

Australia: Inala residents voice concerns about police shooting

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New information from local residents has raised further questions about why and how heavily-armed police commandos fatally shot a man after surrounding him for several hours in the Brisbane working class suburb of Inala last week.

After training about a dozen guns and semi-automatic rifles at the man for hours, para-military police commandos killed him in a hail of automatic gunfire. Police fired multiple shots at point-blank range after he emerged from a car allegedly holding a handgun. He died at the scene a short time later.

People living in the small cluster of public housing townhouses where the victim was shot were traumatised and shocked by the heavy-handed tactics that police used. They said the confrontation with the man, now known to be Shaun Kumeroa, a 42-year-old former oil rig worker, could have been resolved by police negotiating with the obviously troubled man.

Those who spoke to the WSWs described the police Special Emergency Response Team (SERT) siege of their complex and the nearby streets as a show of force designed to terrify people. It took place amid the scare-mongering produced by the federal government's raising of the official "terrorism" alert level, and was a trial run for the use of SERT during next month's G20 summit in Brisbane.

For five hours, the police declared an "emergency situation." They utilised their emergency powers under the state of Queensland's Public Safety Preservation Act to lock down entire blocks of Inala, near the main shopping centre, the Inala Plaza. They imposed "no go zones," took control of the homes facing the car park where the shooting occurred, and seized mobile phones and video cameras of the residents who filmed the events.

Last Monday's fatal police shooting was the second

in Australia within days, following the previous Thursday's police killing of 17-year-old Abdul Numan Haider in the Melbourne suburb of Endeavour Hills. It occurred during the same week that Prime Minister Tony Abbott announced that Australian troops and war planes would join the US-led combat operations in Iraq.

Unlike Haider, Kumeroa was not accused of being an Islamic "terrorist suspect." Nonetheless, the police turned the incident into a major emergency involving about 100 officers, the establishment of a command centre in an adjacent street, and the deployment of SERT commandos with an armoured vehicle that blocked in Kumeroa's car.

Residents of the public housing complex talked to Kumeroa during the siege, warning him against a showdown with the police. They later discovered, from one of Kumeroa's relatives, his identity and some information about his circumstances.

Originally from New Zealand, Kumeroa had difficulty reading and writing. He lost his job on a drilling rig in 2008 and struggled financially and emotionally, leaving him nearly homeless, unable to pay child support or his utility bills. He was depressed by being separated from his partner and losing custody of their three-year-old daughter.

It seems that the police followed Kumeroa when he drove his car into the car park in front of the townhouses, but it remains unclear why he was being tailed. The police have not disclosed any details about their reasons for pursuing Kumeroa in the first place, nor produced the handgun that they allege he brandished during the siege.

Shelly Redding and **Nigel Butowski** watched horrified as the police operation mounted outside their front door. Butowski told the WSWs: "The saddest thing was that he [Kumeroa] was calling out his mobile

phone number. He wasn't aggressive or agitated. He wasn't on drugs. He was crying and depressed. The police had guns drawn on him all day long. When they rolled a bottle of water to him, he said: 'You could have given it to me; I'm not going to shoot you.'"

Redding explained: "We were watching all this, when suddenly the police told us we had to exit. Every townhouse had police officers inside them, and there were more in the back, all with guns. The police should have gotten someone who could deal with a depressed person, but they behaved like a commando regiment, with machine guns." She added: "If they had lowered their guns, he would have talked to them. The SERT officers all had white knuckles from holding their triggers."

Redding showed us a bullet hole in her letterbox, which was near Kumeroa's car. "I hate to think where that bullet went through his body and into our letterbox," she said. "The police took over our house and didn't even tell us when we could return. When we returned the next morning, we found that they had left the house unlocked overnight."

Butowski said he was terrified at one point, when a detective seemed ready to shoot him. "I had a video camera in my hand, and I turned suddenly because I heard someone coming in through the back door. The detective went for his gun, and I shouted: 'It's only a video camera.'"

Butowski commented: "It's like everyone's a terrorist. The police shoot first and ask questions later. Everything is being exaggerated. I'd hate to see civil unrest, but times are getting hard and people are starting to falter. Now the government is going to war again, and people could start turning on each other."

Redding added: "It was like a training exercise. During the G20 summit, these are the blokes [the SERT] who will be in charge. It's like they did this to show that they're ready. It was like living in a war zone. The police were making a statement."

Inala is a sprawling working class community of about 14,000 people. It has long been blighted by poverty and high unemployment—currently 24.6 percent, even according to official figures—primarily because of decades of factory closures, including that of the GM plant in nearby Acacia Ridge during the mid-1980s.

A younger couple living in the townhouse complex

also said they were terrified by the shooting. The police took command of their home during the operation and then confiscated their mobile phone, on which they had recorded the events.

"The cops told us all along they thought it would end with a shooting," a young mother said. "But that man needed help. His life didn't need to be ended. He didn't wave his gun around at all. The police could have tasered him anytime ... I have been rattled to my core. This has shaken my belief in the police."

The young woman's partner commented: "The police hyped this up to scare the people and get them ready for another war. The government says it is worried about people living on the dole but they have been selling off our jobs for years, all for private profit."

Mid-November's G20 summit in Brisbane 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 the Middle East.



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