

Australia: Queensland Police exploit right-wing terror attack to target socialism and Marxism

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In a far-reaching attack on democratic rights, police in the northeastern state of Queensland have been directed to target socialists, Marxists and those who speak critically of capitalism as potential terrorists.

An Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) report last Friday revealed the contents of a briefing recently sent by the top command of Queensland Police to all officers. It contains instructions on how police should interact with and report on those “who allegedly hold a range of ideological beliefs.”

Interactions with members of the public suspected of holding such “ideological beliefs” are to be recorded on body cameras worn by police. The footage is to be uploaded to a centralised database, where it will be viewed and analysed by high-level counter-terrorism officers.

If these officers are displeased with the “ideological beliefs” espoused, “the matter can then be escalated and individuals flagged.” What that means exactly is entirely unclear. Flagged individuals could presumably be subjected to spying, raids and other forms of police harassment.

The ABC stated: “The memo describes the at-risk groups as conspiracy theorists, religious, social or political extremists and sovereign citizens, as well as people with ideologies relating to capitalism, communism, socialism or Marxism.”

The directive has the unmistakable whiff of a police state. Individuals are to be targeted, not for having committed a crime, or even on the suspicion that they could commit a crime in the future. Instead, they are to be targeted on the basis of their political views and opinions. And these are to be vetted by secretive and anonymous high-level political police and intelligence agents who are not accountable to any democratic institution.

Essentially, the Queensland Police are devising their own standard of “thought crimes,” which would not be out of place in George Orwell’s novel *1984*.

The crude amalgam between socialism, communism, Marxism and various forms of extreme right-wing politics is obscene. The Marxist movement has a record of opposition to individual acts of terrorism spanning some 170 years.

The aim of Marxists has always been the mobilization of the

working class, the vast mass of society, on the basis of a political fight for social equality, an end to war and the establishment of genuine democracy, including the democratic control of workers over the productive process.

The pretext for these sweeping changes to police protocols—an incident in the regional Queensland area of Wieambilla on December 12—is significant.

Four police were sent to a Wieambilla property. After arriving, they were allegedly set upon by Gareth, Nathaniel and Stacey Train who were lying in wait in military-style fatigues and armed with high-powered guns. Two officers died. A neighbor was allegedly also shot dead by the Trains who were killed later that night in a shootout with a tactical police squad.

Queensland Police officials initially claimed that officers had been sent to the property to perform a “welfare check” on Nathaniel Train, after he was reported as missing by relatives in the neighboring state of New South Wales (NSW). An obvious question is why four officers were dispatched to a relatively remote area, to conduct such a routine inquiry.

Media reports later in December blew the official story out of the water. It emerged that Queensland Police had an arrest warrant for Nathaniel Train, which had been issued almost a year earlier.

In December 2021, he had illegally entered Queensland via the NSW border, breaching coronavirus restrictions covering unvaccinated individuals. Amid widespread flooding, Train’s car had become bogged and he had dumped a number of items. Members of the public reported to the police that the dumped items included high-powered weaponry.

In other words, Train had engaged in illegal cross-border gun trafficking. But for the best part of a year, the Queensland Police apparently did virtually nothing to apprehend him, even though they must have known that he was staying for part of that time with his brother Gareth. The inescapable conclusion is that the Queensland Police had treated the Trains with kid gloves.

At the same time as these revelations emerged, Queensland Deputy Police Commissioner Tracy Linford told a press conference in late December that the Wieambilla incident was

not being considered an act of terrorism. “We are certainly not classing it as a domestic terror event. At this point there’s nothing really to indicate that,” Linford stated.

In fact, by this stage the extreme right-wing views of the Trains were clear. All of them were virulently hostile to COVID vaccinations. They were part of a broader far-right milieu, whipped up by sections of the political and media establishment to act as a battering ram against coronavirus safety measures.

The Trains had commented prolifically on the internet, promoting their right-wing outlook, their apocalyptic brand of Christianity and darkly foreshadowing their fateful encounter with police.

The sole basis for Linford’s assertion was that the Trains had purportedly not been in contact with other extremists in plotting their shootout. Even this proved to be a lie. As the media reported, the Trains, in their final video filmed after the initial shootout but before they were killed by tactical officers, had sent a message to “Don,” a US-based fascist who appeared to share their views.

In response to Linford’s claim that there was no terrorist group involved, the WSWS wrote at the time: “The obvious refutation of that contention is that in almost any conceivable context, three people, i.e., the Trains themselves, constitute a group. These individuals, moreover, lived together in a fortified compound-like dwelling, shared the same right-wing extremist views and sought to develop a public political presence through a YouTube channel that expounded their hostility to COVID safety measures, animosity to the police and a distinctive brand of apocalyptic Protestant Christianity.”

These basic points were acknowledged in another press conference by Linford last week. She stated: “Our assessment has concluded that Nathaniel, Gareth and Stacey Train acted as an autonomous cell and executed a religiously motivated terrorist attack. The Train family members prescribed [sic] to what we would call a broad Christian fundamentalist belief system known as premillennialism.”

Linford did not present an iota of new information. The fundamental facts were identical to what was known in December, when she claimed that the Trains were just disoriented individuals whose actions were not politically or religiously motivated. The about-face makes clear that the explanation offered last December was a cover-up, most likely motivated by sympathy within the police force for the far right and opposition to any wider crack down on these layers.

Moreover, impetus for the change came from the very top. It followed a meeting on February 3 of the “National Cabinet,” an extra-parliamentary body composed of the federal government and all the state and territory leaders. At the gathering, Mike Burgess, director general of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), the domestic spy organisation, gave a secret brief on the Wieambilla incident.

After the meeting, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese branded

the shootout as a “catastrophic, premeditated, calculated murder on the basis of a warped ideology.”

The intervention of ASIO and the federal government is a warning that the anti-democratic measures being implemented in Queensland are under consideration more broadly. The response to the Wieambilla incident, including the new Queensland Police directives targeting “extremism,” specifically socialism and Marxism, were undoubtedly discussed.

The focus on Marxism and socialism is not accidental. Amid the deepest crisis of the capitalist system in decades and a growth of the class struggle, the ruling elites and their political representatives around the world are terrified of an increasing attraction among workers and youth to socialism.

Fascistic former US President Donald Trump frequently railed against socialism. In Germany, the Socialist Equality Party has been placed on an official watchlist, while German courts have asserted that its promotion of class struggle and a socialist fight for the interests of the working class are incompatible with the constitutional order.

The Queensland directives are another demonstration that the ruling elites are hurtling towards authoritarianism. The call for police to target Marxists and socialists will no doubt be welcomed by the fascistic right. But it is particularly notable that the prime movers are the state Labor government in Queensland, working closely with the federal Labor government of Albanese.

In their own way, the authorities are making it clear that basic civil liberties and democracy itself are incompatible with capitalism. That only underscores the urgency for workers and young people to build a socialist movement against war, inequality, authoritarianism and the profit system.

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