

Massive security for Commonwealth meeting in Western Australia

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Extensive police-state security measures have been adopted in the Western Australian capital of Perth, as part of state and federal government preparations for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) this weekend. CHOGM consists of the leaders of Britain and its former colonies.

Police powers have been vastly expanded for the period October 19 to November 4 under the CHOGM Special Powers Act, passed earlier this year. The legislation violates fundamental democratic rights. It is modelled on and extends the draconian measures implemented by the New South Wales (NSW) Labor government of Morris Iemma for the 2007 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Sydney.

Core Security Areas (CSA) have been designated by the WA Commissioner of Police throughout the Perth central business district, along with swathes of the University of Western Australia, Kings Park and the Swan River foreshore. New CSAs can be nominated by the police chief at any time.

In these zones, police can stop and search any person without suspecting a past or future offence. Laptops and mobile phones can be searched for emails and text messages. Those in the CSA must provide police with their identification, including their name, date of birth and address. A person who refuses to provide these details can be evicted from the area and classified as an “excludable person”, barring them from all CSAs. Excluded persons who re-enter these areas face up to 12 months’ imprisonment.

Under the Special Powers Act 2011, protesters who disrupt or interfere with CHOGM events, including the arrival of attendees, guest accommodation or meetings, could face up to 12 months’ imprisonment. In measures directly aimed at younger protesters, people as young as 16 can be hauled into closed-door

examinations by the Corruption and Crime Commission. Police Minister Rob Johnson said the targeting of 16-year-olds was necessary because “some of the groups looking to engage in extreme acts are known to recruit juveniles and indoctrinate them to their cause.”

The legislation also prohibits carrying items in the CSAs that “can make a loud noise” or “can be used to make a stage, platform, tripod or tower”. Glass bottles and tin cans are not allowed. Carrying prohibited items can result in a \$6,000 fine.

WA Police Commissioner Karl O’Callaghan has drafted a secret list of “excluded persons”, who have been served at their homes and workplaces with notices instructing them not to attempt to enter any CSA.

A number of people have had their homes raided by police over the past two weeks. Colleen Burger, who was arrested as well as having her home raided, told the press: “They kept asking about CHOGM and were very interested in leaflets we had around the house. When they arrested me they kept saying ‘we know more than you think’ and suggesting that I had been under surveillance. It’s absolutely harassment and an attempt to intimidate us into stopping lawful activities.”

A massive security build-up has taken place to enforce the raft of anti-democratic laws. Roughly 700 police officers have been flown to Perth from other states and New Zealand to assist an estimated 3,000 WA police, who have undergone training in riot control tactics in the lead-up to CHOGM. Clusters of police are patrolling virtually every corner in the city.

The federal Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard has placed 1,000 navy and army personnel on standby near Perth, along with Special Air Service (SAS) troops, some of whom have been deployed multiple times in the neo-colonial Afghan war. Eight

air force FA-18 Hornet fighter jets will be on standby, together with four Blackhawk helicopters. Trial flights have been held over the city for weeks to prepare the public for the ramped-up security operations. A “Wedgetail” spy plane, one of the most sophisticated in the world, will maintain constant surveillance over the area and provide target information to fighter jets.

Underscoring the bipartisan character of the security build-up, WA Labor opposition police spokeswoman Margaret Quirk insisted in January on the need for stepped up search and other police powers, in line with the 2007 APEC security measures.

The purpose of the security build-up is to suppress and intimidate protesters and prepare public consciousness for a permanent expansion of police powers. Police Minister Johnson stated this earlier this year: “CHOGM creates serious challenges to police. A major concern ... is that [it] provides an opportunity for persons aggrieved by the actions of one or more of the participating states to publicise their particular cause.”

In particular, government ministers have threatened anyone planning to join an Occupy Perth protest timed to coincide with CHOGM, as part of the international demonstrations against social inequality and corporate power. Protesters plan to occupy the Forrest Chase plaza in the central business district, and camp there for three days.

WA Premier Colin Barnett told the media this week: “If they’re just sitting quietly with a couple of banners, that’s OK ... [But] people won’t be setting up camps ... If they disrupt the public they will be removed.” Barnett’s comments came less than a week after NSW and Victorian police arrested more than 100 people during violent operations to break-up Occupy protests in Melbourne and Sydney.

An unknown number of Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) officers and Australian Federal Police will operate throughout Perth over the weekend. ASIO has spent months in the lead-up to the event spying on “interest-motivated persons”, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and officers are continuing to monitor social networking sites.

Ominously, Police Minister Johnson warned: “The behaviour of anarchist groups at the 2010 G20 meeting held in Toronto, Canada, provides a vivid example of the challenges that may confront police.” The Toronto police exploited a spree of window-breaking by a

grouping known as the “Black bloc”, which had all the hallmarks of a deliberate police provocation, to attack protesters and violently arrest more than 900 people.



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