



Pacific Northwest Staff Union Statement of Condemnation and Call for Change

"I am one of those who think the best friend of a nation is he who most faithfully rebukes her for her sins – and he, her worst enemy, who, under the specious and popular garb of patriotism, seeks to excuse, palliate, and defend them."

~Frederick Douglass

The Pacific Northwest Staff Union Executive Board, joined by PNWSU members in Washington State and California, condemns the continuing harassment, physical and emotional brutality, and murder of unarmed Black and Brown members of our communities. The murder of George Floyd is horrific on its own. The Floyd murder, however, is not an isolated event based on a specific set of circumstances, but rather a continuation of systematic racial brutality and oppression.

- Aiyana Jones (5/16/2010), seven years old, shot and killed by police in Detroit, Michigan, while raiding the wrong house. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Aiyana_Jones
- Eric Garner (7/17/2014), killed by police in New York City, New York using a choke hold, for allegedly selling cigarettes. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killing_of_Eric_Garner
- Tamir Rice (11/22/2014), twelve years old, shot by police in Cleveland, Ohio, for having a toy gun in a public park. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shooting_of_Tamir_Rice
- Sandra Bland (7/13/2015), arrested on 7/10/2015 during a minor traffic stop that allegedly escalated to assault on a police officer and ultimately died three days later while in police custody in Waller County, Texas. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Sandra_Bland
- Philando Castile (7/16/2016), killed by police during a traffic stop in St. Anthony, Minnesota in which his girl friend and four years old daughter were present. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shooting_of_Philando_Castile
- Breonna Taylor (3/13/2020, killed by police in her own home in Louisville, Kentucky when police executed a no-knock warrant in plain clothes and failed to identify themselves. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shooting_of_Breonna_Taylor#Persons_involved

Each of these deaths, and the many that are not listed above, has been reprehensible. But we know they are not independent, isolated events, but form a tragic pattern of institutional and structural racism that is our inherited legacy. Forcing change is not easy. Institutions and people resist change.

Since the murder of George Floyd, protests have occurred in over 75 cities and in every state in the country. As communities react to the murder of George Floyd, demand justice for the Floyd family (and the country), and seek to course-correct the institutional racism and repeated acts of oppression without consequence for law enforcement agencies, the officers working the protests have incited and escalated violence. The story of law enforcement brutality during the protests has been repeated over and over. This is in stark contrast to armed protesters descending on state capitols across the country objecting to the shuttering of the state economies

and shelter at home orders in response to the international pandemic. In those cases, protesters were left unmolested, even though the potential threat of violence was significantly higher.

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/michigan-rally-shelter-place-order-spills-capitol-building/story?id=70432928>

On May 30, 2020 protests in Seattle there were numerous reports from protesters that Seattle police department fired rubber bullets and tear gas into crowds of peaceful protesters, arguably attempting to incite violent response. In at least one instance, captured on video, an officer used a neck hold while arresting an alleged looter, which continued until the officers' partner physically removed his partners' leg from the persons neck. A neck hold was the exact action that led to the murder to George Floyd. When will we ever learn?

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/police-tactics-floyd-protests.html>

On May 31, 2020 Black Lives Matter organized a George Floyd protest march in Snohomish Washington. In answer, other residents attended in counter protest sporting semi-automatic military style firearms and confederate flags flying from their vehicles. Local law enforcement seemed to do nothing to neither halt the blatant intimidation nor stop the violence that eventually occurred between a teenage protester peacefully walking down the sidewalk and a middle aged armed counter protester who attacked him.

<https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/protests/unrest-spreads-from-big-cities-to-small-towns/281-ec1647b-601c-417f-8b14-e6fb1c055720>

June 1, 2020 President Trump ordered the clearing of peaceful protesters with gas agents, flash grenades, and violence in Washington DC in order to walk to St. John's Church and pose for a photo opportunity with a bible in hand.

<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-calls-tear-gas-reports-fake-news-protesters/story?id=71052769>

These are just a few examples of the inexcusable use of force, oppression, and racially based bias in policing specifically and sanctioned by government generally.

Those in the labor movement are committed to representing people who work. That representation does not exist in isolation from the rest of our environment. We must organize beyond contracts, beyond laws, to the spiritual fabric of society.

"It is our duty to fight for our freedom.

It is our duty to win.

We must love each other and support each other.

We have nothing to lose but our chains."

— Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography*

As a union of labor movement staff, we will:

- 1) **Encourage Labor Movement Commitment to Becoming Anti-Racist:** We understand that our labor movement employers are in different places in their commitment as anti-racist organizations. We can drive our employers who have institutional level resources and the strength of labor to commit their resources and energy to transformative change, both internally and in our communities.
- 2) **Defund and Reform Law Enforcement:** Encourage and support the efforts of Labor and our communities to force our civil institutions to build a new vision for community supports rather than problem solving through criminalization and enforcement. Such reforms must include commitments from law enforcement unions to allow real accountability for their members. If law enforcement unions will not reform themselves and revise collective bargaining agreements, changes must be legislated.
- 3) **Continue our Own Commitment:** Building on our 2019 annual conference, continue to challenge and develop ourselves as an anti-racist organization.

For additional educational resources visit: <https://medium.com/@micahherskind/resource-guide-prisons-policing-and-punishment-efb5e0f6620>

We cannot allow the continued gross ignorance of privilege and oppression. We must educate, agitate, and force transformative understanding and change.

In Solidarity,

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