

Police killing of immigrant worker sparks protests in Los Angeles

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Hundreds of immigrant workers marched and rallied in Los Angeles on Monday to protest the weekend killing of a day laborer by officers of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD).

Manuel Jamines, 37, was a construction worker from Guatemala and father of three. He was gunned down Sunday by police who said they were responding to a report of a knife-wielding man threatening the public in a commercial street. Several eyewitnesses have said that Jamines was unarmed when he was shot.

The protesters marched between the Ramparts Division police headquarters and the same Los Angeles corner, 6th and Union, where the shooting took place. Many carried homemade signs calling for justice.

The protests were met with a sharp police response, including the arrest of four individuals after they allegedly threw water bottles and plastic boxes at a police line. On Tuesday, police squads continued to heavily patrol the LA community of Westlake, where the shooting and protests occurred.

Jamines had lived in Los Angeles for seven years and was well known in the district. The incident took place on a busy corner at 1 pm, in front of many on-lookers. As police approached Jamines, nearby people reminded them that Jamines understood little English. They pleaded, to no avail, that he be given more time to respond to officer's commands.

One eyewitness, Julio Martinez, who was at the scene when the killing took place, reported to the *Los Angeles Times* that he saw no weapon in Jamines' hands. Other eyewitnesses indicated that Jamines was drunk but posed no immediate danger. Another eyewitness, Juan Sanchez, reported that Jamines was already on the ground when one of the officers fired the two shots at Jamines' head that killed him.

Immediately following the shooting, astonished

people began surrounding Jamines' body demanding to know why the police had killed him.

The police version of events differs significantly from what the witnesses saw. A police report claims that Jamines, when approached, threatened one of the officers with the weapon. Allegedly, the officer saw no other alternative but to fire and kill him. There was no information provided on whether the officers attempted to use non-lethal methods on Jamines, as is supposedly the policy of the LAPD.

Police Chief Charlie Beck defended the shooting. Declaring that the officer was in "immediate danger of his life."

Beck cynically claims that bicycle police do not carry appropriate non-lethal equipment. Beck's response underscores that, to the working class and immigrant neighborhoods of Los Angeles, the police act with impunity.

On Tuesday, the LAPD police union weighed in and issued the following statement blaming Jamines for his own death: "Getting drunk and threatening bystanders and then LAPD officers with a knife is dangerous and self-destructive in any language."

The Pico-Union district of Westlake where the shooting occurred is a densely populated neighborhood of Central American immigrants. Many of them rely on temporary employment and have been severely impacted by the current economic crisis.

The area, only a five-minute drive from downtown Los Angeles, is one of the most impoverished in the city. High rents often force eight or more people to share small apartments. Gang activity abounds. Many of the inhabitants of the neighborhood either have applied for asylum or are undocumented.

Officially, Pico-Union unemployment is only 12.9 percent, somewhat higher than in California as a whole.

Real unemployment, however, is much higher. As jobs have become more scarce, many earn their living as peddlers, selling fruit and flowers at highway entrances, constantly in fear of police harassment. This army of “hidden unemployed” is not counted in the unemployment statistics.

The Rampart Division of the LAPD, which includes Westlake and neighboring Echo Park, was the home of a major scandal in the late 1990s involving police drug embezzlement, killings, and frame-ups. Westlake was also the scene of a police crackdown on immigrant rights marchers in 2007, resulting in the injury of dozens of protesters and journalists. (See, “Los Angeles police violently disperse immigrant rights demonstration”)

In 1999, two Los Angeles bicycle officers shot and killed a mentally ill woman who allegedly had attacked them with a screwdriver. A *Los Angeles Times* investigation at the time revealed a pattern of questionable shootings, followed by the falsification of police reports. Eleven years later, little has changed for the impoverished inhabitants of Central Los Angeles.



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