

Australian state Labor government announces unprecedented police buildup

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The Victorian state Labor government has announced it will recruit an additional 3,100 police officers in the next four years, expanding the size of the force by 20 percent.

Unveiling the reactionary program that will cost more than \$2 billion, Premier Daniel Andrews declared on December 4: “Business as usual won’t cut it anymore—we are delivering in full the officers that Victoria Police tell us they need.”

Andrews made the announcement alongside police Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton—who lauded the policy as “the greatest commitment to policing in Victoria’s history”—and secretary of the Police Association Ron Iddles, who described the government’s initiative as a “game changer.”

The Labor government has issued press releases boasting of its commitment to so-called “law and order” nearly every day last month.

Together with the additional police recruits, the government is constructing new police stations and upgrading existing ones, purchasing three new police helicopters and a plane, and building a new \$27 million training base for the paramilitary Special Operations Group.

In addition, the government has moved to enact a new raft of repressive laws. These include multiple measures specifically targeting young people, including restricting youth parole eligibility and increasing the maximum period of detention that can be imposed by the Children’s Court, from 3 to 4 years. Four new offences have also been created—carjacking (maximum sentence 15 years), aggravated carjacking (maximum 25 years), home invasion (maximum 25 years) and aggravated home invasion (maximum 25 years, with a minimum non-parole period of three years).

Police will now also have the power to take DNA samples from alleged suspects, without first securing a court order. Few details have been released on this new

measure, though a government press release explained that police would soon be collecting ten times as many DNA samples as they currently are.

Young people are the immediate target of the government’s “law and order” crackdown, particularly those predominantly immigrant and refugee youth in Melbourne’s impoverished outer eastern suburbs.

For more than a year, the political and media establishment has been waging a hysterical scare campaign over a purported “youth crime wave.” In March, an incident in central Melbourne during the annual Moomba festival was exaggeratedly portrayed as a “riot” organised by the “Apex gang,” supposedly a group of teenagers of Sudanese origin from the outer suburb of Dandenong. The Murdoch press has spearheaded the effort, with near daily, lurid front-page headlines that have targeted the so-called Apex gang and young black people more broadly.

The racist campaign was stepped up in November in response to clashes involving teenage inmates at a juvenile detention facility in inner Melbourne.

The government responded by imprisoning the child detainees in maximum-security adult prisons. Victoria’s Supreme Court ruled on December 21 that this was illegal, with the Court of Appeal upholding this ruling and rejecting a state government appeal on December 29.

The government has nevertheless refused to comply with the court orders and has kept 11 boys imprisoned at the adult Barwon prison. In an Orwellian legal manoeuvre, after the Court of Appeal ruling the government rebranded part of Barwon prison as a “youth justice facility and remand centre” and now insist that court orders ordering the children’s relocation do not apply.

Lawyers for the youths told the courts that prison guards had warned their clients that any “misbehaviour” would be met with the use of teargas, firearms and dogs. The

children were initially held in lockdown for 23 hours a day, and denied access to education courses and resources they previously used.

Department of Health and Human Services official Ian Lanyon told the court that children had been transferred to the Barwon adult prison before safety risks had been resolved. He reported that one boy had self-harmed using a porcelain sink in his cell.

The government is determined to impose a ruthless and illegal collective punishment on the alleged youth rioters to send a warning more broadly to young people and the entire population.

Police have been issued an effective blank cheque to harass targeted young people. ABC News reported in early December that youth worker Deng Maleek was travelling to a meeting with police to discuss issues facing the Sudanese community when he was pulled over by officers and asked to provide his registration papers. He said that the police implied he was a member of the Apex gang.

“Young people of Sudanese background find themselves constantly being stopped,” Maleek said. “Young adults, not [just] kids, who were engaged in education or working part time and congregate in public spaces and just to socialise, will be randomly checked [to see] if they are gang members.”

The Labor government’s build-up of the state’s repressive powers is proceeding in tandem with the federal government’s ongoing crack down on democratic rights under the framework of the bogus “war on terror.” Daniel Andrews seized on the alleged Christmas Day “terror plot” to again laud the police and pledge his government’s commitment to deliver whatever resources police commanders demanded.

The ultimate target is the working class as a whole. Under conditions of escalating social inequality, job destruction, and attacks on workers’ living conditions, the ruling elite is preparing to meet the coming social and political upheavals with police-state repression.



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