California state police to deploy in Stockton

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California Highway Patrol (CHP) officers will be joining local law enforcement in the city of Stockton to police the city's streets after a year of record numbers of homicides. Stockton is considered the second most violent city in California and tenth in the nation.

The CHP already participates in routine sweeps around the Stockton area, but its involvement will be considerably stepped up in order to establish a greater visibility of police presence.

Both the California Department of Justice and the federal attorney general's office are involved in planning a response to the skyrocketing rate of violent crime in Stockton. Stockton Police Chief Eric Jones has expressed his wish that the National Guard be involved. Parts of the city are now monitored by surveillance cameras and coverage will likely be expanded. Jones has also outlined a strategy of rapid, flexible redeployment of police resources throughout the Stockton area in response to crime.

The step-up in police involvement on the state level coincides with a renewed push by the local authorities to establish a police presence in schools. Officers with dogs have been making the rounds at over 50 K-8, high schools and adult schools in the area to search for alcohol, illicit drugs and firearms. The searches are conducted on a random, unannounced basis. “We don't even tell the principal or the teachers. We just show up,” the local police chief told the press.

In the last month, three Stockton-area students have been arrested for possession of handguns on campus.

Stockton has consistently made headlines in 2012 for another reason: it is the nation’s largest city to have ever declared bankruptcy. Under the weight of shrinking property tax revenues—Stockton has also seen some of the highest foreclosure rates in the country since the start of the great recession—the city is slashing its fiscal obligations. Central among these is its pension contributions, which the city’s Wall Street creditors hope to tear up in what would be a historic bankruptcy case.

The link between Stockton's fiscal crisis and its criminal situation is far stronger than is suggested by the sensationalist media coverage of shootings and murders. In fact both trends find their source very directly in the rapidly deteriorating social conditions in California's Central Valley and around the country. Working class living standards have plummeted in only a few years. Stockton’s unemployment rate is more than double the national average at 16.3 percent of the workforce, and median household income is barely two-thirds of the state average. Meanwhile, sales taxes have been raised, and Stockton Unified School District is preparing to lay off hundreds of teaches.

The connection is underscored by the coincidence of violent crime and social devastation elsewhere. California’s most dangerous city, Oakland, is home to an exploding poverty rate which encompasses 17 percent of adults and 28 percent of children. Flint and Detroit, Michigan—the heart of America’s decaying industrial heartland—are officially the most dangerous cities in the country.

And although Stockton’s Police Chief Jones makes a great deal of gang and drug-related violence, if robbery were counted as a property crime, the rate would be cut by over a third.

The expansion of law enforcement’s powers and the imposition of draconian, police-state style controls on Stockton’s population will not halt the violence since it does nothing to address its root causes. As much as they may speak of it, the very need for an increased police presence signifies that they do not prevent crime but only respond to it.

The police themselves have an infamous record of criminality, abuse and murderous brutality. Anaheim’s police department achieved national notoriety when in July, after shooting unarmed 25-year-old Manuel Diaz

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in the back, they responded to residents' protests with rubber bullets, tear gas and dozens of arrests. A day later, another young man was shot dead, purportedly after firing a handgun. Of those in Anaheim against whom the police have drawn their weapons this year, only one has lived to tell the tale. It is difficult to scan the national news on a given day without reading reports of brutality and mistreatment at the hands of those who "serve and protect."

It is no accident that abuse of ordinary people by the police has grown to epidemic proportions in the past several years. Rather than a neutral arbiter, the state and its hired guns ineluctably act as servants of ruling class interests, and law enforcement can only respond to heightened class tensions with heightened repression. In a society as starkly divided by inequality as modern America, the elite can maintain its wealth and power in no other way.

This is the situation facing working people—mass unemployment, destitution, violence and public funds for only one thing: the expansion of the police force.

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