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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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01.11.2020

National Guard deployed in Philadelphia following protests against police murder

National Guard troops began arriving in Philadelphia on Friday in response to protests against the police murder of an African-American worker that have shaken the city in recent days. Protests broke out on Monday after two Philadelphia police officers opened fire and killed 27-year-old Walter Wallace, Jr. in the West Philadelphia neighborhood of Cobbs Creek. Wallace, who suffered from bipolar disorder, was having a mental health episode and family members had called for medical assistance.

When the police arrived on Monday afternoon, Wallace was carrying a knife. While his mother was pleading with him to put down the weapon and begging the police not to attack her son, the two officers fired some 14 rounds between them into the young father of nine children. This was despite the fact that Wallace was not within striking distance and had made no attempt to attack them.

The National Guard was activated on Wednesday by Democratic Governor Tom Wolf following large protests that broke out in response to the killing. The same day, Mayor Jim Kenney, also a Democrat, imposed a 9 p.m. curfew.



A member of the Pennsylvania National Guard (Credit: Flickr/NY National Guard)

On Thursday, police reported having made over 212 arrests and claimed that 57 officers had been injured. The protests died down and the curfew was not renewed. Nevertheless, the Guardsmen began deploying.

According to the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, “on both Wednesday and Thursday, local authorities and Pennsylvania State Police ... outnumbered protesters and at times even pedestrians.” The report added that “the Guard is set to stay through next week in case there’s unrest following Tuesday’s presidential election, the results of which may not be known Tuesday night as was common in past years.”

On Wednesday, Philadelphia police claimed to have discovered a van filled with gas tanks, torches and explosive devices. It is not clear if the vehicle bears any relation to the protests.

In sending the National Guard to the streets of Philadelphia, Governor Wolf has set the stage for potentially explosive conflicts on Election Day. President Donald Trump has repeatedly railed against Governor Wolf in order to sow doubt about the election result in the key battleground state, which, according to opinion polls, is leaning toward Democratic candidate Joe Biden. As part of his strategy to destabilize the election and retain power regardless the outcome of the voting, Trump has called on right-wing militia forces to go to polling stations in Democratic Party strongholds to “monitor” the vote.

Speaking from Allentown on Monday, Trump threatened Wolf, stating, “The governor counts the ballots. And we’re watching you, governor, very closely, in Philadelphia. We’re watching you.”

In a blatant provocation, the White House issued a statement Tuesday night on the events in Philadelphia denouncing the “liberal Democrats’ war against the police” and “mob rule.” In a campaign speech Wednesday in Arizona, Trump declared: “Biden and Harris stand with the rioters and the vandals. I stand with the heroes of law enforcement.”

Further revelations have underscored the criminal character of the police shooting of Wallace. Police visited Wallace’s home three times on Monday due to disturbances before the two killer cops took his life in a fourth police intervention. The young man had been treated just days before his death at the West Philadelphia Consortium, a mental health crisis response facility.

According to the *Inquirer*, “[W]hen someone calls 911 to report a mental health crisis, the dispatcher is supposed to flag the call to the city’s Mental Health Emergency Hotline, which then dispatches one of the city’s three mobile crisis units to the scene.”

This was not done in Wallace’s case. John White, the executive director of the West Philadelphia Consortium, the mental health crisis response facility that had treated Wallace, told the *Inquirer*, “Do you realize how egregious this is? The dispatchers should have alerted us immediately. You’re telling me they had three bites at the apple?”

On Friday, Wallace’s family was allowed to view police body cam footage of the young man’s last moments. Family attorney Shaka Johnson stated that one officer shouted “shoot him” before the two opened fire. She said that Wallace was “in [an] obvious mental health crisis,” and appeared to be “in a cloud ... like a person who didn’t understand the gravity of the situation.”

At a Thursday press conference, Walter Wallace, Sr., Walter’s father, denounced Mayor Kenney as a “coward” for not apologizing for the killing of his son. Kenney has promised that the video footage will be made public by the end of next week.

The city has refused thus far even to identify the killer cops, who have merely been relegated to desk duty.

The Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) has received significant backlash for posting a captioned image on social media of a Philadelphia policewoman holding a toddler. “This child was lost during the violent riots in Philadelphia, wandering around barefoot in an area that was

experiencing complete lawlessness ... The only thing this Philadelphia police officer cared about in that moment was protecting this child,” the caption proclaimed.

It later emerged that the toddler’s family had been assaulted by the police, who had pulled over their vehicle. “My firm @MinceyFitzRoss represents this boy and his mother. This photo was taken moments after police attacked their vehicle, busted out the windows, ripped the mother from her car and assaulted her,” stated family attorney Riley H. Ross III on Twitter.

The FOP was later forced to delete the post.

In Washington D.C., protesters have continued to demonstrate outside of the 4th District police station against the killing of 20-year-old Karon Hylton-Brown. Body cam footage was made available Thursday showing police vehicles flashing their lights as they chased Hylton-Brown in violation of their protocol for stopping traffic infractions. The 20-year-old was driving a rented motor scooter on a sidewalk without a helmet. Hylton-Brown later collided with another vehicle, dying in the hospital.

An officer can be heard yelling “Karon!” after his scooter makes impact. “I think at the end of the day it’s pretty clear this is not about someone not wearing a helmet,” District Ward 6 Councilman Charles Allen told the *Washington Post* of the incident. The Democratic official “did not want to speculate on the possible motives of the officers.”

Terrance Sutton has been named as one of the officers giving chase. Sutton has been described as a frequent harasser and sadistic individual by members of the community. Earlier in 2020, Sutton was named as a defendant in a case launched by the American Civil Liberties Union due to allegations of unwarranted search and sexual assault.

Speaking at a Thursday press conference, Democratic Mayor Muriel Bowser said, “I want to acknowledge the pain that the family of Karon Hylton is experiencing right now. They are obviously heartbroken and hurt as any parent or loved one would be in this situation.”

Replying to this overture, Karen Hylton, Karon’s mother, declared: “You will never feel me Bowser. You will never feel me.”

31 October 2020