

Danish government expands surveillance powers following Copenhagen shootings

Jordan Shilton
3 March 2015

The Danish Social Democrat-led government has unveiled a vast expansion in the powers of the country's intelligence services, together with significant funding increases for the police and spy agencies.

In the wake of the twin shootings in Copenhagen last month, a 12-point plan presented on February 19 laid out spending increases of 970 million kroner (US\$148 million) for the police, Denmark's domestic intelligence agency (PET) and foreign intelligence agency (FE) over the next four years. The funds will be used to strengthen foreign surveillance, emergency preparedness and security for prominent politicians.

One of the most significant changes being proposed would see FE obtain authorisation to spy on Danish citizens while they are abroad without a court-issued warrant. This would represent powers that go beyond even those at the disposal of the US National Security Agency. It would open the door to unchecked surveillance of anyone, even if they had not committed a crime or been suspected of committing one.

Social Democrat Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt was quick to label the twin shootings, which claimed the lives of two victims at a cafe where an event was taking place with Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilkes and at a synagogue, as terrorist attacks. This was in spite of the fact that there is no evidence to suggest that the gunman, Omar El-Hussein, had any direct connection with Islamic State (ISIS) or any other terrorist group.

Last week, the Danish authorities detained a third suspect in their investigations into the attacks. An 18-year-old, later identified as El-Hussein's younger brother, was accused of helping the shooter obtain a bulletproof vest and a knife, and will be held in detention for 26 days. Two other men were previously

arrested and charged with concealing El-Hussein after his first shooting and helping him procure and dispose of his weapons.

Although El-Hussein declared himself to have been inspired by ISIS, he was radicalised during a period in prison following several years of involvement in gang violence in one of Copenhagen's most deprived areas. His violent outburst was a disoriented and reactionary response to miserable social conditions and the prominent role played by the Danish government in support of imperialist wars in North Africa and the Middle East.

Commenting on the anti-terror proposals, Thorning-Schmidt stated, "We want to strengthen our ability to gather and analyse (information) about terror planning abroad. We want to ensure that the intelligence service is able to monitor Danes who travel abroad to take part in extremist activities."

The Socialist People's Party (SF) presented its own proposal in parliament calling for the banning of videos and material that "incites" or praises terrorism. According to an article in *MetroExpress*, the planned measures would be enforced by expanding a filter that is already in place on the Internet for child pornography. SF's suggestion was welcomed by the extreme right-wing Danish People's Party (DF). SF was part of the government until last February, when it left the coalition after a dispute over the privatisation of state companies. By then it had sustained the Social Democrats in power for over two years.

Proponents of these draconian measures have argued that they are necessary to combat the number of Danes travelling to Syria and Iraq to fight for ISIS. According to figures, as a proportion of its population, Denmark is behind only Belgium in the number of citizens who have travelled there, amounting to just over 100.

The Danish government is consulting closely with Washington in its response. A few days after the shootings, Thorning-Schmidt spoke by telephone with US President Barack Obama, who assured Copenhagen of his government's support in the struggle against terrorism. The White House declared in a statement that the pair had "agreed on the need to work together to confront attacks on freedom of expression as well as against anti-Semitic violence."

Danish Foreign Minister Martin Lidegaard attended Obama's anti-terrorism summit in Washington, and reportedly committed to hosting a future regional anti-terrorism conference in Copenhagen to discuss the war on ISIS, among other things.

Following the attacks at the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* earlier this year, Lidegaard spoke out stridently in favour of deepening the assault on democratic rights across the continent in the name of combating terrorism and expanding military operations abroad. At an EU meeting on January 20, he declared, "We have been battling foreign fighters since before the events in France and now we will battle it even more. That is true both within Europe's borders, where we have a discussion amongst justice ministers about how to strengthen our security agencies' work. But it is also important to battle foreign fighters outside of Europe because the vast majority of these terror cells come from countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa."

This disingenuous attempt to portray the rise of Islamist-inspired terrorism as a development entirely independent of the role of the major powers was aimed at providing cover for the responsibility of Denmark and its allies for the disaster engulfing both regions of the world referred to by Lidegaard. Moreover, his remarks make clear that plans were already well advanced prior to the Copenhagen shootings to undermine democratic rights even further, with only the appropriate pretext being required.

As one of Washington's close allies in Europe, Denmark has played a considerable role given its small size. Copenhagen has been part of the US-led coalition bombarding ISIS targets in Iraq since last August. The government announced the deployment of seven F16 fighters just one day after receiving a request for assistance from the Obama administration.

The aggressive military operation in the Middle East

was supported by the entire Danish ruling elite, from the right-wing parties to the so-called lefts of the Red-Green Alliance. When the deployment was voted on in parliament the RGA backed it unanimously, proclaiming that there was a "temporary coincidence" of interests between them and US imperialism.

This rightward shift in foreign policy, notwithstanding the nominally "left" government that has been in power since 2011, has been coupled with a continuation of social cuts domestically and the whipping up of anti-immigrant chauvinism. Denmark has some of the most repressive immigration laws in Europe, with the Social Democrats and SF keeping the laws in place that were initially implemented by the previous right-wing coalition with the support of the far-right DF.

It is to deal with opposition to policies of war and social reaction that the Danish ruling elite is preparing to unite behind the new police state powers, rather than tackling any purported terrorist threat. It is treading a path taken by other countries in recent months. In both Canada and Australia, loan gunmen carried out attacks that were quickly seized upon to launch sweeping attacks on fundamental democratic rights and legal principles. France utilized the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks as a pretext to announce its own draconian anti-terror law in January.

The new powers to be given to PET and FE will augment the already wide-ranging surveillance capabilities they possess. In 2006, in the aftermath of the 2005 London bombings, the Danish parliament passed an anti-terror law allowing PET to gain access to financial and medical records of suspects, and flight lists without a warrant. It permitted a vast expansion of the use of surveillance cameras throughout the country.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact