

New Zealand Police brutally attack young man in Auckland

By Tom Peters
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Twenty-six-year-old Nikau Andrews was hospitalised in Auckland after being brutally attacked by police last Sunday during an arrest for graffiti vandalism.

A bystander's cellphone video, widely viewed on social media, shows several officers pinning Andrews to the ground. Witnesses can be heard shouting: "What are you doing? Please get off him!" "You kned him in the head," "He's bleeding everywhere," and "Look at him, he's f--ing hurt!" Officers ignored these pleas.

Speaking from hospital on June 22, Andrews told Radio NZ that he was "spear-tackled" despite offering no resistance. "No one said that I was under arrest, no one said anything like that," he said. Andrews stated that officers punched him when he was on the ground.

After being taken to a Mt Eden police station cell, the young man complained that he found it painful to breathe. Andrews said officers initially "laughed at me." He was only taken to hospital after repeatedly insisting that he needed help. "I have no idea why they responded in that way. I wasn't at all being a threat. Why did they have to use excessive force?... How is that right when I am not using any force to begin with?"

Andrews suffered multiple bruises and a black eye. His sternum was ruptured and a possible air bubble was identified in his heart.

He is due to appear in court on July 10, charged with resisting arrest and wilful damage. Police spokespeople have defended their actions, absurdly saying that Andrews was resisting officers, even after he was handcuffed and on the ground.

Andrews told the *New Zealand Herald*: "I'm 65kg. I had four grown men on top of me. I'm only a little person, there's no way I was going to resist." He said he believed he had been racially "profiled" because of being Maori.

The Independent Police Conduct Authority is reviewing the incident. This misnamed body almost always clears officers of any wrongdoing and protects them from being prosecuted.

The violent attack on Andrews followed nationwide protests on June 1 and 14, involving tens of thousands of people, as part of the global movement triggered by the murder of George Floyd by police in the United States. The protests also opposed the moves towards routine arming of police officers in New Zealand. On June 9, the NZ Police abandoned plans to introduce new Armed Response Teams (ARTs) throughout the country.

Calls to further arm police are being made, however, following the fatal shooting of constable Matthew Hunt in Auckland on June 19. A 24-year-old man was arrested over the killing, which took place during a routine traffic stop. Hunt was the first officer killed in NZ in more than a decade.

Conscious of the widespread opposition to armed patrols, police commissioner Andrew Coster told the media it was "too early" to conclude that they should be reintroduced following Hunt's killing. Right-wing NewstalkZB radio commentator Mike Hosking labelled Coster "soft" and said "serious talk" was needed about arming officers. TV and radio host Jack Tame declared that armed patrols "deserve careful, informed consideration and scrutiny."

Nikau Andrews told Radio NZ that some people had suggested he was attacked as revenge for Hunt's death, even though "that's got nothing to do with me."

Racism may well have contributed to the assault. However, the statement by the pseudo-left protest group People Against Prisons Aotearoa (PAPA) that police "would never have immediately attacked a P?keh? [white] person in this way" is untrue.

The insistence on portraying police brutality entirely in racial terms serves to obscure the function of the police as the enforcers of class rule and capitalism. Members of the Labour Party-led government, including the Green Party, have no difficulty acknowledging “racial bias” in policing. These politicians falsely claim that police violence can be addressed by recruiting more non-white officers and improving training.

According to police statistics for 2018, in more than half of all incidents where officers used force, Maori people were the subjects despite being just 15 percent of the population. Maori are much more likely than non-Maori to be shot, tased and pepper sprayed.

Undoubtedly, racism plays a role in many cases. But the main reason for this significant over-representation is that Maori and Pacific Islanders are among the most oppressed members of the working class and are therefore more likely to live in areas subject to intensive policing.

While pretending to oppose police brutality and racism, the Labour-led government has strengthened the police, recruiting an additional 1,800 officers since the 2017 election. The budgets for the spy agencies and the military have been significantly increased, and civil liberties attacked with new anti-terror and censorship legislation. While the government exploited the fascist terror attack in Christchurch to justify such measures, the real target is the working class.

Significantly, every party in parliament seized on the death of Hunt to glorify the police. Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters, from the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party, said in a speech on June 23 that “police lives matter,” echoing the pro-police slogan “blue lives matter,” used in the United States by Trump supporters and fascists.

NZ First called for the leaders of the June 1 protest to be prosecuted on the pretext that they breached social distancing rules. The Australian government has sought to ban protests on similar grounds.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told parliament: “To lose a police officer is to lose someone working for all of us, but also a family member, someone’s loved one and a friend.” She compared Hunt to a soldier “killed serving New Zealand.” Leaders of the Greens and the opposition National Party gave similar statements.

Such speeches are never heard in parliament for the

victims of police killings, let alone the civilians killed by NZ soldiers in Afghanistan, or the hundreds of New Zealand workers who die each year due to unsafe working conditions.

Whichever party wins the September election, they will continue to strengthen the police. The coronavirus pandemic has triggered the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. The ruling elite is boosting the repressive forces of the state in preparation for a major upsurge of working class opposition to social inequality, unemployment and poverty.

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