

Oakland, California: With guns drawn, police evict homeless mothers from house

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In the early morning hours on Tuesday, police officers forcibly evicted and arrested members of “Moms 4 Housing,” a group of homeless women who advocate for affordable housing, from the vacant home on Magnolia Street in Oakland, California, which they had been occupying since mid-November.

With appeals for affordable housing and calls for housing as a basic right, Moms 4 Housing was able to attract a protest of several hundred people the night before the eviction. Police waited until early morning when most people had cleared out to begin their work.

In a gratuitous display of force, a SWAT team wielding semi-automatic AR-15s broke down the front door of the house with a battering ram, sent a robot into the house to check for weapons, and arrested the residents of the house along with two protesters.

An armored BearCat vehicle, essentially a police tank, was present on the residential streets during the eviction. Apparently, such was considered necessary for the eviction of half a dozen women and their children.

Those arrested were released on Tuesday afternoon after posting \$5,000 bail, raised through a GoFundMe page to support the group.

Despite being the wealthiest state in the United States, with an economy larger than the United Kingdom, California has by far the most homeless people in the country. A 2018 point-in-time survey found that there were about 130,000 homeless people in California, while a 2019 point-in-time survey found that there were approximately 568,000 homeless people across the country at that time.

There are over 150 billionaires in the state of California, more than in any other. Rather than using the vast natural wealth and human capital of the state to ensure a decent standard of living for everyone—including access to basic social rights such as housing, healthcare and education—the wealth of the state is tied up in the bank

accounts of a tiny minority.

The wealth of Hollywood and Silicon Valley does not find its way into the pockets of the state’s workers. Rather, the ridiculously high cost of housing throughout the state has made it the epicenter of the national housing crisis.

The modest three-bedroom house on Magnolia Street the women were evicted from, pictured here in the aftermath of their eviction and arrest, was bought by the Wedgewood Properties real estate conglomerate shortly after the women moved in for \$500,000--a relatively low sum for Oakland, where the median price for a home is \$750,000. It is currently priced at \$630,000, according to Zillow.com.

Such high prices have edged out many workers from being able to afford a home, and leave many of those still able to afford one saddled with enormous amounts of debt.

While there is little relief for the working class, there are ample resources available to law enforcement. The militarization of everyday life in the US since the beginning of the “war on terror” has seen the most egregious police actions become a daily affair. Although there are no official figures, there were over 900 people killed by police in the US in 2019, according to killedbypolice.net. Moreover, the brutality and callousness of the police forces has grown over this period, culminating in acts such as the eviction on Magnolia Street Tuesday night.

Sgt. Ray Kelly, a spokesman for the Alameda County Sheriff’s Office, boasted after the eviction that he considered the militarized operation a success, and added that “there was a tremendous amount of work that went into this and we had to think outside the box a little bit.” He noted that the operation cost the department “tens of thousands of dollars,” and that they were considering directly billing Wedgewood, the real-estate company that

owned the property.

Wedgewood, operating across the western US as well as in Florida, specializes in renovating homes and flipping them for a profit. The surrounding neighborhood has been gentrifying, raising the cost of housing and pushing poorer residents out. Moms 4 Housing expressed their opposition to Wedgewood in a statement the day before their eviction, saying, “We want speculators out of our community ... They’re coming in, they’re profiting off harm that’s done in our community and we want them out.”

Clearly outlining their own class position, Wedgewood released a statement on Tuesday saying, “Wedgewood is pleased the illegal occupation of its Oakland home has ended peacefully. ... The solution to Oakland’s housing crisis is not the redistribution of citizens’ homes through illegal break-ins and seizures by squatters.”

Upon her release from jail, Dominique Walker, the lead mother in Moms 4 Housing, recounted the arrest to local media: “I never would’ve thought they’d use the excessive force that they did. ... The robots that came in the house, the force that they used to take us out of the house—it was unnecessary.”

The WSWS spoke to residents of the neighborhood Wednesday in the aftermath of the raid.

Bonnie, who lives down the street from the house where Moms 4 Housing were staying, said of the eviction, “The police response and eviction was totally overkill. It’s another example that goes to show that our judicial system, our whole legal system, its primary goal is to protect corporate America.

“A corporation owns this home, so if one of the millionaire owners says they have to do this eviction, they have to do it full force, because money is a motivating factor. They shouldn’t be able to come in here with tanks and rifles like that. But it’s the same as before. Back in the 1970s they killed a member of the Black Panther Party at a house just around the block. The police are there to serve the rich and corporate America. They act on their behalf.”



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