

Australia: Mount Druitt residents respond to police attacks on OneFour drill rap group

Our reporters
15 January 2020

Late last year, OneFour, a popular Sydney-based drill-rap group, had its Australian tour cancelled in a blatant act of censorship by the police.

A venue in Melbourne was threatened with the revocation of its liquor licence if the OneFour show went ahead. New South Wales (NSW) police admitted demanding that venues foot the bill for a massive police presence at the concerts. Shows in Perth and Adelaide were also cancelled.

NSW police have slapped members of the group, and their manager, with non-association orders, making it illegal for them to rehearse, record, or perform together. The use of draconian laws, passed on the phony basis of combatting terrorism, to silence working-class musicians, follows similar efforts in the UK campaign to suppress drill rappers. It is part of a broader turn towards authoritarianism, and an attempt to silence any oppositional sentiment, however, limited, coming from working-class youth.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to workers and young people in the western Sydney suburb of Mount Druitt, where the group is from. Our reporters found broad support for the rappers in the working-class suburb, including from young fans of the group, who laughed off the suggestion that listening to OneFour's music encouraged them to become violent.

Workers and young people also spoke about widespread mental health issues, poverty and police harassment in the Mount Druitt area. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the 2770 postcode, which includes Mount Druitt, is in the most socio-economically disadvantaged 4 percent of the country. The bureau's Index of Education and Occupation reveals even worse conditions, with 2770 ranked 8th-worst in NSW, and 47th-worst across Australia.

The area has been decimated by decades of cuts to manufacturing and industry, enforced by Labor and the unions, and the gutting of basic services by successive big business governments at the state and federal levels.

Ashlee, a mental health support worker, described the difficult social conditions facing residents of Mount Druitt. She said: "There's a lot of mental health issues out here. A

lot of issues with poverty, a lot of domestic violence, and issues like this. We do have a little bit of a bad name out here sometimes, but the thing is there's so many great people here too, doing amazing things, such as OneFour, and they don't get a chance to get up there and do what they do.

"I think the cancellation of OneFour's tour is absolutely ridiculous. It's almost like they've got a vendetta against the people here, which is absolutely ridiculous. These boys should have been able to play, they should have been able to share their music, their talent. Just because the police don't like it, these boys don't get to do what they love, and people don't get to see who they love, and that's not fair."

Ashlee noted parallels with the persecution of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange, who faces extradition to the US and life imprisonment for exposing war crimes and global diplomatic conspiracies.

"We are definitely in a world where telling the truth will get you killed or get you in trouble," she said. "The justice system is very corrupt. This world is run by psychopaths and narcissists and they don't have in mind the working class or people who are poor, people who are struggling. They just want to keep the rich people rich and keep doing what they're doing, just keep their circus going. They have the power to pull the strings, and we just have to put up with what they dish us."

Tristan, a 23-year-old roof tiler, said: "I think OneFour are alright, they get the area's name out there, just let them go. Who else from the area is doing what they're doing?"

Tristan told our reporters that police harassment, particularly of young people, was common in the western suburbs. The issue is a particular theme of OneFour's music. "People are judged from how you look, the clothes you like to wear or how you like to talk. I got strip-searched at Lidcombe station," he said.

"The coppers are the government's gang. The police do get funded a lot more than any other service in this area. It's pretty pathetic, we don't need that many coppers. Put a bit more effort into the schools and all the rest of the facilities, you may not need to put that much into the coppers, because

people will get taken care of properly.”

Tristan explained that while he had been able to find work, low wages and the rising cost of living meant it was still a struggle to get by. “I’ve roof tiled for a few years, but I’m still not on very good money. It’s 450 or 500 [dollars a week] to rent a decent house. A lot of people need to go to the city for work and it’s at least an hour of travel. It’s very difficult,” he explained.

“There never used to be such a big gap between rich and poor. My nan and pop used to live alright, they owned a house. They had to sell it to keep going ten years ago though. Things are becoming beyond a joke to live out here. You couldn’t imagine yourself buying a house. You have to move out of state to buy a house, it’s not going to happen around here.”

Coen, a civil excavation worker, said: “I’ve associated with a few of the members of OneFour. They’re all good people. They’re just speaking the truth about what’s going on in this society. I don’t think the authorities like what they say about them. I don’t understand why they’re stopping them performing, they’re good artists, good talent. They’ve just been torn down. They were going so good for a while, and now the police have stopped them performing in Australia.

“If you have that talent and you can share it and other people like it, you should get an opportunity. If they can get somewhere and make a name for Australia in a good way, let them do it. They’re just speaking about what’s in their suburb, and they get in trouble for it.”

Asked about the circumstances facing young people in Mount Druitt, Coen explained: “It’s tough. It’s never going to get any easier for us, it’s only getting harder. Finding work is so hard. You get a bad record and no-one wants to take you on for a job. People in the younger generation, they want to work ... [but] it’s all ‘judge a book by its cover.’

“The police and the government talk about how “you should do your dreams, stop doing crime.” Well people like OneFour can’t follow their dreams because they’re stopped by the authorities. We’re not allowed.

“Police have been heavy-handed around here for years. If they catch someone, it’s not just handcuffing them, it’s giving them a few hits, then handcuffing them. It’s doing the whole ‘you deserve this mate.’ There’s no need. It’s also got to do with colour around here as well.

“Governments and the wealthy don’t want to help anyone, they never have. That’s why they’re so rich. Rich people help the rich people so they can get richer. That’s business.”

Eric, a freight handler, opposed the police shutting down OneFour’s Australia tour. “The police have no right to do that,” he said. “The public should have access to their shows, pretty much as a human right. OneFour’s music

pretty much aligns with their experience and their environment. If you want them to change their lyrics, change the environment. Get some help in here.

“We’re pretty much a melting pot as far as different races and everything. Compared to twenty years ago, it’s a changed demographic, but the poverty is still here. There’s no improvement as far as access to help.

“On a personal level with these OneFour guys, they go through their stuff, but what they say is the truth. Compare it to Chopper Read [a notorious gangland criminal]. He wrote a host of books, sold them, and went on national tours. OneFour can’t even get to do one or two shows. These boys are involved in the community, working with the youth and trying to help them get out of these conditions.”

Caleb, a 15-year-old high school student, said: “I don’t think the cancellation of OneFour’s tour was right. They’re just speaking about what they see, what young ones like us are facing. I’m not sure why police forced the cancellation. Maybe it’s because they think that OneFour’s lyrics are violent, but that’s just what we see, what we face.

“Police see gangs, but to us it’s sort of family, because what we don’t see in our families, what we’re missing, we look for somewhere else. Guys like OneFour are like family, they look after you when you need it.”

Caleb said that welfare payments were often not enough to make ends meet: “I’m like that, my mum’s like that. When we need money, I go to my mates and ask them for help and they help me. Guys like OneFour kind of people, they might seem bad, but they’re actually good. My mates are like that and they help me out when I need money.”

Caleb described the limited job opportunities and abysmal pay offered to young people in the area: “I work at KFC as a casual. It’s \$10.50 an hour. I only work one or two shifts a week, and it’s normally five hours. I make \$50 a week, and with the money, I just give it to my mum.”

Keith denounced the cancellation of OneFour’s tour and said it was “stupid.”

“People should have the right to free speech. The coppers have all the power, and I don’t think it should be abused. These people are just trying to do their thing, produce music. They’re just trying to take every opportunity they can. People have to scrape by just to get through the day. I try to work two jobs just to get by.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact