

Australia: Alleged terror attacker “known to police and intelligence agencies”

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After what the police, the media and governments in Australia quickly depicted as a crude terror-inspired attack in central Melbourne on Friday, in which one man was stabbed to death and others injured, police and intelligence spokesmen admitted that the perpetrator, 30-year-old Hassan Khalif Shire Ali, was well known to them.

Police fatally shot Shire Ali in Melbourne’s popular Bourke Street shopping mall, after he set alight his vehicle that was filled with several liquid gas canisters and attacked random passers-by with a knife. 77-year-old restaurant owner Sisto Malaspina died at the scene from head wounds, while two other men were hospitalised for head and neck injuries. Shire Ali died in hospital later that day.

After the incident, Victorian Police Commissioner Graham Ashton acknowledged that the man was known to counter-terrorism authorities, both “at the national level” and to the state police.

Police reported that the attacker was the brother of 21-year-old Ali Khalif Shire Ali, who is awaiting trial after pleading not guilty to charges related to an alleged terror plot. Police claim that the younger brother was inspired by “Islamic State” and was preparing a mass shooting during 2017 New Year’s Eve celebrations in central Melbourne—though they admitted that he did not have access to a firearm.

In 2015, Ali Khalif Shire Ali had publicly accused the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) of harassing him when he was 18 years old, demanding that he become their paid informant (see: “Intelligence agency involved in latest Australian ‘terror’ scare”).

In the same year, 2015, ASIO revoked the passport of the Bourke Street attacker, Hassan Khalif Shire Ali, supposedly to prevent him joining the Islamic fundamentalist insurgency in Syria that was being

backed by US imperialism and its allies. Whether ASIO attempted to recruit the man as an agent, like they did his brother, is unknown.

It also is yet to be explained how such an individual was able to proceed with the knife attack on Friday without surveillance or interference from the intelligence agencies.

Australian Federal Police (AFP) Assistant Commissioner for Terrorism Ian McCartney stated that despite the passport revocation: “He [Shire Ali] was never a target of the JCTT [Joint Counter-Terrorism Team, comprising Victorian Police, AFP and ASIO] in terms of the investigations we undertake. The assessment was made that whilst he had radicalised views, he didn’t pose a threat to the national security environment. Obviously, the circumstances of how and when he moved from having these radicalised views to carrying out this attack yesterday will be a key focus of the investigation we undertake through the JCTT.”

McCartney did not explain how the allegedly “radicalised views,” i.e. apparent support for ISIS, were deemed not a threat, given that the reactionary Islamic fundamentalist group had, from 2014, called for knife and car attacks internationally.

Nearly every so-called terrorism case in Australia has involved harassment, provocation, infiltration or entrapment by police and or ASIO agents, and a similar pattern has been seen in such cases in the US and Europe.

According to media reports, ISIS claimed responsibility for the incident, but terrorism experts pointed out that the group frequently makes false claims of that character. Rather, the evidence indicated social problems closer to home, experienced by a man who had grown up in Australia since childhood.

Initial media reports on the life of Hassan Khalif

Shire Ali suggest he was an isolated and disoriented young man, rather than the international jihadist operative portrayed by some of the lurid media headlines.

Born in 1988, he moved with his family from Somalia to Australia as a young child, either in the late 1980s or 1990s according to different reports. The family home is in Werribee, a working class suburb on Melbourne's western outskirts, and his father is a taxi driver.

Details are still to emerge of Shire Ali's early experiences; for numerous young people of African origin, however, life in Melbourne is one of significant hardship. Almost no resources are provided to refugees suffering from trauma, dislocation, and family breakdown. Instead they are expected to look to family networks and charities to survive and make a home in outer suburbs with minimal social infrastructure, including recreational facilities for young people.

Black youth are routinely harassed by police and face regular demonisation in the media—previously under the so-called “war on terror” (Shire Ali would have been 13-years-old when the 9/11 attacks occurred), and more recently with the protracted government-media “African gangs” provocation.

Police reported that Shire Ali had a criminal history for cannabis use, theft and driving offences. His family also told the media that he suffered from significant mental health issues and substance abuse. A sheikh from the Werribee mosque told the ABC that the man was “not mentally fit” and had thought “he was being chased by people with spears.”

The deranged actions of an individual in dire need of psychological treatment was immediately seized upon by both the federal Liberal-National and state Labor governments to try to whip up resentment and animosity against refugees and immigrants, particularly Muslims.

Despite the evidence emerging about Shire Ali's troubled life and mental ill-health, Prime Minister Scott Morrison openly sought to scapegoat Muslim refugees and immigrants, yesterday declaring: “I've got to address the real issue here, I've got to call it out—radical, violent, extremist Islam.”

Morrison, whose recent installation as prime minister marked a lurch to the right by the political establishment, added: “The greatest threat of religious

extremism, in this country, is the radical and dangerous ideology of extremist Islam.” He implicitly blamed Muslim community leaders, demanding that they do more to “ensure that these dangerous teachings and ideologies do not take root here.”

In a revealing display of bipartisan unity, Victoria's Labor Premier Daniel Andrews said he telephoned Morrison after this diatribe, to “congratulate” him for the comments, saying Morrison had said all that was needed. Andrews, who suspended campaigning for the November 24 state election after the deaths, denounced what he called “pure evil.” The Labor leader combined this evasion of the social and medical issues with “law and order” boasts of his government's record expansion of the police force (a 20 percent increase, funded with \$2 billion).

Victorian Liberal leader Matthew Guy explicitly tied the issue to so-called “African gangs” crime. In an inflammatory statement, he declared: “Only ruthless determination to stamp out terrorism or crime of any sort can protect our community; be it the domestic terror of a home invasion or rioters and gangs roaming our streets.” He added that there was no place for “moral squeamishness” because “we need to eradicate this sort of behaviour.”

As with previously promoted terror “scares,” both federal and state governments will seek to exploit last Friday's incident to go even further in demonising refugee and immigrant members of the working class, eroding democratic rights and enacting police-state measures, the ultimate target of which is the working class as a whole.



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