

Australia and the War on Terror

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Not so long ago, about 1 year back, Australia used to enjoy a peaceful and serene society where diverse and different cultures and ethnicities coexisted in harmony. Today, however, signs and symptoms of increasing cultural clashes and racism are perceptible. Although these sentiments are disproportionately exaggerated by mainstream media, still it is clear that some ethnicities do not enjoy the same placid life they had within Australian society about a year ago. What triggered this change? Where did this change start and how far is it going to go? What other important changes could pertain to this awakening social cleavage and what impacts might pursuit?

Geographically, Australia is aloof from the rest of the world. But economically it is tightly mingled and fused within globalized economic system. This fusion into global economy is the source of its social diversity. However, because of its geographic segregation from the rest of the world, it has become a haven for many who were tired of ethnic discriminations, conflicts and wars.

Traditionally Australians were one of the leading nations in the class struggle. Australian working class is stiffened with worker unions pushing for social equality and a greater “share of the pie” for the workers. Australians enjoyed an elaborate range of regulations by law protecting them against the absolute poverty inherent in the capitalist mode of production. Despite places like the United States, where tax rates diminish for increasing incomes, in Australia tax rates augment for the same and its revenue is used to provide public services especially for those with lowest or no income and therefore to reduce social inequality. This is the key to the serenity and pervasive peace within such a diverse society of different ethnicities.

Being fused into the global economy, Australian economy, too, suffered from the global Falling Rate of Profit. The neo-liberal economic model, which started to prevail globally about 3 decades ago, has reached a point where its intrinsic contradictions are seriously hampering the continuous growth upon which it thrives. This global and structural delinquency left the Labor Party administration in an impasse. Labor party’s welfare-state policies were effective as long as the cogs of capitalism rotated in full motion. With the first sneeze of capitalism, the battlements of Labor’s redistribution policies began to tremble. It was then the opposition’s turn to take the steer and denude the realities of the ruling system.

With the election of the Liberal party’s coalition in the last parliamentary elections, public appeasement policies were officially abandoned. The capitalist economy was slumped into a position where only two options were left; either to embrace a plummeting growth rate or to increase pressure on the working class to stabilize growth rates on the top and thus keep Australia attractive to Capitalists for their investments. The former option is equivalent to a

death warrant to the entire system of capitalism; wherefore capitalism thrives on continuous growth. Given the global climate and dominance of neo-liberalism, within the system of capitalism the latter option is the only choice left. But people, normal middle class people and workers, care about neither capitalism nor these political frays and debates. What they do care about is their quality of life and if they could not get better lives nevertheless they could not appreciate a quite discernible deterioration of their life-style. At this stage, ordinary Australians are willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Capitalism as little as they are willing to do so to bring about Communism. No one would silently renounce an inch of previously available amenities just because a few fat-cats are not willing to compromise! This is where the rest of previously impertinent upheavals come into picture.

The mainstream media is one of the most effective means for the ruling class to forge public support whenever and wherever needs arise. Since the Liberal party's neo-conservative government took the office, as it started its onslaught on public services and spending such as Medicare, retirement..., there has been several protests building up all around Australia. None of these protests were covered diligently by mainstream media. This of course is because the privately owned media is analogous to a knife which could never cut its own handle. Another bold example of media boycott is the Israeli military campaign in Gaza which again was followed by numerous protests in Australia with very brief and sterile covering in mainstream media. These are all indicative of the ability and power of these media to divert social attention away from controversial and "harmful" subjects.

But let us take a look at another stream of news which could also have been deemed as harmful, but was deliberately trumpeted with conspicuous titles and vociferous reports. The same stream which has ignited the social instability and activated the previously inactive social cleavage between ethnicities and religious sects. First there was an outbreak of sensational news about horrifying decapitations carried out by ISIS terrorists (as if such grisly acts are not business as usual in one of the countries which Australia is in very good relations with i.e. Saudi Arabia). Then there was news about some Australian citizens who had travelled to the Middle East and participated in that campaign of beheadings, again totally omitting the fact that not long ago these terrorists were depicted as pro-democracy revolutionaries and comely rebels by the same media!

This campaign of fear-mongering was immediately comprehended by the prime minister and it did not take long until it was announced that Australia has joined the "international coalition" against ISIS/ISIL/IS. Suddenly a massive anti-terror operation was carried out within Australian soil which was claimed to have thwarted an imminent terrorist attack. Train-stations and public transport, one of the few public places which are still under government control, began to incessantly announce alert messages and importunately ask people to be vigilant of an imminent terrorist threat. Previously peaceful and serene Australian society, turned into a besieged town awaiting herds of barbarian bandits rattling towards it with blazing swords swirling above their heads!

Leftist parties, worker unions, anti-war Liberals and other opposition groups will have two options here. Either they will side with the government and comprehend this "Global War against Terrorism", or they will criticize this folly and express reprehension. If they choose the former, it will further bolster government's position in carrying out its other pursuing policies; but if they rebuke the government, they will be accused to be complicit with terrorists. Thenceforth, anyone who criticizes the new political agenda (i.e. abolishing free health-care and Medicare, eliminating education subsidies and privatization of education system, privatization of public transport, cutting public budget ...) will be labeled as

terrorist, coward, traitor, uncivilized, reactionary ...! And the real reactionaries will be raised and saluted as patriots, heroes, progressives, pro-democracies Already police force is deployed in large numbers in main train stations to “monitor criminal and anti-social activity”. The government has foreseen, or smelled the whiff, of a social unrest. This could be indicative of the magnitude of economic austerity measures that are planned to come about.

Following the news trends and recurring headlines, it should not be a surprise if gradually we hear or read news about observation of some cases of Ebola in Australia, and yet another campaign of fear-mongering in the name of containing an imminent outbreak of Ebola. In this case, which could arise if a formidable public resistance is demonstrated against current policies, the government may use the spending for fighting Ebola, as justification for further budget cuts from Medicare program. This, however, may not be necessary if the “terrorist threat” turns out to be intimidating enough to mar all effective public protests.

Bourgeois democracy is proved to be effective and persuasive because of its openness and flexibility. The ruling class has already practiced all of its rights on free press, political parties and lobbies to protect its own interests. We have to wait and see if Australian workers will also use their rights of assembly, unionization, strike and demonstrations to protect their class interests. As Marx said: “Between equal rights force decides”[i].

Notes

[i] Karl Marx, Capital, Vol I, Chapter X, Section 1: The Limits of the Working day.

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