

Albuquerque, New Mexico rally to protest police brutality

WSWS reporters
25 June 2014

A march and rally in Albuquerque, New Mexico were held on June 21 to protest violence by the Albuquerque Police Department (APD), in particular the series of fatal shootings that have taken place over the last several years. The rally was organized by the Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, the ANSWER Coalition and local community groups. Speakers at the rally included an ex-APD officer and several family members of people killed by the APD.

Reports in the media indicate that the APD planted at least one undercover officer among the demonstrators, who held a “die-in” and mock trial that delivered a guilty verdict against Police Chief Gorden Eden. In 2012 the same sergeant who was present at the rally undercover—and whose name has not been revealed by the APD—shot 20-year-old Dominick Solis-Mora in the stomach outside a West Side restaurant during an undercover drug sting.

Following a familiar pattern, the officer was subsequently cleared by the Bernalillo County District Attorney of wrongdoing. A local news outlet has asked why the sergeant would be at a lawful demonstration with a camera and whether he was gathering intelligence on protesters and other members of the community who are not suspected of criminal activity. There has been no response.

APD officers have shot 36 people since January 2010, killing 26, an extraordinarily high number given that Albuquerque’s population is only slightly more than a half million.

Saturday’s rally was not the first protest in the city against police violence. Previously demonstrators shut down two City Council meetings and held a sit-in at the mayor’s in early June. The latter action resulted in 13 arrests.

Last April, the US Department of Justice announced

the findings of a 16-month investigation into the APD, which described the APD’s systemic pattern of violating citizens’ civil rights, particularly through the use of force. It also noted that city and police leaders failed to hold officers accountable. *World Socialist Web Site* supporters attended the march and rally. They distributed the June 16 WSWS perspective headlined *Militarization of police in America*.

The WSWS spoke to several of those at the demonstration. Zac Britton came to Albuquerque from California to join the protest. He is a member of the Coalition for Justice for Andy Lopez.

“I’m from Santa Rosa, California. That’s the place where 13-year-old Andy Lopez was shot dead by the Sonoma County Sheriff’s Department. We’ve had 61 deaths at the hands of law enforcement since 2000. That’s the year when the US Commission on Civil Rights came in, because during the ‘90s we had a spate of killings by law enforcement. They had a list of recommendations, none of them were followed, and because of that, 61 deaths later, we’re in 2014.

“The vast majority [of victims] are people who are mentally ill. I think there’s an issue of inadequate training for law enforcement in Sonoma County with regards to dealing with people who have mental illness.”

Zac was asked what he believes to be causing the police violence. “I think the biggest contributing factor is probably the militarization of the police.

“All these military veterans come back and become police officers. Some of them have PTSD and they can get triggered very easily. Deputy [Erick] Gelhaus, who killed Andy Lopez, was a military veteran and he had PTSD.”

Darell Lorenzo Wellington is from South Carolina but now lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico’s capital. No

stranger to the tensions between the citizenry and the police, he was living in Savannah, Georgia at the time of the botched execution of Troy Davis, which shocked public opinion. He is well aware that Albuquerque is not unique in terms of police abuse.

“Nine cities have been investigated. I was at least inspired by the DOJ report, which everyone should read. It is very blunt about the situation. Obviously Albuquerque has had a problem with violence for years. You hear about it in Santa Fe.

“A lot of people want an oversight board that has real teeth in it. I’ve lived in communities with very bad relations with police before... I know that those relations could hit rock bottom to the point that the average person tends to think that the police are more of a threat than any local criminal. That’s the bottom line and there are whole big swaths of big cities with hundreds of thousands of people who have that sentiment, and that is no exaggeration.”

Frances Madeson has written about the prison system in New Mexico. She was carrying a sign denouncing the Secretary of the New Mexico Correction Department’s Secretary, Gregg Marcantel, as a “slave catcher.” The WSWWS asked her why she was at the protest. “This is my opportunity to push back against the authoritarian state,” she replied.

Frances explained the sign. “Marcantel is the secretary of the New Mexico Department of Corrections. Pretty much needlessly, he issued an RFP [Request for Proposal] to expand the for-profit women’s prison in Grants [a city in western New Mexico] by over 200 women, an increase of 39% at a time when crime is actually on the decline, when the criminal justice reform committee at the legislature has just begun its work in reforming the criminal code.

“Seventy-five percent of the women who are currently incarcerated are there for drug-related crimes. A very miniscule portion of women who are incarcerated are there for violent crimes. Unfortunately, in this Corrections Corporations of America-run prison, they actually receive a premium for the bed rate for solitary. So women...are being pushed into solitary. Literally, I hear that the stock price is posted daily over the punch clock where the employees come in and punch in and out. If they see profits going down they know just what to do.

“The ACLU and the New Mexico Center on Law and

Poverty in October 2013 issued an 18-page report... It’s called ‘Inside the Box’. It documents the abuses of solitary confinement. We actually have a situation in Grants, where there are retarded women, mentally ill women, they’re doped up—75% of the women are doped up with heavy psychotropics—and they’re shoved into solitary confinement.

“Secretary Marcantel just pulled a stunt a few weeks ago, where he incarcerated himself in the Supermax prison in Santa Fe for two days. Do you know what the average length of solitary confinement in New Mexico is? Over a thousand days. Almost three years!

“What we’re fighting is really important. Not only does this report come out in October about all these abuses about solitary confinement, but the Department of Corrections is so arrogant that they then are trying to expand the prison without curing the abuses that are documented in ‘Inside the Box.’”

Frances said she saw a connection between what was happening in the United States with the policies of the US government abroad. “I think the whole Guantanamo Bay prison is a good canary in the coalmine. Everything that is happening at the prison at Guantanamo has come home to roost.”



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