

Nationwide protests continue over police murder as state violence mounts

By Jacob Crosse
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In response to protests in over 75 US cities following the Memorial Day police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, police across the country have heeded President Donald Trump's call to "get tough and fight," unleashing a wave of state violence against youth and workers of all races and ethnicities.

In scenes repeated across the country, nonviolent youth and workers have been gassed, pepper-sprayed, clubbed, and shot with rubber bullets by heavily armed riot police and state troopers.

At least 39 cities across 16 states and the entire state of Arizona have imposed curfews, restricting movement beginning as early as 6 p.m. Sunday evening. Public transportation is being suspended in major cities, such as Chicago and New York during curfew hours.

The National Guard has been activated in approximately 26 states and Washington D.C. Active Army military police units, including soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division, located in Fort Drum, New York, have been ordered to stand by for deployment.

As of this writing, protests are ongoing throughout the country, with thousands gathered in Boston, Washington D.C., New York City, Seattle and Miami. The *Washington Post* is reporting that President Trump was briefly taken to a "secure bunker" after a small basement fire broke out in the historic St. John's Church, located across from the White House.

Over the weekend thousands were arrested and thrown into crowded jails, as COVID-19 continues to spread unchecked and untracked throughout the country. In Chicago alone, over 1,000 arrests have been made. New York City reported 300 arrests as of Saturday, while 500 were arrested Friday night in Los Angeles. Eighty-four were arrested in Detroit on Saturday. Hundreds have been injured, requiring hospitalization, and at least five people have been killed.

Far-right elements have attempted to infiltrate the protests in order to instigate police brutality, sow disorder and, in some cases, attack protesters. Spurred on by Trump's demagoguery, an Omaha, Nebraska bar owner, identified by local media as Jake Gardner, is in police custody after murdering 22-year-old protester James Scurlock.

Gardner, a Marine veteran of Iraq and Haiti and vocal Trump supporter, was reportedly shouting racial slurs at protesters as they marched by his bar throughout Saturday's protests. In a cell phone video captured at roughly 6:00 p.m. Saturday evening, Gardner can be seen advancing towards a backpedaling Scurlock before two gunshots rang out. Contradicting the ruling class narrative, in historic scenes broadcast around the world, multiracial protesters gathered in the thousands to peacefully demonstrate against unending police murder. Beginning Wednesday and continuing throughout the weekend, protests and marches took place in Minneapolis, Chicago, Detroit, Lansing, Rockford, New York, Syracuse, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Tampa, Milwaukee, Denver, Omaha, New Orleans, Dallas, Little Rock, Houston, Phoenix, Salt Lake City, Las Vegas, Reno, Seattle, San Jose, Los Angeles and at least 50 more cities.

Overwhelmingly, the protests have been met with police provocations

followed by brutal state violence. Donned head to toe in riot armor, wielding clubs, shields, tasers, mace and "less lethal rounds," police fired, often at point-blank range, 40 millimeter CS tear gas canisters, rubber bullets and paintball rounds on peaceful demonstrators, journalists, and innocent bystanders alike.

Bolstered by Trump's demonizing of the media and journalists as "enemies of the people," reporters and photographers attempting to cover the protests have been deliberately attacked and arrested by police forces. According to an ongoing tally by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, there have been at least 15 confirmed incidents of police firing rubber bullets or tear gas at reporters. This includes the maiming of photojournalist Linda Tirado, who was permanently blinded in her left eye after being struck in the face with a rubber bullet while covering the Minneapolis demonstrations on May 29.

On Sunday night, NBC reporter Garrett Haake was shot with a rubber bullet in Washington, D.C., and a *Wall Street Journal* reporter was beaten by police in New York City.

Police departments working in concert with state and federal agencies, including the National Guard, Customs and Border Patrol, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the National Security Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency, have utilized armored personnel carriers, horse mounted patrols, drones, GPS cell-phone tracking, helicopters and humvees to enforce curfew declarations.

The universal response of the political establishment, Democratic and Republican alike, has been to denounce the protests as the work of "outside agitators."

Trump branded the nationwide protests as the work of the "Radical Left" and "ANTIFA-led anarchists." On Sunday, Trump tweeted that he would designate ANTIFA as a domestic terrorist organization. Attorney General William Barr repeated Trump's unsubstantiated and false claims that the protests were "planned, organized and driven by anarchic and far-left extremist groups using ANTIFA-like tactics."

Minnesota Governor Tim Walz in the last 72 hours has blamed anarchists, white supremacists and drug cartels for the ongoing protests. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey agreed with Walz's assessment at a Saturday press conference, while also entertaining the possibility of "foreign actors." Both are Democrats.

Speaking with CNN's Wolf Blitzer on Sunday, Susan Rice, national security advisor to Barack Obama, remarked, without providing any evidence, that she "would not be surprised to learn that they [Russia] have fomented some of these extremists on both sides using social media. I wouldn't be surprised to learn that they are funding it in some way, shape, or form."

During a television appearance Sunday morning on NBC's "Meet the Press," Atlanta Mayor Keisha Bottoms explicitly attacked the demonstrations in Atlanta as "unusual" and singled out the presence of large numbers of white people, whom she labeled as "outsiders."

Throughout the weekend, reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with workers, students and youth across the country about the protests and the reaction of the police.

* Minneapolis, Minnesota:

A tanker truck driver is in police custody Sunday afternoon after barreling into a crowd of 6,000 people, mostly youth, who were taking a knee on the Interstate 35W bridge to honor the life of George Floyd. The driver was pulled from the vehicle by protesters but did not suffer serious injury. Police, however, descended onto the bridge and used tear gas against the youth who had nearly been killed.

A widely shared video posted Saturday evening by Tanya Kerresen, who was sitting on her porch at roughly 9:30 p.m., shows a line of militarized police and National Guard soldiers complete with a humvee escort spread across the length of the street. As they make their way down the street, the video picks up shouts from the soldiers, yelling, "Get inside!"

Kerresen continued to film as the convoy approached. Once the troops were standing in front of her house, a soldier was heard yelling, "Light 'em up!" followed by hail of paint rounds, one of which struck Kerresen.

The same phrase, "Light 'em up," was used by US Apache gunship helicopter pilots in Iraq before they murdered children and journalist, as captured by the "Collateral Murder" video published by Wikileaks in 2010.

* Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Nicholas, a young worker at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, attended Saturday's rally "to show solidarity." He said, "I'm white, and I think that it is important to stand up to police brutality." He continued, "It was a powerful and respectful demonstration. There were children there. Lots of people of different ages and faces."

The protest came to a violent conclusion when a lone person began vandalizing a single police vehicle, which was left unattended near the group of protesters. Dozens in the crowd attempted to dissuade the man from destroying the vehicle. However, he was eventually able to light it on fire.

Nicholas said, "Nobody knows who this person was, and you can see many people trying to get him to stop. I think it is strange that a police car would just get left by itself. Almost as if the police were willing to sacrifice a police car so they could break up the protest."

* Syracuse, New York

Some 500 multiracial protesters gathered in the downtown area, where they remained until early Saturday evening, when police began firing rubber bullets and tear gas into the crowd. The justification given was that windows had been broken at the Public Safety Building. However, it has not been established who exactly broke the windows.

* Reno, Nevada

A protester spoke on the character of the police response. "Police in Reno are accelerating in their vehicles towards protesters and pepper spraying people on sidewalks as they walk by. It is very reminiscent of the French Yellow Vest [demonstrations]. A curfew has been instituted, and I hear they are pulling people out of their cars for breaking curfew by smashing their windows and tasing them in their vehicles."

* New York City

Multiple viral videos have depicted NYPD officers beating and shoving protesters to the ground. One video shows a hulking cop swatting the phone out of a young woman's hand before he shoves her to the ground, slamming her head on the pavement, causing a concussion and a seizure. Another video shows police SUV cruisers, weighing over two tons, attempting to barrel through protesters blocking an intersection. Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio blamed protesters, who were standing behind a police barricade that was in front of the SUV, for "converging on a police vehicle," labeling their actions "unacceptable."

* Washington D.C.

Hundreds of protestors in front of the White House clashed with D.C. police, National Park Police and Secret Service agents throughout the weekend. On Saturday night over 60 Secret Service Agents were injured in clashes with protesters. Eventually six protesters were arrested.

* Atlanta, Georgia

A young African American couple, who did not participate in the protests, were accosted by Atlanta police before being tased, beaten and arrested on television.

* Cleveland, Ohio

On Saturday evening, Cleveland police in riot gear, backed by the National Guard, started firing pepper balls and rubber bullets at demonstrators. In order to shut down the protests, the city enacted a curfew from 8:00 p.m. until 8:00 a.m. the following morning. A second curfew was imposed Sunday beginning at noon and lasting until 8:00 a.m. on Monday.

Cuyahoga County Sheriff David Schilling has stated that 66 people were arrested, with an undisclosed number charged will aggravated rioting, violating the city curfew and lesser charges.

* Oakland, California:

After Friday's protests, in which 40 suspected looters were detained and 17 demonstrators arrested, Oakland city officials urged people to stay home. Saturday's demonstrations were comparatively "very peaceful and quiet," according to local media. The protesters, one media outlet said, "were being tracked by law enforcement on the ground and in the sky."

* San Jose, California

Friday's demonstrations drew thousands of participants, who peacefully marched before San Jose police fired tear gas and rubber bullets into the crowd. Tim Harper, a 40-year-old construction worker, speaking to sanjosespotlight.com, was shot while attempting to help move a child who had been struck by a rubber bullet. Harper had previously helped move an injured officer during the protest Friday.

"I had to come out here because I'm proof of how corrupt these people are," Harper said. "I helped one of them drag (the officer) to the car. I wasn't aggressive, I had my hands up, and they still shot me. It doesn't matter what color skin you have."

* Salt Lake City, Utah

In downtown Salt Lake City, Utah, thousands of workers and young people demonstrated outside the public library and marched to Capitol Hill. The protest lasted nearly 11 hours, stretching into the night despite the issuance of a two-day curfew and the deployment of the Utah National Guard, including military helicopters.

Tensions mounted in part due to right-wing violence against protesters. Militia appeared brandishing rifles, a woman attacked the crowd with a hammer, and a man attempted to shoot demonstrators with a compound bow. The man was tackled, and his car was flipped and set on fire. Despite widespread social media footage of these attacks, local news agencies interviewed the man who tried to shoot an arrow into the crowd in order to frame the protesters as violent.

Salt Lake City riot police were filmed throwing an elderly man with a cane to the ground and deploying tear gas against demonstrators.

* Little Rock, Arkansas

Hundreds gathered and peacefully marched throughout the day with no arrests made. However, once night fell, the response of the Little Rock Police Department (LRPD) was to blanket protesters in a miasma of teargas. While the protests were still ongoing Saturday, Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson, a Republican, tweeted, "I have directed the State Police to work with local law enforcement to stop the damage to the Capitol. The National Guard will be available as well."

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