

Australian paramilitary police kill man in Brisbane siege

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Amid an ongoing campaign of terrorism scare-mongering and large-scale police raids and operations, heavily-armed officers from a police paramilitary unit shot a 42-year-old man in a hail of automatic gunfire in the Brisbane working-class suburb of Inala yesterday.

TV news footage showed police commandos firing multiple shots at pointblank range at the man after he emerged from a car allegedly holding what police said appeared to be a handgun. The man, whose name has not been released, was then dragged out of the vehicle by officers who handcuffed him at about 4 p.m. before declaring he was in a critical condition. He died at the scene a short time later, unable to be revived by an ambulance crew.

It was the second fatal police shooting in Australia in a matter of days, following last Thursday's police killing of 17-year-old Abdul Numan Haider in the Melbourne suburb of Endeavour Hills.

Unlike Haider, who was immediately branded a "terror suspect" by the police, the media and Prime Minister Tony Abbott, before any investigation into his death even began, no such allegations were made against the man shot in Inala. A police spokesman said there was nothing to suggest the incident was terrorism-related.

Nevertheless, the police turned a confrontation with the man into a four-hour siege, during which they declared an "emergency situation" and locked down residential areas extending hundreds of metres. Traffic was blocked from the "exclusion zone" and residents told to remain indoors, creating an atmosphere of alarm.

Despite police commanders indicating that the man made no threats to anyone, the 60-man Queensland police Special Emergency Response Team (SERT) was mobilised. It used two armoured "Bearcat" vehicles

and squads of police marksmen to besiege the man in a car parked at the front of a block of apartments.

The man, who appeared to be agitated but was regarded as unlikely to present a danger, was initially given a mobile phone in order to negotiate with police. Then he was suddenly surrounded by police in full armour, pointing heavy weapons at him from all sides.

Earlier in the day, Inspector Richard Kroon said police were conducting an investigation at the apartments when they began speaking to the man. "There's no real threat," Kroon told reporters, saying that police were speaking to the man by phone.

After the shooting, Queensland Police Union president Ian Leavers quickly declared that the police officers acted lawfully in self-defence "to protect their lives." He said officers did not know whether the man's gun was real and they had to make a split second decision. "As we now know, a firearm was pointed at police," he said.

No handgun has yet been produced by the police, however. Leavers' comments, which were featured uncritically throughout the media, make a mockery of the promised internal investigation by the Police Ethical Standards Command, which will form the basis of a report for the state coroner.

Police were called to the scene about 11.45 a.m. and declared an emergency situation 20 minutes later. The declaration, made under Queensland's 1986 Public Safety Preservation Act, was eventually revoked just after 5 p.m.

It was the second emergency declared in Brisbane yesterday. At about 7.20 a.m., police invoked emergency powers in Ipswich, another large working-class community, after an abandoned suitcase was reported at a bus stop. Surrounding streets near the Ipswich City Mall were cordoned off and several

buildings evacuated. The supposed bomb scare proved to be false. Police said the suitcase contained only “personal items” and the emergency was revoked at 9.15 a.m.

This was also the third bomb scare in Brisbane since September 12, giving another indication of the atmosphere of fear and police mobilisation that has been whipped up since the federal government raised the official “terrorism alert” level on that date. The alert was followed by Australia’s largest-ever police and intelligence agency “counter-terrorism” raids on September 18, conducted on homes and premises in Sydney and Brisbane. Further such raids, involving about 100 state and federal police, were underway this morning across five Melbourne suburbs.

The deployment of the SERT squad in Inala underscores the expansion and increasing use of paramilitary police, which regularly train with the military. SERT took delivery of its first Lenco BearCat armoured vehicle in 2011, under the previous Labor state government, and a second was provided by the federal Labor government in 2012.

Similar commando units have been created in every state and within the Australian Federal Police since the late 1960s. They have featured in the “terrorism” raids and are often dispatched to provide an intimidating presence at political protests.

Yesterday’s Public Safety Preservation Act declarations highlight the far-reaching authority in the hands of the police and governments, both state and federal, to declare emergencies that give the police draconian powers that tear up basic legal and democratic rights.

Queensland’s legislation permits a police commander to declare an emergency simply if he is “satisfied on reasonable grounds” that “an emergency situation has arisen or is likely to arise.” An “emergency situation” can be an explosion, fire, natural disaster or “any other accident” that “causes or may cause” any one of the following: death, injury, “distress to any person,” property damage or pollution.

A police emergency commander then has wide-ranging powers, such as to shut down entire areas, issue directives, enter and search premises, seize property and forcibly remove people. Anyone who fails to comply with a directive faces imprisonment for up to a year.

Police shootings and fatal taser attacks have occurred with increasing frequency in Australia in recent years, always followed by official justifications by governments and police chiefs that the police involved feared for their own safety. This recurring pattern points to an institutionalised “shoot to kill” policy, which is now being pursued within the framework of the Abbott government’s renewal of the “war on terror.”

The show of force in Inala also occurred in the lead-up to mid-November’s G20 summit in Brisbane, which will see a massive police-military operation to block any protests against the gathering of government leaders, many of whom are now participating in the new US-led war in Iraq and Syria, and the threats to Russia over Ukraine.

Just last Friday, the Queensland police announced an extension of the dates and locations of the heavily-fortified security zones that will be established in and around the city for about 10 days, manned by more than 5,000 police. Special police powers will be in place, clearly directed against anticipated political demonstrations.

These preparations underline the real purpose of the police-state conditions on display in Inala and in the “terrorism” raids. The security agencies are establishing precedents to deal with the mounting opposition to the agenda of war and austerity being imposed by the ruling corporate elite and its political representatives.



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