

Australia: Police report reveals real instigators of Cronulla race riots

Part 1

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Below we are publishing part one of a three-part series on the December 2005 race riots at Sydney's Cronulla beach. Part 2 was published on December 1 and part 3 will be published on December 2.

A five-volume New South Wales police report released last month sheds light on the dangerous and reactionary forces that instigated, and were involved in, Sydney's "Cronulla Riots" of December 11, 2005. On that day, approximately 5,000 people, mostly young, gathered on Cronulla beach, many draped in the Australian flag. They launched a nationalistic, alcohol- and drug-fuelled pogrom against anyone of Middle Eastern appearance, injuring more than 20 people, two of whom were stabbed.

Retaliatory attacks and violent clashes followed in some beach-side suburbs that evening and continued the next day. The state Labor government immediately invoked extraordinary police powers and "locked down" entire suburbs, placing them under a virtual state of police siege.

As the WSWS commented at the time, there was nothing spontaneous or accidental about the riots. A Socialist Equality Party statement pointed out that for an entire week, "right-wing radio and newspaper outlets whipped up a racist campaign to 'reclaim our beaches' from 'Lebanese gangs'". The fomenting of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab sentiment was aimed at cutting directly across deepening opposition to the Iraq war, the Howard government's industrial relations laws and declining working class living standards. The enormous class tensions and social unrest in Australian society were directed into a diseased and dangerous channel.

An examination of the report drawn up by retired NSW assistant police commissioner Norm Hazzard further confirms this analysis. The report investigates some of the factors that led to the riots, as well as the response of the NSW police. It also reveals some of the preparations that are now being made by police to suppress future social upheavals.

In the aftermath of the release of the report, media attention was focussed on calls for the state's police minister, Carl Scully, to resign. Scully initially denied knowledge of the document's contents in the NSW parliament. It subsequently emerged that Hazzard had personally briefed Scully on the contents in September, and that copies had already been leaked to some NSW police officers.

The immediate response of NSW premier Morris Iemma was to defend Scully, claiming "it's indisputable he wasn't trying to be dishonest or mislead".

After repeated accusations from the opposition Liberal Party that the

Labor government was covering up the report, Scully further obfuscated, claiming it was only a "draft", and then that it was not "final". Hazzard told the *Sydney Morning Herald* this was another lie. Finally, Iemma ordered the report's release, and Scully was sacked.

The furore over Scully's blatant deception and eventual resignation constituted a massive diversion from the report itself. The entire matter has since been dropped in the press. To this day, the media has barely mentioned the contents, and no copy is publicly available online.

So what does the report say, and why did it claim the scalp of a police minister?

On December 4, 2005 a relatively unexceptional altercation occurred on Cronulla beach involving a group of young men of Middle Eastern appearance and some lifeguards. A verbal exchange took place in which one of the Middle Eastern men responded to accusations that he was "staring" at a lifesaver by saying, "I'm allowed to, now f**k off and leave our beach". The lifesaver responded with, "I come down here out of my own spare time to save you dumb c**ts from drowning, now piss off you scum." A fight ensued, in which one of the lifeguards was badly hurt.

The incident became the launching pad for a hysterical campaign, primarily on talk-back radio, over the next week. As the Hazzard report notes, it was "described as being an attack on an Australian institution" in which "life savers were ... heroes and likened to Anzacs."

The radio reports of the event were outright fabrications. They described an unprovoked assault, with Middle Eastern "reinforcements" called to the beach by mobile phone, after which the enlarged group punched and kicked the lifeguards unconscious, and then fled.

None of this actually happened. The Hazzard report finds "evidence of provocation from both sides". Furthermore, "mobile telephones were not used to call in reinforcements" and "the Middle Eastern group did not increase in number from those who were in the immediate vicinity at the time".

Volume 4, Item 3 of the Hazzard report, entitled, "2GB Broadcast Synopsis: 4th December 2005 to 9th December 2005: Alan Jones, Ray Hadley, Jason Morrison," devotes 108 pages to broadcasts from Sydney radio station 2GB in the lead up to the Cronulla riots. Whilst not "strictly verbatim", it is a "verified and accurate" record.

On these radio programs, listeners call in, correspondents read out letters, and the hosts constantly volunteer their opinions and interpretations of events and issues.

Alan Jones is one of Australia's most promoted personalities, and enjoys the closest of relationships with Prime Minister John Howard, as well as with the Labor government in NSW. He is a former speechwriter for the Liberal Party, and a recipient of the Order of Australia.

It is impossible to reproduce the volume of filth and backwardness spewed forth by these radio commentators and their talk show guests in the space available for this article. But to give a sense of the racist climate they created at the time, it is crucial to revisit at least some of what they said.

Day after day, hysterical exchanges such as the following occurred on morning radio:

Caller: "What kind of grubs do we have here?"

(Alan) Jones: "What kind of grubs? This lot were Middle Eastern, we're not allowed to say it, but I *am* saying it."

The following "correspondence" was read on air by Jones:

* "Unfortunately this happens regularly at Cronulla—gangs of Lebanese youth just swarm over the beach, stealing from and assaulting beach goers; they pick on the youngest."

* "Alan it's not just a few Middle Eastern bastards at the weekend, it's thousands. Cronulla is a very long beach and it's been taken over by this scum; it's not a few causing problems, it's all of them."

* "Police are too afraid to act ... if we were allowed to act the way we want to, we could solve a lot of problems ... these Middle Eastern people must be treated with a big stick—it's the only thing they fear."

Jones openly advocated and encouraged violent reprisals and vigilante behaviour against young men of Middle Eastern appearance.

For instance a caller, John, said: "These people, half of them may be home grown; they have infected minds; they don't live the Australian way ... if the police can't do the job the next tier is to us." Jones replied: "Yeah, good on ya, John." When John said: "Shoot one, the rest will run ... when you're outnumbered 20 to 1 you don't put your hand up and play by Queensbury rules," Jones replied with laughter and added: "You don't play by Queensbury rules; good on ya, John."

Ray Hadley, another "shock-jock" on 2GB, unleashed equally disgusting comments, and also incited violence. Asked whether surf lifesavers should allow people of Middle Eastern appearance to drown when in distress in the water, Hadley commented: "That's good because there is one less to bash them [the lifesavers]. I don't care, I'm sick of it; I'm not in the mood today to pander to minorities." He continued: "It's about time we reclaimed our beaches."

Hadley also commented:

* "At the moment we have a core of young people who will not accept; they are Australians, but won't accept our way of life and we need to do something about it."

* "We have been too easy ... and we need to get tough."

Jason Morrison, filling in for Hadley, endorsed an email from a listener who claimed: "We are experiencing circumstances that have caused leaders of other countries through history to declare war on people not assimilating in their country."

These hosts endeavoured to create the impression of a city and a society under siege by dangerous, distinctly "un-Australian" and barely human elements who needed to be swiftly and violently crushed.

On one occasion, Jones wailed: "We've got the pack mentality, we've got the Lebanese gangs and the disrespect; you've got the mind numbing rap music. They've got the weapons and the knives, and like the US, the gangs are drawn along ethnic lines."

He also said:

* "Here are people hunting with gangs, hunting with knives, randomly threatening people's lives."

* "This is suburban this stuff and these people only know one thing: they hate us and they're going to take over."

With one caller, Yvonne, Jones claimed: "There is a standard that has to apply and you don't meet that standard you should be rounded up." She replied: "And if we don't have enough police, what's wrong with getting the army in?... [G]ive these blokes a bit of rifle butt in the face and they'll back off; they're cowards." Jones replied: "If it gets to that we might have to do that, do you follow what I am saying?"

Jones repeatedly read out an alleged text message sent out by local "youngsters" in the Cronulla area encouraging others to go to the beach on the following Sunday, "to support Leb and Wog bashing day".

On another occasion, Jones called for, "A rally, a street march, call it what you will. A community show of force."

It did not take long to prove that these considerable efforts were not in vain.

Referring directly to the role of the shock-jocks, the Hazzard report states, "comment made by the broader community relating to the incidents was at times racist, exaggerated, inaccurate and advocated vigilante behaviour."

But in the aftermath of the riots—unprecedented in Australian history—no official investigation was launched into their causes. Media attention continued to focus exclusively on how many Middle Eastern youth had or had not been rounded up, and the need for a massive police presence throughout the summer on Sydney's beaches.

The only explanation for Scully's behaviour was that he, too, was trying to protect the culprits. Adam Walters drew the conclusion in an article on *ninemsn.com.au* that Scully's actions were, indeed, aimed at suppressing the police report in order to protect Jones. Apparently, on September 19, when Hazzard initially briefed the police minister on the report, Scully questioned him as to whether the role of the media fell under its terms of reference.

According to Walters, Hazzard's notes of the meeting reveal that the police minister's only concerns "related to the criticism of Alan Jones and other influential media commentators". It appears that the primary motivation of the state Labor government was to avoid, at all costs, a falling out with the highly influential Jones so close to the March 2007 state election.

To be continued



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