

The Danish roots of the Copenhagen terror attack

Jordan Shilton
23 February 2015

The shooter responsible for the deaths of two people in separate incidents in Copenhagen over the weekend, Omar El-Hussein, reportedly pledged allegiance to Islamic State in a Facebook post shortly before he launched his terror attack.

The revelation produced renewed warnings of copycat attacks from other ISIS supporters. Danish media reported earlier this week that a group of people had published a message on Facebook hailing Hussein as a hero, and that the intelligence agency (PET) was monitoring their activity.

However, it now appears El-Hussein never received training from ISIS or Al Qaeda forces in the Middle East. His turn to terrorist activity was produced by conditions in Denmark and the depraved militarism of the major powers in the Middle East and Africa, in which the government in Copenhagen has taken full part.

El-Hussein was a member of a violent gang in Copenhagen and was later radicalised during a two-year prison sentence for stabbing a 19-year-old on a subway train in 2013.

The shooting was a reactionary, disoriented response to the right-wing anti-immigrant chauvinism, imperialist militarism, and assaults on the social conditions of the working class which was embraced by all the major Danish political parties. His demoralised embrace of individual terrorism reflects the terrible consequences of the crisis of political perspective in the working class.

El-Hussein was involved in the gang wars that have intensified on Copenhagen's streets in recent years. Aydin Soei, a sociologist who met El-Hussein and other members of his "brothas" gang in 2011, described conditions confronting immigrant youth in the inner cities.

He told CNN: "It was an environment with a lot of gang wars where you couldn't move around freely. The gang wars in Copenhagen started back in 2008 when El-Hussein was 15 years old and that's the environment he's been a part of. The gang wars meant that the amount of weapons, the amount of violence exploded, so that the generation that he's from has become much more hardcore than any other generation we've seen in Denmark before him."

The disorientation and lack of perspective that have driven sections of youth into such a lifestyle were the direct outcome of policies pursued by successive Danish governments and the inability of the and pseudo-left parties to offer any opposition to them.

Although the right-wing Conservative-Liberal government under Prime Minister and subsequent NATO General Secretary Anders Fogh Rasmussen began a sharp turn to the right, this project has been carried further since 2011 by a coalition of the Social Democratic and Socialist People's parties, which received parliamentary backing from the Pabloite Red-Green Alliance during the first two years of the coalition.

These forces have worked constantly to block a political movement of the working class against the reactionary policies of the Danish bourgeoisie. The absence of a progressive outlet for growing social anger paved the way for some among the most alienated layers of society to view reactionary, Islamist-inspired terrorism as the only available alternative.

From 2002, the Conservative and Liberal parties governed with the support of the far-right Danish People's Party. During their nine years of rule, an unprecedented shift to the right took place. At the initiative of the DPP, the government reformed Danish immigration laws to make them among the most

restrictive in Europe, making it harder for refugees to settle and for families to unite in Denmark.

At his trial in 2012, the fascist Norwegian mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik explicitly praised Denmark's immigration regime, adding that had Norway adopted a similar approach, he would not have carried out his terrorist attack.

Anti-immigrant chauvinism was coupled with a brutal assault on the working class. According to a report published in December 2014, Denmark ranked among the top five European Union members for the fastest rise in economic inequality between 2008 and 2012. While the wages of the poorest had declined by over 1,000 kroner per month (\$152) in real terms, the wealthy had seen a jump in their pay by an average of 14,000 kroner.

Indicating the extent of the shift, only Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary experienced a greater increase—all countries that faced the near collapse of their banking sector, or that were subject to European Union and IMF bailouts.

Amid this growing social polarisation, immigrants formed one of the most exploited sections of the working class. Immigrants are four times more likely than Danish nationals to be unemployed, and four in ten children from an immigrant background lived in households where both parents were unemployed. A staggering eighty percent of married couples who received Denmark's *kontanthjælp* unemployment benefit in June 2014 came from immigrant backgrounds.

El-Hussein, who was born in Denmark to Palestinian immigrants, grew up in this environment. He lived in the impoverished district of Norrebro, a predominantly immigrant area which in recent years has become synonymous with gang violence. In late 2014, the US state department went so far as to warn US citizens in a travel advisory not to visit Norrebro at night.

El-Hussein was not only influenced by dire social conditions. Those who knew him described him as a capable student who had lost his way, and as someone deeply concerned with the plight of the Palestinian people. His initial entry in to gang violence coincided with the NATO bombing of Libya, which led to the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime and the deaths of tens of thousands of people.

As he entered prison, the Syrian civil war was in full

swing, with the funding of opposition forces by the US and its allies strengthening Islamist extremism in the country and in neighbouring Iraq.

El-Hussein witnessed the aftermath of these events from a prison cell, where he increasingly came under the influence of extremist Islam. The authorities acknowledged that his behaviour changed to such an extent during his detention that they reported it to Danish intelligence.

As El-Hussein turned towards Islamism, Copenhagen participated aggressively in imperialist operations in the Middle East and North Africa. In 2011, the Danish parliament voted unanimously to back the NATO assault on the Gaddafi regime in Libya, sending six F16 fighter jets to participate in the bombardment. Copenhagen also sent troops to the US-led war in Iraq and to Afghanistan as part of the NATO mission.

In 2011, the Social Democrats were elected to power. Forming a government with the support of the Stalinist Socialist People's Party and with parliamentary support from the pseudo-left Red-Green Alliance, they took up seamlessly from where the previous government had left off. Social inequality has continued to deepen under the impact of the new coalition's austerity budgets, and the ostensibly "left" government has been just as willing to stir up anti-immigrant chauvinism in response to virtually every social problem as its right-wing predecessor.

The deeply reactionary climate produced by the combination of relentless anti-immigrant chauvinism, social misery and imperialist aggression is replicated throughout Europe. Governments nominally of the right and left have embraced such policies as part of their reckless drive to defend the interests of the capitalist class around the globe, offering no resistance to social attacks and imperialist war. It is in this environment that the most alienated and demoralised individuals, like El-Hussein, find their way to the reactionary programme of Islamist terrorism.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact