

Akron protester and friend of Jayland Walker's fiancée: "They are not 'protecting and serving,' they are hunting and killing us"

Jacob Crosse
7 July 2022

In the face of wanton police violence, including tear gas, baton attacks, physical assaults and mass arrests, hundreds of protesters in Akron, Ohio have continued to demand justice for Jayland Walker.

The 25-year-old African-American delivery driver was unarmed when he was murdered on June 27 by at least eight still-unnamed police officers with the Akron Police Department following a vehicle and foot pursuit. Despite not being armed, Walker, according to the medical examiner's report, suffered over 60 bullet wounds after police shot more than 90 rounds at him. In a final insult, after murdering Walker, the police handcuffed his corpse and left him on the pavement.

Terrified of a social explosion following the release of some of the police body camera footage this past Sunday, which confirmed the completely unjustified and criminal killing of Walker, the Democratic mayor of Akron, Dan Horrigan, has worked in concert with state and local police as well as federal authorities to impose a police-state crackdown on all public expressions of opposition to police violence and support for Walker.

To this end, Horrigan canceled Fourth of July celebrations in the city last week and imposed an authoritarian curfew that was only lifted on Wednesday morning. Police have continued to assault journalists and peaceful protesters, including friends and family members of the Walker family, and an indefinite curfew was reimposed Thursday by the mayor.

Ashley, a good friend of Jayland's fiancée, Jaymeisha Beasley, who was killed in a hit-and-run incident in May, spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* on Thursday about the ongoing protests, the response of the mayor, and the militarized-police occupation of the city. This interview has been edited for clarity and content.

WSWS: Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

Ashley: My name is Ashley, I live in Akron, Ohio and I am part of the Justice for Jayland movement. We are demanding justice for Jayland. We want all of the officers involved in his killing identified, fired and charged.

What happened to Jayland is so heartbreaking. He lost his fiancée, my friend, the month before. His murder is causing a lot of hurt. We are crying out, our city is crying out. What happened to Jayland is not OK and we will be out here every single day until we get some answers.

We know that Jayland was profiled. They [the police] were looking for him because of the incident from the previous night, where the police tried to pull him over for a broken tail light. This is not the first time we have

seen police use something like this to escalate, to go after a young person.

They say the cops fired 90 bullets and that Jayland suffered 60 wounds, but we have heard that the medical examiner stopped counting after 60. I have seen the other body camera videos that show that the police kept shooting him while he was on the ground. What threat did he pose when he was on the ground? Our parents teach us to "stop, drop and roll" when there is a fire, and in the video you can see police shooting Jayland on the ground, causing him to roll. They shot him for seven seconds.

The fact is there is no reason, no justification, for what happened to Jayland.

WSWS: What has it been like on the ground in Akron during the protests?

Ashley: The police are not respecting our First and Fourth Amendment rights. Just yesterday (Wednesday), there were people out here, peacefully protesting, and they were still being treated unfairly. The police beat up a handicapped man. They did not know he was handicapped, not like they would care, but they still beat him up. They are not giving us any answers. Why can't we ask for answers? Why can't we protest in peace? People are going to jail for protesting, for asking questions.

WSWS: What do you think about the fact that Democratic Mayor Dan Horrigan has said nothing about the police rampage, the tear gassing of protesters and journalists? Horrigan, in fact, has slandered the protesters as "violent." What happened to the Democrats and their pledges to "defund the police" after the murder of George Floyd?

Ashley: There definitely needs to be defunding of the police. They are not "protecting and serving," they are hunting down and killing us. They are not using a taser. I have seen other videos, other incidents, like in Illinois. That person conducted a mass killing! Why not shoot him 60 times? It's like he's allowed to walk out of the car, no gunfire, yet Jayland and others are hunted like animals.

I cannot answer why the Democrats have continued to fund the police. It is a slap in our face that they are not defunding them. They are paying them, with our tax dollars, to kill us.

The police do not protect us. Yet when we go to the mayor's house to ask some questions, to get some answers, we see our tax dollars at work. They are paying for SWAT officers to protect the mayor. Meanwhile, we are getting mistreated in jail, helicopters are monitoring us, police are pushing people on the protest lines. Not just men, but women and children too.

He [Horrigan] does not care. We need to demand his resignation. He is not leading, he is hiding, not showing his face while they are blocking our streets with salt trucks.

WSWS: They are still using salt trucks as barricades even though the curfew is over? [The curfew was reimposed Thursday night after this interview was conducted.]

Ashley: Yes! They did not have this many salt trucks out when it snowed in the winter! Now they are all out on the streets, parked three or four horizontally.

WSWS: Seeing images from Akron, I was struck by how much it resembled the occupation of Ferguson, Missouri following the police murder of Michael Brown.

Ashley: Absolutely. Riding through downtown last weekend as we were looking at the protests, we could see people running from the police. I rolled down my window and the tear gas was everywhere, the whole downtown was covered. Our eyes were burning, we almost had to pull over.

They treat us like animals, they put in that curfew from 9:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. During that time we were not allowed to go outside. To do so would have been a “violation.” Meanwhile they are paying millions of dollars to have SWAT secure the mayor’s house.

As a black person, I do not even want to call the police. We have to walk to the straight and narrow. Got to make sure we comply. We have to record the police at every traffic stop. We have to call someone when we are pulled over to let them know.

I know we are just as, if not more, scared of them than they are of us.

WSWS: What is it like living in Akron?

Ashley: Akron has an inner city, a downtown Akron. Our city is not in a good place. There is nothing for the people here. There are no jobs. There is nothing to do, there are barely any sports bars, and the ones that are here are usually racist. We do not have clubs, we do not have anything. There is barely any affordable housing, it’s terrible. No one is ever like, ‘Hey let’s go to Akron.’

They did some bridge building. The Ohio Department of Transportation. They built some bridges and tore some bridges down. But the fact is the city has been crying out for change. It has been like this for years.

What jobs are here are scarce, and many African-Americans have been profiled by the police, so they have criminal backgrounds. So many black men come out of jail and they are unable to get a job. Most of the jobs that are available pay the bare minimum, or minimum wage.

For me, I have to work 70 hours a week just to survive. I have two jobs, on top of going to nursing school. I get paid \$15 an hour at my one job, and \$10 hour at the other, but really, it’s more like \$11 and \$8 after taxes. The rent is so high. I have a two bedroom apartment right now and I am trying to move. I see these one bedroom apartments for \$750+ a month that require a security deposit and three months rent up front. Who can afford that? Who has over \$3,000?

WSWS: We are always told there is “no money” for social services, for

affordable housing, yet the Akron police department continues to receive generous funding from the Democratic Party and their “Republican colleagues.”

Ashley: We can be spending our tax dollars on so many things besides police. The public transportation in Akron is unsanitary. The pandemic is still ongoing, you have people on the bus snorting, sneezing, some with masks, some without. To even get to your job using the bus you have to wake up four hours early just to make sure you get to work on time. You work for an hour, making \$10.30 after taxes and that gets you what—one gallon of gas and one gallon of milk? Who can afford this?

I do not have children, so I do not get any state benefits. I do have to pay for my insurance. It has a high deductible and comes out of my paycheck in a lump sum. I am 31 and have been working since I was 14. I have had a lot of jobs and so have my friends, many of whom do have children. Either way it is struggle, day and night, hour after hour, seven days a week to make ends meet.

WSWS: The first police murder of 2022 happened in nearby Canton, Ohio. James Williams, a devoted father and husband, was murdered in his back yard by Robert Huber of the Canton Police Department while he was celebrating the New Year with his family. The Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigations announced shortly afterwards that they would be investigating the murder of Williams. Six months later, no charges have been brought against Huber. What do you think about the current investigation into Walker’s killing by this same agency?

Ashley: Pardon my language, but this investigation is a bunch of bullshit. They are trying to throw us under the bus and blame Jayland for getting murdered. If this was the kid of a police officer, who got chased down and shot 60 times, murdered on camera, these cops would have had to answer for it. They would have at least had to have given a statement. They have said nothing and continue to get paid for it. If we are accused of shooting a cop, or committing some other crime, we are locked up immediately, no questions asked. We protest peacefully and we are locked up! Why are they still free? It is another slap in the face.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact