

Five-year-old arrested in Florida on felony charges

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The felony arrest of a five-year-old kindergarten student in Florida, Chaquita Doman, accused of biting and scratching a support teacher, once again throws the spotlight on the ignorance and callousness that characterizes official social policy in the United States.

To read or listen to the account of the incident given by Barbara Frye, a spokeswoman for the Escambia County School District in Tallahassee, one would think that a wild animal or a desperate criminal had broken into the school.

“We had a child who went into a rage,” explained Frye. “She was supposed to be in line for lunch and, in doing so, was throwing some furniture and turning some over.” The child now faces a felony charge of battery of an educator or elected official.

School officials in Escambia County, in taking action as they did, were merely adopting the policy pursued by the American political and legal establishment in every situation where the social crisis manifests itself: they locked someone up. By any objective human standpoint their response was irrational. This was, after all, a five-year-old child.

The Tallahassee incident provides another glimpse at the levels of social polarization and official indifference that have been reached in the US. The young girl’s anger can only reflect, in some fashion or other, the environment in which she lives. What social problems does this child carry with her to school each day, which found expression in her temper tantrum? One assumes that the incident will only further traumatize her.

On the other hand, school officials and police feel no need to justify the arrest of a young child; it is the logical extension of a process, the criminalization of the poor and the young, that has been going on for years. The claim by the support teacher, Linda Green, that she sought the child’s arrest so that she could receive

mandatory counseling, only reveals the sense of powerlessness and despair that pervades many school districts.

The Florida jailing is only the latest in a series of well-publicized cases involving children and juveniles being treated as criminals. In Pontiac, Michigan, 11-year-old Nathaniel Jamal Abraham is on trial charged with killing Ronnie Green, 15, with a 22-caliber rifle. In New Jersey, Sam Manzie, a 15-year-old with a history of being, in turn, sexually abused and a sexual abuser, is on trial for the murder of Edward Werner, 11.



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