

Upwey

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Dear Senators,

I have a wife, two children, two grandchildren and another one on the way, and I am greatly concerned about these new terrorism laws that have been proposed.

I am very much afraid that if these laws are passed it will destroy our democratic heritage.

The most frightening and offensive part of this legislation is the secrecy surrounding everything, making it a crime to even say you have been detained by ASIO/Federal Police or tell your wife/family where you are and what is happening.

Transparency is one of the main protectors of our democratic freedoms and rights.

Preventative detention, which will enable an innocent man who has committed no crime to be detained indefinitely, is a law which throws away much of our democratic freedoms and rights. The secrecy provisions associated with this law will prevent any abuses, and the extent of these abuses, ever being known by the general public.

Make no mistake about it, there will be abuses. In every country of the world there are people who will use these powers to their own advantage.

Control Orders placed on people who are just under suspicion is another law that is a completely at odds with what most people want in our society. The ability to extend these orders indefinitely fills me with fear.

The change in the onus of the burden of proof is another frightening change that is totally unfair and will easily lead to abuses (which as mentioned before, can be kept secret). For example it is possible to prove a document exists when you find it, but it is impossible to prove that a document does not exist. ASIO/Federal Police can always claim the document just hasn't been found yet and extend detention indefinitely.

The biggest danger to Australians and our way of life is NOT terrorism, but these laws that would take away our freedom/rights and enable ambitious people in power to turn Australia into a police state. I, and many of my friends to whom I have spoken, wouldn't want any politician, or judge, or head of ASIO, or head of Federal Police to have this power. These laws and the secrecy of the provisions that keep the actions away from public scrutiny provide fertile grounds for corruption.

The "War on Terrorism" is helping to create a myth. Just like with the "War on Crime", the "War on Drugs", the "War on Hunger", the "War on Poverty", etc, terrorism has always been with us in one form or another. The Red Brigades in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, the PLO in similar times, the IRA in Ireland and England, etc all perpetrated similar terrorist actions in the past. Also similar incidents occurred during communist insurgencies and wars of independence/liberation.

We didn't let these incidents in the past change our way of life today. We cannot let a few acts of terrorism deprive us of our hard won democratic rights and freedoms, particularly since they have occurred outside Australia.

Just like the invasion of Iraq made the world a less safe place and increased the likelihood of a possible terrorist attack in Australia, these new anti terror laws are likely to do the same. They will polarise the Australian community as the laws will almost certainly be used mainly against muslims (and peace activists/dissenters), some of whom will be totally innocent of any crime. This will quickly instil fear into their families and friends, create a lack of trust amongst them of anyone in authority, and increase the isolation of these communities.

All of this will tend to inflame the situation and exacerbate the problem so that acts of violence are more likely to occur out of frustration and anger at being unfairly treated, rather than having any terrorist intent. This then usually leads to those in authority becoming more harsh and arbitrary in the use of these powers. As this cycle of escalation takes effect, the Australian community may well become more and more polarised in a similar manner to what has happened to catholics and protestants in Belfast. What a terrible situation this would be, to have isolated, secretive, fearful and angry Muslim enclaves in different areas of Australia.

These draconian laws are not the answer to terrorism. In fact they give in to terrorism by turning a democratic country in to a "potential" police state. By all means let us review our existing laws openly (so the public can be involved), and use some of our budget surplus to increase the dollars going into security infrastructure and jobs, but please don't agree to pass these horrible anti terror laws.

Regards

Jeff Burman