

US: Anti-immigrant activist on trial for murder in Arizona

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Well-known anti-immigrant activist Shawna Forde, along with two accomplices, Jason Eugene Bush and Albert Robert Gaxiola, are now awaiting trial in Pima County, Arizona in the shooting deaths of Raul Flores and his nine-year-old daughter.

On May 30, the three individuals allegedly entered Flores's home in Arivaca, Arizona posing as United States Marshals. Claiming to be searching for a fugitive, the trio allegedly shot Flores, as well as his daughter. Flores's wife grabbed her husband's gun and called police when it appeared that the intruders had fled, but when they returned she exchanged gunfire with the three while still on the phone with the police.

Forde, Bush and Gaxiola were arrested nearly two weeks later. All three are members of a small spin-off group from the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps called the Minutemen American Defense.

According to the Pima County Sheriff's Department, Forde and the others had suspected Flores of being involved with drug trafficking, and had plotted to murder and rob him to help fund their anti-immigrant group. Forde had made these plans known to people close to her, including to family members. The sheriff's department indicated that Flores had a history with narcotics, but did not indicate his level of involvement with drug cartels.

Forde has frequently associated with those high up in anti-immigration circles, including Jim Gilchrist, founder of the Minutemen Project, and Chris Simcox, founder of the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps. Her name has been surrounded by controversy for some time. In 2007, while living in Everett, Washington, Forde ran for and lost a city council spot on a highly chauvinistic and anti-immigrant platform. Her campaign centered on numerous reforms aimed at riling

up anti-immigrant sentiment, and she touted her affiliations with various anti-immigration groups.

A series of suspicious events followed, including the shooting of her then husband, and her own alleged rape, beating and shooting in January of this year, which she claims occurred because of her activities opposing drug cartels. The police have halted the rape investigation due to insufficient evidence, and her own family members have claimed that she played a part in the violence against her and her family. Police in Washington have recently reopened the investigation into the shooting of Forde, with suspicions arising from conflicting information given to them by a relative and friend.

Simcox claims that they had kicked Forde out of the group in 2007. Despite this, he acknowledges that the two still associated with each other, including at a border watch event in October 2008, where he claims she said her group would be going after drug cartels.

According to the *Arizona Star*, Forde's half brother, Merrill Metzger, stated that he had left the group Forde had started after leaving the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps because it had become too radical. He stated Forde told him that the Minutemen American Defense group would begin robbing drug dealers to fund their operations. She also told him that she had begun recruiting members of the Aryan Nation and wanted to start a revolution against the United States government.

According to officials, Bush has confessed to the crimes in question and has implicated Forde and Gaxiola, as well as others. Bush has also been linked to the 1997 murder of a Hispanic transient in Washington state.

In spite of the recent efforts by various anti-

immigration groups, such as those led by Gilchrist and Simcox, to distance themselves from Forde and her followers, these killings are the logical outcome of the reactionary ideology spread by right-wing extremists. The origins of such violent acts can only be understood by examining the political and social conditions of the anti-immigration movement.

In the midst of the political debate on immigration in 2005, the anti-immigration movement escalated its activities, with hundreds of volunteers organizing in several state chapters with the intention of providing additional border enforcement. Anti-immigration activist organizations emerged to lead these movements, including the various Minutemen groups.

With the onset of the economic crisis, anti-immigrant rhetoric has only increased and has been at the forefront of the political debate in border states such as Arizona and California, as well as in Nevada. These three states have some of the highest home foreclosure and unemployment rates in the country, and sections of the political establishment have sought to blame immigrants for these problems.

It is no surprise that many of these anti-immigration activities have been centered in Arizona. The state has undergone tremendous debate over large budget deficits this year, while lawmakers and other authorities have attempted to link the state's budget and financial problems to immigrants.

During the most recent budget talks, in which the state faced a \$3 billion budget gap, a bill was introduced to criminalize the presence of undocumented immigrants through the expansion of trespassing laws. The bill passed in the Senate 16-11, but fell 5 votes short of the 31 needed for passage in the House. Had it passed, Arizona would have been the first state to criminalize undocumented immigrants.

At the same time, the actions of Maricopa County Sheriff Joseph Arpaio have contributed to the whipping up of anti-immigrant hysteria. Arpaio's department is currently under investigation from the Department of Justice for inappropriate tactics against Hispanic looking individuals. He is also known for arresting hundreds of undocumented workers through brutal methods of enforcement.

The "Tent City," an extension of Maricopa County Jail, is one of Sheriff Arpaio's most controversial tactics in his efforts to combat the movements of

migrant workers. In an alleged attempt to tackle the problem of overcrowded jails, Arpaio set up the "Tent City" for prisoners in the desert of Arizona. Temperatures as high as 150 degrees have been reported inside the tents.

The murder of Raul Flores and his daughter is the outcome of a very specific social and political climate, inculcated by the ruling elite for the purpose of pitting workers against each other to deflect blame for the economic crisis from the ruling class. The chauvinistic flames fanned by the ruling elite only serve to plant the seeds that in desperate times can grow into violent acts such as those allegedly committed by Forde.

Workers must reject the false notion that immigrants are to blame for the economic crisis, or the attacks on public education, social services and living standards in general. This crisis is being used as a pretense for the destruction of wages and living standards across the board. The only answer to these attacks is the unity of the working class across borders on a program of international socialism.



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