Encouraged by Trump, police rampage leaves protesters dead and wounded across the US

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6 June 2020

Operating with the backing and encouragement of President Trump—who has threatened to deploy the military to suppress protests—and the aid of thousands of National Guard soldiers, police forces throughout the US are engaged in an ongoing rampage.

More than 11,000 people have been arrested in the less than two weeks of protests that followed the police murder of George Floyd. Most have been attacked by police and arrested for "failure to disperse" or violating curfews, under both Democratic and Republican mayors.

Thousands of peaceful demonstrators have been teargassed, pepper sprayed, shot with rubber bullets and beanbags, beaten with truncheons and pushed to the ground, leading to serious injuries and in some cases death. While largely ignored by the mainstream media, video after video of police attacks have gone viral on social media, fueling popular outrage.

Sarah Grossman, a recent Ohio State graduate, died last weekend after being exposed to CS tear gas fired by Columbus, Ohio police during a May 30 protest. The Montgomery County coroner confirmed that he is conducting an autopsy on Grossman, who is believed to have suffered an asthma attack after being doused with the chemical.

No arrests or charges have been filed in Grossman's death.

In Buffalo, New York, a 75-year-old man is in serious but stable condition at the Erie County Medical Center after being assaulted by officers from the Buffalo Police Department at a protest Thursday. As of this writing, none of the officers has been charged for the assault, recorded on video, which rendered him unconscious. The video has been viewed over 72 million times on Twitter and is being shared widely on other social media platforms.

In the deeply disturbing assault, a Buffalo Police Department officer, identified as Aaron Torgalski, violently shoved Martin Gugino, a peace activist from nearby Amherst, to the ground. Gugino's head struck the pavement and he immediately began bleeding out of his ear. Torgalski and his fellow officers ignored Gugino's apparently lifeless body as they battered back worried onlookers and media.

A petition demanding the Buffalo Police Department fire officer Torgalski exceeded its goal of 300,000 signatures in less than a day, expressing the widespread outrage among workers and youth of all races against state violence.

The vicious assault came after another day of peaceful protests in downtown Buffalo's Niagara Square. The protests were forced to end at 8 p.m. due to a curfew imposed by Democratic Mayor Byron Brown that is to last through Sunday. Buffalo police, clad head to toe in riot armor, formed a line with National Guard soldiers in the rear and began to violently force out the dozen or so peaceful protesters who remained in the public square.

Gugino, walking alone on the sidewalk, approached the officers with a riot helmet that had been left behind, attempting to return it to the police. Officers in the video, recorded by WBFO, can be heard yelling, "PUSH HIM BACK!" followed shortly thereafter by the stomach-churning thud.

The few remaining protesters and WBFO correspondent Mike Desmond, who was recording the attack, worriedly called for help. As one protester moved forward to attempt to render aid, an officer shoved him back, screaming: "What the fuck you walking up on me for?"

The Buffalo Police Department initially attempted to cover up the crime. Michael DeGeorge, a spokesman

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for Brown and the Buffalo Police Department, claimed in an initial email statement sent to reporters at 8:50 p.m. that Gugino “tripped and fell” during a “skirmish involving protesters.”

Desmond, who recorded the entire encounter, released a Twitter video showing the actual course of events approximately 20 minutes later. Less than two hours later, the Buffalo Police Department was forced to suspend two officers without pay and begin an Internal Affairs investigation. There is no doubt that had the video evidence not been released, no officers would have been suspended, much less investigated.

All 57 members of the Buffalo Police Department’s Emergency Response Team resigned from the unit as a “show of support” for the officers who were suspended, exemplifying the class divide that exists between the working class and the police.

In Fort Lauderdale, Florida, LaToya Ratlieff is still recovering nearly a week after being hit in the head with a so-called “less lethal” foam rubber bullet round fired at protesters by police officers. Ratlieff, who participated in a peaceful protest with roughly 1,500 workers and youth last Sunday, was attempting to leave the protest after being hit with CS tear gas. The rubber bullet lacerated her skull and sent her falling face down onto the street, fracturing her eye socket.

The Fort Lauderdale riot police had deliberately set up their lines outside the parking garage where a majority of the protesters, including Ratlieff, had parked their cars, guaranteeing a confrontation. Ratlieff was roughly 10 yards away from the line of officers when she was shot in the forehead. When aimed at the neck or head, “foam baton” rounds are considered a lethal munition, according to the manufacturer’s manual.

Worried protesters quickly ran to her aid, braving rubber bullets and tear gas to scoop up her bleeding body and transport her to the hospital. Ratlieff gave a video interview to the *Miami Herald* in which she contrasted the treatment her working class brothers and sisters gave her to the treatment she suffered at the hands of Fort Lauderdale police.

“These strangers are helping me, they stayed at the hospital to make sure that I was ok... So, civilians and people that have to risk themselves, ‘cause they could get shot with rubber bullets too, came and saved me while these officers stood right there in that line and watched me bleed on that ground. They didn’t move. I didn’t see anyone come over to help me... not a single officer.”

Still holding the expended round casing, roughly the size of an 8 ounce can, Ratlieff, holding back tears, ended the interview by asking, “Why was I shot?”

In a statement released days later, the Fort Lauderdale police department said it did not have “specific information about the incident,” and therefore “no officers had been relieved of duty because of it.” The police department has refused to release incident reports from the day and no investigation is pending.

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