

Demonstrations in Lansing and Detroit demand officer who killed Patrick Lyoya be charged and prosecuted for murder

Kevin Reed
24 April 2022

Two marches and rallies of workers and young people were held in recent days to demand justice for the family of Patrick Lyoya, the 26-year-old Congolese refugee who was murdered in broad daylight by a police officer after a traffic stop in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on April 4.

Both demonstrations expressed the widespread anger and disgust of the public toward the brutal execution-style killing that was captured completely on smartphone video by the passenger, who was in Lyoya's car when he was pulled over at 8:10 a.m. in a residential neighborhood on the southwest side of the city in western Michigan.

Although the policeman's bodycam video shows the officer pulling Lyoya over and, after the young man gets out of his car and asks why he was being stopped, the officer telling him that "the plate doesn't belong on this car," Grand Rapids Police Department (GRPD) Chief Eric Winstrom has subsequently said that the reason for the pullover has not been disclosed by law enforcement yet.

On Sunday, a group of activists rallied in front of the "Spirit of Detroit" statue and marched up Woodward Avenue before staging a "die in" near the intersection of Adams Avenue in downtown Detroit. The protesters carried signs that said, "Justice for Patrick Lyoya" and "Arrest the Cop Who Murdered Patrick Lyoya."

The demonstration was organized by Detroit Heals Detroit, along with the Michigan chapter of March for Our Lives and Protect Our Stolen Treasures (POST). The protesters also carried signs with the names and drawings of Shelly Hilliard, Aiyana Jones and Aura Rosser, three African Americans who were killed in Michigan since 2010 due to police violence and negligence.

On Thursday afternoon, 200 protesters assembled at St. Luke Lutheran Church in Lansing and marched to the Michigan State Capitol building demanding justice for

Patrick Lyoya and calling for the name of the police officer who shot him to be released and for him to be fired and prosecuted. The officer, who is known to be a seven-year veteran of the GRPD, has been placed on administrative leave.

The GRPD and Kent County Prosecutor Chris Becker have maintained that they will not release the identity of the officer unless criminal charges are brought against him. No schedule has been provided for when the official Michigan State Police investigation will be completed or when Becker will make his decision on whether or not to charge the officer.

The march and rally in Lansing included the participation of Patrick's parents, Peter and Dorcas Lyoya, as well as other members of the Lyoya family and Congolese refugee community. The demonstration was reminiscent of the nationwide and international protests that began in May 2020 following the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in that many arrived with their own handmade signs, and some traveled long distances to participate.

At the rally on the steps of the Capitol Building, Patrick's parents spoke powerfully through an interpreter who translated their native Swahili into English. Peter Lyoya spoke of the grief the family and the Congolese community suffered when they saw the video of his son being executed by the Grand Rapids police officer. He explained why the family came to America and that they thought they would be saving their lives, but instead they came "and lost our first-born son." He concluded by saying, "I need justice for my son Patrick."

Dorcas Lyoya said her heart was deeply broken. "I thought I brought my kid here so he could have a safe place. We ran away because there was violent killing and war, but I'm so surprised to see that this is where I lost

my son.”

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team was present at the Lansing march and rally and spoke with protesters. Barney said, “I’m here because the black man got killed, shot in the back of the head in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for no reason. The cop was probably a rookie or whatever, but somebody should have told him about that and stop killing us. I’ve been handcuffed and stomped on by the police. If it wasn’t for a white person, then I would never be here right now because the white person saved my life. That’s the story.”

Nadia, a high school student from Grand Rapids, said she came to the State Capitol “to demand justice for Patrick” and added, “My grandmother marched with MLK [Martin Luther King Jr.]. It’s really tragic that we still haven’t addressed these issues. Police brutality today happens even more often than it did in her day.”

Mark, a General Motors auto worker, said, “I see people getting killed by the police, and I don’t know what to do about it. It gets worse and worse. It’s worse now than it was when I was 20 years old. I’m 65 now.” When asked what he thought about the presence of the Democrats at the rally he said, “This seems to be happening even more in cities where they’re in charge. Places like Milwaukee, Chicago and New York are famous for police violence.”

Speaking about the fact that the Lyoya family fled the Democratic Republic of Congo to escape violence, Mark said, “This man came over here from a country where there is a civil war raging because he thought that he would be safe here. It’s a real shame that apparently America proved to be just as dangerous for him.”

On the claim that racism is exclusively the cause of police violence, Mark added, “That’s not working out for them too well. And they’ve been hiring more African American police officers over here too, but this doesn’t seem to be changing the situation for us. It’s not like only white cops are involved in this.”

AJ, a music producer, said of the brutal manner in which Lyoya was killed, “He could have used a taser, he could have called for backup and used anything but lethal force, especially on somebody that wasn’t even armed. I feel this march is bringing attention to this, and it’s been happening all over America. They keep talking about giving police more training. OK, when is the killing going to stop?”

AJ also spoke about the issues of race and police violence. “Anybody that has any type of humanity should be behind this situation. It wouldn’t matter if he was white, I’d still be behind this.”

Yasmeen, a Palestinian student at Michigan State University, said she was opposed to the tactics frequently used by US police, such as kneeling on the neck, which she has seen used by Israeli forces against Palestinians.

Youssef, an immigrant student from Guinea, said, “I came today to show my support for the Lyoya family. I want to make sure that people know that shootings like this that happen all the time are unacceptable. We have to all work together as a people, as a country, and as a community to deliver justice, to deliver understanding and to get past this issue.”

Indicating the cover-up that is underway and effort to block demands by the public for the police officer to be brought to justice, the *Detroit Free Press* ran a front-page story on Sunday that smeared Lyoya under the headline, “Records, interviews reveal Patrick Lyoya’s complicated life before Grand Rapids shooting.”

The ostensibly liberal Detroit newspaper went about the disgusting business of publishing details of Patrick’s previous encounters with law enforcement and alleged acts of violence, and contrasted this to the perception of family, friends and members of the Congolese community that he had a big heart, was a generous young man and a “go-to” person among refugees.

This campaign is being conducted by the media to condition the public to accept that no charges will be brought against the Grand Rapids officer on the grounds that he thought his life was in danger during the scuffle and his execution-style shooting of Lyoya was justified.

As was explained to the *Free Press* reporters by Patrick’s 26-year-old cousin, Prosper Lutanda, who grew up in Africa with the deceased young man and was clearly angered by their questions, “Even if you’ve been arrested 100 times, still—they can’t kill you.”

Ven Johnson, a Detroit attorney working for the family, also said that Lyoya’s prior arrests and convictions are irrelevant to what happened on the day he was killed. “What difference does it make? It has nothing to do with anything,” then Johnson added, “So, he deserved to be executed in the back of the head?”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact