

Akron, Ohio mayor declares “state of emergency” as protests continue in the wake of police murder of Jayland Walker

Jacob Crosse
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Terrified of a social explosion in response to the brutal police execution of Jayland Walker, Dan Horrigan, the Democratic mayor of Akron, Ohio, signed an executive order just before midnight on July 3 declaring a “state of emergency” in the city.

As part of the emergency, Horrigan effectively canceled July 4 Independence Day celebrations in Akron. Three city-planned fireworks events were postponed and Horrigan announced the imposition of an indefinite curfew lasting from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. The curfew prohibits the free movement of workers within a proscribed zone around the downtown core except if they are going to work.

Protests continued Sunday night and into Monday following the release of grisly police body camera footage Sunday afternoon. The footage unequivocally shows that Walker, a 25-year-old African-American DoorDash delivery driver, posed no threat to police when they shot over 90 rounds at him in a parking lot, causing at least 60 wounds.

Walker was fleeing from police for unknown reasons early on the morning of June 27. After a short vehicle and foot pursuit, at least eight Akron police officers fired on the unarmed Walker, with several continuing to shoot him even after he collapsed.

The footage released by the police on Sunday is incomplete, as it does not show what happened immediately after the cops executed Walker. Walker family lawyer Bob DiCello has said that after killing Walker, police placed his mutilated corpse under arrest by handcuffing him.

In addition to none of the footage showing the aftermath of the police execution, the circumstances of the police attempt to pull Walker over have yet to be

clarified, since none of the body camera footage showing the initial traffic stop has been released and none of the eight police involved in the shooting have yet to give a statement publicly or to state investigators, more than a week after the killing.

The curfew imposed by Horrigan affects several blocks of downtown Akron, including the University of Akron. While protesters continued to gather downtown throughout the day on Monday, as the start of the 9 p.m. curfew approached, with police posted up on nearby buildings and riot police beginning to assemble on the streets, the demonstrators appeared to have mostly disbanded and moved outside the curfew zone.

On Monday, local Akron residents reported seeing police armored personnel carriers and SWAT teams deployed to the city as part of the effort to crush the outpouring of anger and suppress demands for justice for Walker and for an end to police violence. The images emerging from Akron are reminiscent of those that accompanied the militarized occupation of Ferguson, Missouri following the police murder of Michael Brown in 2014.

In his statement announcing the curfew, Horrigan attempted to blame protesters for causing “significant property damage” to downtown Akron on Sunday night. Horrigan lamented that fact that “small business up and down Main St. had their windows broken.” The Democratic mayor proceeded to threaten residents, saying that he “will not tolerate the destruction of property or violence.”

Horrigan tolerates violence when it comes from the Akron police department, whose officers were taped shooting tear gas directly at peaceful protesters Sunday night. While it is unknown how many people were

injured in the police rampage, the department announced on Monday that it had made approximately 50 arrests of protesters, many of whom were detained for violating the curfew that was just imposed.

The Sunday night protests were overwhelmingly peaceful and only turned “violent” once police began to fire tear gas at protesters. That the police were looking for a confrontation was evident from their decision to light up a single floor at police headquarters with a “thin blue line” of lights prior to beginning their assault.

As police continue to kill over 1,000 Americans a year, the “thin blue line” symbol has been adopted by police departments around the country. It signifies the class division between the working class and the bourgeoisie. The police, the enforcers of inequality, stand between the two classes—a blue line—defending the privileges and property rights of the oppressing class.

On Monday, roughly 100 demonstrators marched to the home of Mayor Horrigan carrying signs demanding “Justice for Jayland” in a protest organized by the Akron Democratic Socialists of America and the Freedom Black Led Organizing Collaborative, a racist reformist organization led by Raymond Green, Jr. At the mayor’s residence, they were met by dozens of heavily armed police in riot gear, who prevented the group from getting near the house.

Under conditions of skyrocketing inflation, a perpetual pandemic, the threat of dictatorship and the ongoing NATO-Ukraine war against Russia, the US ruling class is using the popular anger over the killing of Walker to intimidate workers and youth and suppress growing opposition to the entire capitalist system. In order to justify continued attacks on the lives of workers, the most reactionary elements are being recruited into the police and elevated by fascists like ex-President Donald Trump.

The Akron Police department, like virtually all of the police departments in the United States, is riddled with fascists and racists. Flaunting its fascist credentials and, perhaps, relishing in the murder of Walker, the official Facebook account of the Akron Police Department posted a photo the same day the department put out its statement on the killing of Walker. The photo shows a cop with a fascist tattoo on his wrist.

In the photo, which was posted about three hours after the police department’s July 28 statement, the cop on the left has a Totenkopf skull tattoo on his wrist. The “death’s head” symbol is extremely popular among fascists and was popularized by the Nazi Schutzstaffel (SS) during World War II.

This Akron cop is not the only one who enjoys identifying himself with fascist iconography. Last year, the city of Akron chose not to fire or even discipline officer Phil Senior after he was photographed with a III Percenter logo tattooed on his arm.

Following the announcement by the city that Senior would not face any discipline or be fired for his tattoo, which denotes membership in the fascist militia, Mayor Horrigan released a statement exonerating the cop. Horrigan said he trusted the Akron Police Department to investigate itself through its Office of Professional Standards. He added that “some symbols... can represent a range of different meanings over time or between community groups.”

At least 12 people who have been charged in connection with the January 6 coup are affiliated with the III Percenter militia group. The III Percenters, along with the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers, were the spearhead of the assault on Congress in furtherance of Trump’s fascistic coup.

Horrigan’s whitewashing of fascists within the Akron Police Department mirrors the efforts of Biden and the Democrats to shield the aspiring dictator Trump and his Republican co-conspirators from being held accountable for their attempt to overthrow the government 18 months ago.

Both instances show that the defense of democratic rights cannot be left in the hands of the Democrats, a party of Wall Street and war, which would sooner align with its “Republican colleagues” and their fascist foot soldiers in police departments around the country than do anything that might arouse the mass anger and discontent in the working class.



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