

Campaign Against Criminalising Communities (CAMPACC)

We are all ‘terror suspects’: The ‘War on Terror’ at home

After 7th July we all feared death by bombing, but since 22nd July we have been fearing death from armed police. The police call their policy, ‘Shoot to kill – to protect’. But what were they protecting when they killed Jean Charles de Menezes? According to eye-witness accounts, he was already incapacitated, pinned to the floor of a tube carriage. This was a public execution without trial, not the prevention of violence. Afterwards rumours were spread about the victim, to imply that his behaviour was somehow at fault.

This murder extends a long history of killings in police custody, as suffered by Britain’s black and ethnic minority communities over many years. It also extends punishment without trial. Now it can mean a quick death for potentially anyone ignoring the command of armed police, especially anyone who has dark skin.

Now London’s population – especially young, brown-skinned men – are all ‘terror suspects’ under a death threat. Since 2001, a task of crime prevention has been turned into a ‘war on terror’.

Even some anti-war politicians have been recruited to the ‘war on terror’ at home. After the 7th July bombings, Mayor Ken Livingstone rightly acknowledged some link to the US-UK war in Iraq, while proclaiming that London’s people would not be divided. But after the 22nd July murder he quickly absolved the police of their crime: ‘Jean Charles de Menezes was as much a victim of the terrorists as those who died on 7 July’, and ‘the police officers acted correctly’, he said (*Evening Standard*, 25 July). It is disappointing that Livingstone, who has opposed British state terrorism in Iraq, now supports it at home and thus legitimises our insecurity.

Neither have the ‘anti-terror’ laws made us more secure, despite the enactment of more severe powers. The ordinary criminal law was always adequate to protect the public from violence, but not adequate for the political aims of ‘the war on terror’. The Terrorism Act 2000 redefined terrorism to include a wide range of ordinary political activities. In that spirit, anti-terror laws have been used mainly to monitor, persecute, silence and isolate Muslim and migrant communities in this country. Those laws have also been used to disrupt and deter solidarity here with people abroad resisting oppressive regimes allied to the UK. These laws have also been used to stop charitable work among oppressed peoples, by freezing and suspending bank accounts supposedly ‘linked’ to terrorism.

End the policy of ‘Shoot to kill – to terrorise’.

Why did the London bombings happen? They are clearly a bitter harvest from the US-UK wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, not to mention Britain's long-standing imperialist role in the global South. Perhaps less obvious is the link to anti-terror laws, which have been designed to suppress protest against Britain's illegal wars and its allies in state-terrorist regimes abroad. Muslim communities have turned out in force at large anti-war demos, but few have attended local meetings, for fear that they would be identified to the police, especially in the context of anti-terror laws. This fear has limited the social integration of migrant communities through the anti-war movement, and will continue to do so as the anti-migrant backlash ensues. The UK government will now step up political surveillance of migrant and Muslim communities through police informers, thus intensifying the current fear.

We are told to accept the powers of a police state, as necessary measures to protect us and our lives. The 'war on terror' blurs any distinction between political and violent activities. It blurs any distinction between bombers and merely suspected ones.

We demand:

End the policy of 'Shoot to kill – to terrorise'.

End the militarisation of the police and of our society.

Since 2001 our campaign has opposed all 'anti-terror' laws. In particular we aim:

1. To oppose all laws based on a pretext of counter-terrorism.
2. To campaign for the repeal of such laws: the Terrorism Act 2000, the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (ACTSA) 2001, and the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005.
3. To oppose any measures which could criminalise mere association with a political organisation, or which involve detention without charge, or restrictions on freedom of speech, association or publication.
4. To work in close association with affected communities and build the broadest possible alliance for civil liberties, human rights and universal values.
5. To demand that everyone must be treated as innocent until proven guilty, that the right of habeas corpus be restored, and that there should be no punishment without trial (e.g. 'control orders').
6. To defend the democratic freedom to dissent and to resist oppression, nationally and internationally.
7. To oppose crimes against humanity, regardless of who (or what government) commits them.

We ask you to join our efforts to defend civil liberties – and our lives.

Supporters are welcome to join our email list (see below) and to attend our monthly meetings, next to be held as follows:

7-9pm Tuesday 30th August.

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