Police crackdown continues in Akron, Ohio, as Democratic mayor keeps curfew in place

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On Monday, Democratic Mayor of Akron Dan Horrigan announced that he would continue to impose a curfew over a substantial section of the downtown core of the working class city of 190,000 in northeast Ohio. The curfew is an attempt by the mayor, in coordination with his police allies, to criminalize and suppress all opposition to police murder.

Despite the violent response of the police, there have been 13 straight days of peaceful protests in the city since 25-year-old Jayland Walker was murdered in a hail of gunfire by eight still unidentified and uncharged Akron police officers on June 27.

While the previous curfew was in place from 10:00 p.m. until the 6:00 a.m., Monday's curfew has been set from 11:00 p.m. through 5:00 a.m. Protesters have respected the curfew every night, but this has not prevented Akron police from harassing and assaulting protesters outside the curfew zone, including at the Summit County Jail.

On Monday, footage taken by @ComradeOhio shows that police have erected concrete barriers around the jail to prevent peaceful protesters from gathering outside and supporting imprisoned demonstrators. Salt trucks have already been deployed downtown in order to prevent access to the police station.

In justifying the ongoing curfew Monday, Mayor Horrigan cited, without providing any specific examples, alleged "threats" that he said had been made against him and cops in the past week. In virtually every statement he has made following the murder of Walker, Horrigan has been quick to denounce protesters as "criminal" and "violent," yet the mayor has yet to speak about the "criminality" or "violence" meted out by the Akron police force, which is teeming with racists and fascists.

In the conference, which featured Police Chief Steve Mylett as well, Horrigan said the city would not tolerate the destruction of "private property." He also reaffirmed that he was working closely with the federal government through the Department of Justice.

Last week, the Biden administration revealed that FBI agents had been deployed to the city. Shortly after Biden's admission, the FBI disseminated an "intelligence bulletin" to Chief Mylett. In interviews with the local press, Mylett claimed the bulletin warned that a "group of potential violent extremists" were hiding among the protesters. This was a transparent attempt to retroactively justify last Sunday's police rampage that ended with at least 49 arrests and multiple injured protesters.

The attempt by the political establishment and the police to paint the peaceful protesters as "violent extremists" is the exact same tactic the Democrats used in the wake of the police murder of George Floyd. In 2020, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz slandered protesters as "anarchists" after imposing a curfew, deploying the National Guard and letting the police rampage throughout the city.

Likewise at the height of the George Floyd protests, during which millions of workers and youth of every race and ethnicity throughout the United States and internationally marched against police violence, former Obama administration National Security Advisor Susan Rice went on CNN and slandered the protests as illegitimate, claiming they were "straight out of the Russian playbook."

When not blaming Russia or "outside agitators," the Democrats seek to present the issue of police violence when they do talk about it as a purely racial question. This is an attempt by the Democrats to cover up the class role of the police as the front-line defenders of capitalist rule. By claiming that police violence is the result of racism, Democrats present the possibility of "reforming" the police by advocating for hiring a more "diverse" police force which would then, they claim, result in less police killings as well as providing them with even more funding under the guise of "training."

Despite over 60 years of "affirmative action" policies which diversified police forces, including at the leadership level, police killings have not abated in the US. A 2021 *Lancet* study found that US police have killed over 30,000 people in the last

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30 years. According to the Urban Institute, annual spending by state and local governments on police adjusted for inflation grew 179 percent between 1977 and 2019, from $44 billion to $123 billion.

While Akron police and the mayor seek to blame peaceful protesters for wanton police violence, on Monday afternoon Walker family lawyer Bobby DiCello held a press conference on behalf of the family to “denounce violence against the protesters who have gathered to support this family.”

DiCello attacked the city’s attempt to play what he called the “blame game” and vilify Walker for his murder at the hands of cops. Referring to the July 4 press conference held by Horrigan and Mylett in which they showed a picture of Walker in mask and presented only some of the police footage, DiCello said: “They are trying to turn [Walker] into someone to be afraid of. They tried to make him the problem from day one.”

The lawyer said that the family stood for “non-violence” but encouraged “protest.”

Pointing to the mass violence Akron police have inflicted on peaceful working class demonstrators in the last two weeks, DiCello said: “We’ve seen the pictures you’ve seen. We’ve seen protesters with bloody faces. We know about tear gas. We know about people walking on the sidewalk and being accosted by police. ... We’ve seen citizens injured by police, and that’s got to stop.”

There is no doubt that the Akron political establishment and the entire ruling class are terrified that ongoing police violence against peaceful protesters will provoke a mass response not only within Akron, but throughout the United States. The last thing Horrigan, Mylett or Biden want, is for Jayland Walker’s brutal murder to serve as a catalyst for a wider mass uprising that would threaten not only the police but capitalist rule as a whole. No doubt they are well aware of the Sri Lankan uprising which forced the resignation of the despised President Gotabhaya Rajapakse and his government.

Seeking to tamp down social tensions, over the weekend the Akron police, with assistance from the FBI, took a more “hands-off” approach to the peaceful protests. As of this writing it does not appear there were any additional arrests made over the weekend although on-the-ground Akron protesters told the WSWS that the police continue to harass and monitor protest organizers.

Among those who participated in Saturday’s rally in support of Walker and against police violence were several protesters who were arrested earlier in the week, including Jacob Blake, Sr., the father of Jacob Blake, Jr. who was shot seven times in the back by a Kenosha police officer in August 2020.

In his speech Saturday, Jacob Blake, Sr. denounced the heinous shooting of Walker: “You don’t shoot a deer 60 times. A moose 60 times. An animal ... 60-something bullets went into that man’s body. If we don’t stand up now, we won’t stand up ever!”

Demetrius Travis, Sr., Jayland’s cousin, also spoke at Saturday’s rally. During his speech he recited the names of several other Ohio residents who had been murdered by police in recent years, “We are 40 minutes away from where Tamir Rice was killed. Andre Hill, Ma'Khia Bryant, in Columbus, killed!

“Cincinnati, Sam Dubose, 2016, shot and killed! Unarmed. Jayland Walker was the third killing by APD since December! I am angry.”

Travis continued: “This mayor’s named Horrigan ... (Crowd boos.) He calls my family and tells us to tell everybody to ‘protest peacefully’.

“I was out here with you all,” Travis said. “I was here with you. I seen it! I seen you protesting peacefully. I seen him with the military! He got SWAT teams on the roof. Tear gas! Cops punching people in the face!

“And you want me to tell them to be peaceful?” an incredulous and emotional Travis said.

In addition to being monitored by police and federal agents, neo-Nazis have also been spotted in Akron harassing protesters. A small group was photographed by @ComradeOhio on Saturday carrying banners repeating the fascistic “Replacement Theory” rhetoric. The fascist anti-immigrant conspiracy theory animated the Buffalo massacre this past May and has been embraced by Republican-aligned media and politicians.

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