

Australia: Commemoration rally held for youth killed in racist attack

Our reporters

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Several hundred people rallied in central Melbourne yesterday to commemorate the 11th anniversary of the murder of 19-year-old Liep Gony, after a brutal, racially motivated assault. The commemoration marked the first time that Liep's mother, Martha Ojulo, has publicly spoken about her son's death. She is clearly alarmed at the renewed government-media campaign scapegoating youth of African origin, in the guise of combating so-called "African gangs."

Eleven years ago, her son was killed amid a similar vendetta, launched against black youth in the final weeks of the John Howard Liberal-National Coalition government.

A Murdoch media led campaign beginning in mid-2007 sought to link crime in Melbourne's outer suburbs to youth of Sudanese origin. This featured openly racist rhetoric about "violent tribal societies," African-American "gang culture," and a supposed refusal to "integrate" into "mainstream Australia."

On the evening of September 26, Liep Gony went out to purchase supplies for a family wedding. Outside a train station in the working class south-eastern Melbourne suburb of Noble Park, Liep died after being repeatedly struck in the head and torso with metal bars.

Immediately after the murder, media reports linked the incident to a "gang-related attack." In response, Howard's immigration minister, Kevin Andrews, declared he was concerned "that some groups don't seem to be settling and adjusting into the Australian way of life as quickly as we would hope" and that the government would "slow down the rate of intake from countries such as Sudan." The government capped the proportion of refugees it accepted from Africa at 30 percent, down from 70 percent two years earlier.

Just hours after this provocative announcement, police revealed they had arrested two men, 22-year-old Clinton Rintoull and 19-year-old Dylan Sabatino, for the assault

on Liep.

The young men had earlier spray painted "fuck da ni***s" on their rental property's walls before going out and attacking Liep when they crossed paths. A neighbour earlier heard one of them say: "These blacks are turning the town into the Bronx. I am going to take my town back. I'm looking to kill the blacks."

It later emerged that the local newspaper had headlined an article on alleged refugee-immigrant youth crime, "Bronx Fear," underscoring the role of the media in inciting the most backward and disoriented layers with divisive racist politics. Clinton Rintoull, who was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for murder, had reportedly experienced family violence, homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health problems.

Speaking through a translator outside the Victorian state parliament yesterday, Martha Ojulo explained that she had fled South Sudan with her six children after her husband was arrested and family harassed. In a refugee camp, she continued, a fire killed one of her children and badly injured another. After this tragedy, she was accepted as a refugee into Australia.

Martha told the rally that Liep had helped her adjust to her new country, including translating at the local child care centre when his younger sister began to attend. Liep planned to study graphic design, and hoped, Martha explained, to buy a home for the family.

"It has been a very, very tough eleven years," she said. "Because of Liep's killing, my life has been destroyed. I would like a death like this to never happen again."

Martha explained her reaction to the government and media initially connecting her son's death to "African gang" crime. "I was shocked because I expected an opposite reaction," she said. "My son was not killed because he fought someone, my son was not killed because he did something wrong, my son was killed because of the colour of his skin. So, I expected a

different reaction to how Liep was treated. I thought that the government would stand with me because of the manner in which my son was killed.”

She continued: “I hope what happened to Liep never happens to a young man ever again. But I feel that for that change to happen it will require even members of parliament to change the way they talk. I also know that this [issue of youth crime] is much more complicated than what we see in the media. Some of the solutions that should be suggested are not the kind of rhetoric that we have... Support our community to provide more education facilities for our young people.”

Other family members and friends spoke at the rally, including Liep’s cousin, 22-year-old Nyawech Fouche. “I want all of you guys to understand, my cousin was murdered because of racism,” she said. “I don’t want to beat around the bush any more, and I don’t want to have to prove to people that I deserve life, or any other black person deserves to live. We do not want to prove that anymore, and I am tired and sick of the racism going on in this country. I am tired of the South Sudanese community being targeted. I am tired of all the minorities being bullied, being targeted by the media.”

Nyawech then broke down and was unable to continue. She later explained that she had suffered a panic attack, and spoke about the trauma that is still felt by the entire family.

Before the rally commenced, Nyawech told the WSWS: “The media makes it seem like crime belongs to only one group—which is the South Sudanese. But crime is in every race. There is good and bad in every race. And to generalise one group and call it a ‘Sudanese gang’ or an ‘African gang’—you’re generalising a whole continent by calling it an ‘African gang.’ You’re saying that Africans are all criminals. It is affecting our lives, and our studies, and our employment opportunities. I think youth have been targeted for many years—in every race, or every ethnicity. It is nothing new.”

Nyawech explained that she was now organising people of Sudanese origin to enrol to vote.

“Often, our parents are not educated in English, so they don’t understand politics and the way it works, or the way the media works,” she said. “That’s why a lot of them stay at home and pray for their kids. But praying doesn’t do anything—we need action. We need to actually go and demand justice, demand equality. That’s the only way that we will get what we want because I believe that we, as people, can overthrow the government.

“It doesn’t matter how many white supremacist groups

there are, because there are people with good hearts that can fight for the rights of other people. I think poverty is man-made.”

Chudier, a textile student, said, “What has happened has happened—it is sad. We’re just here to say—let this not happen again, to anyone, not just our community. It is not just within our community, they have done it to other communities as well. A while back it was the Lebanese, now it is the Sudanese.”

Liep Gony’s sister, Rouza, was just six-years-old when her brother was murdered and is now in high school. She told the WSWS: “We’re just trying to show people that there’s more to us than ‘African gangs,’ and more to us than our skin colour. My brother wasn’t part of any gang... Since his death our family is not the same, things are not the same. Nothing’s the same.”

The killing of Liep was a stark warning of the consequences of the incessant promotion of anti-immigrant racism and xenophobia by the entire political establishment including Labor, the Liberal-Nationals and the corporate press.

As in 2007, the renewed campaign over “African gangs” is aimed at dividing the workers along racial and ethnic lines, diverting anger over a deepening social crisis into the most reactionary channels and cultivating an extreme right-wing constituency that can be mobilised against the working class.

The alternative to this nationalist poison is the fight for the unity of the working class in a common struggle against social inequality, war, authoritarianism, and their sources, the capitalist system.

The authors recommend:

Australian PM promotes racist campaign over “African gangs”

[19 July 2018]

SEP forum rallies opposition against racist “African gangs” campaign in Australia

[26 January 2018]



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