of forgot how frustrated they were with what happened in the first place with that kid. This wasn't the first case in Toronto, and it wasn't the first case in Montreal. The police exist for the state and for private interests. It's not a police for broke people, for middle class people or for coloured people".

Pete Taranova, a retired worker, said he was approached in 1969 to join the Toronto police force. "I would have been better off financially if I had, but after all the crap I've seen, I'm sure glad I didn't join because I have a conscience. I wouldn't want to be connected with the likes of this".

Judith Hamilton brought a handmade sign listing a number of people in Toronto recently killed by the police. "I'm just someone who's concerned about my fellow citizens", she said. "Edmund Yu was killed in 1997, and nothing has happened since then. We've had all kinds of inquiries, and the police and SIU have said they'll do something—or not—and nothing has happened. Having another inquiry is, in my mind, a little fruitless, and the province really has to step in. The SIU is composed of former police officers, and they watch things happen like the G20, and all of a sudden they become deaf, mute and blind. They did nothing to stop any of these things".



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