

# Eight children found dead in Cairns, Australia

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In a tragic and disturbing development, police yesterday discovered the bodies of eight children, the youngest aged 18 months and the oldest variously reported as 14 or 15 years, in a home in the Cairns suburb of Manoora, in the northern Australian state of Queensland.

Raina Thaiday, also known as Mersane Warria, reportedly the mother of seven of the children, and the aunt of the eighth, was found in the house with stab wounds to her neck and chest, and taken to Cairns Hospital. Another adult was also hospitalised.

Police announced this morning that Thaiday, originally from the Torres Strait Islands, has been arrested for murdering the eight children. Forensic teams and pathologists have not concluded their investigations at the Manoora home, however. As of this writing, no evidence has been disclosed.

Police arrived at the scene at 11.20 a.m. on Friday. Neighbours told the media they heard shouting on Thursday evening and extending into the early hours of Friday. According to the *Herald Sun*, at 9.00 p.m. a neighbour reported hearing a woman scream: “Don’t let them take them away from us. God bless us. Forgive me for what I’ll do.”

Tahniah Ruttensteiner, a neighbour, said Thaiday “was having a bad night. I heard her fighting with someone this morning about 4 a.m.” Ruttensteiner said Thaiday was last seen “moving stuff out of her house” in the early hours of Friday, and saying she wanted to “make a new start.” Ruttensteiner added: “She said she was changing her life. She wasn’t well, but she loved those kids.”

If Thaiday did in fact kill the children, it would indicate that she is in an extremely disturbed and psychologically unbalanced state.

Yet, before any facts were known, or charges laid, both Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Labor Opposition Leader Bill Shorten, immediately prejudiced the outcome of the investigations.

“This is an unspeakable crime,” Abbott said. “These are trying days for our country.” Likewise, Shorten stated: “Today’s tragedy in Cairns comes at the end of one of the toughest weeks for our nation. There’s no greater evil than the killing of children.”

These comments were motivated by two principal political concerns. First and foremost, the references to “trying days” for the “nation” are aimed at exploiting the event to maintain and bolster the atmosphere of crisis that the government, opposition and media have promoted in response to last Monday’s hostage standoff in a central Sydney café, involving a lone disturbed individual, Man Haron Monis.

Abbott, backed by Shorten, raised the Sydney siege to the level of a “national emergency,” to advance the “war on terrorism” agenda of escalating involvement in US-led wars and suppressing basic democratic rights domestically (see: “The Sydney siege and the drive to war”).

Abbott’s claim of an “unspeakable crime” and Shorten’s invocation of “evil” are also intended to deflect attention from any examination of the tragedy’s possible psychological and social causes.

Little information has surfaced about the family. According to neighbours, Thaiday was living as a single parent with eight children, the eldest being a 20-year-old son who came home to discover the bodies.

Services and assistance for single parents have been systematically slashed by successive state and federal governments. In 2012, the federal Labor government of Julia Gillard pushed 100,000 sole parents off the Parenting Payment, and onto the Newstart unemployment allowance, a drop of almost \$120 a fortnight to only \$264.90 per week.

Cairns is a socially polarised city. The suburb of Manoora is known for high levels of poverty, crime and

other indicators of social crisis. Over 80 percent of homes in the area, including Thaiday's, are state-run housing commission properties.

According to the *Daily Mail*, Manoora was at the centre of a secret government report in June into heightened levels of sexual abuse of youth and domestic violence. Murray Street, where the home is located, was singled out by Cairns Regional Council as one of four areas for the installation of permanent CCTV cameras.

Despite being an international tourism destination close to the Great Barrier Reef, Cairns as a whole has an official unemployment rate of 7 percent, above the national average of 6.3 percent. Manoora is located just 4 kilometres from the central tourism and business area of Cairns, which is Australia's 14th most populous city.

Across Queensland, formerly regarded as a "mining boom" state, plummeting export prices over the past year, especially for coal, have triggered closures and mass retrenchments, contributing to worsening unemployment and social conditions.

Indigenous people suffer statistically far higher levels of poverty than the rest of the working class. According to the Australian Council of Social Services, the median income of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households is just 65 percent of non-indigenous households. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that, in the decade of 2001-2010, the average suicide rate for indigenous people was twice that for non-indigenous.

Whatever information emerges about the deaths in Manoora, there will be no examination of these issues or any attempt by the political and media establishment to ameliorate the worsening social problems. Instead, the bipartisan offensive against jobs and services, amid a deepening crisis of Australian and world capitalism, will only exacerbate social tensions, creating the conditions for further such tragedies.



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