

Australian police assault Aboriginal man with taser

By Oscar Grenfell
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Footage posted by a bystander to social media has exposed yet another brutal police assault, this time targeting an Aboriginal man in inner-city Sydney. The video, taken on Monday afternoon, shows Kris Bradshaw being repeatedly tasered in the face, chest and neck by officers as he was in a prone position.

The attack has provoked widespread anger amid a groundswell of opposition to police violence. It occurred just weeks after more than 100,000 people defied government threats to join demonstrations across the country in solidarity with global protests triggered by the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. The Australian rallies also centrally raised indigenous deaths in police custody, of which there have been more than 400 since 1991.

The video begins with Bradshaw being confronted by police behind an apartment block in the Sydney suburb of Darlinghurst. Bradshaw complied with the police direction for him to sit down. The male officer then demanded that he place his “head on the ground.”

Within seconds, the officers violently lifted Bradshaw as one of them tasered him directly in the face. He was thrown to the ground. Bradshaw can be heard screaming in pain and shock. He asked repeatedly: “Why are you doing this to me?” and added, “I wasn’t even fighting you. What are you doing?”

Police issued a statement claiming that they had begun following Bradshaw on Oxford Street. No crimes had been reported in the area. The only “suspicious” circumstances were that Bradshaw had allegedly begun walking in the opposite direction when he saw the police and was carrying a bag.

Indigenous people, along with other minority workers and youth, are frequently targeted by police and are stopped, searched and questioned without having

committed any wrongdoing.

Despite the footage clearly showing that the police were the aggressors and that Bradshaw was passive throughout the encounter, he has been charged with a number of offences including resisting arrest, intimidating the police and trespass.

Yesterday, after the video was widely shared on social media and picked up by several television networks, New South Wales (NSW) Premier Gladys Berejiklian said that she had requested a “police review” of the incident.

Such reviews, involving the police “investigating” themselves, are routinely used to diffuse anger and to whitewash the conduct of the officers involved. Neither of the two officers who attacked Bradshaw have been stood down, let alone sacked and charged.

The official response is similar to that which followed a police assault on a 16-year-old Aboriginal boy on June 1. The boy and his friends had been stopped while they were spending time in a park in the suburb of Surry Hills, less than a kilometre from where Bradshaw was attacked.

After a sharp verbal exchange, one of the officers had aggressively approached the 16-year-old, forced his hands behind his back and threw him to the ground with a “leg sweep.” The boy’s head struck the concrete without him having means of bracing his fall. While he suffered chipped teeth, extensive bruising and lacerations, his injuries could have been far worse or even fatal.

Only after footage of the latest attack went viral online did Berejiklian and other senior political figures issue weasel words of concern. The main officer involved was merely placed on administrative duties while an internal investigation was launched. Police officials publicly defended him, suggesting that he had

merely been “having a bad day” (see: “Australian police officers assault Aboriginal boy in Sydney”).

The responses to both incidents underscore the fact that police violence is systemic and is overseen by the top levels of governments and police command.

This was further demonstrated by a report in the *Guardian* this week, revealing previously suppressed details of a police attack on an Aboriginal youth in Perth in July, 2018.

Footage contained in the article shows up to five cops dragging the handcuffed boy along the ground, causing his head to strike concrete. The youth had been sitting on the ground in handcuffs prior to the assault. It appears to have been prompted by something he said to the officers. A bystander who attempted to help the boy was immediately surrounded by police and arrested.

An internal investigation into the attack has only recently concluded. Despite clear evidence to the contrary, it found that the police had used a “necessary and not excessive” level of force.

The brutal attacks, and the official support for them, stem from the function of the police as a repressive arm of the state, whose role is to suppress the working class, defend unprecedented social inequality and ensure the wealth of a tiny corporate oligarchy.

To bolster this role, state and federal governments, Labor and Liberal alike, have vastly expanded police numbers, equipment and powers over the past thirty years. This has included the provision of tasers to officers in most states.

The roll-out of the weapon was accompanied by assertions that it would make police shootings less likely and would function as a “non-lethal” alternative to firearms. It was claimed that the use of tasers would end a spate of 69 police shootings between 1984 to 1995.

Fatal police shootings, however, the majority of them targeting people with mental health issues, have continued unabated (see: “Police shoot dead mentally ill man in Melbourne, Australia”).

Tasers, moreover, can be a deadly weapon in their own right. The American Heart Association warned in 2012 that their use could cause “ventricular arrhythmias, sudden cardiac arrest and even death.” At least 49 police killings in the United States in 2018 were a result of tasers, following 500 fatalities in the decade to 2012.

Similar deaths have occurred in Australia. Among the most notorious cases is the 2012 killing of Roberto Laudisio Curti, a 21-year-old Brazilian student who was visiting Sydney.

On the morning of March 18, Curti was chased down the street in central Sydney by eleven police officers. He had been behaving erratically after ingesting LSD, but his only alleged offence had been taking two packets of biscuits from a convenience store. Curti was tackled by the officers before being repeatedly tasered, capicum sprayed and struck with batons. He died in hospital several days later.

While evidence at a coronial inquest made clear that Curti did not pose a threat to anyone, none of the officers has ever been held accountable.

Curti’s tragic death demonstrates the horrific consequences that could have resulted from the repeated use of a taser against Kris Bradshaw on Monday.

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