

Social War Policing and Pacification in the Suburbs

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2021

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Police are an invention of capitalist social war—what is sometimes called the war of class against class. Policing is the domestic force for the defense of capital *par excellence*. Police forces as we know them did not emerge prior to the development of capitalist social (and property) relations. They are constructed as necessary instruments of the war over labour and land (commons). Capitalist property (in land, labour, commodities) relations are not elements of nature or evolution. They must be created, reproduced, and maintained by force. Key in this is the re/production of labour markets—human capacities rendered as saleable commodities.

Because the working class always fights, resists, in various ways—openly and in less visible forms—to disrupt or throw off its commodification, capital must deploy force to maintain the working class in its position as labour commodity—and to regulate the conditions of sale and use of that commodity—for capital. Police might well be more properly called pacification or counter-insurgency forces, given that these are their real social roles.

Suburbs are social sites in which the contemporary social war character of policing is often on clearest display. This is related to their place as sites of industry (production and distribution centres) and working-class community growth. Many suburbs are home to diverse working-class communities, especially racialized migrant communities, because they are sites of lower cost working-class residence and rapid development (and gentrification). Policing in this context is perhaps nowhere more instructive than in Surrey, in so-called British Columbia.

Surrey: The (Policing) Future Lives Here

Surrey (occupied Kwantlen, Katzie, Semiahmoo territories) proclaims itself a city of the future, through its tagline “The Future Lives Here.” We might well hope that is not the case because, whatever that boast might mean, the reality of the present is one of repressive and intense policing. As a historically blue-collar working-class city with large racialized communities, and the second largest urban Indigenous population in so-called British Columbia, Surrey has been a site of expansive policing practices, driven by racist gang and drug panics. Surrey has innovated the Surrey Model of layered policing, extending policing into aspects of everyday life such as schools, community centres, and health care.

We understand in Surrey the struggles against policing to be in many ways an everyday ongoing part of our lived reality. We are subjected to policing that is carried out by state forces within a framework of what is nothing less than a social or a class war.

The Obvious Social War Militarization

As residents of Surrey, we are subjected to conditions of social war on an everyday basis. By this I mean the use of police in a military fashion within our everyday lives in our neighborhoods. This includes on the one hand helicopter flights over our communities, with searchlights into our backyards, into our homes. It also involves the deployment of armoured personnel carriers in the city—a Bearcat has been deployed up and down King George Boulevard, a major thoroughfare in the Surrey.

More recently, we see that the police have been experimenting with the use of drones, which are a leading edge of contemporary warfare. Drones are being deployed on an experimental

basis in Surrey, raising a whole range of new questions about issues of surveillance, privacy, and intrusion into our daily lives.

As is the case for many current social war policing advances, repressive and surveillance equipment expansion is justified through gang panic-based fear politics. And this is carried out along racialized lines, in Surrey especially targeting South Asian communities.

Subtler Pacification: Layered Policing

Beyond more obvious forms of military pacification, we also experience subtler forms of counterinsurgency through layered policing. Layered policing involves the development of community forms of policing through organizations and relationships that take forms that are not obvious as policing or are not at first glance repressive. These include police-aligned sporting and “community” groups, policing and mental health partnerships, and police “charity” efforts. It also includes other forms of policing, such as so-called street ambassadors, that target survival strategies of poor people, visible poverty, or unhoused neighbors, or activities such as graffiti or low-level drug trade, under the guise of “liveability” (for businesses).

In reality, layered policing forms are also efforts by police on a daily basis to recruit out of the community not only new officers but also snitches and the development of snitch networks. In layered policing, cops are trying to get people turning on their neighbours. This is a cornerstone of military pacification under conditions of occupation. Surrey has gone far in developing these techniques of pacification, becoming renowned for the Surrey Model, which they have sent officers around the province to export to other cities.

Always Militarized: Always Social War

Some have recently given much attention to the so-called militarization of policing, especially in the context of protests and the deployment of heavily armoured military officers (looking like military personnel) and military weaponry at public demonstrations.

We need to remember the context in Surrey where one of our municipal forces is the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which has always been a military force. The RCMP was founded as a military force of colonial dispossession and occupation, largely involved in the clearing of Indigenous people from their territories and the expansion of capital for extraction and accumulation and for settlement.

While a new municipal force has now been established in Surrey, at a cost of over \$64 million for the transition alone, it is clear that the social war innovations already in place will be continued and extended under the guise of a new “local” police force. Indeed, the Surrey Police Service has already made a show of its military equipment and resources.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
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