

Albuquerque police chief resigns amid surge of police violence

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On March 13, the mayor's office of Albuquerque, New Mexico announced that Chief of Police Ray Schultz would retire later this year from the Albuquerque Police Department (APD). Recent years in Albuquerque have been marked by a spike in police violence, and earlier this month a fleeing man was killed when police shot him seven times.

The surge in Albuquerque police violence cannot be explained by the claim that the city is a backward "frontier" outpost. Albuquerque is a modern industrial city of over half a million—800,000 counting the surrounding metropolitan area. Rather, it is the increasing poverty and social polarization that is contributing to the growth of police repression.

Albuquerque is not alone in witnessing increasingly rampant and persistent violence by its police force. New Orleans, Seattle, New York, Saginaw and scores of cities in California and other states have experienced an escalation of police militarization and violence, with authorities invariably justifying the actions as "within policy" and exonerating the perpetrators.

This trend toward more aggression and violence among police officers has paralleled the attacks on the living standards and rights of the American working class being carried out by the Obama administration and Congress.

Installed in April 2005 following the ouster of then-chief Gil Gallegos amid corruption charges, Schultz was hailed by the local media as "the right man for the job." However, during his term incidents of police violence in Albuquerque have seen a steady rise, particularly since 2010.

Other signs of the increasing militarization, violence and impunity of the APD included offensive and racist comments made by officers on Facebook and Twitter, including one cop's comment that his job was "human

waste disposal"; the death by Taser of a drug-intoxicated man with a heart condition; and a lapel camera video that showed police repeatedly tasing a suspect and punching another several times after he had surrendered, all of which have provoked public outrage.

By the end of 2010, 14 men had been shot by police, nine fatally. That number has since climbed to 25, with 18 fatalities. Seeing him as a liability, some local media and city council members began calling for Schultz's resignation.

In the same week in which a jury awarded \$10.3 million to the family of Kenneth Ellis, an Iraq War veteran with post-traumatic stress syndrome who was shot to death by an APD policeman in 2010, police cornered and shot a fleeing suspect seven times. Their claim that the man had drawn a gun was emphatically contradicted by a witness to the incident.

All of these incidents have taken place in the midst of the deterioration of working class living standards in New Mexico. Although the state's official unemployment rate of 6.6 percent is below the national average, its poverty rate of 22.2 percent (451,000 people) passed Louisiana's last year to become the highest in the US. New Mexico's median household income of \$44,000 places it at number 43 nationwide.

Thirty percent of New Mexican children live in poverty, according to Kids Count, an organization that tracks poverty levels, and childhood hunger and homelessness are chronic problems. One fifth of the state's population has no health insurance, and elderly New Mexicans have an average annual income of around \$10,000.

Education funding has taken serious hits since 2008, and the federal "sequestration" cuts will further erode the state's education outlays, in particular pummeling

programs for preschool and disabled children. The Democratic-controlled legislature's current budget bill allows for a miserly 1 percent increase in teacher pay, after years of no raises, an increase that the Republican governor opposes.

Higher education has also been on the chopping block. A report on local television station KOB's web site notes, "New Mexico cut higher ed spending by \$4,775 per student during the recession years from 2008 to 2013, among the deepest cuts in the country according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Meanwhile tuition has gone up 22 percent to make up for some of the spending cuts."

In Albuquerque, the state's most populous city, the construction sector—a key industry hit hard by the recession—has not recovered, and last year nearly 4,000 public sector jobs, many in Albuquerque, were cut from the state budget. Governors and legislators, Democrat and Republican alike, have emphasized "growth" and "competitiveness" through tax breaks and other investment incentives, which help business more than the working class population, while wages stagnate and jobs are lost.

The US ruling class is well aware that the growing attacks on working class living standards are increasing tensions that will spark resistance. The green light for the militarization and rise in aggression of the police across the nation are part of a strategy of preemptive attack to stifle the growth of that resistance. In Albuquerque, the continuation and intensification of police violence will not be lessened by the replacement of a police chief.



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