Police in Akron, Ohio continue rampage against anti-police violence protesters and journalists

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With the blessing of Democratic Mayor Dan Horrigan, state and federal police forces have engaged in a multi-day terror campaign against anti-police violence protesters and journalists in the working class community of Akron, Ohio.

For at least the third time this week, officers with the Akron Police Department deployed chemical weapons Wednesday against peaceful protesters demanding justice for Jayland Walker, who was killed by a hail of police bullets on June 27, and the release of those arrested while demonstrating over the previous three days.

In the last 36 hours multiple social media videos have emerged of police targeting peaceful protesters and journalists with tear gas even though they are committing no crimes. Despite a self-imposed media blackout by the capitalist media, firsthand accounts by victims detailing the police rampage have emerged exposing the brutality and criminality of the Akron police, which is common among police across the country.

On Wednesday night, following the lifting of a curfew imposed by Mayor Horrigan, dozens of protesters gathered outside the police headquarters in downtown Akron. They were met by riot police, who declared the peaceful protests “unlawful” despite no illegal or violent activity on the part of the protesters.

After police told demonstrators to leave the area, social media videos show police deploying chemical spray against people who were simply on the sidewalk exercising their First Amendment rights.

These violent police state actions are part of a deluge of violence meted out by Ohio police forces aimed at silencing all those who are outraged by the wanton police murder of Walker, a 25-year-old African American worker who was gunned down by at least eight Akron police officers, who have yet to be identified.

Walker suffered over 60 wounds during the seven seconds in which police continuously fired their guns. According to data compiled by *Mapping Police Violence*, Walker is one of 569 people who have been killed by police in the United States so far this year.

In response to mass anger over Walker’s killing, the police have been given a blank check by Horrigan to crush any sign of popular opposition. Like the mass protests that emerged two years ago following the police murder of George Floyd, Horrigan and the rest of the ruling class are terrified that the vicious murder of Walker will expose the fact that more than two years after the killing of Floyd, the police, the front-line defenders of capitalist rule, continue to kill with impunity.

Under conditions of an ongoing pandemic which has already killed more than 1 million Americans, record inflation and war with Russia in Ukraine, the US ruling class will not and cannot brook any dissent. This is why nearly two years after the Democratic Party seized control of both chambers of Congress and the White House, the Democrats have completely abandoned any pretense of police reform while at the same time, providing billions of dollars to the police and military, even as vital social and health programs, such as funding for more COVID-19 vaccines, go unfulfilled.

With the full backing of the political establishment, police stationed outside the Summit County Jail, where several protesters remained imprisoned more than 48 hours after their arrest, have attacked journalists and protesters with tear gas when they were not in violation of the curfew.

In a video posted on social media Tuesday night, Spectrum News reporter Kristen Anzuini explained that she and her photographer Jacob “just got tear gassed” by the Summit County Sheriff's Office.

“And then after being tear gassed,” Anzuini explained, “I was sitting in my car, not able to see, and ... like 20 police officers” surrounded her car and threatened to arrest her. Jacob explained that there was a “wall” of police “blocking the entire street.”

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A clearly shocked Anzuini added, “They came up to our car and said we had to leave or else we were going to be arrested.” Despite explaining to the cops that she could not drive, given the chemical irritants in her eyes, which might impair driving at night, the police still made them leave, forcing her photographer, who was also tear gassed, to drive.

In another example of a wanton assault by the police, Destinee Stark explained in a viral TikTok video posted on July 5 that two Akron teenagers had reached out to her after being arrested by the police for “violating” the curfew. Stark explained that the teens were prevented by the police from going home because they lived within the curfew zone and police would not allow them to enter. The girls said that “armored vehicles were blocking their way,” explained Stark.

“The police would not allow them to pass even though they happened to live on that road,” Stark said. “So the two teenage girls had to hide in the parking garage” as a police helicopter flew overhead searching for them, she explained. After hiding for roughly three hours, the girls attempted to leave the parking garage and make it past the police line and go home.

Reading a text message she received from one the girls, Stark said she wrote that police “grabbed me and pushed me on the grass and tried to use my hand in the cuffs to unlock my phone.” Stark added that prior to arresting the girls and violating their Fourth Amendment right against unreasonable searches and seizures, the Akron police tear gassed them as they approached the police line even though they obviously posed no threat whatsoever. In her video, Stark included a recording taken by one of the girls which shows the police firing tear gas at the teenagers after telling them to “go away” and “figure it out.”

In another example demonstrating the increasingly open fascistic character of Ohio police, an unnamed protester, who was part of the protest group that was arrested on Sunday night, explained in the interview with the Freedom Black Led Organizing Collaborative that once inside the jail, they were refused medical care and not given the opportunity to make a phone call.

Describing the scene on Sunday night, the protester said he saw police “indiscriminately grabbing black and brown people and throwing them on the ground and arresting them.”

Once he was taken to the jail with other protesters, he explained that the jail did not have enough room to accommodate all those rounded up by the cops. So the police decided to chain them all together by the wrists and ankles and then menace them with shotguns. The protester said that “SWAT” and other police kept coming in and out “laughing, patting each other on the back, telling stories to each other.”

In the interview he recalled that at least two imprisoned protesters were severely injured yet denied medical care. He said that one person was forced to remain in handcuffs even though his shoulder had been dislocated during his arrest by the police. The protester had his arm “f*cked up” by a cop while he was in a holding cell, he explained.

In addition to denying those jailed medical care, the Akron police are adding to insult to injury by not allowing bailed out protesters to simply walk out of the jail. Instead the police are vindictively driving bailed out protesters to different locations around the city of Akron and dropping them off, far from their homes and support networks.

In an interview with Abbey Marshall from the *Akron Beacon Journal*, 24-year-old Sierra Mason, explained that she followed a Summit County Sheriff’s officer, who had dropped off two protesters at a Sheetz Gas Station at July 6.

“They didn’t have a clue” why they were being dropped off at the gas station, Mason said. “I had to explain to them,” she said, “that there is an entire team of people ready to support you, with food, water, resources and they [the police] don’t even want you to get that.

“These people [the police] are not only killing us,” Mason said, “but they aren’t allowing us to f*cking grieve, they are not allowing us to support our community, they are not allowing these people to do anything that this country is supposed to be about and its sick.”

Mayor Horrigan has said and done nothing about these police abuses. In fact, when he announced the lifting of the curfew Wednesday morning, he slandered those who were arrested during the police riot on Sunday night, claiming in a bald-faced lie that “those who were arrested were engaged in criminal behavior. They were becoming violent with officers and disturbing the peace...” Horrigan has yet to make any statement about the violent action of Akron police directed against journalists and citizens.

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