

Three incidents of police brutality spark outrage across US

Jessica Goldstein**19 June 2019**

Three incidents of police brutality in the United States over the past month have sparked public outrage. Each incident exposes the systematic brutality that workers in all areas of the US suffer at the hands of police on a daily basis.

Corona, California

On Friday, an off-duty LAPD cop shot and killed an unarmed young man and wounded his two parents, Russell and Paola French, who were also unarmed, inside of a Costco Wholesale store in Corona, California. The parents were taken to hospitals in critical condition.

Kenneth French, 32, was nonverbal and was living with an intellectual disability at the time of his death. He had the mental abilities of a teenager, according to family members, and lived with his parents. French appeared to be well-liked according to his Facebook profile and was studying accounting at a nearby university.

The exact details surrounding the shooting of French and his parents remain unclear. Costco has security cameras throughout its massive retail stores, yet no video footage or witness reports of the shooting from inside the store have been released. The name of the police officer who shot French and his family has not been released as of this writing.

The officer alleges that French attacked him while he was holding his child and getting free samples at the store. The officer's attorney told the press that he was knocked unconscious and woke up "fighting for his life."

The public is right to be skeptical of such a defense. In the US, police fatally shoot roughly 1,000 people each year who pose little threat to the cops who murder them. French's cousin, Rick Shureih, disputes the claims by the police department that the off-duty cop's life was in danger.

"It could have been that he bumped into somebody but couldn't communicate the fact that he was sorry," he told the *Washington Post*. Shureih described his cousin as a "gentle giant" who would never intentionally hurt anybody, and his aunt and uncle as "the sweetest people in the world." He has called for witnesses to be allowed to tell their account of events and for footage of Costco security cameras that recorded the incident to be released. Other family members have also called for the officer who shot the French family to be arrested.

Dale K. Galipo, attorney for the French family, said in a

statement to the press that the shooting was "excessive and completely unjustified because Mr. French was unarmed and posed no immediate threat of death or serious bodily injury to anyone ... There seems to be unequal treatment of police officers compared to other citizens when deadly force is used, causing death or serious bodily injury, which is a great concern to many members of the community."

Phoenix, Arizona

On Saturday, disturbing video footage was released of the violent May 29 harassment and arrest of a young African-American family by Phoenix, Arizona police officers.

Police confronted 22-year-old Dravon Ames, his pregnant fiancée Iesha Harper, and their two children, aged one and four years old, in the parking lot of the family babysitter's apartment complex. Multiple police officers in cars accosted the family after allegedly receiving a call from a Family Dollar store employee who reported the theft of a toy doll by the four-year-old.

In a scene shockingly similar to stories of the war crimes committed by the US Armed Forces against civilians in the Middle East, Officer Christopher Meyer pulled Ames from the car. Meyer then proceeded to hurl obscenities at Ames in front of the crying children and ordered him to put his hands up. After Ames shouted "My hands are up" to show that he was complying, Meyer threatened to shoot him and pushed him against the side of an armored police vehicle, where he handcuffed him. The officer kicked Ames in his leg so hard that he fell to the ground.

Meyer then terrorized Harper and the children as they looked on, shouting "I'll shoot you in front of your f---ing kids" and ordered her to drop her child on the hot pavement. The video shows Harper pleading with police not to harm her because she is pregnant and is seen trying to protect her one-year-old child as the officer attempts to rip her from her arms. A witness came down and took the children from Harper's arms before police dragged her into a car.

Bystanders recorded the videos that were released. Although Phoenix police are required to wear body cameras, none were turned on throughout the entire incident. The police have since reported that no one in the family was armed. The family is suing the Phoenix Police Department for \$10 million.

Phoenix Democratic Mayor Kate Gallego issued a perfunctory statement via Twitter on Saturday: “There is no situation in which this behavior is ever close to acceptable ... seeing these children placed in such a terrifying situation is beyond upsetting.”

The Phoenix Police Department claims that it was not aware of the footage until Tuesday, and Police Chief Jeri Williams announced on Friday that she would begin an investigation. The officers who committed the assault on the family have been assigned to desk duty, the typical slap-on-the-wrist given to police officers accused of brutality.

Ames told reporters in a press conference that he does not believe that the public apologies made by the Police Department and the mayor are sincere, noting that they were “hollow.”

South Bend, Indiana

On Sunday, a South Bend police officer, Sergeant Ryan O’Neill, shot and killed 53-year-old husband and father of five Eric Jack Logan in the Central High School Apartments parking lot. Police claim that they were responding to a call about a person breaking into vehicles when they confronted and shot a man partially inside of a car, later identified as Logan. The police claimed that Logan waved a knife at them, which Logan’s family members dispute, saying that he never carried knives or guns with him.

Shafonia Logan expressed outrage at the killing of her husband at the hands of the South Bend police. “I don’t know what happened or what they say, with breaking into a car. Was that justified for you to shoot and kill him about breaking into a car?” Residents of South Bend were also angered to learn that O’Neill neither had his police body camera nor his headlights on when he shot Logan.

The shooting prompted South Bend mayor and Democratic presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg to cancel campaign events in New York and fly back to South Bend for damage control, and to save whatever face he could for the Democratic Party, which has funneled military grade equipment to the police and expanded police departments across the US in order to better oppress the working class.

South Bend Police Chief Scott Ruszkowski feigned disgust at the events when he met privately with Buttigieg and Logan’s family on Sunday. Sergeant O’Neill, the officer accused of killing Logan, has been placed on administrative leave.

The three assaults have seen an outpouring of public support for the victims, and at the same time, outrage at the injustice of the policy brutality that has become part of daily life for workers and youth in the US.

On Kenneth French’s Facebook profile, supporters wrote:

“We don’t even know what happened yet. For all we know that cop was at fault, or shot someone over a fight. Which in that case, would be wrong as well. He also shot the guys elderly mother and father. All were unarmed. Seems excessive to me no matter what the facts are seeing as how they were all

unarmed. I hope the truth comes out and the cop goes to jail.”

“I smell foul play here and the officer should be held accountable to set an example that being a police officer does not make you above the law. Think about it, I hope the DA adds more charges too.”

One video recording of the assault of Ames, Harper and their children in Phoenix has over 201,000 views and 2,900 retweets on Twitter as of this writing, and thousands more on other social media platforms. Virtually all comments centered around the injustice of the brutality against a defenseless family, including children, and the lack of faith in the US criminal justice system to find the officers guilty of the crimes they committed.

Each reaction by elected officials and police departments to these cases serves the same purpose: to suppress or redirect mass anger at the increasingly common and violent police killings and assaults.

The police function as the armed guards of the capitalist state. Democrats and Republicans alike are arming the police with military weapons left over from imperialist wars abroad and military training in order to prepare to violently suppress the working class at home. More than ever, the ruling capitalist class and its political servants fear the mass struggles of workers against the capitalist system, which are bound to grow as wages and jobs are cut and the cost of basic necessities like housing and healthcare become more and more out of reach for working class families.

Workers who are angered at the rise of police brutality in the US and wish to fight back will find no way forward through the bankrupt calls for “police reform” by the Democratic Party and those groups that operate in its orbit such as Black Lives Matter, the Democratic Socialists of America and others who ignore the class issues involved in police violence and attempt to paint police killings as a purely racial issue.

Workers who want to fight back against police violence will only be able to do so under a genuine socialist program, by connecting the struggle against police violence to the struggles against war, for good jobs with benefits and high wages, the right to public education and a safe workplace. They must break from the capitalist political parties to link up internationally with teachers, healthcare workers, industrial workers and logistics workers worldwide who are fighting for these same basic rights, under a program aimed at placing the means of production into the hands of the working class, and overthrow the capitalist system of exploitation which necessitates the use of police violence to guard the wealth and privileges of the few.



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