

# Aborigines riot in Sydney over teen's death

**Sydney, Feb. 16 (Reuters):** Aborigines rioted in a black ghetto near the centre of Australia's largest city, Sydney, until early today over the death of a teenage boy, hurling Molotov cocktails and bricks at police in a nine-hour battle.

About 40 police were injured, many with broken bones, in one of the worst outbreaks of civil unrest in the city in a decade. Relatives blamed police for the boy's death. New South Wales (NSW) state premier Bob Carr called for calm and police reinforcements were brought in, ready for any repeat.

About 100 Aborigines in Redfern, an inner-city suburb that is home to a notorious Aboriginal area called "The Block", attacked 200 riot police last night and this morning.

The riot was triggered by the death of Aborigine Thomas Hickey, 17, who was impaled on a metal fence after falling from his

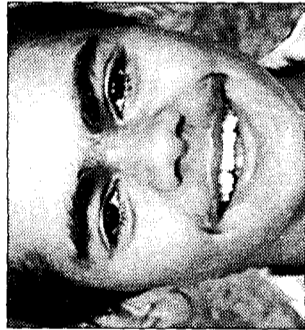
bicycle on Saturday. He died in hospital yesterday morning.

His mother, Gail, said her son was injured while being pursued by police. Police say patrolling officers merely passed by the boy who then sped off, losing control of his bike.

"A brave stance was taken here last night and that stand will continue while ever our community is ostracised and intimidated and traumatised by the racist police of NSW," said Lyall Munro, an Aboriginal elder in Redfern and long-time black activist.

Carr extended his condolences to Gail Hickey. "There will be an independent investigation into the tragic death of a young man."

Protesters, some bare-chested with T-shirts wrapped around their faces, pelled lines of riot police with bricks and bottles, and at one stage pushed a burning garbage bin on wheels to-



Thomas Hickey

wards police and set off fireworks among them. "They were throwing Molotov cocktails both at police and at Redfern railway station during the course of the riot," assistant police commissioner Bob Waites said.

Waites said rioters had eight garbage bins loaded with paving bricks to be used as missiles and large tubs of beer bottles.

It took nine hours to bring the rioters under control and

about 40 police were injured. Eight police remained in hospital today. Five people were arrested either during or after the riot, but it was not clear how many Aborigines were injured.

"My 17-year-old boy was just coming down to get money off his mother and then these dogs... end up killing my son," Gail Hickey said of the police. "How does a... 17-year-old boy end up on the... fence? The police... killed my son."

"The Block" is a ghetto of a few streets of dilapidated houses, some abandoned, smeared with graffiti and occupied by junkies, adjacent to the Redfern railway station a few kilometres from Sydney's central business district.

The no-man's-land for white Australians and has been the site of confrontations between Aborigines and police for years.

The entrance to "The Block" resembles a military checkpoint,

with concrete and wire fencing at the top of the main road. Black and gold Aboriginal flags, the standard for black rights in Australia, are painted on walls.

Local Aborigines say tensions in "The Block" began rising after Thomas Hickey was badly injured in the bicycle accident. After he died, wanted posters with the photographs of three police officers and the words "Child Murderers" started appearing around Redfern.

Senior Aboriginal leaders say the riot was a stark reminder of the deep racial divide in Australia. "People should not ki themselves — this is Australia," said Aden Ridgeway, the chief Aboriginal politician in the national parliament.

"Last night's display of violence is an extreme example of the extent of the alienation felt by some Aboriginal kids and the manifestation of the difficult relationships in the area."



A police car drives past a poster taped to a pole which accuses the police of murder in the Sydney suburb of Redfern. (Reuters)

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