

# Police protect Nazi march in Australia

Mike Head, SEP candidate for NSW Legislative Council  
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About 30 avowed Nazis, dressed in black shirts and repeatedly performing Hitler salutes, marched through Melbourne and formed up on the steps of the Victorian state parliament on Saturday. They were protected throughout against counter-protesters by a heavy and violent police presence.

While the Nationalist Socialist Network (NSN) contingent was small, its blatant display in the centre of the country's second most populous city, is a shocking political warning.

It is a stark demonstration of the degree to which such fascist forces are being emboldened by the right-wing trajectory of the official political establishment, and shielded by the police and intelligence agencies, as social discontent rises over the cost-of-living crisis and the danger of war.

Video footage on social media shows Victorian police, including from the riot and horseback units, attacking and pushing over transgender rights protestors in order to facilitate the Sieg Heil parade, which also featured Australian flags.

The counter-protestors, mainly from a range of gender rights and pseudo-left groups, were demonstrating against a right-wing anti-transgender rally that the Nazis used to perform their political stunt.

The neo-Nazi provocation, and the police assistance of it, triggered widespread disgust and concern, including on social media. In response, leaders of the political establishment feigned horror, despite being responsible for the political and social conditions that have emboldened the fascists.

Victorian Labor Premier Daniel Andrews tweeted that Nazis were "not welcome" in Victoria and foreshadowed legislation to ban their salute, having last year outlawed swastika emblems. But such measures serve only to strengthen the hand of the same capitalist state that has encouraged the fascist forces, and will inevitably be used against left-wing, socialist and

working-class opposition to the ruling capitalist class.

During the first two years of the now unchecked COVID-19 disaster, the neo-Nazis sought to gain traction by spearheading right-wing protests against lockdowns, vaccinations and other essential public health measures. Now that governments, both Labor and Liberal-National, have implemented their demands, serving corporate interests, the Nazis have been invigorated to seek to whip up other anti-social causes.

More fundamentally, the unanimous pro-business and pro-war agenda of the political establishment and trade unions, accompanied by the promotion of nationalism, militarism and anti-Chinese and anti-Muslim xenophobia, has heartened the fascists, even as they falsely posture as anti-establishment.

Significantly, Saturday's march was led by Thomas Sewell, the NSN leader. He had celebrated with a Nazi salute outside a court in January after a magistrate spared him from a prison term for a serious assault on a TV station security guard, leaving him able to conduct his fascist activities.

Pointedly, Saturday's abomination took place just three days after the fourth anniversary of the Christchurch massacre, the worst mass shooting in New Zealand history, when Brenton Tarrant, an Australian neo-Nazi, opened fire on two mosques, killing 51 people, on March 15, 2019.

Tarrant was a supporter of Australian far-right groups, which are connected globally through various online fascist networks. Governments and the police allow them to operate freely to foment anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant and other nationalist prejudice.

Evidence emerged last weekend that serving Australian soldiers and police officers are members of neo-Nazi groups. That indicates their integration into the military-police apparatus, as has been exposed recently in Germany. The *Age* reported on Saturday that the Australian Army has launched an investigation

into these revelations, first brought to light by the newspaper.

Fascists have conducted increasingly open displays in Australia in recent years. In January 2021, people in the Grampians National Park in western Victoria were confronted by dozens of neo-Nazis celebrating the annual national Australia Day, complete with a cross-burning modelled on the activities of the Ku Klux Klan.

In January this year, five days after Sewell avoided a prison sentence, 25 or so of his supporters staged another provocation, performing Nazi salutes at Melbourne's Elwood Beach.

In Australia, as is the case globally, there is growing political and social unrest due to the decades of deepening 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, as in the 1930s, against the population as other ruling class mechanisms for control are increasingly unable to hold back the developing class struggle.

Sewell and the NSN did not come out of nowhere. They constitute a more explicit neo-Nazi version of earlier formations, such as the anti-Muslim Reclaim Australia party. That development was fed by the political and media establishment's ongoing "anti-terrorism" and "foreign interference" witch hunts.

Internationally, Trump's accession to the US presidency in 2016 signalled a turn by sections of the ruling classes toward fascistic forms of rule to combat the rising opposition from the working class to the agenda of war and austerity. Today, the US Republican party, one of the two major bourgeois parties, is increasingly dominated by fascist figures. Trump's coup attempt, featuring Nazi supporters, only narrowly failed in January 2021. Italy is governed by a prime minister who stands in the political tradition of the fascist dictator Mussolini.

A warning must be issued against any reliance on the capitalist state machine to fight the far right. Police repression, even if nominally directed against fascistic elements, is invariably directed against the left wing.

That was underscored last month when an attack by three members of the extreme right-wing milieu at a remote property in the Australian state of Queensland was politically twisted around to become the pretext for police to be directed, in the name of fighting

extremism, to target socialists, Marxists and those who speak critically of capitalism, branding them as potential terrorists.

The change to police protocols came from the highest levels of the ruling class. It followed a meeting on February 3 of the "National Cabinet," an extra-parliamentary body composed of the federal, state and territory government leaders. That gathering was briefed by Mike Burgess, director general of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), the domestic spy organisation.

Amid the deepest crisis of the capitalist system in decades and an explosive growth of the class struggle, the ruling elites and their political representatives are terrified of an increasing attraction among workers and youth to socialism, and are perfectly willing to turn toward fascist forces to combat that threat.

The only way to answer the threat of the extreme right is for workers and young people to build a mass socialist movement against war, inequality, authoritarianism and the profit system, completely independent of, and against, the capitalist governments and police-intelligence apparatuses. That is the basis for the Socialist Equality Party's intervention into the March 25 New South Wales state election.

**Contact the SEP:**

Phone: (02) 8218 3222

Email: [sep@sep.org.au](mailto:sep@sep.org.au)

Facebook: [SocialistEqualityPartyAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/SocialistEqualityPartyAustralia)

Twitter: [@SEP\\_Australia](https://twitter.com/SEP_Australia)

Instagram: [socialistequalityparty\\_au](https://www.instagram.com/socialistequalityparty_au)

TikTok: [@sep\\_australia](https://www.tiktok.com/@sep_australia)

*Authorised by Cheryl Crisp for the Socialist Equality Party, Suite 906, 185 Elizabeth Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000.*



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**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**