

Augusta, Georgia: Police hold back crowd in near-food riot

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Police in Augusta, Georgia held back a crowd of hundreds of people who had gathered near an out-of-business grocery store last Tuesday in the hopes of collecting the store's remaining food surplus. The crowd of three hundred watched in anger as the large pile of fresh groceries was thrown into dumpsters and carted away to rot in a nearby landfill.

"These are brand new [food] items," Richmond County Sheriff Richard Roundtree told WISTV.com. "We saw the potential for a riot was extremely high."

The near outbreak of a food riot in the United States illustrates the historic magnitude of the social counter-revolution being waged by the ruling class against the vast majority of the population.

The assault on the living conditions of the working class has produced a level of social desperation not seen since the Great Depression. Though the scene of hungry crowds confronting armed police may seem more reminiscent of 1931, in fact it depicts the harsh reality of 2013.

The near-riot in Augusta went entirely unreported outside of Georgia, with the national media refusing to mention it. The events in Augusta are unmentionable because they expose all too clearly the fruits of the joint policies of the Republicans and Democrats, including the Obama administration, which are to ruthlessly protect the interests of the financial aristocracy at the expense of the wages and living conditions of the remainder of the population.

The existence of crowds of hungry citizens within the United States explodes the various proclamations from the Obama administration that an economic "recovery" is underway, and demonstrates instead that the capitalist system is proving itself utterly incapable of meeting the most basic needs of society. There is a palpable fear in the political establishment that

widespread opposition within the population to their policies will emerge.

Last Tuesday's confrontation arose after word spread through the heavily impoverished neighborhoods surrounding the Laney Supermarket that the store owners were being evicted and were donating the surplus food to local residents. But Sun Trust Bank, the owner of the property, ordered that the food be destroyed.

Police were deployed to the parking lot and pushed shouting crowds away from the food as it was thrown into dumpsters and trucked away to be destroyed. Armed officers turned away families that had gathered with empty plastic bags, forcing them out of the parking lot.

"People have children out here that are hungry, thirsty, could be anything. Why throw it away when you could be issuing it out?" Robertstine Lambert told local news outlet Fox 54.

"For them to do this is a low blow," Jennifer Santiago said. "A lot of people are sad, a lot of people aren't going to have food to put on the table. This is ridiculous."

Augusta, Georgia is home to profound social polarization. The same city that hosts the Masters golf tournament, a pageantry of Southern wealth and exclusivity, suffers from an official poverty rate of 31.6 percent, which is higher than the national average. In total, 11.8 percent of the population lives below 50 percent of the official poverty line. This means that nearly 12 percent of families of four live on less than \$12,000 a year.

For young people in Augusta, official poverty rates are even higher. Nearly 45 percent of children under 5 years of age live in poverty and the rate is similarly high for other under-18 age groups.

According to the White House, the bipartisan “sequester” plan will result in \$28.6 million in cuts to primary and secondary school education in the state of Georgia. Nearly 400 teachers will be fired and approximately 80 schools will receive no funding in the next fiscal year.

Additionally, \$17.5 million will be cut from programs to help children with disabilities, and 2,500 low-income students will see their financial aid to attend college slashed. Nearly 40,000 civilian Defense Department employees will face mandatory furloughs, resulting in a total pay loss of \$190 million.

It is under these conditions of social devastation that the 300 people who gathered at Laney Supermarket watched—through police lines—as hundreds of pounds of groceries were tossed into dumpsters and trucked off to rot.

Throwing away food in front of starving families recalls the words of John Steinbeck, who described a similar scene in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939): “There is a crime here that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success. The fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunks, and the ripe fruit. And children dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from an orange. And coroners must fill in the certificates—died of malnutrition—because the food must rot, must be forced to rot ... and in the eyes of the people there is a failure; and in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage.”



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