

Australia: Tragic death of indigenous teenager Cassius Turvey after violent assault

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2 November 2022

On October 23, Cassius Turvey, a 15-year-old indigenous youth, tragically died surrounded by his family in a Western Australian hospital after a horrific assault.

Ten days earlier, Turvey and his friends had stepped off a bus after school and were heading home in the Perth suburb of Middle Swan. The four, aged 15, 14 and 13, were in school uniform when a car reportedly pulled up beside them with several people inside. It is alleged that one young man jumped out of the vehicle and ran towards the youth, bashing Turvey on the head with a metal pole.

According to police statements, the car had been damaged the day before. The driver of the vehicle allegedly blamed the group of boys for the damage. Police have stated that Turvey and his friends were not involved. It appears that they were instead targeted because of their racial background. At least one of the boys has said the group of adult men, who were of European descent, directed racial insults at them, including Turvey, during the attack.

Turvey suffered serious head injuries and was hospitalised. He was discharged after 5 days. Within hours of returning home, he had suffered a seizure and two strokes. Multiple surgeries were not enough to save the teenager who had been placed in an induced coma. After five days, the family made the heart-breaking decision to turn off his life support.

The violent attack has been met with an outpouring of grief and anger. Turvey has been described as a much-loved member of the community, including at his school among his peers and teachers, who was kind, generous and fun-loving.

At this point, only one of the alleged assailants has been arrested. Jack Brearley, a 21-year-old man who has been charged with the alleged murder of Turvey

and aggravated assault on one of Turvey's friends. The metal pole that was used as part of the assault has not been found. None of the other individuals in the car has been charged three weeks after the incident.

Mechelle Turvey, Cassius's mother, explained in an interview last week that she was concerned from the beginning that the attack was not taken seriously by the police. They only took a brief statement on the night of the attack.

"We did not hear from any detectives, no police. Nothing. For five full days. That was their opportunity. That was their window," Turvey said.

In an attempt to contain community concern, Police Commissioner Col Branch urged the public to refrain from "unfounded speculation" about racism regarding Turvey's death.

Western Australian Labor Premier Mark McGowan made similar comments.

On Friday a group of indigenous elders made a statement on the death. "Our kids aren't bad, but they are portrayed as bad," they stated. "You see them locked up in prison, you don't see them for who they really are. It seems like our state government just wants kids locked up."

The group challenged initial police statements that Turvey may have been in the "wrong place at the wrong time." They noted that the boy was "in his school uniform with his friends in broad daylight. None of the kids are bad, they have a right to walk the streets."

The group posed a series of questions: "There were several people involved in this very serious attack on our children. Only one has been charged with murder. Why is that? Why did Perth Children's Hospital release Cassius from hospital after just 5 days?"

The anxiety and distress over violent racist attacks

and police inaction are well-founded. In addition to widespread discrimination, Aboriginal people, and youth in particular, have been subjected to vigilante attacks.

In 2016, Elijah Doherty, a 14-year-old in Kalgoorlie, was dragged under a vehicle and killed when he was pursued in an alleged vigilante act over stolen dirt bikes. The perpetrator was acquitted of manslaughter, instead being convicted of a road traffic offence.

In 1992 Louis St John Johnson was murdered on his 19th birthday in Perth by several young men who were part of a British racist group, National Action. In 1988, Leslie Sampi, who was 20 years old and intellectually disabled, was violently killed in Broome by two non-indigenous men who were acquitted by a non-indigenous jury.

More broadly, Aboriginal youths are among the most oppressed sections of the working class. They are frequently the subject of police harassment and violence. Indigenous youth make up the majority of those in juvenile detention in most states and territories. There have been more than 455 Aboriginal deaths in custody since 1991.

Police harassment and persecution of working-class youth, especially the most oppressed, such as Aboriginal and migrant youth, enforces brutal social conditions that are especially acute for broad sections of the Aboriginal population. Aboriginal youth have some of the poorest health conditions, unemployment and poverty rates of any demographic.

While much remains unclear about the killing of Turvey, it takes place in a definite political context.

Aboriginal and other minority youth are frequently targeted for media witch-hunts. For several years, for instance, the corporate media and sections of the political establishment waged a campaign against supposed “African gangs” in Melbourne. Lurid and entirely false claims of a wave of crime were used to try and whip-up a law-and-order atmosphere.

Such blatant vilification goes hand in hand with more subtle promotions of nationalism and racism by the entire political establishment. Labor and the unions, founded upon the racist and anti-Aboriginal program of “white Australia,” still frequently scapegoat foreigners and others for the social crisis that is the result of their own pro-business policies. This has created fertile ground for the growth of far-right forces.

More broadly, the deepening onslaught on the jobs, wages and conditions of workers, the skyrocketing cost of living and a decades-long social crisis, has greatly exacerbated social tensions that erupt in various forms of anti-social behaviour and violence.

Broad layers of workers and young people have responded with shock and horror to the killing of Turvey. A GoFundMe page that was established by Turvey’s cousin to fund his funeral and memorial has in just 7 days raised more than \$500,000.

Vigils have been held in cities across the country, and even in New Zealand and Los Angeles, bringing together workers and young people of all backgrounds, indigenous and non-indigenous. Further vigils are being held in a number of Australian locations this evening, including the capital cities.

Speaking at a vigil in Midland attended by more than 3,000 people over the weekend, Turvey’s mother said: “I don’t want to fuel hate... it is about all our kids. Black, white, brown, pink and yellow it doesn’t matter. We are all the same, all people on this planet.” She added, “this isn’t about a black kid getting assaulted and losing his life, all kids matter, my son just saw people as people.”

The Socialist Equality Party explains that the fight against racism, all forms of discrimination and for the protection of the most vulnerable layers of the population, cannot be waged on the basis of appeals to the powers-that-be, or racialist identity politics that divide workers on the basis of their background.

Instead, what is required is a unified movement of the entire working class, directed against the whole political establishment and the capitalist system itself, which is the source of nationalism, racism and oppression.



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