

Protesters demand release of video after Memphis, Tennessee man dies from injuries suffered at the hands of police during traffic stop

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A Memphis, Tennessee, man became one of the latest victims of police violence last week, following a simple traffic stop on January 7.

Tyre Nichols, 29, was stopped for alleged reckless driving, after which police report Nichols attempted to flee, leading to a foot chase. According to a cryptic initial police statement, after being apprehended, Nichols “complained of having a shortness of breath.” He was then transported in critical condition to a hospital, where he ultimately succumbed to his injuries on January 10. Nichols’ death sparked a number of protests and demonstrations over the weekend.

Protesters on Saturday demanded the release of body camera footage, which city officials have so far refused to do. Speaking to WREG-TV, Rodney Wells, the victim’s stepfather, stated that Nichols died from cardiac arrest and kidney failure. Wells added, “When we got to the hospital, it was devastating. All of that still should not occur because of a traffic stop. You shouldn’t be on a dialysis machine looking like this because of a traffic stop. That’s inhumane.”

Toni Carter, Nichols’ aunt, also speaking to WREG-TV, stated, “We wouldn’t be so mad if it was a car accident or something, but you beat somebody to death and we ain’t gone never be right.”

Nichols’ sister, Kenyana Dixon, told the local news station, “I’m gone see this in my brain for the rest of my life to the day I die. If he did run, like I said, he was scared. He was scared. He had nothing on him. A traffic stop is supposed to be a traffic stop for anybody.” Dixon added that Nichols likely panicked due to the fact that the officers who stopped him were

in unmarked vehicles and wearing hoodies.

Due to the severity of Nichols’ injuries, the Shelby County District Attorney’s Office was contacted immediately following his hospitalization. The DA’s office then requested the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) to carry out a use-of-force investigation. That investigation is still pending.

Five days after Nichols’ death, the Memphis Police Department (MPD) announced an “administrative investigation concerning policy violations,” no doubt in an effort to try to buy time for officials to work out a strategy for covering up the incident and absolve the officers of any criminal or procedural wrongdoing.

In a statement released by the mayor’s office on Sunday, Memphis Police Chief CJ Davis said, “After reviewing various sources of information involving this incident, I have found that it is necessary to take immediate and appropriate action. Today, the department is serving notice to the officers involved of the impending administrative actions.”

In the same statement, two-term Democratic Mayor Jim Strickland tritely stated, “Make no doubt, we take departmental violations very seriously and, while we must complete the investigation process, it is our top priority to ensure that swift justice is served. We want citizens to know that we are prepared to take immediate and appropriate actions based on what the findings determine.”

Throughout his time in office, Strickland has made clear his staunch support for the police. During his first term, his 2017-2018 budget provided a \$5.9 million increase to the MPD’s budget, some of which was to

be spent on hiring 50 more officers and 70 more civilian police service technicians. The budget also incorporated another \$6 million for officer overtime.

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Strickland's latest budget proposal for fiscal year 2023 includes a 10 percent pay increase for police officers. For comparison, firefighters would receive 6 percent, general employees would receive 2 percent, and retirees would receive 1 percent.

The death of Nichols bears a striking similarity to the January 3 death of Keenan Anderson after a violent assault by police in Los Angeles. Anderson, a Washington DC high school English teacher, was in LA visiting his family when he was restrained by police, who suspected his involvement in a hit-and-run accident. Anderson, who was unarmed and appeared to be having a mental breakdown, eventually attempted to flee on foot but was quickly apprehended. Officers then tased Anderson a total of five times. Four-and-a-half hours later Anderson died at a hospital from cardiac arrest.

Following the 2020 police slaying of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, which sparked mass multiracial, multi-ethnic and international protests against police violence, police in the US continue to kill and maim with impunity on a practically daily basis. As the *World Socialist Web Site* reported at the beginning of the year, police killed 1,176 people in 2022, with only 12 days of the year on which the police did not kill someone.

Meanwhile, the Democrats and Republicans try and outdo one another in providing even more money and resources to the police and covering up their criminality. President Biden has routinely hailed the police throughout his time in office, most recently during a ceremony marking the second anniversary of the January 6, 2021 fascist coup attempt, in which current and former police officers participated.

In the final analysis, police violence is rooted in the capitalist system. Therefore, the struggle against police violence is intimately bound up with the struggle for international socialism. This in turn underscores the need for the development of a Marxist leadership in the working class. The International Committee of the Fourth International and its national sections are the only political tendency committed to the building of a

mass global movement of workers against police violence, war, fascism and dictatorship, as well as the pandemic and all the crises produced by the decay of capitalism.



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