

Far-right premier of Australia's largest state admits to having worn a Nazi uniform

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13 January 2023

At a Thursday press conference, Dominic Perrottet, the premier of New South Wales (NSW) admitted that he had worn a Nazi uniform to his own 21st birthday party in 2003. Less than three months out from a state election, the revelation has cast doubts on Perrottet's political future.

As is always the case with official political scandals, there is no question that intense backroom conflicts and unstated agendas are at play. It seems clear that Perrottet's hand was forced by factional rivals within the Liberal Party.

The Liberal-National Coalition, in NSW and nationally, has been engulfed by factional warfare for an extended period. The crisis has been intensified by a series of major electoral defeats, which have posed a question mark over the very viability of the Coalition, one of the key political mechanisms of Australian capitalism.

In the course of the Coalition's decade-long rule in NSW, two of its premiers have been ousted via scandals. In 2014, Barry O'Farrell was forced to resign. His removal was associated with a push for intensified budget austerity. In 2021, Gladys Berejiklian was compelled to step-down, clearing the way for Perrottet's installation and an acceleration of the profit-driven lifting of all COVID safety measures.

O'Farrell's supposed indiscretion was having failed to declare his receipt of a gifted bottle of wine. Berejiklian was targeted over what was, at worst, pork barrelling. Both scandals were entirely manufactured.

The same cannot be said of Perrottet's predicament. That the premier of NSW, one of the most powerful political positions in the country, once donned the uniform of the Third Reich, whatever his exact motive, is a politically disturbing and unprecedented revelation.

Perrottet's press conference raised more questions than answers. He had worn the uniform because he was "naive... At that age in my life I just did not understand the gravity and the hurt of what that uniform means to people." The incident had been a "terrible mistake." Perrottet insisted that he was no longer "the person I was when I was 21." Through his "journey," he had subsequently "become a very

passionate supporter of the Jewish people."

The professions of total historical ignorance were undermined by a *Daily Telegraph* report that Perrottet had approached a Jewish guest at the party and offered to remove the uniform.

An article in the *Guardian* noted: "There are not many people out there who would feel comfortable being held to the standards of our 21-year-old selves. And yet, in 2003, even at 21, Perrottet was no political neophyte. He was already president of the Young Liberals at the University of Sydney, and had gained a reputation, along with his brothers, as a formidable opponent in the cut-throat world of campus politics..."

The birthday party was attended by various Young Liberals, some of whom would go on to prominent state and federal political careers like Perrottet.

Within the NSW Liberal Party, moreover, fascism and Nazism were not merely distant historical questions.

During the 1970s and 80s, a far-right faction had developed within the party, around Lyenko Urbanchich. His supporters successfully prevented Urbanchich from being expelled from the party in the early 80s, after revelations that he had functioned as the propagandist for a Nazi Slovenian military organisation during World War II. In 2003, a number of those who had collaborated with Urbanchich remained prominent in NSW Liberal politics.

Perrottet stated that he has carried the uniform incident as a "burden" for decades, but has "learnt" from the mistake. Those lessons have purportedly helped shape his political life. Perrottet, however, has pursued a political career on the far right of the official establishment.

In 2015, as state treasurer, he branded Mount Druitt, an impoverished working-class Sydney suburb with a large migrant population, as a "tangle of pathologies." The area was characterised by "welfare dependency," along with "delinquency, dysfunction, crime." This was the result, not of sweeping job cuts and the protracted government assault on social programs, but "family breakdown." Perrottet denounced "the left" for "throwing money at welfare."

In 2016, Perrottet hailed the election of US President Donald Trump. The career politician declared that it was “a victory for people who have been taken for granted by the elites in the political establishment for too long.”

Perrottet wrote, in part, “If you stand for free speech, you are not a bigot... If you support stronger borders, you are not a racist... If you love your country, you are not an extremist.” People who held these “values” were being subjected to “persecution from the left.”

Trump’s accession signalled a turn by sections of the ruling elite, internationally, towards fascistic forms of rule. This is a response to rising social opposition from the working class, and is inextricably linked to the agenda of war and austerity which capitalist governments around the world are implementing. As part of this program, a far-right milieu, including Nazi supporters, has been fomented. It played a key role in Trump’s attempted fascist coup of January 6, 2021.

In Australia, a similar process has been evident, with senior figures in the Liberal Party at times seeking to transform the Coalition into an alt-right Trump-style movement. A small right-wing layer has been developed and promoted, associated with hostility to COVID safety measures, including vaccinations.

Perrottet’s signature measure as premier was to spearhead the lifting of coronavirus restrictions, which had limited illness and deaths for the first two years of the pandemic. This program, which has clear eugenicist undertones, resulted in as many as 25,000 deaths last year.

The reopening, which had the character of a conspiracy against the population, was presided over by a triumvirate of Perrottet, former Coalition Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Victorian Labor Premier Daniel Andrews. The latter has collaborated particularly closely with Perrottet, as has Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese since his election last May, underscoring the completely bipartisan character of the profits before lives program.

Perrottet’s lengthy political career and his key role in national politics indicate that the uniform incident was likely widely known in official circles, where dirt files are the norm, certainly within the Liberal Party and possibly in Labor. It has surfaced now, not as the result of any newfound concern over fascism and the Holocaust.

Instead, the crisis is another marker of the breakdown of the two-party system. In the lead-up to the state election, the NSW Coalition is at war with itself. Many have suggested that Perrottet’s opponents in a “centre-right” faction were likely involved in forcing the disclosure.

Other reports have indicated that elements of Perrottet’s own right-wing faction may have been involved, after the premier shot down some of their preselection proposals in a

bid to keep a lid on all-out factional warfare.

The political issues in the disputes are murky. They are, however, inevitably related to the broader context.

The Coalition was routed in the May federal election, suffering its worst result since the 1940s, driven by swings against the Liberals. This was one component of a broader breakdown of support for the two-party system, driven by mounting popular discontent. There are growing fears that the Liberals, widely despised especially by younger sections of the population, are simply unelectable.

At the same time, Perrottet’s government has been faced with another manifestation of the discontent in the form of the sharp growth of the class struggle. Despite the attempts of the corporatised trade union bureaucracy to isolate and suppress these struggles, Perrottet has been unable as yet to impose wage-cutting industrial agreements on the state’s nurses, teachers and rail workers. This is doubtless provoking frustrations within the Coalition and the ruling elite itself.

An editorial in the *Australian* this morning bemoaned the latest scandal as another expression of “entrenched dysfunction” within the Liberal Party. The Murdoch-owned paper largely praised the record of the state’s Coalition governments, especially in limiting and then overturning COVID safety measures.

It warned, however, that the scandal and the factional brawling were a “serious concern” when the state would be “best served by two strong major parties engaged in the battle of policy and ideas.” In other words, the ruling class fears that the episode could further deepen the crisis of the two-party system.

One who received the message was NSW Labor leader Chris Minns. This morning he praised Perrottet’s “sincere and heartfelt apology” and said that he would not press for the Liberal premier’s resignation. Minns has marched in lockstep with the conservative government on every substantive question, from the lifting of COVID restrictions to the need for austerity attacks on the working class.



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