

# Connecticut police charged with brutalizing Hispanics

Peter Daniels  
26 January 2012

A police sergeant and three officers in the Connecticut city of East Haven were arrested on January 25 on federal charges of conspiracy, deprivation of rights and obstruction of justice. The case is in connection with a campaign of harassment and brutality directed against the town's growing Latino population.

The accused cops were identified as Dennis Spaulding, David Cari, Jason Zullo, and Sergeant John Miller, who is their supervisor. Some of the charges could bring penalties of up to 10 years in prison, while obstruction carries a maximum penalty of 20 years.

East Haven is a suburb of some 28,000 people just three miles east of New Haven, the home of Yale University, and 70 miles east of New York. The arrest of four members of a 50-member force points to widespread police abuse and brutality, largely but not entirely directed against the town's immigrant population, which has grown from about 200 to 3,000 over the past three decades. Many of the newcomers are from Ecuador and other South and Central American nations.

According to press reports, the defendants used excessive force in making arrests, conducted unreasonable searches and seizures, made at least five arrests based on false and misleading pretenses and tried to intimidate other cops to obstruct investigation of their own misconduct. Some victims were slapped, hit or kicked while they were handcuffed.

The *New York Times* account of the arrests details charges that the police practiced racial profiling and harassed small business owners and customers in what appears to have been a conscious attempt to intimidate Hispanic immigrants and if possible drive them out of the community. The Los Amigos grocery and La Bamba restaurant were among the establishments

where cops stopped people going about their business and in some cases made false arrests. At one local establishment, My Country Store, which catered to the growing Ecuadorean immigrant population, police told customers "they don't want our kind here," according to Paul Matute, the son of the store's owner. The police later looked for store videotapes in an apparent effort to remove evidence of their behavior.

The discrimination and police brutality was clearly accepted if not encouraged at high levels of the police department, as well as the local government in East Haven. The federal indictment refers to a "Co-Conspirator No. 1" who made several phone calls to the superior of the Rev. James Manship, a local priest who had complained about and sought to investigate police misconduct. The "Co-Conspirator" is widely believed to be the local police chief, Leonard Gallo, although federal authorities would not confirm that, and Gallo has not yet been charged.

Mayor Joseph Maturo Jr. of East Haven expressed sympathy not for the victims of the police abuse but for the accused perpetrators. "It's certainly very unfortunate and very tough for the families," said Maturo, according to news reports, "but it's tough for the Police Department and our community. I am proud of our police department. I stick by our men in blue."

The arrests in Connecticut are the outcome of an investigation that began almost three years ago, after many immigrants, despite fear of retaliation, had begun to complain about mistreatment. Rev. Manship began to look into the complaints and was arrested, while videotaping the police, on disorderly conduct charges that were later dropped. Nine immigrants filed a suit against the local police in 2010, and the federal Justice Department released a report last month charging a pattern of discrimination.

At a press conference to announce the arrests this week, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the US Attorney for Connecticut expressed outrage but sought to portray the case as an isolated or unusual problem.

“The residents of East Haven should not need protection from those that are sworn to protect and serve them,” said Janice Fedarcyk of the FBI’s New York office. She referred to a “cancerous cadre” in the East Haven police, and said the defendants “behaved like bullies with badges.”

“We know and understand how difficult police officers’ jobs are and how important they are to a free society,” said US Attorney David Fein. “It is for their benefit—and society’s—that we at the Department of Justice are ever-vigilant in investigating and prosecuting wrongdoing by those who have sworn to protect the public.”

The official framed the case as one that is primarily aimed at helping the police in maintaining their image as defenders of the public who are not “above the law.” In fact, the Civil Rights Division of the DOJ acknowledges that it is currently investigating 17 law enforcement agencies across the country on similar violations. These include Seattle, New Orleans, Portland, Oregon and Suffolk County in New York. The Maricopa County Sheriff’s Department, including Phoenix and run by the notorious Joe Arpaio, has, after many years of bitter complaints, finally been charged with illegal arrests and other abuses.

Even as the Connecticut arrests were being announced, the New York City Police Department under Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Commissioner Ray Kelly was trying to explain how a vicious anti-Muslim film was shown to as many as 1,500 cops as part of “counterterrorism” training. This uproar follows the brutality used against Occupy Wall Street protesters and even journalists who were trying to cover the protests last fall.

Crime rates are at historic lows, but, as these developments prove, the actions of the police have very little to do with street crime and everything to do with the growing inequality and growing popular awareness and anger in the face of mass unemployment, foreclosures and budget cuts. In using anti-immigrant hysteria, the political authorities act to divide workers along racial and ethnic lines while preparing for full-scale repression against the working class as a whole.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**