



CAMPAIGN BUILDS TO DEFEND PERSECUTED ABORIGINAL FAMILY

RACIST POLICE HARASSMENT IN WESTERN SYDNEY



Riverstone Police brutalise Tisha at the end of her 21st birthday party.

It was early September and Tisha, a well brought-up 21 year-old woman, was getting dressed up. All she wanted was what everyone her age hoped for: a happy and fun 21st birthday party. She was indeed having a pleasant 21st birthday event until a group of thugs dragged her across the road from her own home, crushed her against the ground, tore off the ring on her belly button, lifted up her skirt and unwontedly touched her and left her with bruises on her stomach, arms and legs.

Who would do such a cruel thing? The police in the Western Sydney suburb of Riverstone – that's who! And their pretext for this cowardly assault on a

lightly built woman? The music in Tisha's party was too loud claimed the police and with this fraudulent excuse they raided the family's home.

Not only did the police assault Tisha but they did the same to other close relatives who had come to celebrate with her. Moreover, after all this they arrested Tisha, six of her close relatives and a family friend and slapped them with completely trumped up riot charges. Most of those arrested, including Tisha, have been hit up with six or so serious charges including affray and assault of police officers.

So why would Riverstone Police want to pick on one innocent family peacefully going about their own lives? Well, you see, while Tisha and her family may be courteous and good-natured, as far as bigoted police are concerned they have a problem ... they are Aboriginal. As the enforcers of an unfair social order that is geared to only serve the big business elite and which was founded on the dispossession of Aboriginal people, Australian police are often hostile to the poor and are notorious for downright brutality towards Aboriginal people. Furthermore, NSW police have a special hatred for Tisha's family. You see, they are Hickeys, close relatives of TJ Hickey the 17 year-old boy who was killed by racist police in February 2004 after



Several police bang the head of Jade against the cement as his mother, friends and relatives look on in horror. Who was rioting that day and who wasn't?



Tisha's sixteen year-old brother, Tony, is arrested by a mob of cops. They targeted him after realising that he was capturing on camera what they were doing to his sister and other relatives.

they chased him through the streets of Redfern when he was riding his bicycle. As a result of their defiant refusal to abandon the quest for justice for their beloved TJ, the Hickeys, from Redfern to Riverstone, have faced police harassment over the last six and a half years.

To see just how prejudiced Riverstone cops are against the Aboriginal Hickey family, consider the reason why Tisha's party had to be held at her home rather than in a local hall. Not long before Tisha's 21st, her younger sister Jamie turned 18. Her mother, Patricia, had booked the hall for the 18th birthday party at the Riverstone RSL some three months earlier. Yet, when she went to pay up the remainder of the bond money for the party, she was told that the Sergeant at Quakers Hill Police Station had got the hall booking cancelled. When Patricia went to question the Sergeant about this he told her that the hall booking was cancelled because her last name was Hickey and that she had a lot of bad people in her family!

THE POLICE ATTACK

It was such racist prejudice that drove the police raid on Tisha's party. Tellingly, when police first harassed the Hickey home in Riverstone on the actual night of Tisha's 21st, September 4, they not only made spurious



A sleazy male cop lifts the skirt of Tisha and inappropriately touches her.

accusations about noise but complained that there were people from Redfern at the party (what a crime!) Notably, the one person from Redfern who had actually, along with her immediate family, been at the party was Gail Hickey – the mother of TJ – although she had left by then. The next morning too when the police attacked the family, they preceded this with a threat to not only take the jukebox but to “Get all the Redfern people out.” That the excessive noise claim was merely cover is indicated by the fact that this raid took place not at night ... but after 8am in the morning when the party was already over! Moreover, in all the multiple criminal charges placed on family members following the raid, none were actually over the noise.

The large police contingent that morning was calmly met by Tisha’s cousin Jade who insisted that the police produce a warrant before they raid the house. The police responded with what appears to have been an orchestrated provocation. The sole female cop that was present suddenly strode **forward** right up against the unsuspecting Jade and ironically, as she pushed her face towards his, demanded: “Get out of my face.” When Jade refused to fall for this provocation and, retreating slightly, explained “No one’s in your face,” the cop then shoved him aggressively.

When family members came out to verbally protest against this assault, they were promptly arrested. Among them was Tisha. And while Patricia watched in horror as her daughter was being brutalised, police threatened

to taser her every time she moved in to help her child. Watching a male cop lift her daughter's skirt and put his paws all over her, Patricia tried to pass the police a pair of tights to cover up her daughter. This the police threw back at her.

Meanwhile, the cops violently arrested Jade and banged his head against the cement, causing blood to come out of his head. His mother, Robyn, responded as best she could by splashing the cup of tea she was drinking (a cup of tea that was itself hardly the sign of a rowdy party!) on the shirts of the police. This, incidentally, was the family's only "physical" response to the police attack and for this "terrifying" act Robyn too was arrested and hit up with serious affray and assault charges. In the end, there were carloads of police and sniffer dogs arresting family members. Among the arrested were Tisha's 16 year-old brother and a 16 year-old female cousin. As Patricia noted, "they even treated the 16 year-old kids like dogs."

THE HORROR CONTINUES



Tisha's stomach after the police attack. Note the injury caused after they ripped off the ring on her belly button.

The arrests were hardly the end of the family's ordeal. In police custody, Robyn, a diabetic, was refused medical assistance to get her dose of insulin. As a result she started to go pale and even so police refused to call an ambulance until some two hours later. Meanwhile, police denied Tisha,



Tisha's leg and bruises on her arm after being brutalised by police.

a serious asthmatic who normally has to take Ventolin three times a day, assistance after she had a major asthma attack. Later Tisha told her mother, "Mum, I was scared for me and Auntie Robyn. I thought we were going to die."

Now the arrested people face not only serious charges but ongoing police harassment. Undoubtedly as result of police intervention, Tisha was sacked from her job as a childcare worker the

day after the raid. Jade's partner Jodie, a respected Aboriginal Assistant teacher, has also been forced out of her job.

Tisha was, in fact, so physically bruised and emotionally traumatised by the whole raid that she found it hard to leave her house for weeks. When she has dared to leave the house, she has been stopped by that very same policeman who had his knee in her back while lifting her skirt and touching her. Although she was only a pedestrian, the cop insisted on breathalysing her!

Meanwhile, police continue to find excuses to bang on the family home's door as they attempt to intimidate those arrested into pleading "guilty." On a couple of occasions they kicked on the door claiming to be searching for a phantom "man."

A CHANCE TO FIGHT FOR JUSTICE

In some ways what the Hickeys in Riverstone have copped is just a more extreme version of the frequent racist police harassment that many other Aboriginal people experience throughout the country. The key difference

is that on this occasion the family cleverly managed to capture on camera some of the police brutality and the utterly bogus nature of the affray and assault charges that those arrested now face. See the video footage on YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/v/BzrRXSvCHcE&hl=en_US&feature=player_embedded&version=3.

This visual evidence is very compelling. Yet in such a political case, linked up as it is with the police killing of TJ Hickey, this evidence will not **in itself** be enough to win justice for the family **through the legal process** alone. The Australian courts, like other institutions of the state, are slanted towards the big end of town and are notoriously biased against Aboriginal people. This is the case whether the Australian capitalist state is administered by the openly right-wing Liberal/National Coalition or by the pseudo pro-worker ALP.

However, what the video footage and photographs will do is make it easier to mobilise mass support behind the family **which is what it will take to win them justice**. Already such support is building and there will be a mass rally on October 16, the day before the five adults arrested at Tisha's party go to court for the October 17 resumption of their trial. The demonstration will demand the dropping of all charges against those arrested and more generally will take a stand against racist police attacks against Aboriginal people in the first place and more broadly against police harassment of all non-white and/or working class people as well. The protest will start at 2pm at Parramatta's Church Street Mall at the railway station end near the corner with Darcy street.

It is important for all genuine anti-racists to be involved in this



Police drag Jodie across the road as her shell-shocked friend views the results of the police attack.

campaign. It will be out of the struggles against the worst injustices of today that a movement can be built that will in the future challenge the whole present system of exploitation and racism.

It is vital that the union movement in particular takes a stand in this campaign. Fighting against racism is an act of self-defence of our unions. Greedy capitalist bosses have always used racism to divide workers and stop us organising to defend our rights. Furthermore, as organisations dedicated to winning justice for working-class people, the very principles of solidarity that underpin our existence are strengthened if we defend others who face injustice.

In a plea written to trade unions and intended for all people who hate racism and injustice, Patricia Hickey wrote:

“My family and I have had a lot of harassment from the police since this thing happened to TJ. We’ve had enough. We want it to stop and stop NOW before another Hickey dies in police custody. Please help us! Enough is enough.”

Let’s build a mass rally of trade unionists, Aboriginal people and all anti-racists on October 16 to demand: **Drop all charges against the persecuted Hickey family in Riverstone! Down with all racist police attacks against Aboriginal people!**



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