Demonstrations continue in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in response to the police murder of Patrick Lyoya

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A fourth day of demonstrations took place in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on Saturday evening in protest against the police murder of 26-year-old black man Patrick Lyoya on April 4. The brutal killing of the young auto parts worker on the southeast side of the city, which was captured on the smartphone video, has sparked widespread public anger, including demands that the officer be fired and charged with murder.

Hundreds of people gathered at 5:00 p.m. at Rosa Parks Circle and then marched through downtown Grand Rapids past the Kent County Courthouse and other landmarks before they locked arms in front of the city police headquarters.

The multiracial crowd chanted Patrick Lyoya's name, "No Justice! No Peace!" "Arrest the killer cop!" and "This is what democracy looks like!" as they marched in the cold and windy evening. Police barricades along the march prevented the demonstration from marching south on Ottawa toward Van Andel Arena, and there were several brief standoffs with officers in riot gear before the protesters moved on.

Demonstrations have been held each day since April 13, when the Grand Rapids Police Department (GRPD) released several videos of the police killing of Lyoya, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The officer pulled the young man over in a residential area of the city early in the morning of April 4 for a license plate violation.

Lyoya exited his vehicle to find out why he was being stopped while the officer demanded that he stay in his car. When Lyoya did not comply, the officer asked repeatedly, "Do you have a license?" While he looked confused and scared, the officer became aggressive and said, "Do you speak English?"

The young man then closed his car door and started to walk around the front of the vehicle when the officer grabbed him. Lyoya successfully broke free from the officer's grip and began to run. The policeman tackled him, and a struggle ensued over the officer's taser. Shortly, thereafter, the officer is seen on one of the videos placing his handgun against the back of Lyoya's head, having pinned him to the ground, and pulling the trigger.

On Saturday evening, a prayer vigil of 100 people was also held in memory of Lyoya at the Epicenter of Worship church in Lansing. The service included 15 members of Lyoya's family who stood together at the front of the church wearing shirts that read, "In loving memory."

Peter and Dorcas Lyoya, Patrick's parents, had previously spoken publicly about the murder of their son saying that they had left the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2014 to escape violence, but they never expected to experience it in America. They said they were shocked that the person involved in using violence against their son was a police officer.

The family is demanding to see the man who killed Patrick, and they want him charged with murder. The Lyoyas have called for a demonstration and march to the State Capitol on Thursday afternoon at 4:00 p.m. in Lansing.

Local and state authorities have said the name of the officer will not be released unless charges are brought against him. The seven-year veteran of the GRPD has been place on administrative leave, according to GRPD Chief Eric Winstrom. Kent County prosecutors have said no decision will be made on potential charges against the unnamed officer until Michigan State Police

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complete an investigation.

Jeffrey A. Fagan, a leading expert on policing and crime from Columbia Law School, told MLive that a manslaughter charge is inevitable, and it should happen sooner rather than later. Fagan said, based on a review of the released videos, “At no point was the officer’s life in danger,” and “He shot as if the victim was armed and dangerous, which he wasn’t.”

However, far-right and law-and-order political considerations are involved in the aftermath of the killing of Lyoya. Republican candidate for Michigan governor Tudor Dixon, for example, said last Thursday, “We will not let this officer—or any officer—be sandbagged for reasonably protecting themselves by weak politicians who are afraid to say and do what is right.”

Over the past decade, Africans have become one of the fastest growing immigrant populations in the US through refugee admissions and the diversity visa lottery program, according to the Migration Policy Institute. There are 4.3 million black immigrants in the US, 95 percent of whom live in metropolitan areas.

A report in the *USA Today* said that over the past two fiscal years people from the Congo became the largest group of refugees to settle in Michigan, based on data from the US State Department. Chris Cavanaugh, director of Samaritas’ New American Resettlement program in West Michigan, said Grand Rapids is home to the largest Congolese refugee population in the state thanks to employment opportunities, as well as family and social connections like churches.

Cavanaugh told the *USA Today*, “Certainly the Congolese community is feeling some fear, kind of scared over what happened, and I would say rightfully so. Those maybe who have much less English skills are just more apprehensive about getting pulled over or how they’re supposed to respond in certain situations.”

As in the case of George Floyd, the death of Patrick Lyoya was exposed as an execution by a video captured on a smartphone by a bystander, triggering protests in the community and outrage over police violence across the country and internationally.

This latest brutal killing has been taken up by grandstanding Democratic Party officials and the pseudo-left, pointing out that Patrick Lyoya was black, and the officer was white. While it is true that more blacks are killed by police in the US as a proportion of the population, the exclusive emphasis on race ignores the full context as well as the statistics of police violence, which shows that there are twice as many white people killed by police each year than black.

Murder by police officers across the US is not, in the final analysis, a matter of race but of class. Meanwhile, during the two weeks since the killing of Patrick Lyoya, the protests by Grand Rapids residents have been multiracial and multi-ethnic. Working class people, regardless of skin color, view these events with disgust and are demanding that they be stopped immediately.

Police violence is one of the many indicators of the deepening social crisis. The coronavirus pandemic has killed millions of people worldwide and, as the imperialist fueled war with Russia in Ukraine intensifies, the ruling elites around the world are preparing for even bigger military conflicts including world war. The capitalist system is putting an ever smaller premium on human life, and the police, as the group of armed men and women that exists for the purpose of protecting the wealth of the capitalist class, are the enforcers of this class rule.

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