

North Dakota authorizes police to use weaponized drones

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North Dakota has become the first state to explicitly authorize local police departments to mount weapons, including tasers, sound cannons, teargas and non-penetrating firearms, on unmanned aerial vehicles, also known as drones.

Ironically, the legislation that authorized the weaponizing of drones was introduced under the guise of protecting personal privacy by requiring warrants for drone surveillance. The initial proposal would have banned mounting weapons on drones, but police lobbyists teamed with representatives of the burgeoning drone industry to transform the bill.

Police drones have the capacity to intrude upon personal privacy in a way that no technology currently, or in the past, has allowed. Equipped with advanced weaponry, they can be used for targeted killings as the Obama administration has done repeatedly in Pakistan, Yemen, Iraq and Syria. A Hellfire missile fired from a Predator drone was used to kill an American citizen, Anwar al Awlaki, in Yemen in 2011.

The murderous use of Predator drones is directed from the Grand Forks Air Force Base in eastern North Dakota, and drone manufactures have located nearby.

Despite their growing use, most states have no laws regulating police drones. As reported by the WSWW last year, the San Jose, California police department quietly used a federal grant to purchase a surveillance drone in 2013. (See “San Jose, California police acquire a drone”)

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has issued drone permits to more than 100 law enforcement agencies nationally, including the Ventura County Sheriff’s Office in California. The notorious Los Angeles Police Department acquired two drones last year.

California is among those states that have no

restrictions at all on police drones. The state government, heavily dominated by the Democratic Party, has so far refused to enact even the most cursory laws to prevent local police departments from using drones to gather information without any suspicion of criminal conduct, or to store covert recordings indefinitely.

On August 24, the state Assembly approved proposed legislation that restricts people from flying their privately owned drones over private property without the owner’s consent, but refused to act on another bill that would require warrants for similar drone flights by local police agencies, and compel the implementation of privacy policies for storing and destroying recordings.

The measure was opposed by police lobbyists, who reject any limitation on drone spying. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) opposed the measure, but only because it would have imposed no limits on surveillance in public places and would allow police agencies to use drones without the approval of local governments.

California’s Democratic governor, Jerry Brown, vetoed legislation last year that would have required local police to obtain warrants for drone searches of private property, and to routinely destroy surveillance recordings after a year. Brown said the measure, which was passed over the opposition of lobbyists for law enforcement agencies, was too restrictive.

These intrusions on the privacy and security of masses of people are being implemented behind the backs of the population, with only token and generally gutless opposition from civil libertarians.

The growing, unrestricted use of police drones is a necessary part of a growing conspiracy directed against the working class. As social tensions in the United

States continue to rise, the methods of repression pioneered overseas in the course of the so-called war on terror are being brought home.



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