

Arizona: Man killed in police shooting following home foreclosure

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On September 29, 64 year-old Phoenix resident Kurt Aho learned that his home, where he had lived for nearly 30 years, had just been sold at a foreclosure auction. The two men who had purchased the home went to offer Aho assistance in moving out. Aho, obviously distraught, reportedly went inside his home, grabbed a gun and shot at the vehicles of the two men. After fleeing, the two men called the police.

When police arrived they found Aho standing in the cul-de-sac near his home, holding a gun in one hand and a beer in the other. Neighbors apparently informed police that Aho was suicidal, and pleaded with police to allow them to talk to him. Police shot Aho with rubber bullets, attempting to subdue him. In response, Aho reportedly shot twice, striking the SWAT team's armored vehicle before the police returned fire, killing him with a single shot to the chest.

The *Arizona Republic* reported that Aho's neighbor, Jeffrey Hobson, claimed to have shared a beer with Aho in the hours before the encounter with the police, and that Aho told Hobson he wanted to die. "When the cops get here either I'm gonna die by them or I'm gonna kill myself," Aho reportedly told Hobson.

Yair Lavi, another neighbor, told the *Arizona Republic* that Kurt Aho "was a very nice guy, but he got to a point where he said he had nothing to lose." Aho owned a contracting business and had previously discussed with Lavi his struggle to find work due to the economic crisis. In addition, Lavi told another news source that they had heard that Aho may have been dealing with cancer, for the second time.

Lavi also questioned the actions of the police in killing Aho: "They had a sharpshooter on top of this house, on top of that house, and three of them behind a tree. Just shoot him in the hand and he's no longer a

threat."

Aho's daughter, Tammy Aho, described her father to news station KPHO as a "good, kind man who was always there to help a friend in need." She said, "I think the only thing that meant anything to him was his home where he's lived for 30 years and that was taken from him. He didn't know what else to do."

Aho's death exemplifies the devastating toll that the economic crisis is taking on working people in Arizona and across the nation. Arizona's unemployment rate stood at 9.1 percent in August and the state is implementing widespread cuts in public services due to a prolonged budget crisis. Arizona ranked fourth in the nation in foreclosure filings in August, with 1 in every 150 homes receiving notices—more than twice the national average.

Last October, the WSWS reported on a newly released American Psychological Association (APA) report detailing the growing rate of anxiety and stress caused by economic and financial issues. "People of all age groups are increasingly worried about job security, housing costs, medical costs, rising college tuitions and providing for retirement, and this stress is taking a toll on their mental and physical well-being. Eighty percent of Americans say that the economy is a significant cause of anxiety in their lives." (See "California father, despondent over financial losses, kills family and himself")

The APA report's release roughly coincided with the actions of a California man, Karthik Rajaram. Rajaram shot and killed his wife, mother-in-law and three sons before turning the gun on himself. In one of the letters he left behind, he cited growing economic hardships and his family's financial situation as the motivation for his acts. The same article also reported on the attempted suicide of 90-year-old Addie Polk of Akron,

Ohio, who shot herself twice when police attempted to evict her from her residence of nearly 40 years.

President Obama and some financial analysts have begun claiming that an economic recovery is under way. But with the mounting job losses and growth of poverty in the US it is clear that whatever “recovery” may be taking place has had no impact on the living standards of the working class.

In fact, the Obama administration’s policies have served to ensure the interests of the banks and financial elites at the expense of working people. While the poverty rate in the US now stands at 13.2 percent (the highest in 11 years), the White House has secured multi-billion-dollar bailouts for the banks and financial executives continue to award themselves with massive bonuses.

The agendas set by Washington and state governments are aimed at further reducing the living standards of the working class. Millions of workers, like Kurt Aho, continue to face the direct consequences of these policies on their social position and living standards, which manifest themselves in massive job losses and unprecedented numbers of foreclosures. The tragic death of Aho once again brings to the fore the tremendous pressures faced by working people in the midst of these attacks.



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