

Massachusetts high school student charged as terrorist for Facebook post

Tom Carter
11 May 2013

Teenager Cameron D'Ambrosio faces up to 20 years in prison on "terror" charges for making reference to the Boston Marathon bombings in a Facebook post.

The prosecution of D'Ambrosio has all the hallmarks of a calculated test case, designed to roll back further the protections of the First Amendment and flex the state's expanding power to regulate speech. It is designed to send a message that under the new legal framework imposed in the course of the so-called "war on terror," people have to "watch what they say."

D'Ambrosio, 18, attends Methuen High School in Massachusetts. He was arrested on May 2 on terror charges and accused of making a bomb threat. He is currently being held without bail. Police subsequently raided D'Ambrosio's home, seizing an Xbox 360 gaming system and a computer.

According to media reports, the teenager's "bomb threat" consists of the following rap lyrics: "I'm not in reality, So when u see me f--- go insane and make the news, the paper, and the f--- federal house of horror known as the white house, Don't f--- cry or be worried because all YOU people f--- caused this s---."

D'Ambrosio also posted: "F--- a boston bominb (sic) wait till u see the s--- I do, I'ma be famous rapping, and beat every murder charge that comes across me!"

Acquaintances of D'Ambrosio, who posts raps on Facebook under the alter-ego of "Cammy Dee," expressed shock at the charges. Many felt that, in the hyperbolic braggadocio of the rap genre, D'Ambrosio was not threatening to unleash anything more than "famous rapping."

On Facebook, one acquaintance wrote, "Knowing Cam, and I actually do, he definitely wouldn't do any of the s--- he said," adding that "his raps are influenced by many of the mainstream rappers on the radio today."

It is no secret that confusion, frustration, anger,

isolation, a certain fascination with violence—all these are fairly common among American teenagers at present. D'Ambrosio appears to be no exception. That these sentiments would find their way into a Facebook post is not, as the media claims, a shocking event.

Most importantly, regardless of the merit of D'Ambrosio's Facebook postings, the postings themselves constitute 100 percent protected free speech. Historically, the US Supreme Court has held that the First Amendment to the US Constitution, part of the Bill of Rights, protects even so-called "terrorist" speech.

In a unanimous 1969 decision in *Brandenburg v. Ohio*, the US Supreme Court overturned the conviction of a KKK leader who openly called for violence against politicians in a speech. The KKK leader was convicted under an Ohio statute that made it a crime to "advocate ... the duty, necessity, or propriety of crime, sabotage, violence or unlawful methods of terrorism as a means of accomplishing industrial or political reform."

The Supreme Court struck down the conviction as well as the statute on the grounds that the statute "purports to punish mere advocacy" and "sweeps within its condemnation speech which our Constitution has immunized from governmental control."

The "terror" allegations against D'Ambrosio are remarkable for what is not alleged. D'Ambrosio did not have any weapons or bombs. He did not have any plans to acquire weapons or bombs, and he did not attempt to acquire any. He did not have any accomplices and there was no conspiracy. There were no victims, real or intended. He did not threaten anyone in particular. He had no contact, affiliation, or membership in a terrorist group. There was no plan to carry out an attack in a particular place, or with a particular device, or on a particular date. All

D'Ambrosio did was post the lyrics to a rap song on Facebook.

The authorities are making an effort to link D'Ambrosio's Facebook post to the Boston bombings themselves. Methuen Police Chief Joseph Solomon held a press conference to announce the terror charges against D'Ambrosio, stating, "When we're just recovering from what occurred in Boston, to make a threat and use what occurred in Boston to enhance your threat, is extremely alarming for us."

D'Ambrosio's prosecution is part of a string of similar "terror" prosecutions.

Teenager Abdella Ahmad Dounisi was arrested last year in Chicago for allegedly attempting to join a Syrian militant group that the US government claims is linked to Al Qaeda. While the US government is working hand-in-glove with similar groups in its drive for regime-change in Syria, the authorities are prosecuting Dounisi to establish that a person can be jailed merely for attempting online to join a group designated as "terrorist."

Alex David Rosario, a Michigan high school student, was charged with "domestic terrorism" in January for allegedly threatening to shoot fellow Subway employees, which he claimed was a joke.

In February, two high school girls in Louisiana were arrested and charged with 10 counts of "terrorism" for emailing threats to students and faculty "to see if they could get away with it."

These prosecutions mark a further step in the steady drive to transform the "war on terror" into a domestic war against opposition and dissent, which requires the dismantling of what remains of democratic legal protections and the demolition of the right to free speech as it was understood historically.

With the government free to designate individuals as "terrorists" merely because of what they say or post online, the way will be cleared for mass arrests and the unleashing of police state repression against the population.

The US government already asserts that a person designated as a "terrorist" by the president is subject to abduction and detention without trial (tested in the case of Jose Padilla and codified by the 2011 National Defense Authorization Act), trial before a military commission (pursuant to the Military Commissions Act), torture (tested in the case of Bradley Manning), or

even assassination (tested in the cases of Anwar Al-Awlaki, Samir Khan, and Abdulrahman Al-Awlaki).

Under legal doctrines announced by the Bush and Obama administrations, a person who is designated as a "terrorist" can be denied all of his or her basic constitutional and legal rights. Moreover, under the Patriot Act of 2001, it is a crime to offer any kind of vaguely defined "material support" to any person designated as a "terrorist." Lawyers who provide legal advice to individuals designated as "terrorists" may themselves be subject to arrest.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has warned from the beginning, the so-called "war on terror" has nothing to do with protecting the American population from terrorism. Rather, it is a smokescreen for unbridled militarism abroad and the preparation of dictatorial forms of rule at home.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact