

Detroit police kill seven-year-old child

Jerry White
17 May 2010

Detroit police shot and killed a seven-year-old girl during an early morning raid of a home on the city's east side Sunday morning. The child, Aiyana Stanley Jones, was struck in the head and neck area while sleeping on a couch at the home on Lillibridge Street.

In a Sunday morning press conference Assistant Police Chief Ralph Godbee said police were executing a "no-knock" search warrant for a homicide suspect in the two-apartment home. He said the police—members of the heavily armed Special Response Team—threw a flash grenade through an unopened window around 12:45 a.m. before charging in with guns drawn.

Godbee claimed the policeman's gun discharged after he "had some level of physical contact" with the girl's 47-year-old grandmother, Mertilla Jones. The police were not categorizing the shooting as accidental yet, Godbee said, "although we don't believe the gun was discharged intentionally."

Charles Jones, father of the slain girl, said he rushed from a back bedroom to see his mother being pushed through the door and another police officer carrying his bleeding daughter from the house. "They came into my house with a flash grenade and a bullet," Jones told the *Detroit News*. "They say my mother (Mertilla Jones) resisted them, that she tried to take an officer's gun. My mother had never been in handcuffs in her life. They killed my baby and I want someone to tell the truth."

The young father added, "I want this story to be heard. This was a wrongful death."

Mertilla Jones, who was arrested at the scene and released Sunday, told the *Detroit News*, "They blew my granddaughter's brains out. They killed her right before my eyes. I seen the light go out of her eyes." She

denied police claims she had a physical confrontation with the cops, telling WXYZ-TV, "I never touched none of them. No one gave them any struggle. My grandbaby is gone. The Detroit police killed my granddaughter."

Before the police broke in, a relative told police there were children inside and pointed to toys in the front yard. "'There's kids in the house,' I said five times, 'there are kids in the house,'" a relative told the TV station.

Jones and his relatives said the suspect was not even in the same apartment as Aiyana. Police raided the upstairs unit simultaneously and reportedly arrested a 34-year-old male.

"Based on our intelligence, we got a search warrant for the location," Godbee said. "Because of the violent nature of the crime, we thought we were entering a potentially dangerous situation." Godbee said a full investigation would be conducted and expressed fear of public reaction, saying the police "might be the target of anger."

A spontaneous memorial was set up in front the eastside home, with friends, relatives and ordinary citizens leaving flowers and children's balloons and toys to pay honor to the dead child and her family. A candlelight vigil was held Sunday night.

Class tensions in the city are reaching a breaking point. After decades of plant closings and mass layoffs, the Motor City has a real unemployment rate at the Depression-level of 50 percent. Hundreds of thousands of people face a daily struggle for survival, confronting utility shutoffs, evictions and foreclosures, while the city's Democratic-run administration—led by

millionaire businessman Mayor David Bing—is planning to shut off public services to entire working class neighborhoods deemed too poor to maintain.

A report on an apartment house fire in the poverty-stricken Detroit enclave of Highland Park on Sunday noted that many of those inhabiting the building were homeless “squatters,” including whole families. One resident said the local utility company DTE Energy had come out to disconnect the electrical service to the building, but “people threatened to shoot them if they did.”

Under these conditions, the Bing administration is using the police to crack down on the population. In recent weeks, opponents of police brutality have complained that the Detroit Police Department’s gang squad—known as the Mobile Strike Force—has been “terrorizing” neighborhoods, with complaints against the police rising more than 200 percent.

The Detroit police may have been particularly primed to use indiscriminate and overwhelming force on Sunday, due to a raid last month that left one cop dead and four others wounded.

The squad involved in the death of Aiyana Jones, the Special Response Team, was formed in 1987. It has been described by former members as a “highly trained anti-terrorist unit” and the “Marine Corps” of the Detroit police department.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact