

Public outcry in Pennsylvania borough forces resignation of officer who killed Tamir Rice

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Public outrage in the small Pennsylvania borough of Tioga forced the police officer who murdered 12-year-old Tamir Rice in 2014 to quit his new job Thursday, just two days after being sworn in by the borough's council.

In 2014, officer Timothy Loehmann, then a member of the Cleveland, Ohio police force, shot and killed Rice while the boy was playing in a park with a toy gun on a cold and rainy November day.

Public outcry against the hiring of Loehmann started as soon as the Tioga borough announced his hiring on its Facebook page July 5. The next day about 50 residents of the community of 700 in north central Pennsylvania rallied outside the Tioga Borough building.

Michelle Appleby, who joined the rally, told the *Williamsport Sun-Gazette*, "I am here to protest the hiring of the police officer who shot Tamir Rice." Appleby had seen the news earlier in the day on Facebook and said that she was absolutely shocked that anyone would hire Loehmann.

Appleby told the *Gazette* the story resonated with her in 2014 when it happened. "I've got kids, they play and they play with airsoft guns and they play with BB guns. I saw the video of that police officer get out of the car and shoot that kid with no warning and that has stuck with me ever since."

Tioga Borough Mayor David Wilcox took part in the rally and has told media outlets that he was not given Loehmann's resume or information about his background before his hiring.

Tioga County, with fewer than 41,000 people, is over 97 percent white and less than 1 percent black. Yet in opposition to the notion that seeks to portray police violence in simply racial terms, residents were so outspoken in their outrage over Loehmann's hiring that

he was forced to resign within two days.

Borough Council President Steve Hazlett, who was behind the hiring of Loehmann, resigned along with his wife, who is also a council member. The office of the Pennsylvania Attorney General has sent a letter to the borough stating that the hiring of Loehmann without a complete background check was illegal.

Samaria Rice, the mother of Tamir Rice, publicly condemned Loehmann's hiring in Tioga, telling the *Washington Post* that the borough should never have hired him.

"He shouldn't be a police officer anywhere in the United States," said Rice. "I'm actually shocked that anybody would give him a job knowing what he has done to my family."

Loehmann shot and killed Rice on November 22, 2014. Rice had been playing with a toy airsoft gun in a park near his home. At 3:30 in the afternoon, a 911 caller reported that a boy was playing with a gun in the park, adding that it was probably a toy.

Loehmann and his partner Frank Garmback, who was driving, drove into the park and up to where Rice had been sitting. Both Loehmann and Garmback claimed that Rice reached into his pants, but surveillance video shows that Loehmann shot Rice twice within a second and a half of arriving, almost immediately as he was getting out of the car. It is not possible to tell if the car had even stopped moving before Loehmann opened fire.

As in the overwhelming majority of police killings, neither Loehmann nor Garmback were ever charged with Rice's murder. A grand jury was convened but did not issue an indictment.

Throughout the grand jury investigation, the district attorney continually worked to see that charges were not brought against Loehmann. Jeffrey Noble, a retired

police officer and use-of-force expert, told *GQ Magazine*, “I’ve definitely never seen two prosecutors play defense attorneys so well.”

The Obama administration’s Justice Department opened its own investigation of Loehmann, but did not bring any charges and the investigation was closed in the waning days of the Trump administration.

Lawyers for Rice’s family have filed a request for the Biden Justice Department to reopen the investigation, which it has so far refused to do.

Loehmann was eventually fired by the Cleveland Police Department in 2017, almost three years after killing Rice. Loehmann was not fired for his role in the murder but because he lied on his job application.

No official figures are kept of police killings. Media outlets and groups which tally the numbers by tracking press reports have shown that over 1,000 people, on average over three people each day, are killed by police every year in the United States.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, the police are never charged with a crime, fired or even disciplined. In the few cases in which the officers are charged, more often than not they are able to get off by claiming that they feared for their safety.

In Akron, Ohio, just 40 miles south of Cleveland, eight police officers shot and killed Jayland Walker on June 27 as he ran from police. Police fired over 90 rounds, hitting Walker over 60 times. Video shows police continued to fire even as Walker fell to the ground, with his body flinching each time he was hit.

Police, with the full backing of Akron’s Democratic mayor and the Biden administration, have gone on a rampage against peaceful protesters of police violence while the eight officers involved have not even been fired, let alone arrested.

The case of Loehmann shows that in the few cases where police lose their jobs they will often get hired by other police forces.

The protests that erupted in 2020 after the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers were among the largest protests in US history. The demonstrations were multi-ethnic and spread throughout the world. They reflected the broad hatred within the population for the treatment meted out to minorities, the working class and poor by police.

However, the protests were largely diverted by the Black Lives Matters movement and pseudo-left

organizations into identity politics and support for the Democrats in the 2020 elections, including the election of Joe Biden as president. These forces claimed that police violence could be ended with the election of Democrats, who would in turn carry out reforms of policing and police departments. Instead the Democrats have funneled millions of dollars worth of COVID-19 pandemic relief aid to the police, and Biden has used every opportunity to push for even more funding for the police.

The struggle against police violence cannot be conducted along racialist lines. The role of police is to defend the capitalist system. The use of the police against poor and minority communities is part of the state terror aimed against the entire working class. With the continued growth of inequality between the wealthy and the working class, and as more and more workers enter into struggle to defend their democratic rights and living standards, the police are the “thin blue line” deployed to defend the rich.

The enormous and growing opposition within the working class to police violence must not be channeled into voting for Democrats and their promises of reform. Rather the working class must break from the two capitalist parties and build the Socialist Equality Party as part of an international movement aimed at eliminating the source of police violence, war and inequality—the capitalist system.



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