

The lies surrounding the Sydney siege unravel

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The Sydney siege on December 15–16, 2014 has entered the international lexicon, along with the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US, the 2005 bombings in London and the latest attacks in Paris, as a justification for the bogus “war on terror.”

The standard account of events is based on a series of lies designed to justify the extraordinary mobilisation of police and military personnel that took place in central Sydney in response to hostage-taking by a lone gunman, Man Haron Monis, in the Lindt café. More than 16 hours later, heavily-armed police stormed the café after Monis shot a hostage. Monis and another hostage were killed by police bullets.

As the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) warned at the time, the standoff was used as a dress rehearsal for the lock down of a major city in a time of crisis.

The coronial inquiry into the Sydney siege has now been running for more than a year. Despite its circumscribed remit, it has significantly undermined the official story. Monis was not a member or supporter of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), but a highly unstable individual, given to grandstanding, who was well known to authorities.

The internal intelligence agency—the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO)—received at least 18 emails and hotline calls, in December 2014 alone, warning about Monis’s Facebook statements, but concluded “the posts did not indicate a desire or intent to engage in terrorism or politically motivated violence.” No explanation was given. However, the heavily-censored evidence to the coronial inquiry confirmed that Monis had directly offered to provide assistance to ASIO.

The latest revelations from the coronial inquiry dealing with the actions of the police during the siege punch more holes in the official version of events. The SEP raised the critical question at the time: why did no serious negotiations take place with Monis? Having

transformed the siege into a major “terrorist” attack for their own propaganda purposes, state and federal governments had a vested interest in ensuring that it was not defused peacefully.

While top police officials claimed that “world class” negotiators had been in talks, Monis’s limited demands—for an ISIS flag, recognition that the siege was an ISIS “terrorist” attack and an on-air conversation with Prime Minister Tony Abbott—were not granted and indeed were publicly suppressed.

Police evidence makes absolutely clear that no serious negotiations were undertaken in the 16 hours of the siege.

- * The New South Wales (NSW) police unit handling the negotiations comprised only two full-time staff, along with negotiators employed on a part-time or irregular basis. The unit commander was on duty for 21 hours on the day of the siege and had to deal with four other crisis situations.

- * The unit lacked basic equipment such as computers. A specialised communications truck was out of action. As a result, negotiators operated in makeshift conditions in the gaming manager’s office at the NSW Leagues Club. The team had only one dedicated mobile phone. Vital telephone calls from hostages in the café went unanswered.

- * Significantly, police negotiators never spoke directly to Monis. Moreover, police rejected offers by several Muslim leaders to intervene and try to talk Monis down. No explanation has been provided as to why none of Monis’s demands were met. Conveniently, hours of recordings of conversations between negotiators and hostages have inexplicably been lost.

Inside the café, hostages became frantic as time dragged on, a number of people escaped and Monis’s behaviour became increasingly erratic as his demands were not met. The *Daily Telegraph* reported a call by

one hostage, Selina Win Pe: “He [Abbott] clearly doesn’t give a shit because he hasn’t called us since 9.45 this morning... Help us. Help to get Tony Abbott to call this gentleman... to send the fucking Islamic flag.”

The media has focussed attention almost exclusively on the use of more violent police measures to end the siege. Why were police snipers not given the green light to kill Monis? Why wasn’t the café stormed earlier, rather than waiting for Monis to kill a hostage? Why, when Monis had café manager Tori Johnson on his knees, was forced entry delayed for critical minutes?

However, none of the various commentators has asked why were negotiations such a shambles and why were Monis’s demands ignored. There are only two alternatives: either the NSW police negotiators were simply under-resourced and overwhelmed, or conscious decisions were made to ensure that no serious negotiations took place. The former is highly unlikely given that under conditions of a “national emergency,” the NSW police could have called on substantial resources and expertise nationally during the lengthy siege.

A lot was at stake for the federal and state governments. Efforts to whip up a terror scare campaign just months earlier, in September 2014, had largely failed. A huge police dragnet in Sydney involving hundreds of police and ASIO officers resulted in just one individual being charged on terrorist-related offenses. Lurid claims of a planned beheading turned out to be based on the seizure of a plastic sword.

The Liberal-National Coalition government, backed by the opposition Labor Party and the Greens, exploited the Sydney siege to justify Australian involvement in the new US-led war in the Middle East and to ram through further anti-democratic legislation, supposedly to counter terrorism. None of these parties has raised any criticisms of the handling of events by state and federal governments, the police and other authorities.

The huge mobilisation of police, military and intelligence resources in response to a lone gunman is a sharp warning to workers and youth of the methods that will be used in the future to suppress opposition to war and austerity—the agenda of all the major parties in the July 2 election. The SEP was the only party to warn at

the time of the dangers of such police state measures and is fighting in the present election campaign to defend basic democratic rights.

To contact the SEP and get involved, visit our website or Facebook page.

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