

Australian neo-Nazi spared prison sentence after violent attack on security guard

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On January 12, Thomas Sewell, a neo-Nazi, founder and leader of the Australian National Socialist Network (NSN), was spared a prison sentence after he attacked a security guard just outside Fairfax Nine Network's television station in Melbourne in early 2021. Sewell was found guilty of recklessly causing injury and affray.

The assault was not a random incident but a deliberate political stunt. Sewell and his cameraman Jacob Hersant went to the offices of the television station on March 1, 2021, as a story was being aired that night by "A Current Affair" program on his neo-Nazi group.

Sewell began filming inside the offices and claimed the show was "manipulating public opinion" for anyone who "advocates for the white population." The pair were then approached by a security guard who told them they could not film in the building and had to leave.

Hersant continued filming as the guard escorted them out of the offices. In the footage, which is still available online, Hersant told the guard, who was originally from the Dominican Republic, "dance, monkey, dance." That prompted the guard to slightly push him away.

Sewell reacted in a frenzy, attacking the guard from out of his line of sight, giving him no time to react and punching him at least six times in the face, causing him to fall over and hit his head on the pavement. Sewell and Hersant then fled the scene.

Sewell represented himself at Melbourne's Magistrate Court, claiming the act was in "self-defence." He spoke to journalists beforehand outside the court, saying he did not expect to receive a "fair hearing" and assumed he would be sent to prison. Instead, Magistrate Stephen Ballek handed down a penalty of 150 hours of community service and an 18-month community correction order.

Recklessly causing injury can incur a prison sentence of up to five years. Affray also carries a maximum prison sentence of five years according to the Crimes Act 1958 in the state of Victoria.

In justifying the sentence Ballek noted Sewell's previous service in the Australian Defence Force, lack of prior convictions, his fiancé being 36 weeks pregnant and "previous good behaviour."

Ballek described the attack as "sickening" and said the guard "had no time to defend himself" but said he could not determine beyond reasonable doubt that the attack was racially motivated.

In response, Sewell gave a Nazi salute to his followers outside the court after he avoided jail.

Sewell is not some unknown. He is a prominent fascistic figure in Australia. He emerged out of the right-wing anti-Muslim Reclaim Australia movement that began in 2015, which was emboldened by the xenophobic "anti-terrorism" witch hunt and given political legitimacy by sitting members of parliament, such as former federal National Party MP George Christenson, who addressed its rallies.

Sewell has played the leading role in founding several far-right groups, including the United Patriots Front (UPF), the Lads Society, the NSN and the European Australian Movement (EAM). The tendency of all Sewell's groups is to move toward more open and explicit association with neo-Nazism.

In 2017 the Lads Society attempted to recruit Brenton Tarrant, who carried out the worst mass shooting in New Zealand history on March 15, 2019, when he opened fire on two mosques killing 51 people in Christchurch. Tarrant had been a supporter of the UPF, describing one of its leaders as his "emperor."

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These far-right groups are connected globally through various online fascist networks, which are emboldened by the political establishment that allows them to operate freely and openly.

This was all but stated by the then Australian Security

Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) director-general Duncan Lewis following the Christchurch massacre. Lewis told a Senate committee: “There is a right-wing extremist element—nothing wrong with that, except when it ventures into violence.” In effect, that politically legitimised fascist groups.

Moreover, the promotion of far-right anti-lockdown and anti-vaccination groups since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has provided fertile recruiting grounds for these fascist groups. Their “live with the virus” positions, which serve corporate profit interests, have now been entirely embraced by Australian governments, Labor and Liberal-National alike, including the removal of virtually all public health measures.

Whatever the reasons behind Ballek’s decision not to sentence Sewell to time in prison, it will embolden these layers, who will see this as a victory. Five days after the sentencing, the EAM carried out a political stunt at Elwood Beach, Melbourne. A photo surfaced of a group of 25 males, including one child, giving the Nazi salute with the EAM flag unfurled.

Sewell’s sentence is a sharp contrast to the punishment handed to Deanna “Violet” Coco, who participated in a climate change protest in New South Wales last year, briefly holding up one lane of Sydney Harbour Bridge traffic. She was sentenced to 15 months’ jail under draconian anti-protest laws, with a minimum of eight months before parole, and initially, denied bail to appeal.

In Australia, as is the case globally, there is growing social unrest due to the decades of assaults on workers’ jobs, living standards and conditions. The bolstering of far-right forces by the political establishment is a warning that these elements will be used against the population as other ruling class mechanisms for control are increasingly unable to hold back the developing class struggle.



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