

Police shift their line on Australia's latest terrorism “plot”

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A 17-year-old teenager was remanded in custody on Monday after facing a children's court in Melbourne on unspecified charges of “engaging in an act in preparation for, or planning, a terrorist act” and “possessing things connected with a terrorist act.”

For the second time in two weeks, alarming police claims and media reports about teenagers planning imminent terrorist attacks—first on April 25 (the “Anzac Day plot”) and then May 10 (the “Mother’s Day plot”)—have proven to be dubious.

Last weekend, federal and state police chiefs claimed to have foiled a bombing, just in time, that would definitely have killed people. “As a result of Victoria Police and Australian Federal Police [AFP] interception, some Victorians are going to be alive because of it,” AFP Deputy Commissioner Mike Phelan told a media conference.

“Mother’s Day bomb plot: Teen allegedly blocked family and friends from Facebook posts” was the headline in the *Sunday Herald Sun*, a Melbourne tabloid. According to the Fairfax Media’s *Age*: “Up to three teenagers have been arrested in relation to a Melbourne terror plot that was reportedly set to be carried out on Mother’s Day. A 14-year-old boy in Sydney was also arrested in relation to the ‘imminent threat’.”

Ending any hopes of the teenager receiving a fair trial, Prime Minister Tony Abbott seized on the raids to launch another terrorism scare campaign. “There is evidence of a bomb plot that was in a reasonably advanced state of preparation,” he declared last Saturday.

However, by the time that the 17-year-old, who cannot be named because he is a minor, appeared in court on Monday, the police had admitted they had no evidence of any attack planned for May 10, or any

other specific date. Nor could they nominate a supposed targeted location.

The police also revealed that no other arrests had been made, and they were not investigating any other suspect. No connection was alleged to the 14-year-old reportedly detained in Sydney.

AFP Deputy Commissioner Phelan stated: “We may not know exactly where it was going to occur nor when it was exactly going to occur, but … let me tell you, something was going to happen.”

Victoria Police Acting Chief Commissioner Cartwright said there was no evidence the teenager planned on attacking a specific event. Nevertheless, the police chief sought to continue the atmosphere of crisis. “We will allege he was well advanced in preparing a bomb,” he maintained.

This claim contradicted the earlier police accounts of detecting three “suspected improvised explosives devices” and detonating them in a local park. That operation, conducted by heavily-suited bomb disposal personnel, was designed to give the impression that bombs actually existed.

Cartwright said investigators were not looking for anyone else in connection with any plot, but were exploring the possibility of online radicalisation. His statement underscored the focus on the teenager’s political views, which voiced hostility to the atrocities being committed by the US and its allies throughout the Middle East.

Cartwright declared that, under existing legislation, the teenager could face an adult court, despite his youth. Media proprietors also applied to the children’s court judge to publicly name the boy. This was refused, but the judge said the application could be revisited at a later date.

Media interviews with members of the 17-year-old’s

family gave a picture of the terrifying manner in which balaclava-clad Special Operations Group police officers armed with assault rifles stormed their house last Friday. The operation was clearly intended to send a wider signal to working people of the powers of the police to shoot to kill.

The boy's mother first thought the police were "some type of terrorist group," she told the *Sunday Herald Sun*. "I thought I was being shot at, I thought I was going to be killed," she said. The police shot at her car as she backed out of the driveway. "[T]hey started shooting into the tyres, around the car ... five or six times," she related.

Police sources claimed the bangs were flash charges, thrown beneath the car to distract the teenager. But family members said police, with automatic weapons drawn, pulled the 17-year-old from the car and yelled at his mother to get out.

The boy's sister, who watched the scene from the house, rushed outside, only to be confronted by three police with drawn guns who yelled "do not move." The sister screamed to her friend to "call the cops" but the armed men answered back, "We are the cops."

Questions remain about the timing of the operation. Police said there was an anonymous tip to the national security hotline nine days earlier. The raid was only launched once an attack was "imminent." Now that claim has been abandoned.

Two weeks earlier, both Abbott's Liberal-National government and the Victorian state Labor government of Premier Daniel Andrews exploited the arrests of five other teenagers to urge people to turn out in large numbers to attend the Anzac Day ceremonies marking the centenary of the disastrous British-led invasion of Turkey's Gallipoli peninsula during World War I.

The vague charges laid against the 17-year-old highlight the political and legal purposes of a crucial amendment to the terrorism laws that was rammed through the Australian parliament in November 2005 by the Howard Liberal-National government, with the full support of the Labor Party and the Greens.

That amendment changed the wording of all terrorism offences from "the" to "a" terrorist act. That has allowed the police to arrest and successfully prosecute people without having to show evidence of any specific terrorist act. Nothing has to be proven about any time, place, date, target, method or equipment used—simply

that "a" terrorist act was being plotted, even a hypothetical one.

In a manufactured atmosphere of national crisis, all the parliamentary parties, including the Greens, lined up behind the government in rushing the amendment through both houses of parliament within 36 hours. Prime Minister John Howard claimed he had received "specific intelligence" about a "potential terrorist threat."

For electoral reasons, the Greens have postured at times as critics of aspects of the police-state terrorism laws, while mostly proposing cosmetic modifications. When the *World Socialist Web Site* exposed their role in backing the amendment, they protested, claiming that the change had "no discernible impact."

In reality, the amendment opened vast new scope for police-government frame-ups and "terrorist" scare campaigns. Last weekend's raids are the just the latest in a long line of cases that have relied on the shift from "the" to "a."

By voting for the key amendment, the Greens displayed their broader role of lending legitimacy to the fraudulent "war on terror." Its real purpose has become increasingly clear—to provide a pretext for escalating US-led militarism in the Middle East, and for the ripping up of basic democratic rights and civil liberties at home.



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