

Two more shootings by New Zealand police

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New Zealand police shot two men in separate incidents earlier this month, killing one and leaving the other in a critical condition. The shootings are part of an increasing resort to lethal force by police officers.

On July 12, Armed Offenders Squad officers shot and killed Nick Marshall, 36, in a warehouse where he worked and lived in the industrial suburb of Frankton, Hamilton. The heavily-armed unit was executing a search warrant as part of an investigation into drugs supply and firearms possession.

Before any inquiry had begun, Assistant Police Commissioner Allan Boreham rushed to defend the shooting. He told the media Marshall brandished a gun “in very close proximity” to police, was told “multiple times” to put it down, but “continued to present the firearm and was subsequently shot.” Boreham said the shooting was “unfortunate” but “unavoidable.”

Marshall’s girlfriend Kendall Eadie, apparently the only witness apart from the police, completely contradicted Boreham’s statement. She told Fairfax Media she was standing metres away from Marshall when he was shot and insisted he was unarmed. “They busted in our front doors, then they announced themselves,” she said. “They forced entry and fired shots. That was that. They didn’t ask my boyfriend to put his hands up; they shot at him three or four times.” She described the shooting as “completely unnecessary. In my eyes it was murder. There was no threat.”

Eadie’s statements raise disturbing questions. Firstly, was Marshall armed? Oddly, Fairfax Media reported that “on Wednesday morning,” i.e., the morning after the shooting, “a pump-action shotgun and a live cartridge were found at the spot where he had been standing.” Could the weapon have been planted?

Boreham told reporters the shooting “happened very quickly,” which raises the question: was Marshall given enough warning and time to surrender? There is also another question. Why was the paramilitary Armed

Offenders Squad called out to conduct the search and why did they aggressively storm the property? Marshall had no criminal record and there is no evidence he was violent in the past.

Just two days after Marshall’s death, eyewitnesses captured cellphone footage of police shooting another man, who has not been named, at close range on a street in Rotorua. According to police, the man appeared to be affected by methamphetamine and was holding a machete, which he used to hit a police vehicle.

The 35-year-old was tasered three times and pepper-sprayed before being shot twice in the stomach. The man was surrounded by police officers and it is not clear that he posed an imminent threat to them or to members of the public. He remains in hospital in a critical condition.

The so-called Independent Police Conduct Authority (IPCA) will investigate the latest shootings. The IPCA only has the power to gather evidence and make disciplinary recommendations, not to prosecute police officers. More fundamentally, it is part of the same state apparatus as the police and almost always finds in favour of the police.

The victims of police violence are typically people whose lives have been profoundly disrupted by unemployment, debt, poverty and often drug addiction. Police claim they found a “small amount” of methamphetamine and firearms at Marshall’s property in Hamilton. The *Dominion Post* cited unnamed sources who claimed he was addicted to the drug.

Until recently Marshall owned Marshall Transmissions Limited, a car maintenance company, which was highly profitable a decade ago, and employed about 30 people. The business was sold last year after it accumulated unsustainable debts. Marshall lost his house, prompting him to move into the warehouse to live and work repairing cars and,

allegedly, firearms.

Many desperate and vulnerable people have become addicted to methamphetamine. Following the latest shootings, Ross Bell of the Drug Foundation told TV3's "The Nation" that the number of meth users was on the rise because "the supply is increasing, prices are down." The response of the government has been punitive. Between 2013–14 and 2014–15, the number of convictions related to methamphetamine use jumped by 28 percent.

Vanessa Caldwell from the National Committee of Addiction Treatment told the program that 80 percent of the government money to address drug addiction was spent on "police and Corrections [prisons]" and only 20 percent on treatment. Bell added that many people seeking treatment for drug addiction were turned away because of the drastically underfunded public health system.

There is considerable public anger over the latest shootings. Rotorua mayor Steve Chadwick felt compelled to respond to the criticism of the police on social media, telling Newstalk ZB it was "absolutely wrong" to compare the shootings with "what's happening in the [United] States." Thousands of people in the US have protested against a wave of unprovoked killings by police.

In fact, there has been a dramatic increase in the use of deadly force by New Zealand police. They have fatally shot 31 people since 1941, including five in the past 18 months. No officers have been charged in relation to any of these killings.

Last month, police shot and killed 57-year-old Mike Taylor after a call-out over a domestic dispute in Paeroa. His partner, who witnessed the shooting, denounced it as a "cold-blooded execution."

This followed the killings last year of David Cerven, a 21-year-old Slovakian national, in Auckland and 25-year-old Pera Smiler in Upper Hutt. Cerven was unarmed and witnesses stated that Smiler was preparing to surrender when he was shot.

As in the US, police have become more heavily armed. In 2008 the then-Labour government armed cops with Tasers. Police Commissioner Mike Bush announced last year that all officers would have access to these very painful and dangerous 50,000-volt weapons. A decision in 2011 meant all police vehicles now carry pistols and rifles.

The latest shootings have again prompted media speculation about whether all officers should carry sidearms. The *Dominion Post* carried a front-page headline on 15 July asking "should police get guns?" Police Association President Greg O'Connor declared: "70 percent of frontline police said they should be armed."

The immediate public defence of the recent shootings by the police hierarchy should be taken as a warning. An atmosphere is being cultivated in which police killings become routine, with impunity for the officers involved. The response of successive governments, both National and Labour, to the worsening social crisis produced by their policies has been to give police more weaponry and powers. These methods will be used in the future to intimidate and suppress the opposition and resistance of workers to the endless austerity attacks on their living standards.



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