

Australian Labor Party saves right-wing NSW premier after admission he wore Nazi uniform

Oscar Grenfell
17 January 2023

With extraordinary speed, the political and media establishment has buried last Thursday's admission by New South Wales (NSW) Liberal-National Coalition Premier Dominic Perrottet that he wore a Nazi uniform to his 21st birthday party in 2003.

In an age of manufactured scandals, including of the #MeToo variety, political careers have been ended for far less. One need only recall the fate of former Coalition Premier Barry O'Farrell, compelled to resign over failing to declare his receipt of a bottle of wine, or that of Perrottet's predecessor Gladys Berejiklian. She was forced out over conduct that amounted to pork barrelling, including providing funding for a regional hospital.

But less than a week after Perrottet made what was a politically-disturbing and unprecedented revelation, his position as premier and leader of the Liberal Party until the March 25 state election appears secure. It is back to business as usual. The official media has largely stopped publishing on the uniform incident.

The Labor Party has functioned as the linchpin of this political rescue operation. Almost as soon as Perrottet had concluded his Thursday press conference admission, his nominal opponent in the state election, NSW Labor leader Chris Minns, hailed the premier's "sincere and heartfelt apology."

Over the weekend, Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese made similar comments. Perrottet's decision to wear a Nazi uniform had not been "the wisest thing," Albanese stated, but he was "staying clear of that." The NSW election would centre on "who's best to lead the state on policy issues."

Both Minns and Albanese, together with the media, have accepted Perrottet's explanation. Despite being the president of the Young Liberals at the University of Sydney in 2003, Perrottet has claimed that he was so historically ignorant as to have no idea whatsoever of the significance of identifying himself with the Nazis. It was all a youthful mistake.

Labor is not only promoting this line, it is also seeking to prevent any inquiries that might point to other explanations of Perrottet's actions. Together with the Greens, it is blocking a bid by the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party to refer the uniform incident to a public conduct committee of the NSW parliament.

There are several interrelated reasons for Labor's reaction. Firstly, together with the ruling elite, Labor's leaders are fearful that if the Perrottet scandal develops, it could deepen the crisis of the entire political establishment.

Amid widespread discontent among workers and young people, all the official parties are in a deep-going crisis, reflected in last May's federal election, where Labor and the Coalition received their worst results in more than half a century. They are all, moreover, riven by factional conflicts that could lead to a bust-up of the two-party system.

Secondly, Perrottet has played a key role in national politics, collaborating closely with Labor. Together with then Coalition Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Victorian Labor Premier Daniel Andrews, he spearheaded the profit-driven "reopening of the economy" in December 2021, which led to as many as 25,000 deaths last year. Since Labor's victory in the federal election, Perrottet and Albanese have worked together with Andrews and other premiers, most of them from Labor, to dismantle any public health response to the pandemic.

In an opinion piece in the *Sydney Morning Herald* this morning, Minns outlined the bipartisanship on COVID and every other plank of ruling class policy.

"From my first day as opposition leader, I have not hesitated to back good ideas from the NSW Liberal government," Minns wrote. "Whether it was dealing with COVID, or the national energy package, when they got it right, I backed them in. That's the way I practice politics, and it's the right thing to do."

Finally, there are undoubtedly fears that too great a scrutiny of the uniform incident could shed light on the ever-greater role of extreme right-wing forces in official politics, under conditions where the whole political establishment is hurtling to the right.

In its initial article on the revelations, the WSWs noted that in 2003 Perrottet was already a political figure, having become president of the University of Sydney Liberal club that year, one of the most important feeders for state and federal politics.

We also pointed out that "Within the NSW Liberal Party, moreover, fascism and Nazism were not merely distant historical questions." This was true in a general sense, but it had a particularly direct relevance to Perrottet's political career, as an examination into Liberal Party history makes clear. The following makes use of an informative Reddit thread by user "Jagtom83."

Perrottet and the "Uglies" faction

In the 1970s, Ljenko Urbancic, a Slovenian migrant, came to prominence in NSW Liberal circles, becoming president of the Liberal Ethnic Council in 1977. Urbancic was an unrepentant Nazi

and a war criminal.

As documented in Mark Aarons' book *War Criminals Welcome: Australia, a Sanctuary for Fugitive War Criminals Since 1945*, Urbancic was "a close confidant of President Rupnik," head of Slovenia's Nazi-aligned government.

Aarons wrote: "Urbancic earned his title of 'little Goebbels' from the Yugoslav War Crimes Commission precisely because he was one of the most proficient and fanatical propagandists in German-occupied Europe." Urbancic legitimised the Holocaust, as it was underway, with foul anti-Semitic tirades, and was complicit in the mass murder of European Jewry.

After his record was exposed, Urbancic's colleagues in the NSW Liberals prevented his expulsion. The war criminal had assembled an informal faction, dubbed the Uglies, that would continue, in all but name, for several decades.

A 2016 article in the *Australian Financial Review* noted: "Despite official moves to expel him from the party, Urbancich survived and worked hard with David Clarke, a conservative Catholic solicitor, and a Liberal member of the NSW Upper House, to recruit new members to the Uglies faction."

In 2004, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that NSW Liberal "moderates are claiming that right-wing Catholics, including members of the secretive Opus Dei organisation, have helped stack branches, taking control of the Young Liberals from the moderates for the first time in decades.

"A significant number of the 125 male students at Warrane College, affiliated with the University of NSW—where Opus Dei is entrusted with pastoral care—have been signed up to the Randwick-Coogee Young Liberal branch, according to a membership list seen by the *Herald*."

The article cited NSW Young Liberal President Alex Hawke who "refused to comment on allegations of branch stacking," but declared: "We had large membership growth and I'm very proud of that." Hawke was then a staffer for Clarke and was described in the press as his "protege."

Among those from Warrane College, who entered the Liberal Party at this time, was none other than Mr Perrottet.

As the *Daily Telegraph* reported last week, in discussing Perrottet's birthday party: "The guests included Mr Perrottet's close-knit group of friends, ex-students from Redfield College in Dural, where he had attended high school, Sydney University where he was studying law, and Warrane College, the Opus Dei residential college attached to the University of NSW where he resided."

The *Telegraph* continued: "Guests recalled other predominantly right-wing members of the Young Liberals being in attendance, including federal MP Alex Hawke, who told media on Friday night he had attended events with Mr Perrottet but did not recall being at his 21st.

"The source remembered the mood on the night to be particularly jovial given the faction had just taken control of the organisation from the moderates. 'It was the year after we had taken over the Young Liberals,' the source recalled. '(Upper House MP) Nat Smith was trying to take over Ryde. Alex Hawke was Young Liberal president. We were feeling on top of the world.'"

Clarke's son-in-law Kyle Kutasi was president of the University of Sydney Liberal Club for the two years before the position was handed to Perrottet. After he became premier, a 2021 *Sydney Morning Herald* profile of Perrottet noted that one of his first positions within the Liberal Party had been to work "as a staffer for David Clarke."

In other words, Perrottet's party not only marked his 21st birthday. It was a celebration of the factional triumph of the Uglies.

Given its origins in Urbancic's activities, some may see Perrottet's decision to wear a Nazi uniform in a different light to those presented by explanations of historical ignorance. Was it, they may ask, at the very best, an "ironic" nod to the forces who had set the ambitious young politician's career in motion?

In a further possible irony, there are suggestions that these same far-right forces may be behind Perrottet's present predicament.

In December, the Liberal Party expelled six members for branch stacking, with Perrottet's apparent blessing. As per the *Sydney Morning Herald*, "A seventh party member, Kyle Kutasi... was expelled from the party a day later in relation to a separate incident."

It was in the same month that an anonymous Twitter account began referencing the fact that Perrottet had worn a Nazi uniform to his 21st birthday, with the fallout eventually compelling the premier to make an admission 20 years after the fact.

There are no doubt frustrations, within the Liberal right, that Perrottet's ascension to premier, viewed as their victory, has not been accompanied by the implementation of their full program for a routing of their factional opponents. Instead, Perrottet has worked closely with a centre-right faction, including supposed moderates who acknowledge the reality of climate change, support same-sex marriage and take other positions that raise the ire of the religious right.

Meanwhile, however, Perrottet, together with Labor and the rest of the political establishment, has implemented a COVID policy that has unmistakably eugenicist and fascist implications in its total disregard for mass illness and death on the altar of profit.

The intensity of the factional and intra-factional conflicts is inseparably connected to the crisis of the two-party set-up. As the ruling elite pursues a policy of reaction all down the line, and figures associated with the fascistic far-right are elevated ever-more prominently into the corridors of power, workers and young people are moving to the left. The divergent trajectories set the stage, not only for explosive conflicts within the political establishment, but far more importantly, explosive struggles by the working class against the entire official set-up.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact