

Australia: Another dubious “Anzac Day terror plot”

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For the second year in a row, Australian police, media outlets and government leaders have used the arrest of a teenager to promote a scare campaign about a terrorist attack on Anzac Day, the official celebration of Australia’s involvement in World War I and every other major imperialist war.

Just before 4 a.m. on April 25—Anzac Day—the New South Wales (NSW) police issued a media alert that officers from the state-federal Joint Counter Terrorism Team had charged a 16-year-old boy with a terrorism offence that police would “allege was linked to ANZAC commemorations.”

NSW Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione said the boy was arrested the previous day near his home in the western Sydney suburb of Auburn. The 16-year-old was later charged with one count of “acts in preparation for, or planning, a terrorist act,” contrary to Section 101.6 of the federal Criminal Code. “This offence carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment,” the media statement emphasised.

Scipione gave the impression the police thwarted an imminent attack on Anzac Day events. He claimed the police were forced to take “swift action to ensure community safety on the eve of a sacred day on the Australian calendar.”

This “sacred day” marks the anniversary of the catastrophic Anglo-French invasion of the Turkish peninsula of Gallipoli during World War I. Australia is currently in the midst of a four-year propaganda centenary campaign, funded to the tune of almost half a billion dollars by governments and corporate sponsors, to glorify that war, in which at least 17 million soldiers and civilians perished. The purpose is to inculcate patriotism, especially among young people, and overwhelm anti-war sentiment in preparation for new and more terrible conflagrations.

Amid sensational media headlines about an “Anzac Day terror plot,” Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull’s government immediately called the boy’s alleged activities “chilling” and “disturbing.” These comments were made before the boy—who cannot be named because he is still a child—even appeared in a children’s court today, where his lawyer said he would plead not guilty.

As well as prejudicing any chance of a fair trial, the accusations by the police and the government are calculated to inflame fears of terrorism and link them directly to Anzac Day. Justice Minister Michael Keenan told reporters: “It’s very disturbing when Australians are out there commemorating what is a very important national day for us, some people would think that’s an appropriate time to target those services.”

From the outset, however, even on the information supplied by the police, there appeared to be no proven connection with Anzac Day. At a 6 a.m. media conference, the police commissioner only said the police would be “suggesting that there was a proposed attack to happen on this day.” Scipione also stated that police believed the boy was acting alone, which contradicted media claims of a plot orchestrated by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Police sources later told journalists that the teenager was arrested after engaging in online conversations with someone during the weekend about acquiring a gun. If true, this indicates that no attack of any sort was imminent.

Yesterday, further doubt was thrown over the police claims. According to media reports, based on police sources, the boy was working with the police, under intense surveillance, for almost a year.

Last May, after a highly-publicised raid on the teenager’s family home by police and the Australian

Intelligence Security Organisation (ASIO), he was enrolled in a police “anti-radicalisation” program. The program was said to include regular visits and phone calls from “community contact police.”

Such programs give the police and intelligence agencies access to alleged “radicalised” young people who are pressured to cooperate with the authorities under constant threat of potential arrest. Reportedly, as of last December, NSW police had about 20 individuals enrolled in the program, which is overseen by the National Disruption Group, a taskforce of police, intelligence agencies and government officials.

Last year, five Melbourne teenagers were arrested in violent pre-dawn police raids five days before Anzac Day. Supposedly, they were planning to behead a police officer and go on a shooting rampage during the official ceremonies. The Liberal-National government and federal and state Labor Party leaders seized on lurid media stories of an “ISIS-inspired” plot in order to whip up support for the nationalist and militarist displays on Anzac Day.

Over the past year, however, the terrorism charges have been dropped against all but one of the teenagers. Aged 18, he is still in prison, awaiting trial on vague charges of conspiring and preparing for an unspecified terrorist attack.

Nevertheless, these and several other terrorist scares have been exploited to push through parliament, with Labor’s backing, five new “anti-terrorism” bills, giving governments and the police and intelligence agencies far-reaching powers to override basic legal and democratic rights. These provisions include metadata retention laws that permit mass electronic surveillance, as well as powers to strip citizenship from individuals accused of supporting terrorism.

As was the case last year, the latest terrorist claims are being used to condition public opinion to massive police mobilisations. Commissioner Scipione announced that Operation Blueridge, a “high-visibility policing strategy,” which included the Public Order and Riot Squad, and the para-military Operations Support Group, would protect all Anzac Day events.

Ideologically, the “plots” are being utilised to drum up pro-war jingoism. An editorial in Murdoch’s *Australian* yesterday declared that “as Australia prepared to pay tribute to our fallen soldiers,” for the second consecutive year, “Anzac commemorations

were the target of young men preparing to attack innocent citizens on home soil.”

It “offends our national ethos,” the newspaper insisted, “that jihadists chose Anzac Day to unleash their murderous, dark age ideology.” It reiterated a 2005 proposal that “Australian values, epitomised by the Anzac story, should be taught in schools.”

What are these “Australian values?” World War I was not fought for the defence of freedom, as the official propaganda proclaims. It was a bloody struggle by the major imperialist powers, joined by all the smaller ones, such as Australia, over empire, colonies and profits. The same deep-seated contradictions of capitalism that gave rise to both World War I and World War II—above all between the global integrated economy and its division into antagonistic national states based on corporate profit—are today driving sharpening geo-political tensions and the dangers of a third world war.



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