

Police State: A chilling glimpse of ‘stop and search’ Britain

‘I took a picture of Tower Bridge and was arrested for terrorism’

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Government ministers and police chiefs are demanding new powers to allow the police to stop and search people in the streets if they suspect them of terrorism. These powers echo the notorious “sus laws” of the 1970s. Then the laws created an atmosphere of fear as police targeted young black men. Those laws were abandoned after widespread rioting in the early 1980s.

A glimpse of what these new laws would mean was shown last week when two foreign students were arrested for “terrorism” after taking snapshots of Tower Bridge.

Salam Abdulrahman is a politics student at Swansea university. On 14 May he and a friend travelled to London to arrange funding for a PhD.

After their meeting they decided to visit tourist attractions and walked around the capital taking pictures.

Salam told Socialist Worker, “We went to Tower Bridge and then to Big Ben.

“I took pictures of many beautiful views. The final one I took, minutes before being arrested, was a building belonging to the MI5 security services – which I only discovered was an MI5 building when in jail.

“We did not realise we were being watched. As we approached Scotland Yard we were stopped by police.

“They questioned us, took our student IDs and searched us.

Searched

“They radioed other police who arrived in two cars and they too questioned us, searched our bags and frisked us.

“They told us we were being arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. We were handcuffed and taken to a police station.

“There we were strip-searched, fingerprinted, photographed, swabbed for our DNA and put in separate cells.

“While I was in jail the police raided my room at the university. They broke down the door and seized my laptop, my other camera, CDs, books, passport and clothes.

“The next day I was interviewed by police. I was told that I would be charged for possessing a book called Future Jihad, Terrorist Strategies Against The West by Walid Phares, possessing a press ID, using the term Al Qaida in my emails and essays, visiting a number of places in Britain, taking photos of Tower Bridge which show the structure of the bridge, and having pictures of military people.

“They concluded that I was acting suspiciously and ‘collecting information for terrorism’. I was told that my Iraqi passport – I am a Kurd from Irbil – added to their suspicion of me. But these charges are unbelievable. I bought the book from my university bookstore for academic reasons – it is widely available.

“I was issued a press card before coming to Britain because I worked for the Kurdish Globe newspaper. The accusation that they found the term Al Qaida in my writings and emails is not a surprise.

“I am studying international relations and for one of my essays I had to collect a lot of articles related to radical Islam and terrorist groups.

“I also have relatives throughout Britain, and wanted to visit the places I had read about. There are thousands of tourists taking photos of Tower Bridge, and every photo shows the ‘structure’ of the bridge.

“I do have pictures with officers and soldiers of the South Korean Army who were based in Irbil in Iraqi Kurdistan. I worked as an interpreter for the Korean troops.

“I have been released on bail. I have to return to the police station on 26 June. What happened was a great shock. I recently wrote an essay on multiculturalism in Britain saying that the police do not discriminate on race.”

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