

One year on: Lessons of the London bombings

Socialist Equality Party (Britain)
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The official commemoration of the July 7, 2005, terror bombings in London, which killed 52 people, is being used by the Blair government to justify even greater powers of repression.

Behind the crocodile tears that will be shed today, the government is indifferent to the suffering of those involved. Nothing testifies more poignantly to this than the paltry compensation offered to the victims and their families. For example, Nader Mozakka, who lost his wife in the bombings, has received just £5,500 in compensation, while Martine Wright, who lost both legs, was awarded £110,000.

The government's commemoration is a shameful attempt to manipulate public grief, so as to suppress any critical discussion on the political lessons that must be drawn from the worst terrorist outrage ever committed on British soil. As far as the government is concerned, the silence on the circumstances surrounding July 7 and its political background will extend far beyond the two minutes set aside to commemorate the victims of the attack.

The Labour Party government of Prime Minister Tony Blair spent the days leading up to the anniversary opposing the demands of relatives of those killed and maimed for a public inquiry into the bombings. Blair maintains that such an inquiry would divert resources from the war on terror.

His cynical argument was backed by Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell, who is leading the commemoration on the government's behalf. She was caught out in a lie when she claimed that the official inquiry into the 1972 Bloody Sunday massacre of civil rights demonstrators in Northern Ireland had cost £400 million. The actual figure was half that amount.

In any event, Blair's argument is spurious. How could a public inquiry divert from any genuine attempt to protect the population against terrorist attacks?

The government does not want an inquiry because, in the first place, it would raise political questions over the role that the illegal war and occupation of Iraq played in creating the conditions that produced the July 7 outrage.

Millions of people across Britain and internationally opposed the war and warned that, far from securing innocent people against terrorist attacks, the outrage felt around the world over the neo-colonial aggression would make the populations of the US and Britain more vulnerable. Blair, in his rush to carve out a sphere of geopolitical influence for British capital in the Middle East on the coat-tails of the Bush administration, disregarded such concerns and placed the lives of every man, woman and child in Britain in danger.

Even now, the government insists that the Iraq war has nothing to do with any increased terror threat. Why, then, did Blair admit that he was "probably not the person to go into the Muslim community" and call on the relative non-entity Jowell to preside over the July 7 commemorations?

The government also opposes an inquiry because it does not want to

answer awkward questions about the role of the security forces in the run-up to the July 7 bombings. It hopes that a stage-managed display of "national unity" will divert public attention from such questions.

Not a month has passed without accusations being made that the security forces had detailed fore-warnings of a possible terrorist outrage in London.

The *Observer* has revealed that in early 2005, Saudi intelligence had advised British officials that four Islamic militants, including at least some British citizens, were planning to bomb the London Underground within the ensuing six months. The newspaper has cited the Saudi ambassador and senior US National Security Council counterterrorism agents confirming the report.

The security forces have admitted that two of the bombers, Mohammad Sidique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer, were known to them for at least two years before July 7. On two occasions, MI5 placed both under surveillance in connection with other individuals who were under investigation. The pair had also been observed in Pakistan. MI5 had Khan's telephone number as a contact of a terror suspect, and also the phone number of a third bomber, Jermaine Lindsay.

This apparent failure to maintain surveillance of the future bombers was justified with the claim that Khan and Tanweer were believed to be only peripheral figures. However, according to American journalist Ron Suskind, Khan was refused entry into the United States on security grounds two years before the London attacks because he was regarded as a major figure within Al Qaeda circles. Suskind also claims that US authorities gave MI5 a detailed file on Khan at the time.

The bombers were subsequently proved to have acted under the leadership of Al Qaeda. In September 2005, a video was released of Khan in which he said he was inspired by Osama Bin Laden. The same tape contained a message from Al-Qaeda's second in command, Ayman al-Zawahri, claiming responsibility for the blasts. Yesterday, a similar video was broadcast featuring Tanweer and including a statement by al-Zawahri and Adam Gadahn, known as Azzam al-Amriki, who is believed to be in charge of Al-Qaeda's propaganda.

Every allegation of the security services having information about the terror plot has been either denied or put down to "oversights" and "intelligence failings." If these explanations are true, then the British government must stand condemned for perpetrating a massive hoax on the British people, in the form of its so-called "war on terror." If the Blair government and the security services were truly involved in an intensive, daily struggle to protect the population against a terrorist threat that they define as immense and imminent, then such a monumental "lapse" could never occur.

At the very least, the so-called "intelligence failings" demonstrate that the "war on terror" is a fraud, employed to spread fear and panic and justify external military aggression and an unprecedented assault on democratic rights at home.

But another explanation is possible: that the bombings were the result not of official lapses or failings, but rather a deliberate decision to allow them to take place, so as to provide the government with a pretext for further attacks on civil liberties and new military adventures overseas.

It should be noted that there has still been no explanation for the decision taken in March 2005 to downgrade the national security alert, despite the pending G8 summit in Scotland, which was in session at the very time the suicide bombers struck the capital.

For the past decade and more, these gatherings of heads of state of the most wealthy and powerful countries have been held under military-type security, with entire urban centers placed under conditions resembling martial law and the most intensive and sophisticated anti-terror measures in place. Especially after the Madrid train bombings the previous year, Britain as the host country of the summit would have had to have been considered the prime target for an Al Qaeda attack. And yet, inexplicably, the government decided to lower the terror alert!

The bombings were certainly a political gift to the government, which had just suffered major losses in the general election and was facing significant opposition—including sections of the judiciary—to its latest raft of anti-terror legislation. After July 7, it was able to pass the Prevention of Terrorism Act—described by Blair as a “watershed” in legal history—with only minor amendments.

The government, the police and the security services thus acquired draconian powers of surveillance and detention based on the claim that they were necessary to combat terrorism. In the process, they have abrogated habeas corpus and the right to free speech, and secretly implemented a shoot-to-kill policy.

These measures have already claimed innocent victims. The cold-blooded execution of Jean Charles de Menezes last year has been followed by last month’s raid on a house in Forest Gate in which another innocent man was shot.

De Menezes was falsely identified as one of the conspirators involved in a failed plot to bomb London again on July 21, 2005. After dozens of arrests, later that same month four men were arrested and have been charged with attempting to murder passengers. They are still awaiting trial.

In total, the police claim that 60 people have been arrested and face charges on terrorist-related offences since July 7, 2005. Extraordinarily little information has been made public as to their alleged crimes, and it is reported that most will not come to trial for two years. Hundreds more have been released without charge.

The threat of terrorism has been used in an ever more indiscriminate manner to ban or limit protests. Writing in the *Observer*, Henry Porter told of the case of Steve Jago, who was arrested in June for displaying a placard outside Downing Street and has been charged with mounting an illegal demonstration. When searched by police, Jago was found to have an article by Porter on civil liberties, entitled “Blair’s Big Brother Britain.” The article, published in *Vanity Fair* magazine, which has a circulation of more than 1 million, was described by the police as “politically motivated material” and used as part of the justification for charging Jago.

A picture emerges of practices usually associated with a Latin American dictatorship becoming commonplace in Britain. The anniversary of July 7 is being used to whip up a climate of fear in order to take these developments even further.

In the last days, there have been repeated warnings of a heightened terror alert, including allegations of plots to “release cyanide gas in a

public place—even on the London transport system.” Blair has said that the danger of terror attacks on Britain is “clear and active,” while Peter Clarke, head of the Metropolitan Police Anti-Terrorist Branch, described the threat as “unprecedented.” He added that “the flow of new cases shows no sign of abating—if anything it is accelerating.”

Media reports state, without any substantiation, that large numbers of white Britons are being “lured” into joining Islamic terrorist groups, and Whitehall sources claim that Al Qaeda sympathisers have tried to infiltrate MI5.

The hysteria that characterises many of these proclamations is not only for public consumption. The manner in which the terrorist threat is used as a synonym for all forms of social and political opposition points to a ruling elite that is profoundly disoriented, and feels itself isolated and besieged by enemies on all sides.

The Blair government is pursuing policies that are diametrically opposed to the interests of the broad mass of the population. Acting on behalf of a financial oligarchy, it has aligned itself with the United States in a campaign of colonial plunder aimed at securing hegemony over vital resources and global markets. Domestically, it has set out to eliminate social provisions that are considered by its backers to be an impermissible drain on profits, facilitating a redistribution of wealth away from working people to the rich that has resulted in a historically unprecedented social polarisation.

Unable to countenance any retreat from its policy of imposing the dictates of big business, the government’s only answer to rising opposition will be further provocations and attacks on democratic rights.

Every official report now stresses that the terror threat is “home-grown,” implying a need for more domestic repression. To this end, Chancellor Gordon Brown has announced a further £40 million for the intelligence services to develop “specific new capabilities,” taking their budget over £1.6 billion. MI5 is undertaking a massive recruitment campaign, aimed at doubling employee numbers to 3,500, and intends to set up eight regional offices throughout the country in its biggest deployment outside the capital in peacetime.

It cannot be excluded that Britain could face another terrorist attack. However, working people must not allow the government to corral public opinion behind its anti-democratic agenda by using a threat that its policies have fostered. Instead, they must inaugurate a mass political and social movement that links opposition to imperialist war with the defence of democratic rights. This must be waged as a struggle against the profit system that is the source of militarism, war and social inequality.



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