

Australia: Police “terrorism” raids exploited to boost Anzac Day events

By Mike Head
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Australia’s federal Liberal-National government and the Victorian state Labor government have seized on violent pre-dawn police raids on homes in Melbourne on Saturday to launch yet another terrorist scare campaign.

On Saturday, starting at 3 a.m., about 200 para-military police smashed their way into seven homes in Melbourne’s outer southeastern working-class suburbs. In the terrifying operation conducted in darkness, doors were battered open, windows broken, and those arrested were physically attacked and injured, as were some family members.

Without providing any evidence, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) alleged that two 18-year-olds planned some kind of Anzac Day attack on police, and claimed that the unspecified plan was “ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] inspired.”

Despite the thin basis for the new “terrorist conspiracy,” Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews have exploited the arrests of five teenagers to try to whip up support for next weekend’s Anzac Day events marking the centenary of the disastrous British-led invasion of Turkey’s Gallipoli peninsula during World War I.

Abbott immediately declared: “This was a potential attack at an advanced stage of planning.” As well as prejudicing any chance of a fair trial, Abbott’s comments were an attempt to incite fresh fears of terrorism, this time directly linked to the Anzac Day commemorations and the government’s effort to produce a large turnout.

Later, speaking from New Zealand, Abbott amplified this appeal and linked it explicitly to support for the military. “The best thing Australians and New Zealanders can do is to turn up in very large numbers at Anzac events wherever they are to support our values,

our interests, our armed forces,” he said.

Opposition Labor Party leader Bill Shorten gave unconditional bipartisan support, encouraging “people not to be deterred by these raids yesterday, but rather demonstrate together, side by side... that we will not be deterred by a fear of terrorism.”

Victorian Premier Andrews announced a major show of police force next weekend. “There will be a significant, increased, visible police presence for Anzac Day,” he said. This would extend beyond actual Anzac Day events to “lots of different locations” across the state, including football matches. Other state governments are following suit.

The Anzac Day events are a high point of the four-year official multi-million-dollar “celebration” of World War I—a campaign that is glorifying war and promoting militarism and nationalism. Despite saturation media coverage of what today’s editorial by Murdoch’s *Australian* declared to be a “sacred day,” there are growing signs of public hostility and opposition to this pro-war commemoration.

Timing of the Melbourne police raid appears convenient politically, like other “anti-terror” operations, including last September’s huge police raids in Sydney and Melbourne and the police killing of Abdul Haider, another 18-year-old from southeast Melbourne, and above all last December’s Sydney café siege, which involved a sole deranged hostage-taker. These police actions were used to justify a barrage of draconian new “counter-terrorism” laws and the dispatch of more Australian troops to join the US-led war in Iraq and Syria.

Saturday’s raids were clearly intended to terrorise the families whose homes were besieged and intimidate working class households more broadly. Neighbours said they were shocked by seeing police use battering

rams, smash windows and explode flash grenades inside houses.

Vehid Causevic, whose son Harun was arrested, said his family was traumatised when police broke into their home, dragging people out of bed. Causevic told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) that police held a gun to his head and forced him to lie on the floor for 30 minutes. He said police told him: “One more word, I’ll kill you.” Causevic said his son’s arm was broken.

The family of another teenager, who was arrested and released without charge, lodged a formal complaint about the police violence. The young man told the ABC he did not resist arrest, but “After my hands were cuffed, laying on my stomach, I got kicked in the head. Then he [one of the police officers] grabbed me, slams me into the fridge. As you can see, there’ll be blood on the fridge. Then he slammed me on the ground and then hit me with his gun and I think I passed out then.”

Acting Victoria Police Commissioner Tim Cartwright flatly defended the fact that three arrested teenagers were taken to hospital. “High risk searches, high risk raids at three in the morning, in the dark, I’m not surprised again that some of them needed medical examination,” he said.

Claims of a terror plot are unsubstantiated. Cartwright told reporters that officers found “edged weapons, numbers of them,” without specifying what the “weapons” were or how many there were. AFP Acting Deputy Commissioner Neil Gaughan drew a connection to ISIS, saying: “Some evidence that was collected at a couple of the scenes and some other information we have leads us to believe that this particular matter was ISIS-inspired.”

Police chiefs also asserted, without providing any specific information, that the teenagers were linked to Haider, the young man killed by police last September. It seems, from comments made by family members, that some of the teenagers simply knew Haider and had been questioned by police previously about their relations with him.

Significantly, only one teenager was charged with a terrorist offence—a vaguely-worded count of “conspiring to commit a terrorist act.” Sevdet Besim, 18, was arrested with the aid of recently imposed terrorism laws that permit police to carry out arrests on the basis of “reasonable suspicion” rather than

“reasonable belief”—i.e., without any firm evidence. He was imprisoned but will apply for bail.

Another young man was charged with unknown weapons offences—not terrorism—then released. Two teenagers were detained but released after interrogation.

The fifth teenager was imprisoned without charge for up to 14 days via a preventative detention order—the first time such an order has been used in Victoria since the measure was introduced in 2006. Clearly, the police have no evidence against him on which to lay any charge. Police can obtain these orders merely by asserting there were “reasonable grounds to suspect” that a person “will engage in a terrorist act.”

Labor’s Premier Andrews vehemently backed the police use of violence in the raids and praised the “courage and professionalism” of the Counter-Terrorism Command. Like Abbott, he insinuated that all five teenagers were guilty of terrorism, demonising them as “simply evil, plain and simple.”

The latest raid underscores once again connection between war and the assault on fundamental legal and democratic rights. The intensification of the wars being pursued by Washington and its allies in the Middle East, and glorification of war surrounding the World War I centenary, are increasingly accompanied by police state conditions at home.

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