

Lancaster, Pennsylvania police assault protesters after killing mentally ill man

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On Sunday, Lancaster, Pennsylvania police responded with deadly force to a domestic disturbance call around 4:15 p.m. Rulennis Munoz had called the police on her brother, 27-year-old Ricardo Munoz, to receive help because the latter was “incoherent and misbehaving.” Munoz suffered from bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

Rulennis told *Lancaster Online*, “He had an episode. He was just incoherent and misbehaving.” According to statements and body-cam video released by the Lancaster Bureau of Police, an officer approached Munoz’s row house and, after having spoken briefly to Munoz’s sister, Ricardo Munoz, clearly disoriented, rushed out of the door brandishing a kitchen knife, chasing the officer down the street, screaming obscenities. The officer responded with deadly force, shooting Munoz multiple times. The mentally ill man instantly dropped to the ground dead.

Munoz was awaiting trial for stabbing several people after he had been attacked in an altercation. In that case, when police had arrived at the scene, he refused to drop his knife and was tased, a supposedly non-lethal form of violence that sometimes results in death.

Within hours of the killing, several hundred multi-racial and multi-ethnic peaceful protesters responded to the use of deadly force in the city, demanding answers and the end to police violence. The demonstration continued into the early morning hours, with right-wing pro-police militia members arriving in army fatigues to defend the police and confront protesters.

Around 3 a.m. Monday, protesters linked arms in a line on an access ramp leading to the west side of the police station. Police responded by blanketing the protesters with tear gas, pepper spray, and other “chemical munitions.”

Having been provoked, a few protesters threw bricks

at the station and damaged police vehicles, after which time police moved in with brute force, arresting eight protesters and charging them with crimes such as vandalism, rioting, failure to disperse, and other charges. Six of the eight had their bail set at an excessive \$1 million dollars. Five more protesters were arrested by police Monday.

The killing of Munoz comes in the wake of the brutal murder of George Floyd, which has sparked months of unprecedented nationwide and international protests against police killings. Protests have also been fueled by the recently released video of a killing of a mentally ill man in Rochester, New York on March 23.

The highly disturbing video shows that police tortured Daniel Prude, a 41-year-old black man, by placing a hood over his head, handcuffing him naked, and smashing his head repeatedly against the pavement. The medical examiner ruled it a homicide by asphyxiation.

The killing of mentally ill individuals by police happens with regularity throughout the United States and other countries. In Australia, for example, Todd McKenzie, a 40-year-old man diagnosed with schizophrenia was gunned down by police last month. Linden Cameron, a 13-year-old with Asperger’s syndrome was left in critical condition after being shot multiple times by police in Salt Lake City, Utah earlier this month.

Lancaster’s Democratic Mayor, Danene Sorace, held a press conference on Monday, in which she detailed the abysmal social conditions confronting the city’s working class. One-third to one-half of the city lives below the poverty line, depending on metrics, while half of renters pay more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs such as rent. Human and mental health departments have been cut, and Pennsylvania

currently has a \$5 billion state budget deficit. Workers and the poor are faced with decades of stagnant wages and rising housing costs.

Sorace of course did not mention that it is her party, along with the Republicans, which bears responsibility for overseeing and enforcing the dramatic decline in living standards for the working class in communities like Lancaster over many decades.

The criminal response of the Trump administration to the pandemic will only worsen the horrific social conditions faced by working people. Tens of millions are still unemployed and every month workers are losing their jobs with no relief coming. Millions have lost their health insurance, limiting their ability to gain access to health care. In fact, the government is embarking on a strategy of herd immunity that will result in more deaths.

Echoing Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, Sorace sought to blacken the protesters as violent criminals, claiming “there is no place for this in the community,” and refused to reproach the police department for firing tear gas on peaceful protesters.

Presenting police violence in racial terms, Sorace said “black and brown communities” are being the “most directly” impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and unemployment, while offering reformist nostrums. Such promises will not do anything to minimize or eliminate police violence. As usual, Democratic politicians present police killings in racial terms and as the problem of individual bad officers.

Police killings continue unabated, on track to once again hit the average of 1,000 victims per year, the majority of whom are working class or poor. While Native Americans and blacks are disproportionately killed compared to whites, who make up the largest share, the uniting factor of police brutality victims is that they are working class and poor.



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