

# Workers in Detroit and across Michigan support anti-police violence protests

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Powerful protests demanding justice for George Floyd, the 46-year-old man killed by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota on Memorial Day, and a halt to police violence have continued in Detroit and across Michigan over the past week, even in the face of escalating attacks by law enforcement.

In a show of solidarity within the working class for the protesters this week, two hundred health care workers at Ascension Providence Hospital in Southfield, Michigan gathered outside at 12:30 p.m. to hold signs and take a knee in protest of police violence.

For nine minutes, the crowd of doctors, nurses and others, most of them in their scrubs, kneeled in silence in front of the hospital, beside Nine Mile Road, a main thoroughfare in Southfield. Several people held their fists in the air.

Several vehicles driving past honked their horns in support of the demonstration. Nearly everyone in attendance wore masks against the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of the nine minutes, representing the amount of time a Minneapolis police officer kneeled on Floyd's neck, the crowd counted down the last several seconds aloud, then applauded before returning to their jobs.

While many of the demonstrations throughout Michigan have occurred without incident, several were met with repression at the hands of the police or national guard. Curfews were implemented in several cities. Hundreds have been arrested. Dozens of those arrested in Detroit were held in the loading dock of Little Caesars Arena for processing Tuesday night.

As elsewhere in the country, the protests have been multiracial and multiethnic, with the largest demonstrations in Detroit, Lansing, Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo, where thousands have participated. Dozens more rallies have taken place in the suburbs and rural

working-class small towns. Hundreds gathered in Muskegon, Bay City, Portage, Saginaw, Lapeer, and other municipalities and townships.

In Detroit, protests have taken place for six successive nights. Democratic Mayor Mike Duggan implemented an 8:00 p.m. curfew on Sunday, after violent assaults by police on protesters. Although there have been minimal reports of looting, as of June 3, over 381 people had been arrested. Several videos of unprovoked police attacks on protesters have gone viral.

Cassidy, a young woman from the Downriver suburbs of Detroit, recorded a video of police roughing up a man who was walking away from the protests. After throwing the man to the ground and spraying him with mace, a group of officers shoved other nearby protesters and hit them with their shields.

"We didn't yell at them, there was no antagonizing," Cassidy told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "A lot of people are saying that the protesters are violent and that's why the police are being violent back—that people were throwing bottles and stuff, but nothing like that happened. They charged us for no reason at all. We hadn't even made it to the actual protest yet."

Protesters were not the only ones in the crosshairs of the police. Several journalists reported being harassed, pepper sprayed or handcuffed. Darcie Moran, a *Detroit Free Press* reporter, was placed on the ground and her hands zip tied behind her back, even though she was in a police authorized media zone and identified herself as a reporter.

"Police started shoving us and said they didn't care we were media," she wrote on Twitter. "One reporter went down hard. He is fine."

MLive photographer Nicole Hestler and three other journalists were shot by dozens of pepper balls while

walking to their car. “We were just trying to leave the scene,” Hester said. “We weren’t charging at them.”

Last Saturday night, *Free Press* reporter JC Reindl was chased down and pepper sprayed in the face while he was holding up his press badge. Later several *Free Press* reporters at the corner of Michigan and Griswold were targeted with rubber bullets, although none were hit.

Detroit activist Tristan Taylor was arrested in Detroit on Tuesday evening and spent the night in jail on felony rioting charges after violating the 8:00 p.m. curfew. Taylor was finally released after a further demonstration on Wednesday afternoon demanding that he be let out of jail.

Fifty National Guard members from the Port Huron armory were deployed in Grand Rapids Monday night at the request of Democratic Mayor Rosalynn Bliss. Peaceful protesters were met with rubber bullets and tear gas after just after the 7 p.m. curfew.

Of the presence of military Humvees and soldiers in riot gear, 21-year-old Rayna Johnson told MLive, “It’s really terrifying, and I think we should all be scared of it ... we’re marching for human rights, and for it to be met with military presence speaks a lot to the fundamental problems within our system.”

On Thursday evening, more than 100 gathered in front of the historic courthouse in Howell, Michigan. Protesters said they were determined to demonstrate even though the Livingston County sheriff asked them to refrain from going out.

Protester Harley Wheeler told News 10 that she wants people to know Howell is a safe place for protest, “Howell does have a bad history and I think we can change that. I think our first step to changing that was when we stopped a KKK meeting from happening on these same court steps. Our town came together 23,000 strong to stop that from happening and this is our way of continuing that same stance that happened back then,” Wheeler said.

The news media and the Democratic Party in Detroit, along with corporate media nationally, is presenting the death of Floyd and fight against police brutality as exclusively the product of “systemic anti-black racism,” deliberately concealing the class basis for the violence of law enforcement against the working class.

While racism plays a role in police violence against workers and the poor—as shown by the disproportionate

number of black deaths at the hands of police—the total number of whites killed by the police each year across the country is actually double the number of African Americans.

The foundation of police violence and murder across the US, regardless of race or ethnicity, is economic and social inequality. As the protests in Detroit and other cities have demonstrated, a powerful, racially integrated movement has developed against police violence. This struggle can only be taken forward on the basis of a strategy to unify the entire working class against the source of inequality, the capitalist system, and to fight for socialism.



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