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AUCKLAND COMMITTEE ON RACISM AND  
DISCRIMINATION.

Task Force.



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# **TASK FORCE**

**A FAILURE IN LAW  
ENFORCEMENT**

**A DISASTER IN  
COMMUNITY  
RELATIONS**

A report prepared by the AUCKLAND COMMITTEE ON  
RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION - ACORD

April 1975

# The oppression continues

In an earlier report, "Task Force — An Exercise In Oppression", we examined the activities of the Task Force after its first six weeks of operation. We concluded that the Task Force was called for and established by white citizens, politicians and police chiefs on the basis of irrational and unfounded racist assumptions. We found that the Task Force deliberately discriminated against Maoris and other Polynesians by selective policing and arresting and that it actively oppressed these racial minorities.

In this report we consider the first six months of this style of law enforcement and find that the oppression has in no way decreased. Furthermore, we show that the Auckland Police Task Force has totally failed to achieve its original task.

## Behind the formation of a Task Force

The strategy of having a "highly-trained, tightly-knit and mobile squad of police to attack violence and disorder on the streets" is far from new. In the U.S., for example, many cities in the 1960's boasted such squads. In Auckland, as in the U.S., the formation of a special Task Force was demanded by the residents of middle class affluent white suburbs who claimed that they were "afraid to walk the streets at night". Not, of course, the streets of their own well-ordered neighbourhoods, but rather the streets of the inner city suburbs. Conservative community groups echoed the cry and the politicians representing the affluent white suburbs responded by pressing those responsible for law enforcement into creating the special squad. Nor was much pressure needed. The irrational fears of affluent whites, which were, in essence, that while walking to the carpark after a concert they would be attacked and robbed by a drunken polynesian lurking in a side-street, were readily identified with and shared by other ill-informed pakehas. After all, senior politicians, police chiefs and newspaper editors had for some time publicly stated as a 'fact' that much of inner city violence resulted from the "inability of Maoris and Pacific Islanders to handle alcohol" and this was readily accepted when it seemed to confirm suspicions already held.

But those suspicions and fears of the affluent white community, which have their roots in deep-seated racial prejudice along with an equally deep-seated passion to protect possessions which reflect that affluence, are indeed irrational. Notwithstanding the fact that Auckland newspapers continually attempt to create the impression that Auckland is an unsafe and violent city, policy statistics prove the opposite. Official police figures supplied by Police Headquarters to the Wellington office of the Auckland Star late last year show that **in 1974 there was an average of only 3.6 violent street crimes per month in Auckland city.** This figure is about 30 times lower, per head of population, than the figure for equivalent crimes in for instance San Francisco. The full figures were:

Crime	Rate per Month	
	1973	1974*
Assault with intent to rob	0.4	0.0
Aggravated robbery causing grievous bodily harm	0.8	1.6
Disabling, stupefying, wounding & injury with intent	0.5	1.3
Aggravated assault & aggravated assault with weapon	0.4	0.7
Totals	2.1	3.6

\* based on the first 9 months of 1974.

In fact, because the number of these crimes is so low in Auckland, newspapers are able to give each one massive publicity, which they readily do. This, together with the usual newspaper practice of stating the race of an assailant when he is Maori or non-Maori Polynesian but failing to do so when he is European, adds weight to the fallacious belief that the streets are violent places and that this is primarily due to the actions of one segment of the community. Fears such as these breed rapidly and were eagerly exploited by a police force led by men with expansionist aims. Hence the obvious police as well as public pressure for a Police Task Force.

In this way, a predominantly white police force now controls the predominantly non-white inner city area through the demands of the affluent white areas. The people of the inner city have had no say in the policing of their neighbourhood. It is forced upon them from outside. It is they who must now suffer police cars continually cruising their streets, slowing down when passing groups of young Polynesians, and randomly stopping and questioning others. Intense police activity is now an oppressive feature of Ponsonby/Newton/Grey Lynn life. And what has been achieved?

# Six months of continuing oppression

Together with several Maori and other Polynesian groups, ACORD has followed closely the activities of the Task Force. For the first six months of its operations (June 26th — December 26 1974) we have monitored all Auckland city Friday night arrests by attending Saturday morning sittings of the Auckland Magistrates Court. In this way we have obtained detailed information on

about 30% of all Task Force victims. We have also obtained from various sources official statistics bearing on the activities of the Task Force. And, besides these facts and figures, we have at first hand observed the actions of the Task Force on the streets and in the hotels.

## WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

Six weeks after the formation of the Task Force its commander boasted publicly that the Task Force had arrested 403 people and that "about 80% of offenders are Maoris and other Polynesians" (N.Z. Herald 22/8/74), a figure which the editor of the catholic weekly The Tablet (23/10/74) described as "a fair proportion". And after 8 weeks the commander bragged that the Task Force had arrested 555 people, again estimating that "more than 80% were Maoris or other Polynesians". "Task Force is achieving what it set out to do" he said (Auckland Star 22/8/74).

These statements no doubt accurately reflected the Task Force attitude and approach to law enforcement, i.e. arrest as many people as possible as quickly as possible. The police knew very well that this could most easily be achieved by arresting those who were least likely to effectively assert their rights either when being arrested or when being processed through the courts. The victims were predominantly Pacific Islanders and Maoris:

Ethnic Origin	Police statistics *	ACORD statistics
	1st 3 months	1st 6 months
Pacific Islanders	35%	60%
Maoris	32%	
Europeans	33%	40%

## The fiction of "trouble-spots"

The Task Force arrested approximately 1500 people in its first 6 months and these were arrested mainly in the central inner city area and in the inner city suburbs as the following statistics obtained in the ACORD court survey show:

Central City	42.0%
Newton/Ponsonby/Grey Lynn	26.5%
Khyber Pass/Newmarket	10.5%
Onehunga	11.1%
All other areas	9.9%

Of the several hundred Task Force arrest cases covered by the survey, only 1.1% (5 cases) were of people arrested in the Eastern Suburbs, although twice as many people live in this area as live in the

Ponsonby/Newton/Grey Lynn central city area. The regular, selective policing of one part of town is clearly demonstrated. But the claim is often made that this pattern of arrests results from the police concentrating on "known trouble-spots". In fact, the reverse is true. "Trouble-spots" are those places with a history of arrests for even the most trivial charges. By selectively and intensively policing a few places the police create "trouble-spots".

\* Figures kindly supplied by Inspector L. O'Shea, Auckland Police.

# WHAT WERE THE CHARGES?

Because it was set up in such a flurry of publicity, the Task Force had to quickly justify its existence by arresting large numbers of people. But although its task was to control "muggings and bashings" there are not and never have been many such crimes in Auckland and the arrest rate is correspondingly low. The predicament of still producing high arrest figures to satisfy the public was solved by (1) arresting anyone who could conceivably be described as 'drunk'; (2) by actively hunting out anyone relieving themselves down any alleyway however dark and out of the public eye; and (3) by becoming supersensitive to obscene language, by over-hearing "obscene" words which would normally be lost in the din of public bar conversation and, when all else failed, by harrassing people until they responded by swearing at the police.

Official police figures\* for the first 3 months Task Force arrests are:

Drunk in a public place	39%
Obscene language	22%
Offensive behaviour	17%
Disorderly behaviour	7.7%
Obstructing/resisting	3.7%
Fighting	3.7%
Depositing dang.litter	2.0%
Assault	2.0%
Wilful damage	0.3%
Carrying off.weapon	0.3%
Other	2.2%

At least 90% of all Task Force arrests are for trivial anti-social behaviour. But although the charges are trivial, the consequences for the victim are serious. He is almost invariably deprived of his liberty for a night, convicted and fined in court and the next day and from that time on has a criminal 'record'.

\* Figures kindly supplied by Inspector L. O'Shea, Auckland Police.

## Denial of bail an extra punishment

Police have the discretion to bail anyone they arrest for drunkenness. The going rate is \$10 which is forfeited by an imposition of the standard \$8 fine and \$2 costs. What this means in practice is that the person must have \$10 in his pocket and (although it is not a condition of law) must provide the police with a signed confession of guilt which can be read out in court. Be-

cause of these conditions, very few are bailed (only 16% in our survey). And although a first offence of drunkenness is only punishable by a fine, most such offenders are not bailed out and so are in fact penalised by several hours deprivation of liberty. "A night in the cells" is commonly regarded as part of the punishment although by law it cannot be for first offenders.

## Licensees escape

Drunkenness cases are of further interest especially since the President of the Auckland Branch of the Hotel Association of New Zealand, Mr V.Watts, has said that drinking in Auckland hotel bars is the "most tightly supervised drinking you'll find". He went on to say "with the Task Force and generally tighter supervision by police, no publican would be stupid enough to serve anyone who is intoxicated" (Auckland Star, 7/10/74). At first sight, the statistics seem to back up Mr Watts claim for during our six-month court survey, not a single prosecution was brought against a publican for supplying liquor to an intoxicated person. But does this mean Mr Watts is right? The answer is no. During the survey period the Task Force arrested numerous people for drunkenness actually inside hotel bars. Examples are the public and lounge bars of the Star Hotel (NZB) (7/9/74), Trident Tavern (NZB) (14/9/74), Globe Hotel (licensee, Mr P. Sheehan) (14/12/74), Glen Innes Hotel (NZB) (21/12/74), and the Newmarket Hotel (DB) (21/12/74). Obviously anyone found drunk while in the bars of these hotels must have been drinking there, yet not one of the licensees was prosecuted. It is also obvious that those arrested for drunkenness immediately outside or in the car-park of hotels were shortly before equally drunk inside the hotels, but again no licensees have been prosecuted. Some hotels stand out in this regard: the car-parks of the Trident Tavern (NZB) and the Onehunga Hotel (DB) are especially frequently named, as are the Great Northern (NZB) and Rob Roy Tavern (NZB) and the Globe Hotel (licensee Mr P. Sheehan).

Here again the Task Force goes for the quick and easy arrest and conviction, the person who is allegedly drunk, and leaves the licensee alone. Sometimes even the magistrates are moved to comment on this. For example, a magistrate was recently (31/3/75) told of arrests for drunkenness inside the bars of the Great Northern Hotel (NZB) (2), the Rob Roy Tavern (NZB) (1), and the City Hotel (NZB) (2). He remarked on the number of these arrests and asked the police prosecutor whether the police ever took action against the hotel licensees. The police prosecutor brushed the question aside, saying that such prosecutions were "very difficult". Which, of course, proves again the selective nature of Task Force activities. Hundreds of Maoris and other Polynesians are arrested, spend a night in the cells, are convicted and fined while the affluent white licensees who have flagrantly broken the law are left alone to continue profiting by selling liquor to anyone who will drink it.

That this is actually police policy was confirmed by Auckland police chief Tait. At a press conference soon after his arrival in Auckland he concentrated his attention on what he called the "problem of excessive drinking by Maoris and Pacific Islanders". He stated that he saw the section of the Sale of Liquor Act which provides for the prosecution of licensees who serve people who are drunk only as "a last resort" (Auckland Star, 21/8/74). It is perfectly clear that such prosecutions should be the first resort. The licensees constitute the real problem, not those from whom they profit.

# Obscene language charge proves racial discrimination

Above all others this charge provides the Task Force with the easiest way to boost arrest figures. It is a real catch-all and for the police anything is worth a go — "piss off", "arseholes" as well as the standard "fuck off" (now more often than not directed at the Task Force itself). Even if someone challenges the police and pleads Not Guilty the Task Force has already notched up an arrest statistic and has ensured a hassling and a night in the cells for the victim.

As we mentioned before Pacific Islanders are the easiest victims for the Task Force — they make up 35% of all arrests, more than any other ethnic group. But we found in our survey that they comprise over half of all obscene language arrests (52% compared with 27% pakehas and 21% Maoris). For most this is their first court appearance. It is clear in court that many have only a slight knowledge of English. We have seen Polynesian defendants on obscene language charges for whom interpreters were called because their English was so limited. In fact, so eager are the Task Force

to arrest Polynesians they even arrest those who swear in their own language. On 23/11/74 in the Auckland magistrates court a Samoan was said to have sworn in Samoan to a Samoan policeman. A white police officer then asked the man to translate his comment and when he did, arrested him for obscene language. He was convicted and fined.

In our view it is grossly unjust to arrest, convict and fine \$60 (the going rate) for a language charge, people of an ethnic minority who have a language difficulty. And we challenge Mr Connelly, Commissioner Burnside and Assistant Commissioner Tait to say whether they believe that over 50% of all obscene language in Auckland city is uttered by members of an ethnic group who make up only 5% of the population. If they are not prepared to say that, then they must admit that the Task Force is selectively enforcing the obscene language law against one racial group — those of Pacific Islands origin. The fact of racial discrimination by selective arresting could not be plainer.

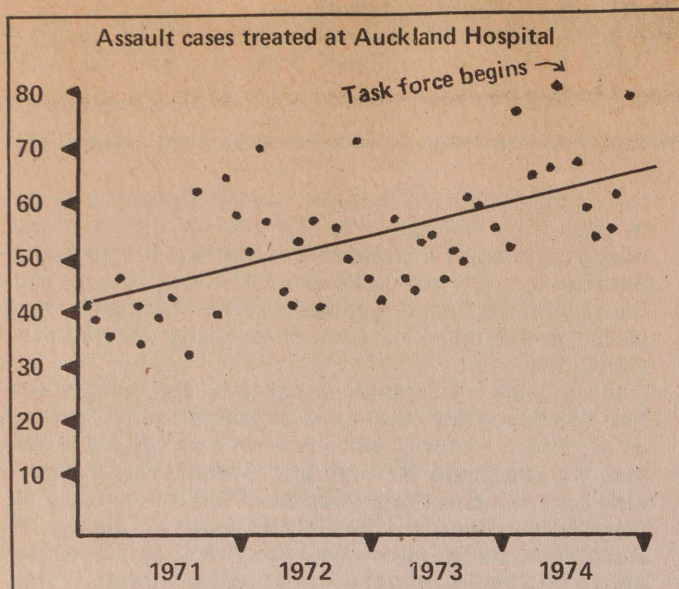
## WHAT HAVE 1500 ARRESTS ACHIEVED?

The Task Force was not set up to enforce archaic laws under the Police Offences Act. It was "set up to deal with the rise in bashings, group violence and muggings which was alarming the public in Auckland" (Minister of Police, N.Z.Herald, 26/9/74). It must therefore be judged on what effect it has had on these crimes. Late in 1974 Police Headquarters in Wellington released to the Wellington office of the Auckland Star crime statistics for before and after the formation of the Task Force. We have been given these figures by the Star and have recalculated them as the number of cases per month:

Offence	Before T.F.	After T.F.	Change
Petty street offences (fighting, offensive and disorderly behaviour)	71.5	167.3	up 134.0%
Common assault (including domestic)	202.5	155.0	down 23.5%
Resisting or obstructing Police	31.8	41.0	up 28.9%
Serious street offences (wounding, injuring; aggravated assault; assault with intent to rob; aggravated robbery with weapon other than a gun)	3.6	3.6	no change

These official police figures show that the Task Force had no effect whatsoever on the total rate of reported muggings and bashings. It failed in its stated aim of reducing serious street violence. At the same time, although there was a drop in the number of cases of common assault (down by 23.5%) there was a huge rise in the rate of reported petty street offences (up 134%). The rise in the rate of cases of resisting or obstructing the police seems to give some indication of the hardening attitude of people towards the Task Force, and the beginning of the sort of counter-violence such police squads always provoke.

Another index of street violence which has been used by the news media and others to judge the effectiveness of Task Force operations is the number of assault cases treated at the Auckland Hospital (see e.g. N.Z.Herald 23/10/74; Sunday Herald 3/11/74). The Medical Superintendent of Auckland Hospital has given us the monthly total of assaults treated at the accident and emergency department since 1971. These are plotted on the graph. The line is the calculated statistical trend line for all assaults — it has not been affected at all by the introduction of the Task Force in late June 1974. The slow upward trend has continued. In fact, the figure for December 1974 (80) was virtually back at the all-time high level of June 1974 (81) which had led to the introduction of the Task Force.



Official police and hospital statistics show, therefore, that the Task Force, in arresting about 1500 people, has completely failed in its primary objective of reducing serious street violence. Its only tangible achievement so far has been to alienate still further Maoris and other Polynesians from the police and from the white community generally. The damage that the Task Force has done to community relations in Auckland is immeasurable and probably irreparable.

## Law enforcement, Task Force-style

On the evening of December 19th, 1974, the South Auckland Task Force with the assistance of police dogs injured four innocent people and arrested five outside a South Auckland Hotel. All were Maoris. Two eyewitnesses who were passing and who had not been in the hotel, have described the incident in detail to ACORD.

It all began when two car-loads of police plus police dogs arrived at the hotel on a "routine visit". At the time there was no trouble at the hotel at all. The dogs were immediately taken from the car and remained outside while the Task Force went inside. One man, 'A' is alleged to have shouted "Fuck the Task Force". He was immediately arrested, taken outside (where a small crowd had gathered) and placed in a police car. Outside the hotel 'B' a friend of 'A', went up to the police to ask why 'A' had been arrested, and told police that 'A' hadn't shouted the comment. 'B' was grabbed by the police who tried to force him into the car. He resisted and three police officers got him face down on the ground and knelt on his back to hold him there. He was handcuffed and put into the police car. Another friend 'C' also a bystander, asked the police why 'B' had been arrested and was himself grabbed and pushed into the police car.

Meanwhile, the police dogs were creating confusion and alarm by lunging and snarling at people. One managed to reach another bystander 'D' who was doing nothing but looking on when the police dog attacked him, ripped his trousers and bit his leg open. His leg was bleeding and he asked the police why he had been attacked and what would happen about his trousers being ruined. He was told "these things happen" and was arrested. Another bystander, a woman, was badly bitten in the lower abdomen but escaped being arrested.

At about the same time, two men were standing between a couple of cars watching what was going on

when a constable with a dog on a leash walked between them and the dog suddenly lunged at 'E' and bit him on the leg. He said to the police officer "what's going to happen about me being bitten on the leg?". He was told "these things just happen" and another constable called out "Grab him — arrest him" and 'E' was then arrested.

Another bystander, 'F' who was upset at what had happened asked a constable why 'D' had been arrested. A witness stated "The cop just spun around and hit him. So 'F' said 'You hit me first, so...' and punched the constable. 'F' took off and wasn't seen again".

As usual, none of the arrested men were told why they had been arrested until they were being 'processed' at the Otahuhu Police station. The men were not released on bail until the next morning (two at 6 am and two at 9am). In court next day 'B' was charged with 'resisting arrest' and the other three with 'disorderly behaviour'. 'A' had taken advantage of the confusion outside the hotel, and had escaped from the police car — he wasn't recaptured, and so didn't appear in court. The other four all pleaded Not Guilty. 'B', 'C', and 'D' were convicted and fined and 'E' was acquitted. But the police still weren't satisfied. 'B's wife, also a Maori, who had been an onlooker received a summons for "obstruction" over a month after the event. She was convicted and received a suspended sentence. The only person who escaped unscathed was a young white woman who shouted insults and "obscene" abuse at the departing police, pointing out their blatant racial discrimination, without being arrested.

A regular drinker at this hotel, not a witness to the above events, has stated "the people who drink in the corner bar of this hotel have got to a point where they would shut the doors and "do" the Task Force. They are talking about this now. It's going to blow up soon with the Task Force. They'll "do" them, no doubt about that. It's only a matter of time."

## THE REAL PROBLEM

The racial oppression of minority ethnic groups in Auckland, particularly Polynesians, is an established fact. It is oppression demanded by a powerful section of white citizens, authorized and sanctioned by white parliamentarians and enforced by the police. The Prime Minister, the Ministers of Police and Justice and the police chiefs have for months been in possession of all the facts presented here. Yet repeatedly they have defended and justified the Task Force and made the false claim that it is not guilty of racial discrimination. We conclude, therefore, that the oppression they are perpetrating on Maoris and other Polynesians in Auckland is deliberate.

The response to the Task Force from the rest of the white establishment has been the same, Lions, Rotaries, businessmen's groups, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Auckland and other local body representatives have all expressed a blind, unthinking, support for the Task Force. To be fair, no-one looks to these groups for a lead on moral issues any more than they look to Parliament. One does, however, look to the Church for such leadership. But although the major churches have been presented with all the facts on the Task Force, what has been their response? Not a single official statement. Not even a public expression of concern. Nothing but a racist, law-and-order editorial in the Catholic newspaper *The Tablet* (23/10/74) stating:

"It may be a regrettable fact that Islanders, for instance, become troublesome in liquor, even fightable (sic). But the fact that they are Islanders should not exempt them from action if they become a nuisance or menace to other people .... We do no service to either police, community or ethnic groups if we refuse to face reality in this field. The streets of our cities must be safe to walk upon; citizens should be free from the danger of being molested by mobile thugs; social functions should not have to go in fear of drunken gate-crashers."

On the other hand, the Young Christian Workers have vigorously investigated and exposed the Task Force but instead of supporting the YCW the Catholic hierarchy has acceded to police pressure and sacked YCW organizer Paul Tolich and confiscated his files.

Is this the best that the white christian churches can do? Their leaders have totally failed to respond to the public criticisms of the Task Force by representatives of numerous Maori and other Polynesian groups. They have offered no support to Reverend Sio of the Pacific Islands Church who has tried to counteract ill-informed prejudice against his people with constructive comment and action. They have not even listened to their Maori members. Reverend Kingi Ihaka, Auckland Anglican Maori Missioner has said that police action "is not the only way" to deal with excessive drinking and violence (N.Z.Herald, 27/8/74) and Reverend Hone Kaa "It is evident that the actions of the Task Force are heavily weighted against the Maori and other Polynesian and are therefore harmful to racial harmony" (N.Z.Herald, 21/10/74).

In the same nine months that the Task Force has arrested approximately 2000 Aucklanders, 1400 or so of them Maoris and other Polynesians, the major, pakeha-dominated churches have loudly criticized racism and oppression in South Africa, Rhodesia,

Uganda, Russia, Chile and Vietnam. **Yet not one has had the honesty and courage to face and challenge the racism of New Zealand and particularly the racism of the Task Force.**

But if the Churches have the responsibility to confront the police and politicians on the issue of the Task Force, the Labour Party which created it has the duty to disband it. Right now the carefully cultivated liberal image of the Labour Party is in shreds, and nowhere is this clearer than in the area of law-and-order. In its eagerness to win votes at any cost Labour is willing to abandon its commitment to improving racial harmony and accede to the demands of the affluent white majority. Labour parliamentarians have for over nine months been in possession of the report of the Statutes Revision Committee which considered the revision of the Police Offences Act. In fact, the report was published **before** the formation of the Task Force. The Committee recommended sweeping changes which would remove 'drunk in a public place' from being an offence and would eliminate many if not all obscene language and disorderly behaviour charges. But Labour has not made the slightest move to introduce a Bill incorporating these changes. Why not? To do so would strip the Task Force, symbol of Labour's commitment to the law-and-order posture, of 90% of its arrests and would leave it idle in the streets.

We predict that the counter-violence already provoked by the Task Force will certainly be used as an argument for strengthening the police force still further. Riot shields and dogs, now standard Task Force weapons, will be superseded by guns. In fact, we suspect this to be the case already. On two separate occasions late in 1974 police officers conducting routine questioning of Polynesians were alleged to have held pistols to their heads. The police denied this but did not deny that they were **carrying the guns**. They offered no reason. Certainly, the Task Force would be the first section of the police force regularly to be issued with guns. If they were, the current Labour Party, the National Party who support them and the white majority of New Zealand will be answerable for the real violence which will inevitably follow.

Oliver Sutherland

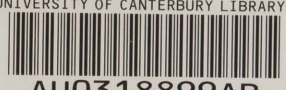
Ross Galbreath

Auckland Committee On Racism and Discrimination

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