

Canada: A Galloping Police State?

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After five years of what can only be described as intense “terrorism envy” by our security establishment —with their repeated predictions of terrorist acts in Canada — the country has moved up a notch, to terrorism frenzy. The discovery of an alleged conspiracy by 17 Muslim men to attack facilities in Toronto and kidnap parliamentarians (as well as beheading the prime minister) — ostensibly to get Canada to withdraw from Afghanistan— came just in time before parliament debates the renewal of our post-2001 anti-terrorism legislation, and when support for Canada’s all out military involvement in Afghanistan is softening by the day.

The June 2 arrests were done with massive police involvement. Snipers on rooftops, in full glare of the notified-in-advance media, guaranteed 24-hour TV coverage and screaming headlines, topped off by a full court press conference by the CSIS and the RCMP. A full-fledged national crisis was born, fueled by rumours and fear. Our whole national security was at stake, and Islam, and to a lesser degree, multiculturalism, was to blame, for enabling such individuals to function underneath our very noses. A new term, “home-grown terrorists,” was slammed into our vocabulary overnight.

While the frightening picture of religion-driven extremists was bombarding our senses, the lawyers of the accused complained that they could not find out what the evidence against their clients was, could not even talk to them without armed police presence. Two weeks after the arrest, the accused and their lawyers are still in the dark about what led to the extreme charges. The accused are kept in solitary confinement, forced to sleep with lights on and woken every half-an-hour during the night.

A media ban has been imposed, preventing the press and the lawyers from exposing the exact nature of the information or discussing the court proceedings. The initial horrific rumours are left standing, fueling more fears of all things Muslim (now interchangeable with “extremist”). Some of the Muslim community were also pulled into this vortex of hysteria, trying to do the impossible: disassociating themselves from “bad” Muslims and pledging to do “house cleaning,” to rid their mosques and communities of such individuals. For this they have received many pats on the back (and head) from the amen-corner in the media and security establishment.

Two weeks after the spectacular arrests, Canadians still know next to nothing of the doings and utterances of the 17: they were on chat lines (watched by the police), they played paint ball and did target practice in the woods (watched by their neighbours), they wore camouflage and military style boots, they had ordered a large amount of ammonium nitrate, a potential component of bombs, some of it delivered to their door by a police agent. We don’t know how many were involved in any of the above. Five pairs of boots were displayed

for the cameras, six flashlights, one walkie-talkie set, one voltmeter, eight D-cell batteries, a cell phone, a circuit board, a computer hard drive, one barbecue grill, a set of barbecue tongs, a wooden door with 21 bullet marks and a 9 mm hand gun. That should do it —clear proof that they were up to no good!

But wait a minute, is this scenario not deja vu from August 2003, when 24 Muslim men were taken down in an similar early-dawn police action, apprehended for planned terrorist acts such as bombing the CN tower and nuclear facilities in Ontario, their names and faces plastered on the media, far and wide? Much mutual congratulation among the intelligence community, the police and security forces ensued. Project Thread, as it was called, however, turned soon into Project Threadbare: nothing was found on the men, no evidence, no plans, no conspiracy, no tools to accomplish their dastardly deeds, and no membership in an “Al Quada sleeper cell,” as was initially claimed. They were cleared but not before being incarcerated, some for months. In the end, a couple of the men were found guilty of minor immigration infractions and deported. Others left the country, disgraced, their lives in tatters, only to find their “terrorist” reputations following them to Pakistan, where some ended up being interrogated and jailed before being released. They have received neither an apology nor a penny of compensation from Canada.

Is it possible that the CSIS and the RCMP have learned their lessons, that they have worked harder to make the charges stick this time? Having watched the 17 men and boys for several years, with no terrorist acts having occurred, they appear to have helped the suspects along by entrapping them, including delivering an order of ammonia nitrate to one of the suspects (although with contents substituted). Perhaps we will find out that the purchaser was reluctant but the agent was ardent in his determination to make the terrorist charges hold, at last.

With the defence of the current accused already thwarted, we can expect a show trial and a kangaroo court to justify the terrorism hysteria that is so aggressively being cultivated, day in and out, by authorities and much of the media. With several other Muslims being held for years on dubious “security certificates” — challenged now in the Supreme Court of Canada — we will likely see more Muslim men end up in the no-man’s-land of Canadian justice, without trial and due process. A galloping police state is emerging, in a fashion, familiar to those who know their history, of 1930’s Germany.

It is time for Canadians, living blindfolded and silenced in a fool’s paradise, to remember Pastor Martin Niemoller’s famous warning to his fellow Germans, here freely paraphrased: *“When they came for the Muslims/I remained silent/I was not a Muslim. //When they locked up the Aboriginals/defending their ancient lands/I remained silent/I was not an Aboriginal// When they came for the brown-skinned immigrants/ I did not speak up /I was not one of them// When they came for the critics, the dissidents, and the protesters/I did not speak out/I was not one of them// When they came for me/There was no one left to speak out.”*

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