Australia: “Terrorism” warnings ratcheted up for Christmas

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Two days before Christmas, Prime Minister Tony Abbott, acting on the advice of the intelligence and police agencies, issued a grim-faced statement. He claimed that “chatter” by “terrorist sympathisers,” following the hostage crisis in Sydney on December 15, made it necessary to warn that another “attack is likely.” Abbott stated that the security apparatus did not know where or when an attack would take place, but people should “go about their lives as normal.”

The purpose of such a warning was to ensure that, as millions of people gathered with their families and friends for Christmas events, the notion firmly was implanted in their heads that in any part of Australia, at any time, a terrorist atrocity could take place. This constant fear-mongering is being used to justify the extraordinary measures taken during and after the Sydney siege, all of which have far-reaching implications for the democratic and social rights of the working class.

The same day as Abbott issued his statement, 20-year-old Sulayman Khalid was arrested in his western Sydney home and charged with planning to commit a terrorist act. Lurid claims have been published in the media alleging he was in possession of hand-written notes detailing plans to attack an Australian Federal Police building and wage a “guerrilla war” from the Blue Mountains to the west of Sydney.

Khalid, who adheres to the Wahibbist current of Sunni Islam promoted by the Saudi monarchy as well as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), was among those raided in Australia’s largest-ever counter-terrorism operation on September 18. Earlier, he gained attention by storming out of the audience of the current affairs “Insight” program after he had condemned the persecution of Muslims by the police in Australia and refused to answer questions concerning ISIS.

In a court hearing on December 24, Khalid’s lawyers stated that he denied being the author the alleged hand-written “terrorist” notes, which, the Fairfax media reported, were described as “random,” “crazy” and “hard to read.” He was denied bail outright and remanded to appear in court again in February.

A 21-year-old man, who has not been named and was also raided in September was also brought before a court on December 24. On December 18, police had raided five homes in Sydney and the unnamed person and another man became the first individuals to be subjected to the new “control orders” under legislation that the Abbott government pushed through parliament with the support of the opposition Labor Party.

The police can apply to impose sweeping restrictions on the movement and activities of people they claim are a terrorist risk. The young man allegedly violated the terms of his control order by ringing a friend from a pay phone and using his mother’s mobile phone. His lawyers insisted in court on Christmas Eve that the phone calls were over mundane personal matters. Nevertheless, he was denied bail, will stand trial next year and faces a possible two years in prison.

Eleven people in Sydney and Brisbane whose homes were raided on September 18 have now been charged with offenses. Omarjan Azari is accused of the vague charge of “conspiring to act in preparation for, or plan, a terrorist act or acts.” He allegedly discussed killing random people in Sydney during a recorded phone conversation with an Australian fighting with ISIS in Syria. An arrest warrant has been issued for the purported ISIS militant who made the call, Mohammad Ali Baryalei, but he has reportedly been killed in combat.

Others have been charged with non-terrorism related crimes such as assaulting police during the raids,

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possession of a Taser and possession of cannabis. It is unknown at this point whether the young owner of a plastic ornamental Shiite sword, which was seized by police and presented in the media as the weapon to be used in a "beheading," has been charged with any offenses.

The ongoing drumbeat about terrorist dangers is being exploited shamelessly to justify the deployment of Australian military forces to the US-led war against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, which itself is part of the continuing US regime-change operation to oust the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad. Australian F-18 Super Hornet fighter-bombers have been heavily involved over the past several weeks in attacks on alleged ISIS targets in areas of northern Iraq.

The editorial of today's *Australian* declared that the fact that Australian citizens had travelled to the Middle East to join ISIS "shows it is in our security interests to help defeat the organisation." The Sydney siege demonstrated, the newspaper asserted, that "we are also at risk from radical Islamists in Australia, necessitating effective counter-terrorism laws." All the far-reaching questions about the siege and how it unfolded are being actively suppressed by the media. (See: "The Sydney siege: Official lies and contradictions")

The new measures being pushed through the parliament will compel Internet providers to store meta-data for two years. Alongside greater powers to spy on, control, detain and charge people, the intelligence agencies and police will gain additional funding and manpower as the edifice of a police-state continues to expand.

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