

Lawsuit claims Washington, DC police participated in June raid on Lafayette Square protest

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On July 8, the American Civil Liberties Union and Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs filed an amendment to their class action lawsuit on behalf of Black Lives Matter DC and other groups against the government officials involved in the clearing of protesters from Lafayette Square Park on June 1.

The suit was filed last month following the Trump administration's violent attacks on peaceful protesters in Lafayette Park outside of the White House. The clearing of the park by police and federal agents marked a new stage in the American ruling class's slide toward authoritarianism and dictatorship. Peaceful protesters were met with tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, and flash bangs as they defenselessly fled the advancing walls of riot shields and projectile weapons clearing the way so that Trump could pose for a photo-op in front of a nearby church.

The amended suit adds the chief of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) of the District of Columbia Peter Newsham to the list of defendants that already includes several federal officials alongside Trump, including: Attorney General William Barr, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and US Park Police Acting Chief Gregory Monahan.

The case alleges police and federal agents, acting on direct orders from Trump, Barr and Newsham, brutally repressed peaceful demonstrators and seeks damages for violations of the First and Fourth Amendments, as well as charging the government with conspiracy to violate civil rights.

In the latest development, it emerged last week that the United States Park Police failed to record radio communications between agents that day as they helped

sweep protesters away from the area. The loss or lack of any recorded audio among the Park Police that day was likely intentional in order to remove the prospect of accountability. As University of South Carolina criminology professor Geoff Alpert told the *Washington Post*, "These are things that are just inexcusable in 2020" because "It's all you've got. Memory and reasoning can be clouded. They can be manufactured."

While the Trump administration's fascistic actions have made clear its views about democracy, the amended allegations against the MPD implicate the Democratic administration of Washington, DC Mayor Muriel Bowser in the assault.

According to plaintiff Dustin Foley, he and his 15-year-old daughter were attacked by MPD officers "wearing riot gear, standing shoulder-to-shoulder, blocking off" the street as protesters fled from Lafayette Square. "MPD officers began firing tear gas canisters at the demonstrators, including Mr. Foley and [his daughter] who were fleeing Lafayette Square down 17th Street NW," states the affidavit.

"Both Mr. Foley and [his daughter] immediately felt the severe effects of the tear gas fired by the MPD officers, including burning eyes and difficulty breathing. [Foley's daughter] experienced significant symptoms, and had difficulty opening or seeing out of her eyes."

There have been multiple reports since the incident of MPD officers being captured on video at the scene, lined up in riot gear around the intersection of 17th Street and H Street NW. Local CBS News affiliate WUSA-TV reporter Nathan Baca, for instance, tweeted on June 4 that "police canisters gathered by @wusa9

crews Monday night show federal police DID use artificial CS tear gas in addition to natural OC gas on #BlackLivesMatter.” Reporters from the *Post* and *Vox* have also covered the active presence of MPD officers in the area that day.

For his part, MPD Chief Newsham has denied more than once that any of DC’s police officers took part in the clearing of the area around the park right outside the White House grounds.

Following the June 1 assault, the Democratic Party establishment and media have also sought to promote Mayor Bowser as a champion of civil rights. “[O]verall and so far … the city [of Washington, DC] and its police force have performed well, respecting and protecting protesters’ First Amendment rights while ensuring public safety,” said the *Washington Post* in a typical comment in the days after the attack.

This has coincided with an effort to flood the public discourse with racialist identity politics in order to direct justified anger at the police toward “white people” in general and divide the multiracial protests that swept hundreds of cities across the world last month.

The addition of MPD to the suit confirms that it is not only elements within the Trump administration deploying state violence against the demonstrations of working class anger, but the capitalist state as a whole at the national and local level. It exposes the absurdity of the claims by Democratic Party politicians around the country that they represent popular opposition to the Trump administration and the defense of democratic rights.

Overwhelmingly, the response of Democratic and Republican officials to peaceful protests was to institute curfews, call in the National Guard, and attack the protesters themselves as fringe extremists or outside agitators, a slander regularly used by segregationists against civil rights activists during the 1950s and 1960s.

Such actions also explain the relative silence within the establishment since the Trump administration’s June 1 assault on the protests and his attempted coup against the Constitution.

“Democrats should if anything be doing far more to get to the bottom of what happened [on June 1] than they have so far,” states a worried comment published in the *Post* this week. The opinion, headlined “A

protester was shot by police in Oregon. Democrats should demand answers,” notes “actual violent clashes are happening, as the Portland shooting shows… Yet remarkably, it’s not being treated as a major controversy” by the Democratic Party.



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