

Australian media promotes fascists amid growing racist hysteria over “African gangs”

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A coordinated government-media racist campaign targeting young people of African origin in the city of Melbourne is becoming ever more frenzied.

Promoted by the press, extreme right-wing and neo-fascist groups are preparing to mobilise against immigrant youth, with a spate of racist attacks already reported. Every day, politicians and journalists are pumping out more filth, deliberately creating a pogromist atmosphere.

On Sunday night, Channel 7 television news in Melbourne featured an interview with members and leaders of two fascistic organisations, True Blue Crew and United Patriots Front. Beside a graphic reading, “Fighting Back,” news presenter Jacqueline Felgate breathlessly reported that the network had secured “exclusive access” to a meeting organised “in response to Melbourne’s African youth crisis.”

She then crossed to reporter Jodi Lee, beneath a caption describing the ultra-right meeting as a “community gathering.” Lee declared: “They call themselves patriots and say they have come together to help average Australians deal with what they are calling an immigrant crime crisis.”

Channel 7 then broadcast interviews with True Blue Crew member Kane Miller and United Patriots Front head Blair Cottrell, a known neo-Nazi, though this was not reported. Miller and Cottrell appealed for the police to be given additional powers, and for “the community to get involved.” The report concluded with Jodi Lee declaring: “This group hopes to harness the power of social media to protect both them and their families. They are hoping to create a kind of neighbourhood watch that will be able to quickly let people know when an incident, a robbery or an attack, is occurring and hopefully send locals there to protect residents.”

The True Blue Crew’s Facebook page provided a sense of what the fascists’ so-called “neighbourhood watch” would comprise. “We must rise up and fight these

cockroaches on the streets,” one commenter wrote. “I’m 59 but I can still crack some f***ing heads,” said another. “We can go do what we like, the police won’t so if these [sic] means putting them in a life raft and sending them back to Africa I will,” a different comment read. Several people called for “another Cronulla,” referring to the 2005 race riot in Sydney, which targeted Middle Eastern and Muslim youth. One True Blue Crew Facebook follower wrote: “Good luck all! I was there for the Cronulla riots! Aussie pride! Show them what we are made of!”

The media’s promotion of neo-Nazis marks a new stage in the highly orchestrated racist campaign.

Last month the Murdoch press seized on several petty crime incidents in Melbourne, that were allegedly committed by young people of African origin. The *Australian* and *Herald Sun* newspapers invented “African gangs,” which even the police have acknowledged do not exist, and have since published a daily stream of lurid articles. On January 1, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull issued his stamp of approval for the campaign, denouncing “African gang crime,” supposedly responsible for “growing lawlessness” in Victoria.

No-one within the political or media establishment has allowed the facts to get in the way of their inflammatory comments. The reality is that crime in Victoria was significantly down in 2017, while the number of young offenders in the state was two-and-a-half times lower than in the neighbouring state of New South Wales.

Minister for Home Affairs Peter Dutton has attacked Melbourne’s “African gangs” on a near daily basis. Last Thursday, he demanded that Victorian Labor Premier Daniel Andrews publicly apologise, and resign if he were unable to “rectify the problem.” On Friday, the Law Institute of Victoria issued a statement opposing Dutton’s attacks on so-called “civil libertarian” judges, whom he accused of handing down “soft” sentences. “There is no

place for political attacks on the judiciary and undermining the independence of our judges and magistrates,” the Institute’s statement read.

Turnbull and Dutton were denounced by Dave Anei, a resident of Brisbane originally from South Sudan, after he was racially abused last week. Anei uploaded on social media a video that he took of the incident, in which a young man entered his front yard and threatened to assault him, while naming several bikie gangs, saying, “Do you know who us Aussie c***s are, mate?—Odin’s Warriors mate, Black f*** Uhlans mate, Finks, Rebels, Odin’s Warriors!”

In response, Anei wrote: “I hold the Prime Minister Malcolm Trumbull and his Minister for Home Affairs Peter Dutton full responsibility for this racial attack on my family because they chose to be in the office to serve certain group of Australian communities NOT Australia as a whole country ... Congratulations Mr Prime Minister and your Minister Dutton, you’ve achieved to create division among the community.”

The entire political establishment is responsible for creating this toxic atmosphere, which is being utilised to mobilise the most backward, disoriented, and racist layers of society. The federal Labor Party has remained silent on the issue, lending tacit support to the government’s campaign. Acting party leader Tanya Plibersek’s only criticism of Turnbull was that he had cut the Australian Federal Police budget.

The state Labor government in Victoria has responded to the Turnbull government’s criticisms by touting its own “law and order” credentials. Premier Andrews has previously provided a record \$2 billion in additional funding for the state’s police, with the number of officers to be expanded by 20 percent. The state government’s attorney-general, Martin Pakula, indignantly denied Dutton’s claim that Labor was responsible for “soft” judges, declaring: “No government in recent memory has done more to appoint former prosecutors to our bench than this government.”

The police, who have long been responsible for provocative surveillance and harassment of immigrant youth throughout Melbourne, have quickly adapted to the racist campaign. Senior commanders have dropped their previous insistence that the small groups of young men and boys committing petty crimes were not “gangs.” Police have stepped up patrols in Melbourne’s working class outer western suburbs. Last weekend they set up a “mobile station” outside a Tarneit shopping centre, encouraging residents to provide them with information.

Officers patrolled the centre alongside self-styled African-Australian “community leaders” wearing hi-vis vests.

There are obvious electoral calculations behind the Murdoch press and Turnbull government’s promotion of the “African gangs” campaign. Wracked by crisis and confronting a possible federal election this year, the government hopes to gain some traction by stoking fear and campaigning on “law and order” issues. The opposition Liberal Party in Victoria likewise aims to capitalise on the issue ahead of a state election that will be held in November.

Beyond the sordid operations of the Liberal Party, however, there are broader issues involved in the campaign over alleged “African gangs.”

Its escalation is just one toxic symptom of a political and social order in profound crisis. Social inequality has reached unprecedented levels in Australia, with a narrow upper-middle class layer enjoying ever growing personal fortunes, while the vast majority confronts mounting financial pressures and hardship. No section of the political establishment is prepared to address the social and economic problems in working class areas, such as western Melbourne, which feature overcrowded and underfunded public schools, rundown public hospitals, virtually no recreational facilities for young people, expensive and inadequate housing, and an unemployment crisis made worse by an ongoing wave of factory closures. Far from addressing these problems, all of the parliamentary parties, Labor, Liberal, and Greens, are preparing further spending cuts to basic social services and welfare support programs.

The political establishment has nothing to offer young people and the working class except state repression. Much like the war on terror, the war on “African gangs” aims to divide the working class through racist politics, while at the same time creating the conditions for further bolstering the police and other repressive arms of the state. In this way, the ruling elite is preparing to violently suppress any challenge to its rule that emerges from the working class in the coming period. This is why the racist campaign against immigrant youth is a *class* issue. Working people and youth of all races and nationalities must unite against the “African gangs” provocation.



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