

Police violence in Anaheim: The class issues

Statement by Jerry White, SEP candidate for US president

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As the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for US president, I condemn the brutal shooting of 25-year-old Manuel Diaz in Anaheim and the subsequent violent crackdown on protesters. These acts of police brutality are an attack on the entire working class and must be met with a unified political response.

The killing of Diaz, who was unarmed, was followed by the use of tear gas and rubber bullets against peaceful demonstrators, including children. Barely 24 hours later, 21-year-old Joel Acevedo was shot dead, allegedly in the course of a chase in which he drew a weapon. Acevedo was the sixth person killed by Anaheim police this year.

In response to the second killing, there were even larger protests Tuesday outside City Hall, with as many as a thousand people taking part, and 24 arrested. There was sporadic window-breaking and water bottles thrown, which was seized on by police as a pretext for unleashing nightsticks and rubber bullets to disperse the crowd.

These protests show the widespread anger among working people, not only over police brutality, but over the deepening economic and social crisis that has driven unemployment in California well into double-digit figures. The plight of Anaheim's Hispanic working class population, the target of increasingly draconian anti-immigrant policies, is particularly dire.

The police violence, and the social crisis behind it, are not, however, primarily racial issues. They are class questions, manifestations of an economic system in which a relative handful monopolize the wealth, while the vast majority of all races struggle to survive.

According to one recent report, median family income has fallen 6 percent since 2000, the worst drop since the Great Depression. Meanwhile, the top one percent of households has doubled its share of national

income, from 10 percent to 20 percent, since 1972. Under Barack Obama, the country's first African-American president, the top one percent has swallowed up 93 percent of all income gains since the beginning of the so-called "recovery."

Under such conditions, it is impossible for the ruling elite to maintain its wealth and power through democratic and peaceful means. Instead, there has been a systematic buildup of the powers of the police, initially in name of fighting "crime," more recently using the pretext of the "war on terror." The real social function of the police, however, is to defend the interests of the corporate and financial elite.

Since the killing of Diaz, several groups have intervened quickly to insist that the police attack is about enforcing racial segregation, and that the response must be to build a movement against the "New Jim Crow." The attempt to focus popular anger on the question of race is aimed at promoting a section of the Democratic Party political establishment involved in Hispanic organizations, such as Presente.org and a community group called Los Amigos. It serves to block the only means of fighting against police brutality and the attack on democratic rights—a united political movement of the entire working class.

In fact, police brutality affects all sections of the working class, white, black, Hispanic, Asian and immigrant. There was widespread popular revulsion last year to the murder of Kelly Thomas, a homeless white working class man who was beaten to death by police in Fullerton, next door to Anaheim, despite outraged protests from bystanders.

Only a week before the killings of Diaz and Acevedo, Los Angeles police unleashed a brutal assault on a small group of Occupy LA participants at the annual

chalk art festival in downtown Los Angeles, firing rubber bullets and beating and arresting people, most of whom were white.

The great dividing line in the United States—and, indeed, around the world—is between a small layer of the super-rich, on the one hand, and the vast majority of working people on the other. The beefing up of the powers of the state and the unleashing of police violence is the response of the ruling class to the growth of social tensions. America is ripe for a social explosion, as the immense popular outrage over the killing in Anaheim demonstrates.

The fight against police violence must be connected to a political movement of the working class against austerity and inequality. This means a break with the Democratic and Republican Parties and the building of a new party of the working class. In California, Governor Jerry Brown is overseeing unprecedented attacks on health care, public education, and other social programs. The same is true of Obama at the federal level.

Appeals to this political establishment will yield nothing. In particular, the decision by the federal government, at the behest of the Mayor Tom Tait and the City Council, to carry out an investigation is aimed at covering up for the police and those who are responsible for the violence.

An end to police repression is possible only through the establishment of a society based on genuine equality, in which the economy serves the interests of working people, not the rapacious profit interests of the banks and corporations. This means the fight for socialism. The SEP presidential campaign is dedicated to laying the basis for such a movement among all sections of the working class.



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