

Australia: Youth and workers express disbelief over anti-terror raids

Our reporters

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Socialist Equality Party (SEP) supporters spoke last weekend with workers, youth and students in Melbourne, Sydney and Newcastle about the unprecedented anti-terror raids conducted on over 15 homes in Sydney and Brisbane on September 17 by hundreds of heavily-armed police and Australian Security Intelligence Organisation officers.

While some people were reluctant to publicly comment, almost all of those who stopped to speak with SEP supporters were deeply suspicious about the police operation.

Many voiced their concerns about how the raids were being used to justify support for the latest US-led war in the Middle East. Others pointed to increased anti-Muslim hysteria and the impact of draconian new anti-terror laws being debated in parliament this week. A number of workers said they appreciated the fact that the *World Socialist Web Site* had given them the opportunity to express their opposition to the raids and the political agenda behind them.

In the western Sydney suburb of Auburn, which has a large Middle Eastern population, there was opposition and anger over the raids.

Mayouf, a self-employed solar energy installer originally from Algeria, said the raids were “ridiculous and completely unjustified...Why go in there in the middle of the night and intimidate kids and women?”

“The government is using this as a diversion from real issues. The last government used the issue of illegal immigrants as a diversion and this government is using this as a diversion,” he said.

The government was attempting to justify its involvement in the new US war in Iraq and Syria “by making people feel there is a danger from ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria]. Otherwise they won’t get any support and now they want to introduce new laws, which would allow them to put cameras in your house. The raids are being used to push these things through. We must protest against this.”

Adam said the government was using the raids “to pass the new anti-terror laws... If you look at the nature of the raids and the publicity they have received and the charges

they have made, it doesn’t add up. These were the largest raids ever in Australia and only one person has been charged and it’s over a phone call...

“This creates a divide between the Muslim community and Australian community at large,” he added. “After the budget announcement, Abbott’s popularity plummeted and now with this whole issue of anti-terror, I’m sure there’s been an increase in the support for his government. Joe Hockey was going around blasting the poor. He was out of touch with the public.”

Adam referred to the “weapons of mass destruction” lies used to justify the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the regime-change operation against Gaddafi in Libya. “We have seen this before, the government has a hidden agenda and its time we stood up and made our own judgments,” he said.

Muhammad, student from Mascot in Sydney, was concerned about anti-Muslim hysteria from the media.

“This is having a negative impact on society. The raids are based on evidence that is not good enough. They’re planting this fear into peoples’ mind that all Muslims are bad people but it’s based on inadequate evidence and one extremist group...”

“I have friends in Auburn living in Muslim communities and they’ve received threats. It doesn’t sound safe for them to go out in those areas. The car of a friend of my friend in Mascot was smashed and they wrote something on the car.”

In the south-west Sydney suburb of Lakemba, **Marven** was also concerned about the press: “This is slashed all over the media and blown out of proportion to achieve the aim of terrifying everybody... It’s back to 9/11 all over again. I’m very disappointed that this country is falling into that type of fear mongering against Muslims.”

The timing of the raid, he continued, “could not be more perfect and it’s to add weight to the changes to our laws. This happened in America as well and many other countries too, where they are trying to pass laws that do not have much support.

“We have had some well-timed outing of potential terrorists. A lot of these terrorists were charged and locked

away. Eventually they let them go; there were no charges against them. They were found to be innocent but we do not hear about that.

“If you dig around a little bit you’ll find that there are big corporations with big interests in oil and gas pipe lines going through certain countries. It’s not a fight about ideology but about companies with different interests. Because Assad is on the Russian side, they want to get rid of him.”

Ali, a warehouse assistant, bluntly declared: “It’s all made up by the Australian government, the police and ASIO.” Asked about the relationship between the government’s anti-terror measures and the new war on Iraq and Syria, he said: “They want to take over natural resources in the region and do not care how many countries will be destroyed and how many people will be killed or made homeless in this process. Their real aim is to get rid of Assad, not ISIS. They have created ISIS, as they created Al Qaeda...”

“They want to manipulate people to think just about war, rather than thinking about social issues including education or government spending in the budget.”

In Footscray in Melbourne’s west, an unemployed casual worker said: “I think the world is controlled by a small number of people. No-one is listening to us. People need peace. We know that Wall St wants war and it is because of money that’s obvious.”

Christopher, a PhD student, commented: “For Abbott it is like the Falklands War was for Thatcher. The raids are chest beating. They need to be seen to be doing something. It is almost like a TV ratings war. It is derisory that they should claim that ISIL members in Australia would carry out public executions. They will use them as a pretext for the new anti-terror legislation—that will use the Guantanamo Bay formula—don’t tell anybody about the torture they use.”

In Meadows Heights in a northern Melbourne suburb, **Mimo**, a handyman, said that the government was “trying to put pressure on people.

“They want us to think that there are terrorists here so we will agree with the sending of troops to Iraq... Actually it has been all right here. There haven’t been terrorists in Australia.

“America creates everything and I think Australia follows the US on this...They went into Iraq saying there was a nuclear bomb there or something. They found nothing!

“Look at what happened in Syria as well? They said they have chemical weapons. But where are they? And now there is ISIS but who made them? The US or Israel. People shouldn’t believe this but look more and think about it before they say anything...”

“I’ve been three months without a job. No one wants to spend any money now, everyone is scared now. And the government spends money overseas with America on war. It

would be great if we could stop them and have peace.”

In Newcastle, **Jim**, who is involved in the visual arts, said the anti-terror raids were “an infringement on our rights, aimed not only at these so-called extremist forces but against all working people, particularly the left-wing. I believe nothing the world news tells me, they just blow things out of proportion.”

Belinda, a social worker, said she was “dubious” about the raids: “What I worry about is whether it’s used to present a single story and not include more information about what is going on; specifically if the families were treated badly by the police.”

Commenting on the media coverage, she said: “The media is controlled by the interests of a select few, whose economic interests are supported by certain political decisions...”

“Where you have a society in fear, you can control that society. You can direct that fear outwards, away from what they are suffering. ... This strikes into the heart of people and gives them a reason to go to war.”

Heath, a gap-year student, said there was “a parallel between [the raids] and the recent announcement of the involvement of Australia in the US’s new war in the Middle East. I think that we should be able to have a discussion in the public on what are the pros and cons of going to war. And, frankly, there aren’t any pros for the average working person

“The reintervention into the Middle East is about resources and to expand our dominion over countries that we can profit from. This is masqueraded through the use of the religious turmoil in the country but the turmoil is a result of western intervention.”



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