

Australian Nazis march through regional city as entire establishment vilifies refugees

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In a disturbing incident, around 30 Nazis of the National Socialist Network (NSN) marched through the regional Victorian city of Ballarat, northwest of Melbourne, on Sunday. They chanted fascist slogans, including “Australia for the white man,” and generally created an atmosphere of menace.

Footage posted to social media shows local residents responding with shock at the display. Some shouted at the NSN and sought to combat their grotesque racism.

The ostensible purpose of the rally was to commemorate the anniversary of the 1854 Eureka Stockade in Ballarat. For years, the far-right has attempted to appropriate the legacy of that uprising, presenting it as a birth of Australian nationalism.

In fact, the stockade was a rebellion by impoverished miners against the companies and state authorities that exploited them. It had nothing to do with an Australian nation-state, which was not established until 1901, and was led by a diverse group of workers, including an African-American and several Jewish labourers.

It would be a mistake to exaggerate the influence of the NSN. There is little doubt that the thirty who assembled, clad in black and with their faces covered, constituted most or all of its membership. The organisation, to the extent that it is known, is reviled.

But it would also be an error to dismiss the NSN as merely a collection of diseased and aberrant individuals.

In the first instance, they are a dangerous organisation. Their leaders revere not only Hitler, but also Brenton Tarrant, the Australian terrorist who in 2019 massacred 51 people in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. The march in Ballarat was part of a more assertive public presence, which has included NSN members rampaging around the Melbourne CBD in October, hunting Jewish people, and on a separate occasion attacking and threatening anti-fascist activists.

More fundamentally, depictions of the NSN in the corporate media, presenting it as a disturbing oddity with no connection to the broader political culture, are false. The

group and its evolution have functioned as something of a barometer for the ever-greater shift to the right of the official political establishment itself.

The core of the group began its activities, under different front names, in the mid-2010s. Its members presented themselves as “Australian patriots,” fighting a purported Islamic threat. Those efforts were directly inspired by the relentless vilification of Muslims, associated with the phony “war on terror.”

They also claimed to be devoted to the ANZAC tradition of Australian soldiers, at the very same time the political establishment was organising a massive celebration of the centenary of World War I, to justify the current eruption of militarism associated above all with US preparations for a catastrophic war against China.

Somewhat later, the predecessors of the NSN claimed to be committed to a struggle against African gangs. That was a straight take-up, by the fascists, of a racist campaign whipped-up by sections of the corporate media and the political establishment. Individuals from this milieu were favourably featured on commercial television, discussing “community patrols,” i.e., violent vigilantism targeting working-class African youth.

The decision of the NSN leadership to drop the mask and come out as Hitler-loving Nazis was also connected to broader developments. It coincided with the rise of fascistic figures to prominence within the political establishment itself, exemplified by the presidency of Donald Trump.

Over recent years, the NSN was active in the anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine movements. This small rabble, consisting of far-right forces and the most disoriented layers of the middle-class, was actively cultivated and promoted by the powers-that-be, as they sought to dispense with COVID-safety measures, to ensure a resumption of full corporate profit-making activities. The program of the fascists has been implemented totally, with Labor governments across the country presiding over a new wave of mass illness, without a single mitigation measure.

Even given this pattern of a confluence between what the

NSN has advanced and what the political establishment has put forward, the most remarkable feature of Sunday's rally in Ballarat was that with a few cosmetic changes, it could have been called by the federal Labor government or the opposition Liberal-National Coalition.

"Australia for the white man," the Nazi chant, is essentially the line that has dominated the federal parliament for the past several weeks.

On November 8, the High Court ruled that the bipartisan policy of indefinitely detaining asylum-seekers violated the 1901 Australian Constitution and was unlawful. This compelled the release of nearly 150 refugees so detained.

Ever since, the media and the official parties have relentlessly vilified the refugee cohort, presenting them as an imminent threat to "Australia" and "the Australian people." A handful of asylum-seekers, who were previously convicted of serious crimes, and served their sentences, have been the focus of the most lurid coverage. In this, there is nothing with which the NSN would disagree.

This week, Labor and the Coalition joined hands to ram through parliament a "preventive detention" regime, aimed at effectively abrogating the High Court ruling and providing for the re-detention of the detainees. Labor had declared that, despite the end of the year, parliament would continue to sit until the laws were passed, in an attack on the very concept of parliamentary democracy.

Parallel to the legislation, the refugees have been subjected to what increasingly resembles a round-up involving state policing authorities and the Australian Federal Police. Five have been arrested, and the allegations against them blared in the media as though they were already proven.

In one case, a man who cannot speak English, and has schizophrenia, HIV, diabetes and other chronic health conditions, was arrested for allegedly breaching a curfew and "stealing luggage" at an airport. It seems entirely possible that he picked up the wrong bag or was having a mental health episode.

Another man, who experienced and witnessed dreadful things as a child soldier in the Sudanese civil war, was rearrested on a minor warrant predating his immigration detention in 2014. The official media has viciously attacked that man as a "danger" based on his criminal record, the supposed highlights of which include drink-driving offenses.

"Australia for the white man" indeed. In addition to enacting deeply anti-democratic measures, which will serve as a precedent for attacks on the entire working class, the campaign is clearly aimed at whipping up racism, amid a massive cost-of-living and social crisis and widespread opposition to the official parties.

That is entirely of a piece with the full support of the Labor government and the entire establishment for the

Israeli genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza. The NSN's political identity is based on its support for the Holocaust, the worst crime of the 20th century. The major parties and the press are supporting a 21st century Holocaust in real time.

Two other points should be made.

Firstly, the literal Nazis of the NSN have received a fraction of the official vitriol as that directed at peaceful mass protests opposing the Gaza genocide. The protesters have been smeared continuously, in line with the bogus conflation of the Israeli state with the entire Jewish people, which is itself an antisemitic position. The lie that defenders of Palestine are antisemitic, by virtue of their opposition to war crimes, only serves to relativise and downplay the threat posed by genuine antisemitism, and to invite cynicism towards the entire issue of anti-Jewish racism.

Secondly, the danger presented by the NSN and fascistic groups will not be defeated through government legislation, or any other actions of the state apparatus and political establishment that have fostered the environment for such tendencies to emerge.

Such measures, including recent legislation banning the Nazi salute, are a cover for the responsibility of the ruling elite for the development of fascistic tendencies and will be used as a precedent for attacks on socialists and other left-wing opponents.

It is notable that up to now, the Nazis have been treated with kid gloves. Their demonstration was given a police escort, despite being unscheduled, in contrast to aggressive police attacks on pro-Palestinian and climate protests over recent weeks.

The real task is to build a socialist movement of the working class, directed against the decaying capitalist order, which is giving rise to genocide, social misery and the scourge of fascism.



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