

Police riot in Detroit against peaceful protesters

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On Saturday night, the Detroit Police Department (DPD) went on a rampage against continuing protests against police brutality in the city. Video footage of the attack shows DPD moving in on a crowd of peaceful protesters, shoving people to the ground, beating them with batons and shields, and dousing them in teargas.

Photos and videos of the attack went viral on social media, including images showing face-down, zip-tied protesters getting sprayed in the face with tear gas by cops. According to DPD, 44 people were arrested for “unlawful assembly” downtown as they blocked street traffic at Woodward Avenue and John R. All but one have since been released.

Detroit Police Chief James Craig told a press conference Monday that, in spite of several ongoing internal investigations of excessive force, there was no instance of such force Saturday night. While simultaneously admitting that force was necessary in order to “prevent a Seattle zone of lawlessness” from taking place, Craig and DPD spokeswoman Sergeant Nicole Kirkwood claimed that all accounts of excessive force were “completely false and inaccurate.”

Craig expanded the lie further, claiming that the information released on social media—apparently including video evidence of the attack—was put out as a “false narrative.” “Was force used?” he asked. “Absolutely. But there’s a difference between force being used and a determination if that force was excessive. ... The bottom line is, we’re not going to have a Seattle here.”

On Tuesday, the Detroit *MetroTimes* reported that legal observers, including a representative of the National Lawyers Guild (NLG), were assaulted by the police during the protest on Saturday. A statement from the NLG said, “One DPD officer beat a Legal Observer so severely with his baton that she could not move.”

The statement went on, “When two other Legal Observers attempted to remove the injured LO out of harm’s way, another officer deployed pepper spray directly in all three of their faces.”

The Detroit chapter of the NLG has monitored demonstrations in the city for decades. They are present to observe neutrally and document police behavior to ensure First Amendment rights are not violated. The NLG representatives were attacked even though all of them were wearing neon green hats emblazoned with the words, “National Lawyers Guild LEGAL OBSERVER.”

The *MetroTimes* also reported on Monday that witnesses to the police rampage said five people were taken to the hospital with injuries. One of these was Alex Anest, a medic who was clubbed by a police officer with a baton and suffered a broken rib and collapsed lung. Anest said that the police “dragged me 15 feet across the sidewalk and cuffed me,” and denied him any treatment for his injuries while detaining him with a group of protesters. Anest was eventually let go and given a ride by other protesters to the hospital at 4 a.m.

Demonstrators held a meeting Sunday in the aftermath of the attack. Many were limping, in casts and covered in bruises from being brutalized. The protests over the weekend in Detroit were aimed specifically at the removal of federal agents from the city, while ongoing demonstrations in Detroit have been part of a broader movement against police brutality internationally since the May 25 murder of George Floyd.

In an ongoing effort to divide protesters against each other, DPD and the right-wing Detroit media continue to identify the cities where protesters are from. Claims of “outside agitators” are used in an attempt to whip up

support for the police, in particular along racial lines.

The accusations about “outsiders” among the protesters was endorsed by Democratic Party Mayor of Detroit Mike Duggan several weeks ago at a press conference called to address the ongoing protests in the city. Responding to the demand by citizens for defunding the police department, Duggan said the “loudest voices” calling for cutting the police budget are coming from those who do not live in Detroit.

“You’ve got people who are largely from outside the city coming into Detroit and saying, ‘defund police,’ before going back home to the suburbs,” Duggan said. “We need more officers on the street, not fewer.” The police riot on Saturday is the product of Duggan’s policy of more police on the street.

Additionally, when President Trump announced plans to send an undercover Department of Homeland Security swat team to Detroit as part of a nationwide “law and order” initiative to assault protesters and build support among fascistic elements for his reelection campaign, Mayor Duggan did not object to support for federal crackdown in the city.

Duggan said on July 22, “I was talking to my fellow mayors across America about, there’s something about what’s been going on in the protests across the country that have emboldened people with guns in a lot of cities.” Mayor Duggan went on to say that what would help are ATF agents [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives] and federal prosecutors to help the Detroit police deal with illegal guns in Detroit.

The DPD is not unique. Emboldened by support from the far-right Trump administration and insertion of federal agents into the city to crack down on protesters, police nationally are continuing to operate with impunity.

Just a week ago, the Trump administration’s Attorney General William Barr visited Detroit to review Operation Legend with Chief Craig. The pair boarded a US Army UH-72 Lakota helicopter ostensibly to tour the city, “and for something else I can’t tell you about,” Craig cryptically told a news conference afterward.

The operation is part of the Trump administration’s law-and-order initiative, using gun violence in the city as a pretext for intimidating and cracking down on protests.

Last year DPD looked on as a neo-Nazi attacked a

woman at the Detroit Pride festival. Last weekend a Proud Boys rally drew fascists from across the country to Kalamazoo, where police intervention was delayed and to a large extent friendly to the neo-Nazis and their supporters.

Significantly, since the police assault on Saturday night, Mayor Duggan has not been heard from. No statement has been issued by the mayor’s office and Duggan has not been quoted by the local news media about the rampage.

Instead, local Democratic Party legislators, State Senator Stephanie Chang (1st District) and US Representative Rashida Tlaib (13th Congressional District), have stepped forward to call for an investigation into the police brutality against peaceful protesters in Detroit. Chang tweeted, “There should be a full independent investigation of this incident and the use of excessive force,” while Tlaib put the blame for the police violence on the Detroit Board of Police Commissioners.

Supporting the Mayor-in-hiding and the posturing of the other local Democrats, the Metro Detroit Democratic Socialists of America and other groups associated with the pseudo-left are falsely presenting the struggle against police violence as purely a racial matter. While they deny the class foundation of the police as an arm of the state that exists for the purpose of defending the private capitalist ownership of the means of production, these groups collaborate with the Detroit Democratic Party and are supporting the ticket of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris in the US presidential elections.



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