

Toby Shone and the spectre of ‘anarchist terror’

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Having failed last year to show its much heralded “anti-terror” raids against anarchists in 2020 were justified, the State last week lost a second bid to silence their main target, Toby Shone.

The cops’ attempt at targeted repression, using anti-mafia laws against someone unlucky enough to have had drugs in his home during the raids, is just the most recent attack against European anarchists however. It’s part of a broader pattern which has emerged as energy for the moral panic over fundamentalist Islam subsides.

Europe-wide crackdown

There is a strain of insurrectionary anarchism in Europe which has maintained itself for decades, and often pops up particularly in Italy and Greece involving direct confrontations with the State. Alongside solidarity actions against sites connected to ruling class oppression like the US embassy, groups will often respond in kind to police and fascist violence.

For the most part in the 2000s and 2010s this activity was of a low enough order, particularly when stacked against the political project of “anti-jihadi” policing, that anarchists weren’t a priority. This equation has steadily been changing however, most noticeably via the priorities of Europol’s anti-terror unit.

In its 2021 *Terrorism Situation and Trend report* (pdf) Europol notes that “In the EU (in 2020), 21 people died as a result of terrorist attacks and at least 54 people were injured. The deaths were the result of one right-wing terrorist attack and six jihadist terrorist attacks.” Of course the fast-rising number of violent racist incidents aren’t counted under this umbrella – if it did then Germany alone would have seen 24,000 extra crimes listed last year. German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer has warned that the far right is by far the most significant threat to national security.

So, the focus is fundamentalism and the far-right, right? Well, not according to their arrests list. From the report:

In fact leftists and anarchists, while not being responsible for any deaths, are being arrested more often for terror offences than the far-right and fundamentalists *combined*. So what’s going on here?

In Greece, New Democracy has accelerated arrests and actions against both insurrectionist groups such as Conspiracy Cells of Fire and the anarchist enclave of Exarchia, even going so far as to repeal the country’s iconic university sanctuary rules so they could get at anyone escaping onto the grounds of Athens Polytechnic. In Germany, the most recent series of raids took place in Munich, rummaging through people’s things, stealing printed matter and every bit of electronics they could reach, including the entire contents of a print shop down to the risograph machine. Anarchist media hasn’t been safe either, with Linksunten Indymedia raided and shut down. Other Indymedias have been threatened for hosting texts the State deemed too spicy.

This is, sadly, something we often have to live with. The State goes through phases – in the ’80s it was the Communists, then it was the jihadists, and now it’s stuck for a bogeyman to frighten the public into supporting its continued invasions of privacy. A lack of arrests against far-right terrorists meanwhile is par for the course because they don’t threaten State or capitalist priorities. For all that their chinless avatars moan and cant on major media platforms about being “silenced,” fascists are the golden children of law enforcement, exempt from any real experience of repression. Let’s face it, a not inconsiderable number of them *are* law enforcement.

So perhaps we're just next on the list.

Britain's lightweight panics

There is, for the most part, little insurrectionary tradition in old Blighty these days, and hasn't been for a while, which is one reason why the State's legislative and policing priorities have been so petty and draconian. In the absence of a real organised threat, MPs have ended up criminalising "serious annoyance" and traffic jams because apparently the ruling class here is so cosseted it panics even in the face of entirely fluffy actions undertaken by non-violent protesters.

But there has also been an effort by police to intimidate anyone who even talks about more disruptive activities. Enter Toby Shone.

In November 2020, during a raid on his home, police arrested Toby on allegations involving links to fiery direct actionist website 325nostate.net (now available only as an archive, as Dutch police stole its server). Pompously titled "Operation Adream," the raid turned up nothing more dangerous than some LSD, MDMA and a handful of other drugs common to communes across the land. Nevertheless, unwilling to admit to an embarrassing miss, they accused Toby of being involved in terrorist activities, in particular funding terrorism, possessing information of use to terrorists, membership of a terrorist group and of carrying out "direct actions."

As it became clear that this was going to fail abysmally however (and it did, he was found Not Guilty) they focused instead on the drugs they'd found in the collective space of the house, charging him for possession with intent to supply. This was more successful, and he was jailed for three years and nine months in October last year on a guilty plea.

This was, of course, not the end of the story. No police force can stand being shown up, and their "we'll get him on something" itch was scratched with a follow-up application for a Serious Crime Prevention Order (SCPO), a blatant overkill measure usually aimed at organised crime dons which a judge rightly said had no grounds whatsoever.

As Toby himself notes, the use of such invasive legislation allowing police to try and control his use of computers, bank accounts and any other electronic devices for the next five years on the basis of such a limited charge is quite clearly a work of political repression. He has said outright that: "I'm anti capitalist and against any gang or mafia type practices. I'm opposed to the use of hard narcotics and their supply."

Toby is no organised crime boss. He was found not guilty of the wad of drama-baiting terror charges the State threw at him. Not guilty of "glorifying" terrorism. Not guilty of "supporting" it. Not guilty of "funding" it. That should have been the end of the matter. But instead frustrated cops tried to have their way by another route. A sentence of snooping, a jail without bars which would have made it impossible for him to work in activist circles. It is a victory for basic common sense, let alone human dignity, that it was not indulged by a judge.

But the application should never have been brought. This undue confidence with which cops are harassing people has been underwritten by the current mob of political paranoiacs at Westminster, whose attitude towards dissent would be comical if it weren't so malevolent. Backed by mass media and a surprising level of public indifference, it's part of a general rolling back of freedoms for everyone who isn't, in that classic line, able to treat laws as cobwebs.

Yet the Tories are just the dimmest part of this particular bulb, and similar efforts have been hammering anarchists across Europe. As far-right ideals continue worming their way into the halls of power and media, anarchists may face a difficult decade.

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