

San Diego school district acquires a military assault vehicle

Jake Dean
16 September 2014

The sight of armored personnel carriers and police officers decked out in fully militarized weaponry rolling down the streets of Ferguson, Missouri shocked the world.

The recent events in Ferguson underscore the extent to which the police in the United States are now becoming fully militarized. To this effect, militarization has reached the public school system, as the San Diego Unified School District acquired their own Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles (MRAP) in April.

The mine-resistant armored trucks that are deployed in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars are capable of withstanding improvised explosive devices and have the ability to run through walls and smash through barricades. These armored trucks have now been brought home to American schools. Valued at around \$730,000, the San Diego school district received the armored vehicle free through the Department of Defense's Excess Property Program, commonly known as the 1033 program, paying only \$5,000 for transportation fees.

The program gives used military weapons free of charge to local police departments across the nation. The same equipment and weapons that the police forcefully used against the population of Ferguson was provided through the 1033 program.

According to spokeswoman Ursula Kromer, the grant application was approved by the school district's Superintendent Cindy Marten and was never required to go before the school board.

Scott Barnett, one of the school board trustees, has shown his satisfaction with the armored truck acquisition: "The symbol of having an armored vehicle in the district is not the message we want to send to schools. But we have it now. Can we leverage that vehicle to fund something we really need—new patrol cars?" District Police Chief Ruben Littlejohn defended his actions to attain the vehicle without consulting the school board.

He stated, "I don't report directly to the Board of Education, and I went through my chain of command as required. So the fact that you weren't informed at that time was not something that I bothered myself with at the time. But I certainly see the importance of it."

A blatantly undemocratic act, the procurement of the vehicle was never brought to the attention of the public. As usual, decisions impacting working class communities are done behind the backs of the people.

Police authorities are exploiting fears that another school shooting is imminently possible, and the only solution is to be prepared with absolute force. Joe Florentino, captain of the San Diego Unified School District Police Department told *inewssource*, a KPBS media partner, "When we have an emergency at school, we've got to get in and save the kids. Our idea is 'How can we get in and pull out a classroom at a time of kids if there's an active shooter?'"

In attempts to further justify the acquisition of the MRAP, Littlejohn made the claim that the acquisition is not intended to militarize the schools but to serve as a "rescue vehicle." He pointed out that all weapons capabilities would be removed and up to \$30,000 worth of medical supplies and teddy bears would be carried in the armored truck. The vehicle was also repainted white with red crosses. The school district intends to lease the armored truck for up to \$60,000 a year to raise money for additional police vehicles.

In reality, the arming of school police with military grade weapons is not designed for the safety or well being of the students or the community, but is part of a political agenda to acclimate working class neighborhoods and youth to a militarized police presence. The possession of the armored vehicle is part of a broader process to equip all the police agencies within San Diego with military weapons.

According to *inewssource*, six other agencies throughout

the county have also appropriated military weapons through the 1033 program:

- The San Diego Police Department received 77 M-16A1 assault rifles and an armored truck.

- The San Diego County Sheriff's Department received 10 M14 battle rifles.

- The San Diego Unified Port District Harbor Police received one infrared illuminator.

- The El Cajon Police Department received 10 M-16A1 assault rifles.

- The Escondido Police Department received 25 M-16A1 assault rifles, four M14 battle rifles and an armored truck, among other equipment.

- The National City Police Department received 17 M14 battle rifles.

San Diego is not the only city in the state that has witnessed such a transformation. Nine other school districts throughout California have recently acquired semi-automatic AR-15 assault rifles, including Los Angeles, Santa Ana, Baldwin Park and Fontana. The growing militarization of the police can only be understood in the context of growing social polarization in the United States.

The Obama administration, far from being defenders of the "middle class," have systematically pursued policies to redistribute wealth from the bottom to the very top of the income ladder. Since the financial crash of 2008, 95 percent of income gains have gone to the richest 1 percent of Americans. In 2013 alone, the world's billionaires, 442 of whom are Americans, saw their combined wealth rise another \$1 trillion. While the richest 1 percent of Americans have seen their wealth increase, the yearly income of a typical household has dropped by 12 percent, or \$6,4000 between 2007 and 2013.

The same corporate and financial oligarchs that are pursuing imperialist wars and military occupations abroad are turning their attention inwards. Democracy is incompatible with such levels of social inequality. The ruling elite is being forced to pursue the same policies at home as it carries out abroad.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact