

Australian police violently attack climate change protestors

Our reporters
31 October 2019

Police have attacked climate change protestors in Melbourne, Australia, arresting 67 people on Tuesday and Wednesday and hospitalising several others, including a woman who reportedly had both her legs broken in a police horse charge.

The state Labor government in Victoria has enthusiastically endorsed the police violence, with the state premier, attorney general, and police minister rushing to issue their unqualified support for the provocations.

The incident marks a further escalation of state repression in Australia against protest and dissent. State and federal governments, Labor and Liberal-National, have spent the last period outlawing a wide range of political and industrial protest action.

A relatively small number of climate change protestors, about 300, assembled on Tuesday outside central Melbourne's Convention and Exhibition Centre, to protest the International Mining and Resources Conference (IMARC). The three-day event, concluding today, has involved more than 400 transnational mining corporations, including many of the most exploitative and environmentally destructive such as BHP and Rio Tinto.

The protest was organised a fortnight after national Extinction Rebellion climate change demonstrations were met with police-state measures. Some of the tactics of the climate change protestors at IMARC were similar to those at Extinction Rebellion, including attempts to block roads and demonstrators glueing themselves to building entrances. Protestors tried to prevent mining conference delegates from accessing the convention centre.

In response to this non-violent action, the police responded with brutality surpassing the Extinction Rebellion response. Officers rammed horses through

the crowd, creating a dangerous situation when densely grouped protestors were unable to avert contact. The woman who suffered serious leg injuries reportedly had a police horse trample her. She was later seen inhaling a morphine whistle while being treated by paramedics before going to hospital.

Of the 47 people arrested Tuesday, two were accused of assaulting a police horse. However, none of the extensive footage of the protests on social media shows any such assault, and it is likely that the individuals were merely attempting to prevent being trampled by the horses.

Other video footage shows the police, who outnumbered the protestors, repeatedly swinging their batons into people who had their hands raised in the air. Several demonstrators were aggressively grabbed around the neck and throat, and thrown to the ground. One 18-year-old protestor was knocked to the ground by a cop who sprinted towards him from behind and bumped him with hip and shoulder.

Officers targeted any protestor identified as a leader and organiser. One spokesman for the blockade began to speak on a megaphone and was then surrounded by more than a dozen police officers who prevented him addressing the demonstration. After two people climbed poles and hung a protest banner on the convention centre building, a large group of police charged into the crowd in an apparent attempt to arrest those erecting the banner. The police indiscriminately sprayed capsicum spray into the crowd.

Journalists were also assaulted. Channel 7 News reporter Paul Dowsley was aggressively grabbed by his suit lapel and shoved away from the protest. Visibly shocked, Dowsley later tweeted: "Incredible. I was obeying their direction to move to another area. I'm stunned."

Police released a false statement claiming that the reporter had disobeyed “police instructions to move away from the area.” They insisted that “an appropriate amount of force was used.”

Student journalist with the University of Melbourne’s *Farrago* magazine, Ailish Hallinan, was also assaulted with capsicum spray by police. She wrote: “Truthfully, I couldn’t tell you what drove police to fire that pepper spray so recklessly out into the crowd. I was far enough away from the blockade at the time that I couldn’t hear what was happening between protesters and police. I thought I had positioned myself at a safe distance to observe and report peacefully. Clearly, I was mistaken.

“If you’ve never had the experience of being pepper sprayed before, all I can say is that it’s immeasurably worse than I ever imagined. What ensued in the moments after I was sprayed was an unbearable sensation of feeling like someone had lit a match on my skin before shoving it in my eyes. It took me at least 5 minutes to regain my sight, but even at the time of writing this—nearly 8 hours later, my vision is still blurry and my skin still burns.”

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke with some of the demonstrators earlier today.

Declan, a community services student who has volunteered with the Wilderness Society, was very upset. “I have two friends who were protesting yesterday and they both got pepper sprayed in the face. It looks like there was a lot of rage from the police. I don’t see why they can’t find a middle ground. I feel like no-one’s listening to the people.

“Things have been amping up from a couple of weeks ago when I was camping out in Carlton Gardens [for the Extinction Rebellion protest]. I don’t think violence is the answer from protesters or the police. We should be able to peacefully protest and express our opinions. And we should be heard and considered, but we—people who don’t believe in destroying our earth for the sake of profit—are not being heard and considered.”

Brett is a retired beef farmer from King Island and attended the protest with his wife. He previously participated with former Greens’ leader Bob Brown in a convoy protest against the proposed Adani coal mine in Queensland, though he explained that he is not a member of the Greens and regards himself as “apolitical.”

“I’ve come out of genuine concern for the climate

because climate change is happening now. We need the government to act to produce clean power from renewable energy. All the big battles in the world, the fight against the Vietnam war, the fight for women to vote, those people were brutalised as they demonstrated for that right and now they’re seen as great movements. This climate movement will be seen in the future as a great and necessary movement to mobilise the government to do what they should be doing,” Brett said.

“I’ve been shocked by the brutality of the Victorian police. The police put out reports saying they have behaved reasonably. They are not behaving reasonably. I know reasonable behaviour, I am a reasonable man. Some of them are very, very brutal.”

The police rampage was enthusiastically endorsed by the state Labor government. Police Minister Lisa Neville declared that she “commends” the police, and was “100 percent comfortable” with their actions.

In state parliament yesterday, Labor Premier Daniel Andrews denounced the protestors for “appalling behaviour” and stated that police “are doing every one of us proud.” He added, “be in no doubt—not only will we guarantee as a government the resources Victoria Police need, but we have a resolve to continue to support them in everything they need.”

State Labor governments are at the forefront of the forging of a police state. In Queensland, the state Labor government last week rammed through parliament new laws targeting peaceful protest actions, with demonstrators using proscribed “devices” now subject to two years imprisonment. The government also granted police expanded powers to conduct personal and vehicle searches without judicial warrants.

The ultimate target for all such anti-democratic measures is the working class. Amid a worldwide resurgence of political protest and industrial activity, the ruling elite in Australia is preparing violent repressive measures against working people as they enter into struggle in opposition to social inequality and attacks on jobs, wages, and conditions.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact