

Wisconsin governor mobilizes National Guard after eruption of protests over police killing

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Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker mobilized the state's National Guard Sunday after demonstrations against police violence erupted in Milwaukee following the killing of 23-year-old Sylville Smith by a police officer. One hundred national guardsmen remain on standby awaiting possible orders to join police units in shutting down further demonstrations.

On Saturday, at approximately 3:30 p.m., Smith and another unidentified person were driving through the Sherman Park neighborhood on Milwaukee's northwest side when they were pulled over by two plainclothes officers for, as Milwaukee officials have put it, "suspicious activity." Police say that Smith and the other individual exited from the car and proceeded to run on foot. The officers allege that Smith had in his hand a semiautomatic handgun as he ran and was told to drop it. He was then shot twice, as bullets ripped through his chest and arm, killing him.

Smith's shooter has been identified as a 24-year-old black police officer who has been placed on administrative duty awaiting investigation by the Milwaukee County District Attorney. He wore a body camera during the shooting, but officials have not made the video public.

During a news conference on Sunday, Milwaukee Police Chief Edward Flynn commented that Smith, "did turn to the officer with a firearm in his hand," adding that the killing of Smith "certainly appeared to be within lawful bounds." There are no claims, however, that Smith fired his gun.

The shooting was met with anger by local residents who face conditions of poverty, mass unemployment and continual harassment by police. Reports indicate that about 100 people gathered Saturday night in the Sherman Park neighborhood to protest the killing.

Media coverage of the initial protest is almost

nonexistent, with all reporting instead focused on the events later in the night. Four buildings, including a bank and gas station, were set ablaze. Cars, including police cruisers, were set on fire. The media, including many government officials, have been quick to use these events to justify the deployment of the National Guard and a police lockdown of the entire city.

The mobilization of the National Guard against social opposition within the United States is becoming routine. Walker previously mobilized the National Guard in December 2014 amidst growing protests over the police killing of 31-year-old Dontre Hamilton, who was shot 14 times in a city park in Milwaukee after a police officer provoked a confrontation with the unarmed man as he slept on a bench.

During the protests against the police killing of Michael Brown in August 2014, Missouri National Guard units amassed in Ferguson, Missouri. National Guard commanders referred to peaceful protesters as "enemy forces" and ran roughshod over the democratic rights of protesters. In April 2015, two thousand National Guard soldiers occupied the city of Baltimore, Maryland in response to the social eruption spurred by the killing of Freddie Gray.

The use of military force to quell social upheaval in response to police brutality will only grow as police killings continue unabated. According to killedbypolice.net, this year US police forces have killed 721 individuals as of August 13th.

The main common factor in these killings is not the race of the victim, but the fact that almost all those killed are poor and/or working class. This applies as well to the killing of Smith, where both the victim and the police officer were black.

The eruption of protests over the killing Sylville Smith reveals the deep social tensions that exist

throughout the country. Smith gasped his last breaths in Sherman Park, Milwaukee, where a reported 43 percent of residents live in poverty. African-Americans in the city have been the hardest hit, with an average poverty rate of 39.9 percent. For children 18 and under, the poverty rate for all races is a staggering 42.1 percent. A recent report notes Milwaukee's unemployment rate was 29 percent in 2014, double the national average of 14.8 percent.

Industry and manufacturing jobs have been decimated in recent decades. Milwaukee is one of many cities scattered through the United States gutted by deindustrialization. As in Detroit and Chicago's South Side, residents of Milwaukee's more impoverished areas are surrounded by fossilized industrial warehouses that once provided decent-paying jobs.

Since the 2008 financial crash, all sections of the working class have seen a relentless attack on their living standards. Under Democratic President Barack Obama, the United States has seen the largest transfer of wealth from the working class to the ruling class.

The Obama administration has overseen the continued transfer of military equipment to police forces throughout the country, while the White House has used federal investigations—including the most recent on Baltimore, Maryland—to whitewash police killings and ensure that nothing is done to stop them.



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