

Police spy agencies target Australian universities

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Last week's revelation that police intelligence sought to recruit University of Sydney Students Representative Council (SRC) leader Daniel Jones to spy on fellow students points to increasing state surveillance of political activity on university campuses.

A front-page report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* revealed that 20-year-old Jones was approached by an undercover agent on June 6. The intelligence officer—who introduced himself as 'Ahmed'—offered to "make arrangements" in relation to charges against Jones following last year's G-20 protests in Melbourne.

In a clear case of police blackmail, 'Ahmed' asked Jones to provide regular information about student protest activities in the lead-up to this September's APEC meeting in Sydney. "He was saying that police needed some help in the lead-up to APEC and of course they could help me. He said 'have you got charges against you? We can help with that.'"

Five days later Jones received a call from 'Ahmed' on his mobile phone: "Look Daniel, the necessary arrangements have been put in place in Melbourne."

"I was in a dangerous situation," Daniel told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "I was put in a position where to turn down the offer I was effectively choosing to be charged." The undercover cop also offered Jones money in return for regular briefings.

The agent—who claimed he was from NSW Police intelligence—already knew many details about student protest activities. During a twenty-minute discussion with Jones, 'Ahmed' spoke of a newly-formed anarchist collective called Mutiny, and referred to the International Socialist Organisation, and Solidarity, saying he was aware of their conflict with another group, Resistance, over pre-publicity for the APEC protests.

The agent also made clear his familiarity with

Jones's own political views and affiliations: "He knew about my attitude to other socialist groups ... he used exactly the same words to describe them as I have."

Jones, who is SRC Education Officer at the University of Sydney, said the above information could only have been uncovered via surveillance of an online "e-list" (similar to a bulletin board) used by student activists like himself, or through state infiltration of student gatherings.

The attempt to recruit Jones comes just 12 weeks after anti-terrorist police coordinated pre-dawn raids on the homes of five University of Sydney protestors. Jones's Newtown home was one of those ransacked. Students were dragged from their beds, strip-searched and interrogated, while police seized and photographed personal belongings, including political leaflets, flyers and other material. The five were subsequently charged with serious offences including riot, affray, dangerous conduct and unlawful assembly.

That anti-terror police are now targeting student politicians is no aberration. The real but unstated purpose of the battery of anti-democratic laws enacted by state and federal governments since 2001—including provisions for secret detention, and the stripping of habeas corpus—is the criminalisation of political dissent.

The University of Sydney SRC reports that undercover police have threatened several activists in recent months:

On February 22, undercover officers followed and then chased a group of student protest organisers as they walked through Victoria Park. One of the students was subsequently cornered in a nearby back lane. A plain clothes officer named a long list of protestors in a threatening manner.

On the evening of March 14, following the pre-dawn raids earlier that day, a young female activist was

confronted by two suited detectives as she left choir practice. They told her to stop going to rallies, and to “watch out” or the “same thing would happen” to her.

Also in March, at least two plainclothes officers were present at a public forum convened to protest the opening of a controversial US Studies Centre at the university. Students allege that a man taking close-up photographs of audience members was working for police and that such surveillance is now routine.

SRC President Angus McFarland said some fellow activists now proceed on the assumption that the SRC’s activities, including email correspondence and phone calls, are monitored.

“I think a lot of people would be really disturbed by what’s happening. People have this rose-coloured view of Australia as a democratic country. But we are seeing measures which have more in common with the Stasi or a police state. University is a time when people traditionally question things and open up and learn about the world. That spirit of inquiry is now under threat.”

Recent media reports have made unsubstantiated claims that Mutiny and other anarchist groups are planning “violent action” at protests called to coincide with the APEC meeting of world leaders in Sydney on September 7-8. These reports, combined with the activity of undercover agents, raises the danger that police stooges are infiltrating left-wing organisations with the express aim of instigating violence and thereby legitimising sweeping police suppression of the right to demonstrate.

During the recent G8 protests in Rostock, Germany, agents provocateurs were identified amid riots that triggered a police-military crackdown. Measures prepared more than a year in advance—the lockdown of entire suburbs, mass detention of demonstrators without charge or trial, the erection of prison-camp facilities and unprovoked violence against government opponents—were suddenly enacted.

Police surveillance at the University of Sydney is at least partly connected to government preparations for APEC. The Iemma Labor government has legislated unprecedented police measures for the duration of the APEC leaders’ summit, effectively outlawing the right to protest. The latest of these, introduced early in June, empowers police to establish checkpoints, randomly search citizens, seal off the city and surrounding

suburbs and prevent entry of designated persons (and items) into the central business district.

But overt police intimidation of student activists has a far wider meaning. A creeping assault on freedom of speech and political activity on universities has occurred throughout the past decade. In 1995, at the initiative of federal Labor’s Higher Education Minister Simon Crean, charges were laid in the state of Victoria against the editors of La Trobe University’s student magazine *Rabelais* after publication of a satirical article entitled ‘The Art of Shoplifting’. Then, as opposition among students to government policy deepened, the Howard government moved to disband student unions with the introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU), eliminating funding for a range of cultural activities including clubs and societies and student newspapers.

As a new generation of young people becomes radicalised, state authorities in every country are responding with methods of surveillance, censorship and repression. Last week the WWSWS carried a report detailing FBI spying and recruitment activity at universities in New England (see “FBI targets universities in new scheme to recruit informers”). Similar measures are underway in Europe.

A comment by right-wing British commentator Ross Clark, re-reprinted in Murdoch’s the *Australian* newspaper over the weekend, reveals something of the discussion underway in ruling circles. Clark warns that anti-capitalist sentiment, which grew steadily in the late 1990s, is now re-emerging after a five year eclipse that was ushered in by the terror strikes of 9-11. He equates the thousands of G8 protestors in Rostock with the leaders of the terrorist Bader-Meinhof Group in the early 1970s and warns that “the rich haters are back on the march”. As Clark’s diatribe makes clear, increasingly, those deemed a threat to public order and safety are not terrorists but the growing mass of the population protesting war and global social inequality.



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