

London nail-bomber arrested--What shapes the psychology of hate?

The Editorial Board
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A 22-year-old engineer has been arrested and charged with the three London nail-bomb attacks that killed three people and injured more than 100.

David Copeland, from Cove, near Farnborough, Hants, was also charged with the murder of the three victims who died following last Friday's explosion in the Admiral Duncan pub in Old Compton Street, a gay bar in Soho.

The nail bomb attacks in Brixton on April 17, Brick Lane on April 24 and Soho last Friday evening were targeted at black, Asian and other ethnic minorities, along with homosexuals. Police said the devices used were "crude and unsophisticated", made up of shoe boxes containing hundreds of pieces of shrapnel including nails and a detonating charge packed in a sports bag.

The most devastating blast was the last that injured 65 and killed three. One of those who died was Andrea Dykes, 27, who was three months pregnant. Her husband Julian, 26, has been left fighting for his life with severe burns and nails lodged in his lungs. John Light, 35, the best man at the couple's wedding two years ago, was also killed along with another friend, Nick Moore, 31. Between 15 and 19 people remain hospitalised with serious burns and limb injuries. Four men were critically injured; three of whom have had a leg amputated.

Copeland's arrest on Saturday came the day after detectives released photographs of a suspect in a white baseball cap. The pictures were taken from closed-circuit television film in Brixton at the time of the first bombing, in which 39 people were injured.

Anti-terrorist officers, supported by a team from the Organised Crime Group Flying Squad, sealed off a street in Cove, before smashing down the door of a house at 2 a.m. and making the arrest. Police woke

about 100 families in surrounding houses and took them to a recreation centre while the arrest was made. They also closed off a section of the M3 motorway behind the estate. Copeland appeared at a West London magistrates court yesterday.

It was with a palpable sense of relief that David Veness, Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, told the press on Sunday that Copeland had been acting alone for his own motives. "There is no suggestion at this stage that the arrest is linked in any way to the extreme Right-wing groups that have been reportedly claiming responsibility for these attacks on innocent people."

Veness went on to say, "There appeared, and still appears, to be no trigger event or specific date that has sparked these attacks."

The arrest has come after weeks of media speculation about whether the bombings represented a turn to overt terrorism by various right-wing groups in Britain. "Combat 18", the "White Wolves" and other neo-Nazi organisations have all claimed responsibility for the bombings.

Immediately, press coverage of the events has shifted focus to the psychological causes that provoke an individual to commit such outrages. The *Guardian* has cited the views of Cary Cooper, professor of psychology at University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, who said that the spark for acts of terror comes from "resentment towards somebody or something", built up in childhood.

Explaining that Copeland must be a disturbed individual says very little. That the "lone bomber" is always a disturbed personality is at best a truism. What is not addressed at all are the broader societal causes of such disturbed behaviour, nor why psychological problems should manifest themselves in a murderous

hatred of entire groups of people. It remains the case that, whether he belonged to a neo-fascist organisation or not, Copeland's targets were blacks, Asians and homosexuals. Such prejudices must still be accounted for.

According to the media and the government, extremism and intolerance is the province of a marginalised group on the fringes of society. To emphasise that this was "alien to the British spirit of tolerance", the media noted that Britain's right-wing groups drew their inspiration from the American militia movements and terrorist acts like that committed by Timothy McVeigh in Oklahoma City. The vehicle for this pollution of liberal Britain was the Internet and "popular" US media, they claimed.

The parallels with the United States are indeed obvious. But more is involved than simply emulation. What fundamentally connects the US and Britain is not a telecommunications network, but a social and political model.

For the past two decades, under both the Thatcher and Blair governments, Britain has sought to emulate the American example. The welfare state policies of the post-war period have been replaced by a celebration of the free market, social laissez-faire and law-and-order measures. Both nations are today characterised by a hitherto unprecedented polarisation between a fabulously wealthy few and widespread social hardship for the majority.

Beneath the surface, social tensions have reached explosive proportions. The ruling elite attempt to suppress and conceal the antagonisms their policies generate by creating a cultural and political climate which glorifies wealth and power, and that blames the less fortunate for their own situation. But these tensions must manifest themselves nevertheless. In the absence of any progressive alternative, such manifestations take on increasingly violent and inchoate forms. From the Colorado school shootings to the London nail-bombings, the consequences are making themselves felt.

Moreover, the political climate created by government to justify its policies itself shapes the reactionary form in which social discontent is manifest. In Britain, New Labour has sought to suppress any discussion of the growing class divisions through the promotion of "identity" politics, based on race, religion,

nationality, sex and sexual preference. Acknowledging and celebrating such distinctions is meant to be the hallmark of a new "inclusive" agenda for Britain. Hours after Copeland's arrest, Blair proclaimed his agenda of a "new Britannia" as the answer to the intolerance exhibited by a marginalised right-wing minority.

Addressing a meeting of representatives from Britain's Sikh community, he said that an attack on any Asian, black or homosexual was an attack on "the whole of Britain". Patriotism and national identity in the past had been defined by a reference to those excluded, he continued. "Nationalism in this sense can be dangerous. But today we take pride in an identity, limited by the geography of the country, but within that country, open to all, whatever their colour, religion or ethnic background."

This attempt to repackage British nationalism is far from the liberal agenda Blair claims it to be. If geography is to define the limits of toleration, then those outside Britain must be, by definition, excluded. On this basis, his government justifies some of the most draconian anti-immigration and asylum legislation ever seen. It hardly needs pointing out that blaming immigrants for unemployment and other social problems is the stock-in-trade of the extreme right.

Moreover, since it came to power, Labour has participated in the almost continuous bombing of Iraq, supported US military action against Afghanistan and Sudan. And now it is playing a leading role in the NATO onslaught against Serbia. Blair even began his paean to tolerance with the claim that NATO was fighting in Kosovo for the same values as those the police sought to protect in Britain -- "The right to live in freedom from fear, whatever your race or religion."

He neglected to say that they were doing so by raining bombs down on those considered to be a threat to British values. Blair may believe that the government can dictate what constitutes a legitimate "hate target", but right-wing elements and disturbed individuals define their own and act accordingly. The one message they retain is that it is necessary to terrorise "outsiders".



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