Australia: Arrest of two boys used to ramp up terrorism scare campaign

Mike Head
14 October 2016

Two 16-year-old boys in Sydney have been arrested and charged with terrorism offences amid a blaze of prejudicial police and media allegations designed not only to destroy any chance of a fair trial but also further whip up public fears of terrorism.

Broadcasting vague and unsubstantiated police accusations has become the modus operandi of the "war on terrorism" over the past 15 years. But Wednesday's arrests in the working class suburb of Bankstown have seen this operation taken to new depths.

Fed by police leaks, the headlines in the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, a Murdoch media tabloid, included: "Two boys 'planned beheading in Bankstown'" and "Arrested teens 'have links to Islamic State.'"

Both teenagers were charged yesterday with terrorist offences after police surveillance teams allegedly observed them purchasing knives, which were later referred to as bayonets. Police declared they found a note on the boys, handwritten in Arabic, pledging allegiance to the caliphate of Islamic State.

Each was charged with "acts in preparation for a terrorist act," which carries a penalty of life in prison, and being a member of an unnamed terrorist organisation, which carries a penalty of 10 years' imprisonment. They were denied bail, so they are likely be detained at least until December before any court hearing.

Without waiting for any trial, let alone conviction, the *Australian* reported: "According to police the pair were moments away from carrying out a gruesome stabbing attack, or perhaps a beheading, one of the hallmarks of Islamic State-inspired terrorism."

Likewise, NSW Police Deputy Commissioner Catherine Burn told reporters the police had prevented an "imminent attack" that was "inspired by Islamic State." She admitted, however, the police had no information about the target, or any other details of the alleged plot.

"What we do know, though, is that the actions, we will allege, were enough to say they were preparing to do an attack, although we don't know specifically where that attack was going to take place," Burn said.

Police said the two boys had been under "intense surveillance" for at least two years. Among the accusations against them is that in 2014 one boy refused to stand for the national anthem during an assembly at East Hills Boys High, his school. This allegation demonstrates that any form of legitimate political protest, including refusing to stand for "Advance Australia Fair," can be characterised as evidence of terrorist intent.

The guilt of the other boy was insinuated by reporting that he is a relative of a man who was recently jailed for eight years on charges of helping Australians travel to Syria to fight in the country's civil war. As part of this barrage, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) reported: "He is a relative of Australia's most notorious Islamic State recruiter, Hamdi Alqudsi." This is blatant guilt by association.

Prosecutors fed the media coverage by tendering court documents quoting a phone conversation between one of the boys and his mother, intercepted by the security agencies a day after the killing last October of New South Wales police worker Curtis Cheng.

The boy is alleged to have told his mother: "When they come, I am going to do something to them that they have never seen before. I am going to do something bigger." As intended, the media immediately depicted this unclear remark, made more than a year ago, as a threat of a ghastly crime.

The *Australian* began its report by asserting: "An

© World Socialist Web Site

alleged teenage extremist arrested on the streets of Sydney moments before he was to commit a grisly terrorist attack was deported by Egyptian security services less than a year ago after he travelled to the Sinai region to join a foreign terror group."

The newspaper's article revealed that the boy was "stopped and interrogated by Egyptian security services" last December. It said the Egyptian authorities "provided information on the teenager's alleged activities to Australian intelligence services, which fed into an investigation of the boy."

In other words, the Australian agencies are collaborating closely with the Western-backed Egyptian military dictatorship. This is part of Australia's integral involvement in the US-led wars that have devastated the Middle East since 2001, fuelling the intense popular hostility that Islamic fundamentalists have readily exploited.

Both boys and their families have long been subjected to police and media assaults. One of the teenagers told the media in 2014 he was "burning" after police raided his home and his mother was detained without her nijab on.

Amid the media frenzy, one commentator pointed to the fact that marginalised young Muslim people, who typically confront mass unemployment and constant police harassment, are also becoming increasingly hostile to the Australian political establishment and its police-intelligence apparatus.

Associate Professor Mehmet Ozalp from the Islamic Sciences and Research Academy told the ABC's "7.30" program: "They are in that world, and experiencing raids in their homes … their being angry is not about anger towards what is happening to Muslims around the world but what is happening to them and to their family members."

As it has since barely surviving the July 2 election, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's Liberal-National government seized on the arrests to justify further bolstering the repressive police-intelligence apparatus in the face of rising social and class tensions.

Justice Minister Michael Keenan declared: "Since the national terrorism threat level was raised on 12 September 2014, there have been four attacks, and now 11 major [counter-terrorism] disruption operations in response to potential attack planning in Australia."

Like the latest arrests, these 11 "major" operations have been based on accusations of "imminent" attacks that have contained no evidence of any specific plots. The more than 60 "anti-terrorism" laws enacted over the past decade and a half permit people to be jailed for life for allegedly preparing "a" (unspecified) terrorist act," without any proof of an actual plan.

This legislation, adopted with Labor's bipartisan backing, also defines terrorism in sweeping terms that can cover traditional forms of political protest. Two recent "terrorism" arrests, one against a right-wing activist and the other against a Kurdish journalist, highlight the capacity of the laws to be used against political opponents, particularly anti-war and socialist organisations.

This week's arrests continue the government's efforts, assisted by Labor and the corporate media, to ramp up the "war on terrorism" under conditions of a deepening offensive against the jobs, working conditions, welfare entitlements, essential social programs and living standards of the working class.

These operations, accompanied by intensifying witch-hunting of Muslims, seek to both divide the working class along communal and ethnic lines, and create the ideological conditions for escalating Australian participation in the widening wars provoked by the US in Syria, Iraq and throughout the Middle East.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site