

Latest Australian “terrorist” witch-hunt targets Islamist meeting in Sydney

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Last week saw yet another “terrorist” scare in Australia designed to whip up anti-Muslim hysteria. This time, the fear-mongering focused on what turned out to be a regular Friday night prayer session and lecture by an Islamist group in suburban Sydney.

Over the past month, the Australian population has been bombarded by one government-media witch-hunt after another, seeking to stampede public opinion into support for Australia’s involvement in the US-led war in Iraq and Syria, and the accompanying barrage of anti-democratic “terrorism” legislation.

Clearly nervous about the prospects of widespread opposition developing to the imperialist war—given the collapse of the “weapons of mass destruction” and other lies told to justify the 2003 Iraq invasion—the Abbott government and the media have gone to extraordinary lengths to manufacture pretexts for the military deployment.

Above all, repeated efforts have been made to bolster the claim that the war’s aim is to combat a dire terrorist threat presented by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). First, Australia’s official terrorist level was raised, then the largest police “counter-terrorism” raids in the country’s history were conducted, accompanied by lurid media headlines about a plot to publicly behead someone in Australia on behalf of ISIS.

Last Wednesday, in order to keep the anti-Islamic agitation on the boil, Prime Minister Tony Abbott teamed up with right-wing radio “shock jock” Alan Jones to incite another witch-hunt, targeting the Hizb ut-Tahrir group’s Friday night lecture.

With Abbott as his guest on his morning show, Jones fulminated against the group for saying on its web site, advertising the meeting, that “America has initiated yet another war, rounded up its puppets and allies to attack the Syrian revolution, while using intervention in Iraq

as a convenient excuse.”

Jones declared that such talk would not have been tolerated during World War I and II, demanding to know why the group had not been “proscribed” and “exiled.”

Abbott assured Jones that he was just as “angry and frustrated” as Jones. He held out the prospect of banning “organisations like Hizb ut-Tahrir” under the laws currently being pushed through parliament.

“Under existing law we can’t ban them, we’ve looked at banning them, but we were advised under existing law we can’t do it,” Abbott explained. “Under the law that we are bringing through the parliament, hopefully before the end of the year, it will be an offence to promote terrorism, not just to engage in terrorism.”

Abbott spelt out the anti-democratic character of the new “counter-terrorism” laws being introduced. Twice before, in 2005 and 2007, the last Liberal-National government, headed by John Howard, moved to ban Hizb ut-Tahrir, but received legal advice that it could not, because the group opposes terrorist attacks on civilians.

Changing the law to outlaw “promoting” terrorism will pave the way for not just Hizb ut-Tahrir to be proscribed, but any organisation that can be accused of promoting terrorism, such as by denouncing the Iraq-Syria war—even if it explicitly opposes terrorism.

That night, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) stepped forward to assist. It televised a baiting “interview” with Wassim Doureihi, an Hizb ut-Tahrir spokesman. From the outset, the segment on the high-profile “Lateline” television program was a political ambush. Host Emma Alberici demanded that Doureihi give a simple “yes or no” answer to her opening loaded question: “Do you support the murderous campaign

being waged by Islamic State fighters in Iraq?”

A “yes” answer would have given the government the ammunition it needed to outlaw the group, without further delay, in a blaze of publicity about local Muslim “extremists” endorsing beheadings and other violence. A “no” answer would have meant lining up with the US-led militarism in the Middle East.

Doureihi’s attempts to discuss the record of the Western powers in the Middle East, including the killing of 650,000 people in Iraq as a result of the 2003 invasion, were met with constant denunciations. Alberici repeatedly shouted over him, cutting off his comments. At one point, she blurted out the interview’s purpose, yelling at Doureihi: “You are clearly obfuscating and I did not invite you onto this program to do that.”

The “Lateline” segment gave Abbott a cue for a session with another right-wing radio personality, Neil Mitchell, the next morning. The prime minister stepped up his threat to ban Hizb ut-Tahrir, saying it made “excuses for terrorism,” even though it “carefully avoids advocating terrorism.”

Abbott specifically expressed his gratitude to Alberici for her assistance. “Good on Emma Alberici,” he told Mitchell. She “spoke for our country.”

Opposition Labor Party leader Bill Shorten, who has given the government total support on both the war and the terror laws, immediately aligned himself with Abbott. “I couldn’t believe that I didn’t hear an immediate repudiation of the violence and the beheadings,” Shorten told reporters. “I do share with the prime minister his concerns about this.”

Last Friday night’s lecture, attended by about 200 people, was a weekly event, convened in the Sydney suburb of Lakemba. Due to the efforts of Jones, Abbott and the ABC, however, it was held in a glare of media attention, with cameras intrusively filming everyone entering the premises.

While there was no visible police presence, except for a van parked around the corner, the main speaker reported that the police held a two-hour interview with the organisers.

Ironically, the ad for the meeting, entitled “The War To End The Blessed Revolution,” falsely accused the West of intervening in Iraq and Syria to prop up President Bashar al-Assad and head off an Islamic “revolution.”

In reality, the US-led military mobilisation seeks to resume Washington’s plans, deferred last year, to conduct air strikes aimed at ousting Assad. It is part of US imperialism’s wider quest for unchallenged hegemony over the Middle East and the entire Eurasian landmass, which necessarily means conflict with Iran and Russia, Assad’s main backers.

Hizb ut-Tahrir is one of a number of sects that espouse a reactionary vision of establishing an Islamic caliphate in the Middle East. Like ISIS, while these sects condemn “Western capitalism,” they represent disaffected sections of the Middle Eastern bourgeoisie.

Their perspective was summed up by the main speaker on Friday night, Ismail Al-Wahwah. He spoke of erecting a “wall” around the bountiful “garden” of the Middle East, keeping out the US, Russia and others, so that the region could be “stabilised.”

In other words, Hizb ut-Tahrir does not oppose Western imperialism as such, but seeks to cut a better deal for a greater share in the spoils from the exploitation of the resources and the working class of the region. In return, it offers the Western powers greater stability in the Middle East.

Al-Wahwah’s speech became the subject of yet further media excoriation, with a *Sydney Daily Telegraph* headline blaring: “Extremist cleric on divisive crusade.”

It is not yet clear if the government will outlaw Hizb ut-Tahrir, automatically making all its members, supporters and donors liable to imprisonment. Some media and academic commentators have warned that a ban would inflame the widespread anger among Muslim Australians about their victimisation at the hands of the media, the government and the police and spy agencies.

If Abbott’s government issues a proscription order, it will be precisely to fuel a backlash and stir communalism, in order to split the working class along ethno-religious lines, and set a wider legal precedent for use against all those opposing the imperialist war drive.



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