

Rochester Police Chief resigns following violent police repression against protesters

By Jason Melanovski
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Protests following the release of bodycam video of the March 23 police killing of Daniel Prude, a 41-year-old black man, have caused the resignations of both the police chief and deputy chief of Rochester, New York.

At just 40 years old, Rochester Police Chief La'Ron Singletary announced his resignation – officially retirement—and in a self-centered statement. He refused to accept any responsibility for the killing of Prude, and instead criticized protesters for demeaning his character.

“As a man of integrity, I will not sit idly by while outside entities attempt to destroy my character. The events over the past week are an attempt to destroy my character and integrity,” Singletary, a 20-year veteran of the police force wrote.

Deputy Chief Joseph Morabito likewise followed Singletary’s actions and announced his retirement. Several other members of the police department’s official command announced their resignation to move back to lower-ranking positions within the department.

Singletary chose to retire just prior to being questioned by Rochester’s City Council over the death of Prude. Singletary’s retirement indicates that no further details on the coverup of Prude’s death will be revealed by police leadership unless questioned in an official legal proceeding.

New York Attorney General Letitia James announced on Saturday that she will call a grand jury to investigate Prude’s death. According to the Attorney General’s office, Rochester police officers involved in the killing have not been made available for questioning. While reasons for the holdup have been disputed by the Rochester Police Department (RPD), it is clear that questioning by the Attorney General’s office is unwelcome.

The Democratic-controlled Attorney General’s office had reportedly been investigating Prude’s death since April, but is only now convening a grand jury following the release of bodycam footage by Daniel Prude’s family last week and the subsequent protests.

Meanwhile, Rochester Mayor Lovely Warren had duplicitously continued to publicly back Singletary following the release of the video while continuing to deny her own knowledge of the video stating on Sunday that “I do not believe there’s another person more dedicated to changing the culture of policing than La’Ron.”

While backing Singletary prior to his resignation, Warren had earlier attempted to throw him under the bus, claiming that Singletary had not informed her of the full details of the video and police homicide until early August.

Singletary’s surprise retirement was preceded by multiracial protests over Labor Day weekend in which thousands participated, demanding justice in the killing of Daniel Prude in March at the hands of the Rochester Police Department.

Daniel Prude was killed in police custody in March from asphyxia after being forced to lie on the ground for approximately a half an hour while naked in cold temperatures. Prude, who had a long history of mental illness, was unarmed and had not committed any violent crimes while suffering a mental breakdown.

While the protests were overwhelmingly peaceful, they were met with violent repression by police with dogs and armored vehicles who used tear gas and pepper balls to assault protesters.

The most violent police repression took place Saturday night as protesters marched toward the city’s police headquarters to demand justice for Prude. Using the excuse of having bottles thrown at them, police

unloaded pepper balls and tear gas canisters, injuring several with direct hits to the face.

While police flatly denied using projectiles, this was contradicted by protesters such as Tonya Noel with Flower City Noire Collective, who said “There are a lot of eye injuries specifically because they’re pointing the rubber balls directly at people’s faces. A lot of people have bruises, lacerations, just from getting hit with rubber bullets.”

In addition, several protesters posted photos to their Facebook accounts showing the extent of their injuries caused by police-launched projectiles.

Protesters also reported being corralled into the nearby Spiritus Christi Church and forced inside. Church officials helped treat some of the injured. Blast marks from pepper ball blasts were left on the side of the building from police shooting at those fleeing.

Smaller protests continued through Sunday and Monday as RPD attempted to attribute the totally unwarranted police rampage to being sparked by “outsiders” and protesters throwing bottles and rocks at Rochester police officers.

Despite widespread condemnation of police violence against protesters by all racial groups, the local Democratic Party establishment that runs the city has continued to back and encourage police repression.

Rochester City Council President Loretta Scott, who previously served as the city government’s first African-American Department Head, attempted to equate violent police attacks on protesters with minor property damage.

“Know that I understand the anger, confusion, and betrayal felt by the community during this time,” she said. “Although tensions are high, we must ensure everybody remains safe and peaceful while protesting. I condemn any violence inflicted upon protesters, bystanders, and officers alike.”

In addition to backing police repression, city officials and the local Democratic Party establishment have attempted to blame the killing of Daniel Prude and subsequent coverup solely on racism despite the fact that the Mayor, Police Chief and the majority of City Council are all African American.

Following the release of the bodycam footage last Wednesday, Mayor Lovely Warren stated “The only way we can confront systemic racism in our city is to face it head-on. There cannot be a justice system for

white people and a justice system for Black people,” and blamed the killing of Prude on “institutional racism.”

The killing of Daniel Prude and the subsequent resignation of La’Ron Singletary are an indictment of the so-called “police reforms” based around identity politics and supported by the Democratic Party and the pseudo-left groups in its orbit.

Singletary, who is African-American and graduated from the city school district and lived his entire life in the city of Rochester, was by all “institutional” accounts an exemplary police officer and noted for being “patient and professional.”

This same “exemplary” officer participated in the coverup of the homicide of an unarmed poor black man and then continued to lead a police department that violently oppressed the subsequent peaceful multiracial protests against Daniel Prude’s killing.

Rather than being “servants of the people,” Singletary’s resignation exposes the true nature of the police as servants of the ruling class who oppress and kill people who are overwhelmingly poor and members of the working class.

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