

Australian PM promotes racist campaign over “African gangs”

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19 July 2018

Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull intervened this week to bolster a two-year racist campaign, alleging, without any evidence, that the Victorian capital of Melbourne is in the grip of an epidemic of violent crime perpetrated by “African gangs.”

Speaking on 3AW Radio on Tuesday, Turnbull claimed there was “real concern about Sudanese gangs” in Melbourne. He defended comments by Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton last January, alleging that Melbourne residents were “scared to go out to restaurants of a night time.”

Turnbull echoed Dutton’s xenophobic assertion, declaring: “I’ve heard people—colleagues from Melbourne—say that there is real anxiety about crime in Melbourne. It is a real issue.”

The manufactured frenzy over supposed “African gangs” is one aspect of a broader attempt by the Liberal-National Coalition, the Labor Party and the corporate media to whip up nationalism, racism and anti-immigrant sentiment.

Turnbull’s comments were a brazen response to growing popular opposition to the “African gangs” propaganda amid further evidence of its bogus character.

On July 8, Channel Seven’s “Sunday Night” television program featured an hysterical segment, alleging a conspiracy by the police and government bodies to downplay “African crime” as a result of “political correctness.” This was in line with similar coverage in the Murdoch media’s *Australian* newspaper and its tabloids across the country.

The Channel Seven program provided no evidence for its claims. Instead, it focused almost exclusively on two robberies at a single jewellery store in Toorak, Melbourne’s wealthiest suburb. The most recent

incident occurred a year-and-a-half ago in January, 2017, following an earlier robbery in October 2016. Other footage used in the program was of a minor scuffle between youth in 2016.

That Channel Seven was unable to find more recent events on which to pin its story, is another indication of the manufactured character of the supposed crime wave.

The program uncritically featured the openly racist statements of one former jewellery store employee, who declared she could no longer work at the outlet because if she “ran into a coloured person I’d be having a panic attack again.”

In response to widespread condemnations of the program, Channel Seven issued a statement defending it as a “fair and factual report” on an “important issue.” Members of the African community plan to protest outside the network’s Melbourne headquarters tomorrow at 4 p.m.

The “Sunday Night” story was not Channel Seven’s first promotion of anti-African racism. In January, the station aired a glowing report of a meeting held by fascistic groups, the True Blue Crew and the United Patriots Front, to establish violent “neighbourhood watch” patrols targeting working class African youth.

The program described the groups as “patriots” who were “fighting back.” It did not disclose that one featured interviewee, Blair Cottrell, is a self-avowed admirer of Adolf Hitler who has previously been convicted of violent crimes.

Contrary to the claims of the media and political establishment, crime in Melbourne and across Victoria has significantly declined in recent years. Crime Statistics Agency figures show a statewide fall in overall crime of 9 percent in the 12 months to March 2018. Violent crimes, including break-ins, abductions

and assaults, registered substantial falls.

Crimes reportedly committed by individuals of Sudanese-descent in Melbourne comprise 1 percent or less of all offences leading to a conviction.

By contrast, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission data indicates that racial violence and abuse, including that directed at workers of African descent, has increased. During the 2017–18 financial year, inquiries to the commission about race-related incidents rose by 34 percent, while formal complaints were up 76 percent.

The Commission said many of the cases were products of “inflammatory race-related political statements and reporting” about “African gangs” last January. That was when Dutton made his comments and Channel Seven televised its promotion of “patriots.”

Commission spokeswoman Kristen Hilton told the *Guardian* last week: “People in the African community called us on our inquiry line; they talked to us about being afraid to take public transport; we heard people who were spat on waiting for buses or other forms of public transport.”

In one case, an employer asked an African worker about “African gangs.” When the worker complained, his shifts were cut. In other instances, African workers were subjected to vicious racial abuse by neighbours, and schoolchildren suffered racially-motivated bullying.

As this demonstrates, the media and political establishment’s campaign is aimed at fomenting foul jingoism to divide the working class. It is an attempt to divert mounting anger over social inequality, declining wages and soaring costs of living—resulting from the pro-business policies of the official parliamentary parties—in a reactionary direction.

Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition are competing with one another for the mantle of who is “toughest” on immigrants and immigration. While committing themselves to continue imposing the austerity dictates of the corporate and financial elite on the working class, they are seeking to scapegoat migrants and refugees for a deepening social crisis.

In Tuesday’s interview, Turnbull boasted that his government’s crackdown on visas resulted in last year’s net immigration being the lowest in a decade. Liberal Senator Dean Smith this week called for further

reductions, blaming immigration for the country’s inadequate urban infrastructure.

Labor leader Bill Shorten this month escalated his party’s attacks on foreign workers, likewise accusing them of being responsible for rising unemployment, and foreshadowing further visa restrictions. Shorten also reiterated that a Labor government, like those before it, would keep detaining refugees in offshore detention centres, in violation of their basic democratic rights and international law.

The “African gangs” campaign is being used to boost police powers and numbers.

The Victorian state Labor government of Daniel Andrews last year announced it would hire an additional 3,100 police officers over four years. It is constructing or upgrading police stations, purchasing three new police helicopters and a plane, and building a \$27 million training base for the paramilitary Special Operations Group.

These resources will inevitably be mobilised against the developing social and political struggles of workers and youth.

The defence of the social rights of the working class requires a political struggle against the attempts by the crisis-ridden ruling elite to sow divisions based on race and nationality. The alternative to the racist poison of the media and the parliamentary parties is the fight for the unity of the entire working class, in a common struggle against war, austerity and authoritarianism, and their source, the capitalist profit system itself.



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