

# National Guard sent to suppress protests over police murder in Philadelphia

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Following the eruption of protests in West Philadelphia Monday night in the wake of the police murder of a black worker, 27-year-old William Wallace Jr., Democratic Governor Tom Wolf on Tuesday authorized the deployment of “hundreds” of National Guard troops to aid local police in cracking down on demonstrators.

Two Philadelphia police, whose identities have yet to be revealed, fired at least seven rounds at Wallace, a father of four, in broad daylight Monday afternoon. Wallace, who was bipolar, was having a mental health episode and his family had called for an ambulance. Instead, the police showed up and executed Wallace for carrying a knife, even though their victim was many feet away and had made no attempt to lunge at them.

On Tuesday, the Wallace family, through their lawyer, Shaka Johnson, stated that when they called emergency services for help, they specifically requested an ambulance, not police. Johnson also said that Wallace’s pregnant wife told the police that her husband was in a crisis before they shot him.

The police involved in the killing have merely been assigned to desk duty.

When local residents marched to protest the murder, police lashed out in brutal attacks, provoking some rock throwing and looting. So far, Philadelphia police have announced 91 arrests, including 11 people charged with assaulting a police officer. More arrests are expected in the coming days as protests continue. As of this writing, multiple demonstrations were in progress Tuesday evening.

On-the-ground footage from the protest shows police beating protesters with batons. Thomas Blackwell, a local activist, was one of those beaten and arrested for “disorderly conduct.” Blackwell, speaking to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, said police beat him on the chest and chin with a baton until he fell to the ground, where they continued assaulting him.

“I could’ve died... They wouldn’t stop until someone was bleeding, and their head was busted open,” Blackwell said. “It was almost like sport to them, the laughing, the carrying on after they beat someone.”

Governor Wolf’s deployment of the National Guard follows similar orders issued by Democratic governors Tim Walz of Minnesota and Tony Evers of Wisconsin earlier this year in response to protests against police shootings. In Minnesota, where Minneapolis police murdered George Floyd on May 25, over 11,000 National Guard soldiers were deployed to the Twin Cities, while nearly 2,000 were deployed to Kenosha, Wisconsin after police shot Jacob Blake in the back seven times, crippling him for life.

Wolf’s call for the National Guard comes in the wake of threats from the White House to deploy federal police and paramilitary forces to the city. During an appearance on “Fox & Friends” Tuesday morning, White House Communications Director Alyssa Farah said: “This president has made clear before—whether it was in Seattle or Portland, or others—we’re prepared to deploy federal law enforcement if necessary. So, I’m sure those conversations are ongoing now.”

In campaign speeches, Trump has singled out Philadelphia as a target for far-right militia forces, backed by the police, to descend on polling stations on Election Day, November 3, to intimidate working class and minority voters. Trump’s mobilization of so-called “poll watchers,” dubbed the “Army for Trump,” is part of his strategy to hijack the election and remain in power regardless of the outcome of the vote. A large turnout in Philadelphia is key to the Democratic campaign of Joe Biden winning the battleground state of Pennsylvania, and Trump is determined to use violence and the threat of violence to suppress the vote.

At a campaign speech in Pennsylvania on Monday, Trump threatened Governor Wolf, saying, “We are

watching you, governor, very closely in Philadelphia.” Trump added that “law enforcement” is “watching Philadelphia.”

On Tuesday morning, following the crackdown by police on protesters, Trump tweeted that Philadelphia “must have pollwatchers.”

The killing of Wallace follows a summer of protests against police violence throughout the US and internationally. Demonstrating the international character of police violence, protesters in Philadelphia solidarized themselves with the protests in Nigeria against the brutal Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) police. “This is happening in Nigeria too,” said one demonstrator. “It’s not just happening here. SARS is a problem. It’s happening all over Africa.”

Despite over 10,000 demonstrations in the US alone, in which millions of youth and workers of all races have participated, police continue to kill with impunity. Philadelphia police have shot at least 10 people in nine separate incidents so far this year, with Wallace being the second fatality. Over the last 12 years, Philadelphia police have on average been involved in nearly 35 shootings per year.

Nationally, at least 874 people have been killed by police in the US in 2020, according to MappingPoliceViolence.com. This represents a slight increase compared to last year, putting US police on track to, once again, kill over 1,000 people in a single year.

The impoverished Cobbs Creek neighborhood of West Philadelphia where the Wallace family lives is the same neighborhood where the 1985 MOVE bombing took place. Then-mayor Wilson Goode, a black Democrat, ordered the bombing of the row home occupied by the cultural nationalist MOVE group, killing five children and six adults and setting off a fire that destroyed 61 houses, leaving 240 people homeless.

The police who killed Wallace were wearing body cams, but Philadelphia authorities have yet to release the footage. However, a cell phone video taken by a witness to the killing shows that the cops who shot Wallace were well separated from him when they fired their weapons. At the time of shooting, Wallace’s mother, brother and several community members were frantically trying to deescalate the situation. The video shows them pleading with the police, who had their guns drawn, not to shoot, as they beseeched Wallace to put down the knife.

Following the shooting, the Democratic mayor of Philadelphia, Jim Kenney, released a mealy-mouthed statement, which he reiterated on Tuesday, saying his

“prayers are with the family and friends of Walter Wallace.” The statement continued, “the video of this tragic incident... presents difficult questions that must be answered.” It concluded with an assurance that an “Officer Involved Shooting Investigation Unit of PPD will conduct a full investigation.”

As countless police shootings have shown, including the murders of Breonna Taylor in Louisville and Hannah Fizer in Missouri, this internal police department investigation can be counted on to exonerate the police of any wrongdoing.

John McNesby, president of the Philadelphia Fraternal Order of Police, released a statement declaring, “Our police officers are being vilified this evening for doing their job and keeping the community safe after being confronted by a man with a knife. We support and defend these officers, as they too are traumatized by being involved in a fatal shooting.”

The Philadelphia police, like police departments across the country, are infested with fascists and far-right sympathizers. On July 9, the Philadelphia *Inquirer* reported that Proud Boys were in attendance at the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 5 headquarters when Vice President Mike Pence gave a speech telling the police that he and Trump “have your back.”

Just over a month ago on September 26, the Proud Boys were videotaped shaking hands with Philadelphia police after they marched through the city, flashing white power hand signs while denouncing leftists as “terrorists.”

On Tuesday, the Democratic presidential ticket of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris issued a statement on the events in Philadelphia consisting of a pro forma expression of sympathy for the family of Wallace and a nod to Black Lives Matter. It then placed the onus for the overnight violence on the protesters and whitewashed the attacks by the police.

“Attacking police officers and vandalizing small businesses, which are already struggling during a pandemic, does not bend the moral arc of the universe closer to justice,” Biden and Harris declared, adding, “Looting is not a protest, it is a crime.”



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