



‘Techno-Stasi’ police-state laws before UK parliament

By Elisa Barwick

A new bill before the UK parliament, the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill 2017-19, has been denounced by former MI5 officer Annie Machon as “a potentially dangerous blueprint for a techno-Stasi state”. The nation which routinely accuses Russia of putting dictatorial restrictions on its population is again threatening people’s rights in the name of protecting them from a terrorist scourge it has itself fostered.

Since at least the 1990s, MI5 operated a now-notorious “covenant of security” with the world’s most dangerous Islamist terrorist groups, under which the terrorists were permitted to operate in the UK so long as they did not commit attacks on British soil. This policy either backfired on to the UK with the 7 July 2005 (“7/7”) London tube and bus bombings, or there is a more sinister explanation for that attack involving direct MI5 involvement; either way it led to the investigations that brought the covenant of security to light. No government officials have been held to account for this, and there is evidence the covenant has continued, as the terrorists who committed both the May 2017 Manchester Arena bombing and June 2017 London Bridge attack also had involvement with MI5 and the Home Office. “Virtually every terror attack carried out in the UK over the last few years has been committed by someone already known to the authorities”, said Machon in an 11 June article for Consortium News, headlined “Britain’s Brave New World just got braver”.

Yet Sajid Javid, the minister in charge of the Home Office, which oversaw the covenant, cited these attacks in a 4 June speech in central London as the basis for the new bill which amends existing legislation, including the *Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015*, the *Protection of Freedoms Act 2012*, and the *Counter-Terrorism Act 2008*. Javid stressed that “The UK is widely seen as a world leader in counter-terrorism strategy”, and is leading the way with its “Five Eyes partners”. The bill has gone through its first and second readings in the House of Commons and is now in the committee stage where it will be scrutinised line by line, before heading to the House of Lords.

More spying

One of the main features of the new Home Office plan includes sharing previously classified information on some 20,000 “subjects of concern” with a variety of organisations such as local councils, businesses, police, social workers and teachers, in order to monitor their activity. These agencies will be asked to spy on “subjects of interest”. The private sector will be enlisted to report suspicious purchases such as chemicals, fertilisers, gas cylinders, or van rentals. Social media hosts will be called on to report and remove extremist or suspicious content.

Machon points out that “intelligence is not evidence. Effectively MI5 will be very widely circulating partially assessed suspicions, perhaps even rumours, about individuals who cannot be charged with a crime just based on the intelligence, but who will nonetheless fall under a deep shadow of suspicion within their communities”. Referring to the East German Stasi’s vast network of informers, Machon observed: “How ironic that the same system that was devised to protect East German youth from the ‘decadent influence’ of the West is now being proposed in a ‘decadent’ Western

country to spy on its own youth for traces of radicalisation.”

The Home Office wants an increase of some 2,000 new spies for MI5, MI6 and Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ)—for even greater surveillance capabilities. MI5 has already doubled in size since the “war on terror” began. Face recognition cameras are already being tested by three UK police forces, and the prospect of integrating CCTV cameras with Facebook “face-tagging” technology has been mooted to identify suspicious behaviour in real time. In addition, the *Investigatory Powers Act 2016* allowed for “bulk data storage, bulk dataset hacking and hacking per se”.

If passed, the bill will allow for tough new powers to arrest and jail suspects before terror plots are conducted. The bill would grant the power to obtain warrants to enter and search the premises of suspects for the purpose of “assessing the risks posed by the person”; the suspects can be kept under close surveillance. Such “serious crime prevention orders” are preventive rather than punitive, and include prohibitions, restrictions or other requirements to protect the public; they were first introduced by the *Serious Crime Act 2007*, but did not apply to terrorism offences.

Hostile state acts

Extending such powers to include terrorism and ill-defined “hostile state acts” provides additional scope for security services to intersect activities deemed undesirable. The bill “confers powers exercisable at ports and borders in connection with the questioning and detention of persons suspected of involvement in hostile activity for, on behalf of, or otherwise in the interests of, a State other than the United Kingdom”. This is the same Home Office, however, that under Theresa May as Home Secretary in 2011 allowed Manchester-based Libyans, even ones suspected of being terrorists, to travel to Libya to fight alongside al-Qaeda to topple Qaddafi, and then return home to Manchester, one of whom committed the May 2017 suicide bombing of the Manchester Arena.

Javid confirmed that terrorism is a mere pretext when he cited the attempted poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury as proof of the increasing and evolving threat to the UK, even though any findings in the case have been suppressed despite repeated Russian attempts to access information. A Fact Sheet on the new bill explains that it was after this attack that British Prime Minister Theresa May announced “the Government was developing legislative powers to harden the country’s defences against all forms of hostile state activity”. The National Security Capability Review release in April, with its “Fusion doctrine” of “soft” warfare against challengers to Anglo-American power, made a commitment to develop powers to determine threats against national security. (“UK launches soft warfare blueprint”, AAS 11 April.)

Police state to protect the elite?

The new regulations also include changes to traffic regulations and event security to protect against potential terrorist attacks, in the form of Anti-Terrorism Traffic Regulation Orders (ATTROs). This can apply to any street or “relevant site” at which activities are carried out which, if interrupted, would cause significant risk or damage to human welfare, the environment, the UK economy or its national security. The

police or authorised personnel will be empowered to shut off streets to traffic (including pedestrians) by using bollards or other obstructions. The bill's provisions amend the existing law governing ATTROs "to enhance their effectiveness and simplify their implementation". It also waives the existing requirement to publicise an ATTRO in advance.

In 2016, with the express authority of the City of London Corporation (the private municipal body that houses London's financial district) London Police applied to create a permanent ATTRO to protect the "Square Mile", allowing police to pre-emptively close roads and footpaths, supposedly to prevent a terrorist attack. Such powers could be used to protect the City's "economy" during a financial breakdown, and has been foreshadowed before.

In January 2016, City of London financial insider Tim Price, director of PFP Wealth Management and columnist for *MoneyWeek* magazine, warned that "financial martial law" was on the cards in Britain at the time of the 2007-08 financial crisis. "In that kind of financial instability", he said, "you're talking troops on the streets. How do you maintain law and order if people have suddenly run out of money, and through no fault of their own?" ("UK

Establishment plans martial law?" AAS 20 January 2016).

A more recent admission brought on by fear of a new crisis came on 28 May 2018, when Britain's chancellor at the time of the 2008 global financial crisis, Alistair Darling, told *Business Insider Australia* that the UK came within hours of "complete panic" and "the breakdown of law and order" when Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) failed.

Machon concluded her review of the proposed legislation with a stark warning:

"Do we really want to live in a country where our every movement is watched by technology, with the police waiting to pounce; a country where if we are having a stressed work day and seem 'strange' to a clerk at a car hire company we can be tracked as a potential terrorist; where children need to fear that if they ask awkward questions of their teachers or raise family concerns with social care, they might be put on a watch list?

"In that direction lies totalitarianism. I have been tracking how a state can slide unthinkingly into such a situation for years, particularly looking at such warnings from 1930s Germany. Over the last decade I have seriously begun to fear for my country."

McDonnell demands 'investment revolution' and Bank of England reform

In an article published in *The Guardian* on 20 June, UK Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell showed exactly how different he would be to the succession of recent chancellors from both parties, by reporting on an inquiry he commissioned into the functioning of the UK financial system, particularly with regard to the pitiful level of investment in the real economy.

The Labour team under leader Jeremy Corbyn and McDonnell has pledged to re-nationalise all essential services, including rail, water, electricity and the postal service. At the time of the Davos World Economic Forum on 23-26 January, McDonnell had warned that, "If our rigged economic system isn't radically changed and its rules rewritten, people will demand change. We've seen the first eruptions of these demands right across the globe. The global elite gathering in Davos are risking a social avalanche that will sweep them and their broken system away. We need a systemic change—not just tinkering at the edges."

In his *Guardian* piece, "Britain needs an investment revolution. Labour will provide it", McDonnell reveals how his approach to that goal is developing.

"This country suffers the lowest rate of investment in the G7", he said. "Our infrastructure—the essential networks of transport, utilities and telecommunications—is creaking under the strain, and suffering from decades of privatised mismanagement. On technology, we are falling even further behind, with the latest Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development figures showing that British manufacturing has the lowest rate of industrial robot use in the developed world...."

"Real wages remain lower than they were eight years ago", he continued. "Yet amid the public squalor and worsening conditions for the many, there are huge new investments in luxury flats and, at least in parts of London, extraordinary private wealth."

"When I asked a respected City economist, Graham Turner, and his team to take a look into the functioning of the finance system, it was with this fundamental problem of low investment in mind. Their interim report,

published in December, drummed home some startling facts. Our financial system was taking money from manufacturing and lending it to invest in property; promising growth in new tech sectors was overwhelmingly concentrated in and around London; and some of the issues we saw in the run-up to the financial crisis have still not gone away.

"The team's final report is published today", McDonnell revealed, "and proposes fundamental shifts in how our financial system is organised." Turner's report addresses the politically fraught issue of the Bank of England's "independence", not by proposing to remove independence, but by moving the BoE out of the City of London to distance it from the private banks, and by requiring it to take the broader economy into considerations in its decision-making. Continued McDonnell: "Reform of the Bank of England's mandate is at its centre. It should retain operational independence, but—more than two decades after this was granted it is time to reassess its guiding principles. Turner's team have recommended that alongside the Bank's existing inflation target it should set a 3 per cent target for productivity growth. This will be backed by new powers that steer the financial system towards investment to maximise productivity growth. The report also proposes that a new government should agree an accord with the Bank, showing how each will work towards achieving that productivity target. And the Bank, they suggest, should be charged with assessing such measures in an annual budget."

McDonnell concluded: "Along with other detailed proposals, including the creation of a dedicated applied scientific research fund and a Strategic Investment Board to oversee investment, the authors' aim is guided by the belief—entirely correct, in my view—that almost a decade after the global financial crisis caused the worst recession in living memory, the time for a fundamental transformation of our financial system is long overdue. It means building on the immense strengths of our financial system, and harnessing them to meet the needs of a productive economy that works for the many, not the few."