

Police killings in America

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Last month, police in Albuquerque, New Mexico shot and killed James Boyd, a homeless man camping in the foothills outside the city. A video of the incident, which has been viewed hundreds of thousands of times, has sparked a public outcry throughout the city and nationwide. Since 2010, there have been 23 lethal police shootings in Albuquerque alone.

The video shows police, in military battle dress and helmets wielding scoped assault rifles, confronting a lone homeless man. The officers throw a flash grenade at Boyd, sic an attack dog on him, and then fire up to eight lethal rounds into his back before shooting his motionless body with beanbag rounds and siccing the dog on him once again.

The release of the video sparked protests by hundreds of people in the city, which were dispersed with tear gas by riot police. Only days later, Albuquerque police killed another man, 30-year-old Alfred Lionel Redwine, outside an apartment complex. A witness told the *Los Angeles Times* that Redwine had “his arms down, with his palms out, when officers shot him.”

The Albuquerque shootings are only the latest in a series of nationwide police killings this year.

- The day after Redwine was killed, police officers in Spokane, Washington shot and killed 30-year-old Steven C. Cordery as he was walking out of his house in compliance with their orders.

- On January 14th, police shot Manuel Orosco Longoria in the back while he had his hands in the air after a traffic stop south of Phoenix, Arizona, killing him. There have been nearly a dozen police shootings in the metropolitan Phoenix area in the past three months alone.

- On February 14th, police beat 44-year-old Luis Rodriguez to death after being called in response to a fight between his wife and daughter.

In each of these incidents, the officers responsible received nothing more than disciplinary slaps on the wrist in the form of temporary suspension with pay.

Local media uncritically reported the justifications for the police murders, and the national media largely turned a blind eye.

The almost routine violence, often murderous, unleashed by police departments across the US has deep objective roots in American society. It reflects a society in which class tensions are stretched to the breaking point and the ruling class maintains, through its state apparatus, a regime of oppression over the working class.

Hardly a week goes by without a video emerging of another wanton killing by police somewhere in the country. The so-called “justice” system in America is notorious for its brutal treatment of workers and youth who get caught up in its web.

Despite having only five percent of the world’s population, the United States holds one quarter of the world’s prison inmates. Some 2.2 million Americans are in prison, and 4.8 million are on probation or parole. The US is one of a handful of developed countries that carries out the barbaric practice of capital punishment.

Capitalist rule in America has always been carried out by violent means, but the presence of police, armed guards and the military in daily life has grown rapidly in the aftermath of the financial crash of 2008. Its growth has paralleled a further increase in already staggering levels of social inequality.

The ruling class has responded to the global economic breakdown by launching a ferocious assault on all that remains of the past social gains of the working class, together with a plundering of society’s resources and transfer of wealth to the financial-corporate elite without historical precedent.

The wealth of US billionaires has more than doubled since 2009, while the income of a typical household has plunged by more than \$5,000.

The ruling class has nothing to offer a population that faces permanent economic insecurity, declining living

standards and growing poverty, hunger and homelessness. It lives in mortal fear of the emergence of mass social opposition to its economic and political system.

Its response—in the US and internationally—is to attack democratic rights, throw off the restrictions on its actions bound up with constitutional and democratic processes, and prepare to meet social opposition by means of mass repression and dictatorship.

The “counterinsurgency” methods of mass violence employed in America’s dirty neocolonial wars abroad—in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya—are being adapted for use at home.

Police departments across the country are being militarized. Some 500 armored fighting vehicles that have been decommissioned from combat duty in the Middle East have been transferred to American police departments. The vehicles, which can mount .50 caliber machine guns and automatic grenade launchers, are being recommissioned for use by urban SWAT teams.

April 15 marks the one-year anniversary of the imposition of de facto martial law in Boston in response to the Boston Marathon bombings. In the aftermath of the attack, residents were told to “shelter in place” while squads of police in body armor bearing assault rifles conducted warrantless house-to-house searches, and machine gun-mounted armored vehicles occupied the streets while police helicopters circled overhead.

This was a dry run for dictatorship in the United States. It was carried out with near universal support from the political establishment and the media.

The social and political buffers that in the past mitigated the conflict of opposed classes are disintegrating under the pressures of economic crisis and social polarization. The class war has to this point been one-sided. The American working class has not yet responded in a mass way. But that will come, sooner than many think.

The critical question is the preparation now of the new, revolutionary leadership needed to impart to the struggles of the working class a conscious, socialist program and perspective. The building of this leadership is the only means of defending the social and democratic rights of working people and stopping the drive of the ruling class toward dictatorship.

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