

Australia: Explosive-filled caravan likely not connected to antisemitism

Oscar Grenfell
19 February 2025

The Australian political and media establishment has seized on a series of murky incidents in Sydney over December and January to claim that there is a national crisis of rampant antisemitism. Those assertions have been used to further demonise opponents of the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, falsely conflating their hostility to massive war crimes with anti-Jewish bigotry.

Despite the barrage from politicians and the press, many questions remain.

To the extent that individuals have been arrested over the incidents, which have largely involved anti-Israel and anti-Jewish graffiti sometimes combined with arson, they have been small-time criminals without any evident connection to, or interest in, Middle Eastern developments. The possibility of neo-Nazi and fascist involvement has also not been seriously examined in the official discussion.

The most puzzling episode was the revelation on January 29 that 10 days earlier, police had discovered a caravan full of explosives in the outer Sydney suburb of Dural. Whoever had deposited the explosives had also allegedly left a list of possible targets with them, including Sydney's Great Synagogue and Holocaust museum.

That was very unusual. The obvious question was why a potential terrorist would leave both their arsenal and details of their plans in the same place and entirely unattended. The existence of the caravan was not reported to the public by the police, but by the *Daily Telegraph*, the Murdoch media's Sydney tabloid, which has been at the forefront of whipping up an atmosphere of hysteria around purported antisemitism.

Senior politicians, ignoring all of the oddities related to the caravan, rushed in to inflame the situation and to spread panic.

The day after the *Telegraph* story, New South Wales (NSW) Labor Premier Chris Minns declared in a media interview: "This is the discovery of a potential mass casualty event. There's only one way of calling it out and that is terrorism."

Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese was asked by the journalist, "Do you classify this as terrorism as well?" He

replied, "I certainly do... It's clearly designed to harm people, but it's also designed to create fear in the community. And that is the very definition."

Police at both the federal and state level have collaborated with politicians to present the graffiti incidents as a major crisis.

But in this instance, they were far more cautious than Albanese and Minns. At no point did the NSW or Australian Federal Police classify the Dural caravan episode as "terrorism." Instead, they complained that the media leak had "compromised" their investigations. Senior police also repeatedly stated that they were investigating "all possibilities," including that the caravan was a "set up."

That possibility was all but confirmed by a *Sydney Morning Herald* article over the weekend. It revealed, for the first time, that the explosives were up to 40 years old. Given that explosives degrade over time, it is entirely unclear whether those found in the Dural caravan could blow anything up. They were also not found with any detonation device.

According to the *Herald*, "The link to organised crime has become a stronger line of inquiry for state and federal authorities despite early concerns about terrorism." The publication had been told by "legal sources" that "underworld crime figures offered to reveal plans about the caravan weeks before its discovery by police, hoping to use it as leverage for a reduced prison term."

The *Herald* stated that this had been a common practice among serious criminals for decades. They would store caches of arms and other illegal materials, and if charged for unrelated offences, would offer to reveal the stash to garner more lenient treatment.

In this scenario, the otherwise inexplicable placement of a target list with the explosives also makes sense. Providing the police with the location of decades-old and potentially useless explosives may not aid the criminals greatly. Presenting the explosives as the possible means of a terrorism attack, which the criminals were helping to thwart, would obviously provoke more interest.

If that is the case, the alleged criminals exploited the national hysteria over antisemitism for their own purposes. And the politicians, who had cultivated that hysteria, in turn exploited the actions of the criminals to further inflame it. That is a picture of politicians and criminals in a de facto alignment, each using the actions of the other to further their unstated and self-serving aims.

At a press conference on Wednesday, Albanese was asked if he had received any more information about the Dural caravan. “There have been statements made in the media that make it clear that all is not what it seems from the first reporting of that,” he replied. This showed that it was necessary to allow the police to “do their job,” and demonstrated “why some of the preempting of this is not appropriate.”

But three weeks earlier Albanese had been the preemptor-in-chief, using his authority as prime minister to declare the unattended caravan a terrorism event!

The exposure of the initial narrative about the caravan cannot but increase questions about the other antisemitism incidents with which it was linked by the media and politicians. Police have advanced the hypothesis that numbers of the incidents have been perpetrated by low-level criminals, not for ideological motives, but for payments. They have stated that if this scenario is accurate, they do not know who orchestrated the incidents.

Despite the media insinuations, there is not the slightest reason to suspect the organised pro-Palestinian movement. It is explicitly anti-racist and includes within its ranks many anti-Zionist Jews. The attacks, moreover, have been used as the pretext to besmirch and target pro-Palestinian activists.

It is possible that some of the incidents have been perpetrated by backward layers, incensed by the scenes of mass death in Gaza and accepting the establishment’s false and antisemitic conflation of all Jewish people with the Israeli government. Given the rudimentary character of much of the graffiti, it could even be perpetrated by children.

The Latin phrase “cui bono” has been a component of criminal theory for centuries. Answering the question that it poses, of who benefits from a crime, is frequently used to identify potential suspects.

Even making allowances for some of the graffiti incidents being random and unconnected, taken together, the spate of attacks have principally benefited supporters of the Gaza genocide, those seeking to tar all opposition to it as antisemitism and those seeking to justify expanded police and state powers.

The incidents, whoever has perpetrated them, have been entirely reactionary. But, it is also the case that they have been blown out of proportion. Middle Eastern and Islamic organisations have noted that apparent and possible

ideologically and racially-motivated crimes targeting their communities have largely been ignored by the political and media establishment. For instance:

- In December, a woman was charged with attempting to run over Shaykh Wesam Charkawi, one of Sydney’s most prominent Islamic leaders, with her car. The next month, the woman was filmed making Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian comments towards a Middle Eastern woman in a shopping centre.

- Also in December, a school bus belonging to an Islamic school in Adelaide was set alight. Police rapidly declared the incident “isolated and opportunistic.” That may or may not have been the case. When those statements were made, the police had made no arrests.

- This week, two visibly Muslim women were attacked by a woman unknown to them in a Melbourne shopping centre. One of the women, who is pregnant, was allegedly choked from behind with her hijab. The other was reportedly punched, slapped and pushed over. The violent attack occurred in front of one of their four-year-old children.

Politicians have commented on that last attack after their “double standards” were called out by Middle Eastern and Islamic community organisations, as well as national cricketer Usman Khawaja. The attack on Charkawi, which could have had disastrous consequences, was largely ignored, and the arson of the Adelaide school bus was dismissed as a local oddity.

With their frenzied denunciations of opponents of the Gaza genocide, and their suggestions that supporters of the Palestinians are all antisemitic, Islamist fanatics, politicians have created an atmosphere in which such attacks were inevitable.

Defeating the slander campaigns and witch hunts, the attempts to whip up racial antagonisms and to crackdown on civil liberties requires the construction of a political movement of the working class, directed against the political establishment and the rotting capitalist system that it defends. So too does the struggle to end the historic war crimes being perpetrated against the Palestinians.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact