

Alabama executes death-row inmate in third nitrogen asphyxiation execution

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Thursday marked the third time that Alabama has carried out an execution via nitrogen gas asphyxiation, whereby the victim is deprived of oxygen by its displacement with nitrogen, resulting in death by suffocation.

The latest victim of the grisly execution method was convicted murderer Carey Dale Grayson, who had been put on death row in 1996 at the age of 19 for the murder of Vickie Deblieux, 37, a brutal act which he and three other teenagers were convicted of carrying out.

While the other three youths had their death sentences commuted to life imprisonment due to a ruling by the US Supreme Court preventing death sentences for youth, Grayson's remained due to his age. Grayson was killed at the age of 50, having spent most of his life on death row.

Deblieux's daughter, Jodi Haley, took a principled stand against the execution and condemned the state's actions despite the loss of her mother.

"Carey Dale Grayson, as a child, he was abused in every possible way, cigarettes put out on his skin because he was standing there ... physical abuse, mental, sexual, thrown out onto the streets as a young adolescent, and I have to wonder how this slips through the cracks of our justice system, because society failed this man as a child and my family suffered because of it.

"Murdering inmates under the guise of justice needs to stop." Denouncing revenge, she said, "No one should have the right to take a person's possibilities, days, moments, life."

Nitrogen gas was pumped into Grayson's lungs from a respirator, causing him to shake violently, pull at his restraints and clench his fists. According to the Associated Press, he gasped for air more than a dozen

times. At 6:14 p.m. his legs lifted off the gurney and into the air.

Grayson only lost consciousness around six minutes after the gas started flowing, at around 6:18 p.m. He appeared to stop breathing at 6:21 p.m. Alabama Corrections Commissioner John Q. Hamm said the nitrogen gas flowed for 15 minutes, and Grayson no longer had a heartbeat after around 10 minutes.

Hamm callously claimed that Grayson's movements at the beginning were for show.

The time that it took Grayson to go unconscious was significantly longer than with other barbaric and cruel methods of execution, which usually take anywhere from a few seconds to a couple of minutes.

The Alabama attorney general's office told a judge that nitrogen gas would "cause unconsciousness within seconds and death within minutes." It, in fact, conforms with what Grayson's attorneys argued, that the new method causes "conscious suffocation" and does not result in swift unconsciousness.

Grayson, like the two other men executed in Alabama via nitrogen asphyxiation, including Kenneth Eugene Smith, died an agonizing and prolonged death, which easily fits the legal definition of torture and took well over the "seconds" that the attorney general claimed would cause unconsciousness. Smith, the first-ever victim of a nitrogen gas execution, stated right before his execution on January 25: "Tonight Alabama causes humanity to take a step backwards."

Before this, he was awake, and when asked for his final words, he responded with an obscenity apparently directed towards state officials, after which his microphone was cut off. He raised both middle fingers at the start of the execution.

The aim of these executions is in no small part to pave the way for more executions via the readily

available gas—which composes around 78 percent of the Earth’s atmosphere on average—after companies that had made execution drugs ceased providing those drugs amid well-justified public outrage.

Not only does the execution fly in the face of human rights, with the first of its sort being condemned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk, but it violates Eighth Amendment protections against cruel and unusual punishment in the US Constitution and signifies a further erosion of democratic rights.

This follows decades of attacks, including the assassination of US citizens by drones under Obama, mass spying on American citizens. It now is taking place as the incoming Trump administration is preparing an unprecedented assault on democratic rights. When he was last president, Donald Trump oversaw 13 federal executions, the fastest pace on record.

The death penalty, far from providing any justice, is a tool which the state retains for use primarily against the working class, and as such must be opposed by all workers as part of a fight against the threat of dictatorship, war, and inequality, and for socialism.



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