

California community put on police lockdown

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A small California community became the second American city to be put on lockdown, after Boston, following a murder in the town.

Leila Fowler, an 8-year old resident of Valley Springs, was stabbed to death by an unknown attacker in her family's home on Saturday, April 27. Leila's 12-year-old brother was the only witness to the crime. The attacker apparently escaped and has been described only as a white or Hispanic man wearing a black shirt.

Valley Springs is a very rural community with a population of about 3,500 in Calaveras County, on the eastern edge of California's Central Valley.

The response of the County Sheriff's Department, which is conducting the investigation, would have been unthinkable barely a week before.

Calaveras County Sheriff, Gary Kuntz, issued a shelter-in-place, or so-called "lockdown," order—mirroring the State of Massachusetts's actions during the manhunt for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev on April 19.

This is a highly reactionary and anti-democratic action. In Boston, the issuing of the order—which required people to stay in sealed homes and admit only verified law enforcement agents—marked the first time it has been used outside of the context of a natural disaster or chemical accident, such as an oil refinery fire.

Leila Fowler was killed on the morning of April 27, and the lockdown order was issued that same afternoon. Although details are scarce, it appears that at minimum no one was allowed to enter or leave Valley Springs. However, contradictory reports also state that the residents "were advised via Reverse 911 and other mass notification systems to lock their doors and report suspicious activity..."

About 100 officers and "other personnel" flooded into the town over the weekend. As in Boston, the police forces conducted warrantless, systematic

searches of homes. In practice, residents of Valley Springs were placed under house arrest, with their 4th amendment rights suspended.

"We will not rest until we capture the responsible person," Sheriff Kuntz told the press.

When the local elementary school was opened the Monday after the stabbing, it was reportedly crawling with Sheriff's deputies.

The police-state measures carried out in Boston during the manhunt for alleged terrorist Dzhokhar Tsarnaev are now being applied to the rest of the country, setting a new precedent for the declaration of effective martial law. First used in the aftermath of a terror incident—in which the involvement of intelligence agencies is not fully understood—the same measures are applied in a routine search for a criminal hardly a week later.

Manhunts for alleged criminals have played an important role in providing a pretext for the expansion of authoritarian forms of rule. Beginning with the enormous mobilization against ex-cop Chris Dorner in Southern California and reaching a climax in Boston, the lockdown and manhunt routine has now been made modular and readily applicable throughout America.

As the WSWWS has warned, the repressive measures, which are justified as protection against terrorism, in fact stem from the ruling class' fear of social unrest. These powers are being turned more directly against the working class, the suspension of democratic rights in Boston serving in essence as a trial run.

However, the initial acquiescence to these measures, stemming largely from fear, cannot last long. Coverage by local ABC News television affiliate Channel 10 featured interviews with disgruntled residents who are tired of being searched. Police continue to man checkpoints along the road where the Fowler home is located. "They came and searched our trash the other day," said a neighbor. "I'm frustrated. I'm frustrated

that we can't live a normal life again. And I would imagine that Leila's family would like to live a normal life again."

Whether due to lack of media interest or inability to access the town due to the lockdown, the developments in Valley Springs have received very little coverage from the media, nearly all of it pointedly avoiding the martial law measures being applied. What media coverage there has been has focused on the unusual and chilling nature of the murder, as if to attempt a justification for the barely-acknowledged state of lockdown. Until April 30, only the local news was covering the story.



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