Police carry out militarized lockdown of UCLA after murder-suicide

Adam Mclean
3 June 2016

On Wednesday morning, Mainak Sarkar, previously an engineering student at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), shot and killed his former engineering teacher, Professor William Klug, in his office. Shortly after, Sarkar took his own life at the same location. Another reported victim, believed to be Sarkar's wife, was found dead in Minnesota.

Police also reportedly found a "kill list" in Sarkar's Minnesota home including his wife's name and that of another UCLA professor. The second named professor is alive and unharmed.

Multiple police departments, including several SWAT teams and the FBI, swarmed the UCLA campus in response to reports of a shooting. By the time they arrived on campus, however, the shooter was already dead. Despite this, the entire 420-acre campus—one of the biggest in the state, with about 42,000 students—was put on lockdown.

There have been numerous images of students and teachers waiting on their knees, or marching with their hands above their heads, all under the eyes of police officers armed to the teeth.

Facts are still emerging about the incident, but the media has latched onto these events to incite panic and to justify the police lockdown of the campus. Early reports from the media called it a mass shooting and even promulgated exaggerated reports of multiple shooters on campus. These reports were completely unsubstantiated and served only to whip up hysteria.

By most accounts, the police response caused more panic and distress than the shooting itself.

One student reported seeing a man holding a shotgun walking through the hall of his building. Having received an alert on his phone about an active shooter on campus, the student panicked and ran, fearing for his life. He later reflected that he wasn't sure if he saw the shooter or an officer. This was almost certainly an officer, as Sarkar had killed himself by the time the alert was sent out.

A main consideration behind the heavy militarization of the police and their mass mobilization in situations such as these is the preparation for large scale suppression of an eruption of working class opposition.

Pictures from the scene, which show multiple officers decked out in body armor, fatigues, and armed with long semi-automatic rifles recall the lockdown Boston and the suppression of popular protests against police violence in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland.

At this point, it seems that the shooter's immediate motivation was largely personal. Sarkar accused the professor of stealing some of his ideas and denounced him online on several occasions.

The shooting occurs within a broader social context. In the US, there have been 186 school shootings since the Sandy Hook massacre in 2012. According to Everytownresearch.org, there were eight shootings at schools in the US in May alone.

Workplace shootings are even more prevalent. A 2014 US Centers for Disease Control report that looked at data over a 20 year period found an average of over 700 workplace homicides annually.

The pervasiveness of these acts of violence cannot be ezplained by lax gun laws. They come from a society beset by deep economic, social and political crises.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site