

experience & thoughts of a sydney arrestee

[forwarded to *arushandapush.blogsome.com* 20 March 07]

This email represents only my own opinions and views and has not been written with the advice or help of anybody else. I am responsible for this statement.

p.s. i would just like to pay homage to the amazing political activist Tanya Reinhardt who died today. She was an inspiration for all human beings.

Dear friends, family, colleagues and comrades,

On Wednesday the 14th of March, 2007 i was woken at 6 am by 8 armed men and women who had demanded entry to my family home. These men and women identified themselves as police officers from a range of police organisations; NSW Police, Vic Police, Federal Police and Counter-Terrorism Agents. 2 other officers in dark clothing and gloved came around the back of the house - i assume to cover any attempted escape - and 1 officer filmed everything on a digital camera.

The police explained that they were raiding my house in relation to protests that I had attended in Melbourne last November. These protests had occurred in relation to the G20 economic forum that was held in Melbourne at that time. After seizing clothing and my university backpack, i was officially arrested and taken to Surrey Hills Police Station.

Similar arrests have occurred to some 48 other students and activists around Australia over the past 4 months. (I have heard of cases where the process of arrest has led to serious personal injuries, significant property damage, loss of jobs and in one case an individual was locked up for a month without bail.)

Personally this arrest is the second time that i have experienced the force of Victorian Counter Terrorism Agents in relation to this protest. On the night of the protests in Melbourne (18/11/06) i was snatched by roughly 8 unidentifiable men and forced into an unmarked white van as i attempted to walk with friends away from the protests.

Without identifying themselves the men in the van tied my hands behind my back, forced me to lie face down on the floor of the van and proceeded to interrogate me, punching me repeatedly in the face if i didn't answer their questions quickly enough and once for accidentally calling one of them 'mate'.

This is the first time i have talked about this publicly, apart from with close friends, family, my lawyer and an officer who photographed my injuries and bruising at the police station. i have been too afraid of antagonising the police further and having this happen again...

...now it has happened again.

There is one point i would beg you to consider after hearing about what has happened.

This is not just a story about me, or a story about Melbourne.

The arrests that have resulted from the Melbourne protests are not an isolated example of new policing techniques. This is not simply a case of protesters taking things too far and police having to hunt down and arrest the criminal thugs responsible. This is not an occasion when things went 'wrong' in isolation.

Riot Police and Counter Terrorism Snatch Squads present in Melbourne in November, have also been deployed at the Free David Hicks rallies around Australia, Anti-VSU (voluntary student union) student rallies in Sydney, Anti-War demonstrations, Global Warming Awareness Campaigns and marches against Industrial Relations changes. Police surveillance and undercover "snatches" are occurring on university campuses with alarming support from university administration and security forces. Without counting the G20 arrestees, over the last year and a half at least three dozen

students at Sydney University alone have been arrested and charged in court for protesting, some multiple times. Less than a handful of these cases were for any activity more serious than refusing to move away from the protest, and the large majority didn't even resist arrest.

And yet they spend sometimes over a year going through the court processes, and face the possibility of criminal records.

This policing also occurs at the same time as media organisations are increasingly controlled by fewer and fewer powerful parties, and the public broadcasters such as ABC and SBS are attacked for posing political questions. Academic and scientific communities are frequently raising alarm about government policing and censoring of their findings. Military and intelligence leaders are personally attacked for speaking about military tactics or concerns that do not match those of the government.

Recent books such as "Silencing Dissent" and "Do Not Disturb" are essential reading and provide countless statements and examples that even public service officials are fearful of speaking truthfully about the current political situation in Australia, and the world.

Protesters are not the only people who worry about the state of the world.

YES - the protests in Melbourne made striking front-page photographs.

YES - there was a lot of passion, anger, verbal and physical expressions of dissent.

YES - normally this dissent is not expressed in such a public manner.

But NO - this was not an example of random violence or thuggish behaviour.

I went to the G20 protests to have my dissenting voice heard, the response has been extreme repression, inter-state anti-terror raids, media stigmatisation, public ridicule and jail sentences.

We are concerned citizens, concerned students, concerned human beings... A world without people who speak up is not a safer world for anybody to live in.