

Australia: New South Wales police gun down 22-year-old woman

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Police shot and killed a 22-year-old woman near a Hungry Jacks restaurant in the working-class Sydney suburb of Hoxton Park at 11.45 a.m. yesterday.

The young woman, who appeared to be in a disoriented state and was carrying a kitchen knife, was initially surrounded by at least four police officers. She was Tasered and sprayed with capsicum before being fatally shot in the chest by a male officer.

The 22-year-old, who has still not been named, is the second person killed by police in the state of New South Wales (NSW) in the past four weeks and the fifth individual gunned down by Australian police in the last six months. The deaths are another indication of growing police violence in working-class suburbs and evidence of an officially-sanctioned “shoot to kill” policy.

While details are still not clear—the police having released little information—eye-witnesses thought the young woman was mentally ill or possibly under the influence of drugs. She had been wandering around the Carnes Hill Marketplace shopping centre in West Hoxton at 11.35 a.m.

Dressed in jeans and a T-shirt and drinking from a takeaway cup, she reportedly walked to the corner of Cowpasture and Hoxton Park Road, where she was confronted and surrounded by heavily-armed police. Residents report that scores of police were mobilised to seal off nearby streets and lockdown the area. Police also ordered everyone in Hungry Jacks to take cover. Restaurant staff and patrons were kept inside the building by the police for at least an hour after the fatal incident. Network Seven has reported that the young woman’s mother, who is a teacher’s aide at a nearby school, collapsed when told of her daughter’s death.

NSW police claim that the young woman had lunged at them with the knife and that the police officer fired a

single shot in “self-defence.” Several witnesses, however, told the media that they heard two shots.

Nicole Maher, a local resident, said that she heard two gunshots and rushed to the scene. “I know there is bad in the world but in the end, the young girl didn’t even get a chance to make up for her wrong,” she said.

Angela Martin told the *Daily Telegraph* that she saw the girl running from police. “I had no idea what was going on. I knew someone had been shot,” she said. “I saw someone fall and saw all the cops run to that person. Next thing there were cop cars everywhere, it was a nightmare ... the worst thing I’ve witnessed in my whole life.”

No information has been provided as to whether police attempted to defuse the situation by negotiating with the young woman. She was simply ordered to drop the knife. When she failed to respond, she was capsicum-sprayed, Tasered and then shot in the chest at close range as she moved towards police.

Addressing a press conference yesterday, NSW Police Assistant Commissioner Frank Mennilli refused to provide any detailed information but justified the large police mobilisation over what was a minor incident that should have been ended through careful negotiation. Making clear that the police response at Hoxton Park was in line with official operational procedures, Mennilli declared, “You’re better going too big than going too small.”

Whatever the exact cause of the woman’s behaviour, the worsening social crisis in working-class suburbs created by poverty, mass unemployment and the government rundown of mental health facilities, drug abuse treatment and other vital social services, was undoubtedly a significant contributing factor.

The response of governments to the social problems they have created has been to flood working class areas

with heavily-armed police authorised to use lethal force. Yesterday's shooting follows a definite and increasing pattern of police repression in Australia.

Between September and November, police shot and killed four men in separate incidents in suburban Brisbane, the Queensland state capital. The shootings occurred in working-class areas and in the context of a massive police-military build-up for last year's G20 meeting in Brisbane. More than 7,000 heavily-armed police, backed by the military and snipers, were mobilised for the event.

One of those killed by Queensland police in November had a history of mental illness. The other, a 51-year-old grandfather, had been involved in a domestic argument. They both died after being shot in the chest by police who claimed they had pulled knives (see: "Two more Australian police killings in working-class areas").

Last month NSW police Tasered to death a roof tiler in a fast food restaurant in the Southern Highlands, south of Sydney, following a domestic dispute with his partner.

The increasingly brutal police operations are part and parcel of an escalating assault on basic democratic rights over the past decade and a half, which has been imposed under the bogus "war on terror" and the equally fraudulent spectre of a "crime wave" among working class youth.

Successive state and federal governments, Liberal and Labor, have systematically built up and heavily-armed the police who will inevitably be used to suppress the resistance of the working class to the deepening assault on jobs, living standards and democratic rights.



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