

# Police Killing in the Fields



**Analysis of Actions and Interventions  
Against Police Murder in Salinas, CA**

## November 2014

1.) Lynd: [http://www.montereyherald.com/ci\\_14228624](http://www.montereyherald.com/ci_14228624)

The family of Osmar Hernandez said in their lawsuit that the cops involved in killing their son were implicated in other shootings. The names of the cops who killed Juan Luis Acuna on July, 26 2013 were never released, but the officers involved were members of the Salinas gang task force, County sheriff's department, and Monterey City police, so it is likely that Gibson and/or Lauricella are part of this gang task force unit.

2.) RT, "One dead after protesters riot against police brutality in Salinas, California," <http://rt.com/usa/160820-riots-salinas-california-police-shooting/>

KSBW, "1 killed during riot in Salinas; Demonstrators turn violent against police," <http://www.ksbw.com/news/breaking-news-violence-erupts-on-del-monte-in-salinas/26113072>

3.) Bradley Allen, "Peace Police and Counterinsurgency in Salinas," <http://bradleyallen.net/2014/05/peace-police-counterinsurgency-salinas/>

4.) "DAMN Response to Salinas Demonstrations," <http://solidaritymonterey.wordpress.com/2014/05/24/damn-response-to-the-salinas-demonstrations/>

5.) Bradley Allen, "Salinas PD Kills Three. Let's Have a Rally!" <http://bradleyallen.net/2014/06/salinas-pd-kills-three-lets-rally/>

6.) Sin Barras, "In Memory of Frank Alvarado," <http://sinbarras.org/2014/07/11/in-memory-of-frank-alvarado/>

7.) The Salinas Californian, "Group plans police brutality protest in East Salinas," <http://www.thecalifornian.com/story/news/local/2014/08/15/group-plans-police-brutality-protest-east-salinas/14136979/>

8.) Solidarity Monterey, "Demonstration in Salinas Turns Into Copwatch-in-Action," <http://solidaritymonterey.wordpress.com/2014/08/22/demonstration-in-salinas-turns-into-copwatch-in-action/>

9.) The Salinas Californian, "Protesters ask for justice in wake of police shootings," <http://www.thecalifornian.com/story/news/local/2014/10/22/protesters-ask-justice-wake-police-shootings/17756271/>

10.) Kristian Williams, "The other side of the COIN: counterinsurgency and community policing," <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Interface-3-1-Williams.pdf>

11.) KSBW, "Salinas cops trained with new policing tool: Talking," <http://www.ksbw.com/news/salinas-authorities-employs-new-policing-tool/25870418>

12.) Policy Link, "Beyond Confrontation: Community Centered Policing Tools" <http://www.policylink.org/equity-tools/beyond-confrontation-practices-needed>

13.) Lazzarini: [http://www.montereycountyweekly.com/news/local\\_news/salinas-police-work-overtime-to-try-to-quell-gang-violence/article\\_99781a2b-0abb-5519-bd6c-bf8bb986658c.html](http://www.montereycountyweekly.com/news/local_news/salinas-police-work-overtime-to-try-to-quell-gang-violence/article_99781a2b-0abb-5519-bd6c-bf8bb986658c.html)

14.) "Salinas City Employee Pay Top 20's," <http://archive.thecalifornian.com/assets/pdf/J2220906419.pdf>

of accountability.

Also, many of the cops involved with the shootings this year seem to be part of the SPD Violence Suppression Unit (Gang Task Force),<sup>13</sup> suggesting that the "culture" or trainings of this particular unit might prepare police to respond even more violently than usual. However, it is difficult to really expose these kinds of trends because gang task force officers are often not identified.<sup>14</sup> Still, the fact that different cops were involved in each shooting (and few had been involved with shootings before) shows that the problem is not caused by some "violent cops" or the "wrong trainings", but with the very institution of the police.

Another notable practice is that Salinas Police Chief McMillin has been running around the central coast on a PR campaign, speaking at various places such as a bookstore in Santa Cruz, a small graduate college in Monterey, and a community college in Salinas. SPD appears to be reaching out to the more white, affluent populations in the region in an attempt to convince them that SPD is simply doing their best in Salinas and to ignore the daily intimidation, harassment, and violence that they unleash upon the community in East Salinas. We've joined Sin Barras and our friends from Salinas at several of these events to heckle McMillin and to expose SPD as the violent, oppressive institution that it is.

Furthermore, we've tried to distill a few lessons from our experiences this year, and these sentiments are echoed among many others who live in a region where spontaneous resistance to police violence has occurred. The most obvious is to always be prepared for shit to go down and to immediately support people who respond with antagonism towards the police. For example, we were unable to connect with the man who was arrested on May 21st to offer him support through the legal process. Seeing an example of people supporting each other through the whole ordeal rather than dealing with it on their own might have helped other people overcome their fear of risking arrest by coming to demonstrations and getting a bit rowdy.

The most important lesson we learned is to work directly with friends and family of victims and connect with people whose ideas resonate with our own. Organizing independently makes co-optation by nonprofits more difficult, but it cannot be done without strong relationships with people who live in the area. We are only beginning to build those relationships which were almost non-existent in May. For now, we continue to pursue autonomous and anti-authoritarian responses to police violence and stand in solidarity with those who are doing the same.

This year in Salinas, CA four unarmed Latino men have been shot and killed by the police: Angel Ruiz (holding an airsoft gun) on March 21st, Osmar Hernandez<sup>1</sup> (holding a lettuce cutting knife) on May 10th, Carlos Mejia (holding garden shears) on May 20th, and Frank Alvarado (holding a cell phone) on July 10th. Salinas is a small agricultural town (~150k people) in Monterey County with a large population of farm-workers who are largely segregated to the east side of town known as the Alisal neighborhood. While police murders of unarmed Latinx people in Salinas has happened in the past, the number of shootings this year is unprecedented (another man died on October 31st after being tased by police, but his death may have been due to a drug overdose).

However, the community's response to these shootings was also unique. On Wednesday, May 21st, the night after the video of Carlos Mejia's murder spread quickly through social media, a spontaneous demonstration turned into a small-scale riot. People shut down the intersection of Sanborn and Del Monte where Mejias was killed. They threw bottles and rocks at police and smashed a few windows on police cars. Salinas PD called for reinforcements from neighboring cities as far away as Santa Cruz.

In a tangentially related incident, a man was shot and killed a couple blocks from the riot. When police and medics showed up people charged towards them and attacked the cops. A cop who was watching medics provide CPR was hit in the head by a bottle and sent to the hospital. The local media claimed that the cop was actually providing CPR to the gunshot victim, but this is contradicted by video shared by local news stations. Attempts to relate the shooting to the riot have also been challenged by people who were there, but the media certainly tried to make the connection. Many news stories about that night implied that the shooting was directly caused by the riot.<sup>2</sup> Based on conversations with friends in Salinas, this reporting strongly deterred people from returning to subsequent demonstrations.

Of course, we also see the typical media reactions including a focus on the supposed "violence" of demonstrators with hardly any mention of the violence of the police that triggered this response from the community; demonizing protesters and blaming them for getting out of control; blaming them for not snitching about the shooting that took place that night; posting the mugshot of the one man who got arrested at the riot.

On Thursday, May 22nd, the night following this small riot, members of the Direct Action Monterey Network (DAMN) joined the demonstrations. By the time we arrived, local nonprofits, civil rights organizations, and politicians had already began recuperating the elements that they could and excluding people who refused to be silenced or controlled.

The local "progressive" organizations divided themselves into two camps. Local city official who pretend to oppose the local political establishment,

and those aligned with them, held a meeting at a church a couple blocks away from the location of Mejia's murder. The other faction, consisting of nonprofits and activist-types, held a competing program at a community center across the street from the politicians' church meeting. A small demonstration was held in front of this community center before their program.

We joined the demonstration in front of the community center because a friend of ours who was involved had invited us. However, when we unfurled our banner that read "Desarmen a la policia," we were surrounded by the main organizers and told that our banner was too aggressive. We knew some of these organizers from participating in a local coalition that is challenging jail expansion and were (foolishly) surprised by their reaction. Meanwhile, the other organizers began to usher everyone inside for their meeting. We realized that the crowd across the street consisted of all of the angry people who the nonprofits had kicked out of their demonstration, so we obviously walked across the street and joined them!

This crowd was markedly different. The signs and chants were all anti-police. People were making fun of the politicians meeting at the church, and they were pissed at the nonprofit groups who excluded them from the demonstration across the street. The numbers and energy had drastically dropped since the previous night. However, we were able to begin connecting with people who share an anti-authoritarian perspective, although there is no organized anarchist or radical presence in Salinas.

If the process of shutting down widespread militancy against the police in Salinas began on Thursday, then by Sunday, May 25th it was finished. A march was organized in East Salinas by the liberal/progressive groups mentioned above, bolstered by the addition of labor union staff, who joined together to repress any antagonistic or anti-police messages. Our friend Bradley Allen from Santa Cruz IndyMedia has written more about the march which was full of yellow-vested "peace police", effectively policing the crowd by surrounding and intimidating people with anti-police messages, controlling the bullhorns and drowning out anti-police chants with generic ones, and keeping people in only one lane on the streets.<sup>3</sup> A member of DAMN was also surrounded and told to stop passing out flyers with our statement.<sup>4</sup>

Since then we've continued to organize with people who we met in May, along with a few of our friends who are from Salinas. For example, we organized a counter demonstration against a pro-cop rally on May 31st<sup>5</sup> and supported a rally/vigil after Frank Alvarado was killed by police in July. Since then we've been working closely with Frank Alvarado's family and Sin Barras, a prison abolition group in Santa Cruz that Frank had been involved with since April, having himself finished a 10 year prison sentence

about a year ago.<sup>6</sup>

From July to mid-September we were meeting regularly with our newly found accomplices, calling our group Ni Una Muerte Mas. We tried organizing a community forum in East Salinas, but we were told by library staff that the city wouldn't let us hold our forum there because of the "anti-police" image on our flyer.<sup>7</sup> Instead, we held a demonstration against police violence which turned into a mass CopWatch when a man was almost arrested across the street.<sup>8</sup> Although the group no longer meets, we've stayed in contact with everyone and held another demonstration against police violence in front of the Salinas police station on October 22nd.<sup>9</sup>

Along with organizing and supporting visible expressions of opposition to police violence in Salinas, we have also been researching and exposing the practices and strategies of the police. While others have written about SPD's implementation of counterinsurgency practices brought to them by military personnel from the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey,<sup>10</sup> their latest strategies seem to be coming from the Chicago police department.<sup>11</sup> This approach, known as Procedural Justice and Police Legitimacy, appears to focus on the "soft" side of counterinsurgency. It essentially consists of trying to convince people to accept a strong police presence in their community. Of course, most people see through this, so it requires certain elements within a community to work with the police, such as the groups who shut down any anti-police sentiment in the demonstrations in May. This softer side is also paired with exceptionally harsh violence to control anyone who might slip out of the deceptive grasp of the nonprofit/friendly-cop alliance. It is worth mentioning that Oakland PD, another notoriously violent police force, has apparently been training in "procedural justice and police legitimacy" since June 2014.<sup>12</sup>

The evolution of SPD's strategies from explicit counterinsurgency to "police legitimacy" could still be better understood, but we have noticed a few interesting trends. With the help of internet archives we discovered that some time in May 2013 the SPD website was updated with images of smiling cops, but the names of various officers and their departments were removed.

The names of the cops involved in the shootings this year were not even released until early October, and even then probably only in response to community pressure or to avoid investigations from the Justice Department. The names of the cops in the only police shooting that we are aware of in 2013 have not been released at all. Yet before 2013 the names of police involved in shootings were regularly released. We are not suggesting that the SPD was preparing for a wave of shootings, but these trends do point at some changes in their policies that create the facade of a friendly police force which in reality further protects individual cops from any form