

Another fatal police shooting in Australia

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The latest police shooting in the suburb of Ettalong on the New South Wales (NSW) central coast is a warning to workers and youth everywhere of the systematic build-up of the police apparatus amid growing social tensions and immense hostility to the agenda of austerity being imposed by governments, state and federal.

Early on Sunday morning, police called to a domestic dispute in Ettalong shot and killed a 45-year-old man on his front porch. The man was the third person killed by police in NSW since the beginning of this year and the sixth to be fatally shot nationally in just over six months.

Police shootings now occur with sickening regularity, mostly in response to low-level incidents that could be resolved by non-lethal means. At the same time, the massive police operations surrounding the G20 Summit in Brisbane in November and in response to the café siege in Sydney in December highlight the increasing militarisation of the police forces and the preparations underway to lock down entire suburbs, towns and cities.

Details of the Ettalong police killing are scant. According to media accounts, police shot the man after he reportedly rushed out of the front door allegedly brandishing a “steak knife.” One of the three police officers, all described as experienced, drew his gun and shot the man in the chest.

No attempt was made to use capsicum spray or a Taser. Some eyewitnesses told the media that the police had no time to issue a warning. However, the question remains why the three experienced officers had not approached more cautiously and avoided a deadly confrontation.

The shooting comes less than a month after police capsicum-sprayed, Tasered then gunned down a disoriented 22-year-old woman suffering from Asperger’s syndrome in the Sydney suburb of Hoxton

Park on February 10. Police in Queensland shot and killed three people in separate incidents late last year.

The police have all but admitted a shoot-to-kill policy. Speaking to the media following the Ettalong killing, Northern Region Commander Jeffrey Loy confirmed police were not required to first use capsicum spray or a Taser before resorting to using guns. He also explained that officers were trained to shoot “at body mass”—that is, at the chest—ensuring that injuries will almost certainly be fatal.

Incidents involving domestic arguments and violence, like those of drug and alcohol abuse, mental breakdown, petty crime are, in the final analysis, the product of a dysfunctional society and the pressures brought to bear by poverty, chronic unemployment and the gutting of essential social services. The Central Coast has one of highest rates of youth unemployment in NSW, with at least 28 percent of 15–19 year-olds without a job.

As they continue to slash social spending, the response of governments, Labor and Liberal, is to flood working-class areas with heavily-armed police sanctioned to use lethal force. Increasingly, the police are being militarised and armed with weapons such as automatic rifles and armoured vehicles that would once have only been seen in war zones.

Such weaponry is being deployed in working class suburbs in situations where it is out of all proportion to the alleged threat involved.

Last September the Queensland police Special Response Team (SERT) deployed two Lenco “Bearcat” armoured vehicles into the working class suburb of Inala as part of locking down an entire residential area for hours. Heavily armed police commandos shot dead a 45-year-old man, allegedly armed with a handgun.

Last month, dozens of heavily-armed police from the Firearms Investigation Squad and Strike Force Crosswise, backed by a military-style Humvee and

officers from the Public Order and Riot Squad and the Tactical Unit, stormed into a residential area in the outer Sydney suburb of Liverpool surrounding a house in pursuit of a 24-year-old man wanted for drug offences.

The build-up of the police state apparatus was graphically on display last December when the federal and NSW state government escalated a café hostage siege in central Sydney involving one disturbed individual into a major national “terrorism” crisis. Thousands of police, including snipers and heavily-armed police paramilitary units, shut down the central business district and were deployed in other suburbs and major cities.

In their campaigns for the March 28 election, both the Liberal and Labor Parties are promoting a law-and-order platform—promising more police, more military-style equipment and greater police powers. Latching onto the Sydney siege, Labor has promised \$8.3 million to provide frontline police with “counter-terrorism training focused on the ‘active shooter’ scenario.” This is in line with NSW Police Association demands for all police cars to be equipped with high-power rifles to enable police to kill “active shooters” from a distance.

The main target of these measures is not “terrorists” but the working class, reflecting deep fears in ruling circles that opposition and resistance will erupt to the relentless assault on living standards. The build-up of police and police powers in Australia is fully in line with the preparation of police-state measures and attacks on democratic rights taking place internationally.

In Ferguson, Missouri, American police and the National Guard armed with high-powered assault rifles and armoured vehicles were deployed against people protesting the police killing of unarmed black youth Michael Brown. The exoneration of the policeman involved in killing Brown has been followed by a spate of fatal police shootings in working-class areas.

The ruling classes in Australia and around the world are preparing for major class struggles being fuelled by the deepening breakdown of capitalism and the growing class gulf between rich and poor. Workers and youth must also prepare.

The only means for halting the attacks on democratic and social rights, as well as the drive to war, is through the independent mobilisation of the working class in

Australia and around the world on the basis of a socialist program to put an end to the profit system. I call on workers and youth to support the Socialist Equality Party, which is the only party fighting in the NSW election for this perspective.

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