

Police quickly suppress spontaneous protests after arrest in Baltimore

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On Monday afternoon, simmering social tensions in Baltimore erupted once again, amid conflicting reports of an African American man, later identified as Robert Tucker, being shot by Baltimore police. The gunfire took place near the intersection of North Avenue and Pennsylvania, which has been an epicenter of the ongoing protests against police violence in the city following the murder of 25-year-old Freddie Gray.

One of the first reports of the incident came from Fox News, whose Mike Tobin declared live that a young African American man had been shot once by police and “didn’t appear to be in good shape.” Other witnesses told Fox they saw an officer shoot Tucker, saying he was unarmed.

Fox has since retracted its initial report, however, following BPD statements that police were chasing Tucker for having a concealed weapon, which, they say, he dropped, causing the weapon to fire. Despite Tucker being taken away on a stretcher, police claim he was never shot or injured and is perfectly healthy.

Within seconds of the gunfire, nearby officers swarmed the scene carrying truncheons and shields. As spontaneous protests erupted, with protesters screaming in the present officers’ faces, the police responded with the blanket use of pepper spray in an effort to temporarily blind protesters and diffuse the immediate situation. At least ten bystanders can be seen suffering from this military grade eye irritant.

Emergency calls were clearly sent across the entire city to rally backup forces, as the number of riot police quickly grew to dozens and a police helicopter circled the area demanding that protesters leave.

Expressing an ever-growing sentiment shared by the American working class, bystander Chanel Lee, 20, told McClatchy News Service, “At this point, I don’t believe anything the police say. I feel like the police

shot him and are doing what they did with Freddie Gray: get in a huddle and figure out something to say for the cameras.”

Shortly after the police repression of enraged bystanders, Baltimore police Lieutenant Colonel Melvin Russell gave a brief press conference at the scene, declaring that Tucker was followed in a “very short pursuit,” and that “Police have not discharged any weapons, so we could not have shot him.” Russell claimed Tucker was “not injured anywhere on his body.”

The immediate aftermath of the incident was captured on live stream and circulated widely across social media. The video footage clearly demonstrates that despite all the talk of tensions easing in the impoverished city, the social situation in Baltimore remains on a knife-edge.

It is likely neighborhood witnesses and the extra close attention being paid to their activities made it more difficult for the Baltimore cops to simply riddle Tucker with bullets, the general modus operandi of police particularly if they claim a victim is armed or “reaching in his waist band.” Nevertheless, as the incident demonstrated the police, with military forces behind them, remain on full alert to suppress the slightest renewal of social opposition.

After the occupation of the city by more than 4,000 National Guard troops and state and local cops failed to curb social unrest and protests grew larger and spread to other cities, the state prosecutor, working closely with Obama’s Justice Department, decided to bring charges last Friday against six cops involved in the murder of Freddie Gray.

The indictments were hailed by the city’s largely black political establishment, which endorsed State Prosecutor Marilyn Mosby’s call for demonstrators to

give her “peace” while allowing the justice system to work. This was followed by Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake’s decision to lift the 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew Sunday and the announcement by Maryland Governor Larry Hogan of a “draw down” of National Guard troops.

These measures are aimed at chloroforming the population as the state repression in Baltimore and other cities continues. There is already discussion afoot of moving the venue of any future trial to create better conditions for the exoneration of the cops, and the police union is demanding Mosby recuse herself because her husband is a city council member and she also has close ties to the Gray family’s attorney.

Regardless of the outcome of this case, however, the corporate and financial elite and its political representatives require police repression to contain popular opposition over the growth of poverty and social inequality.

While providing tens of millions of dollars for the militarization of local police departments, with the weapons of war from Afghanistan and Iraq, the Obama administration is also promoting the lie that cultivation of a new layer of African American and Hispanic entrepreneurs is the answer to the decaying neighborhoods and destitution that afflict tens of millions of workers and youth across America.

In a speech at Lehman College in the Bronx, New York Obama pledged to spend “the rest of my life” working to improve poor communities through re-launching his My Brother’s Keeper initiative as a non-profit foundation. The operation—made up of celebrities, athletes, corporate CEOs and current and ex-government officials, including former attorney general Eric Holder, former secretary of state General Colin Powell, and Democratic senator Cory Booker of New Jersey—oversees mentoring programs to convince impoverished youth that the system can work for them too.

“The only difference between me and a lot of the other young men in this neighborhood and all across the country,” the millionaire president said, “is that I grew up in an environment that was a little more forgiving. Really that’s what this comes down to: Do we love these kids?”

The president, who has made a political career as a tool of the corporate-financial elite and the military

intelligence apparatus, has shown his “love” by overseeing the shutting down of thousands of public schools, the laying off of thousands of teachers and the slashing of essential services. He is now preparing to collaborate with the Republicans to impose even more draconian cuts.



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