

Australia: SEP censored at Melbourne rally on police killing of Aboriginal man

Max Boddy
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More than a thousand workers and young people took part in rallies across Australia's major cities last week, protesting the brutal police killing of Kumanjayi White, a 24-year-old Indigenous man with a disability who died after being violently restrained outside a supermarket in the Northern Territory (NT).

At the Melbourne rally, Socialist Equality Party (SEP) members were subjected to a coordinated attempt at political censorship by the event organisers, the Black People's Union (BPU). SEP members were harassed, their leaflets condemning White's killing were ripped from their hands, and they were slandered as "colonisers" and "white supremacists." The BPU escalated the confrontation by involving police, forcing SEP members to leave.

The SEP intervened to raise the critical question that none of the organisers would answer: What was the real cause of White's death? White was impoverished, disabled, and required ongoing support. His killing was not just an act of racism, but a tragic expression of a broader social crisis rooted in capitalism.

The SEP's leaflet pointed to the appalling conditions in NT Aboriginal communities as the result of decades of bipartisan attacks on welfare, health, and housing—policies now affecting the working class nationwide. While Aboriginal people are disproportionately impacted, state violence targets all workers. In 2024 alone, 109 people died in custody: 27 were Indigenous, and 82 non-Indigenous.

The leaflet concluded that police violence cannot be ended through appeals to the very governments responsible for it, but only through the unified mobilisation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers against the capitalist system that drives inequality and repression.

It was this class-based perspective that the BPU

sought to silence. The inflammatory accusations hurled against the SEP were a calculated effort to prevent a discussion of a socialist and a revolutionary alternative to the social crisis that workers and youth of all skin colours, genders and ethnic backgrounds confront.

The BPU's attacks stem from the racialist foundation of its politics. It treats all non-Indigenous people, including working-class youth and socialists, as part of a homogenous "White settler" population. Within this reactionary framework, the vast majority of the Australian population is deemed inherently complicit in and responsible for colonial oppression and the ongoing horrific conditions facing the majority of Aboriginal people.

The BPU is particularly hostile to the SEP which explains that capitalism was responsible for the colonisation of Australia and the ongoing oppression of the Indigenous people. The profit system based on the private ownership of land was incompatible with tribal society that in a loose sense acted as the communal custodian of the land and its resources.

Not accidentally, the BPU is also fundamentally opposed to any conception that class, not race, is the central divide in capitalist society—including among the Indigenous population. The appalling conditions facing many Aboriginal people stems from their integration within capitalism as one of the most oppressed layers of the working class.

The BPU does not, however, represent the interests of Aboriginal people and marginalised social layers but rather the thin layer of the Aboriginal elite—well-off businesspeople, academics, media personalities and public servants—who do not in any way challenge capitalism but rather seek a greater slice of the pie within it.

For this grasping social strata, racial politics are the

means for promoting themselves as the representatives of the Aboriginal people as a whole to advance their own power and privileges. As a result, the BPU is bitterly opposed to SEP's exposure of the policies of race and calls for the unity of the working class.

The worsening reality facing the majority of Aboriginal people has fuelled mass anger evident at the nationwide rallies. White was killed in full public view. Witnesses reported one officer drove his knee into White's neck, echoing the murder of George Floyd in the United States in 2020 that sparked national protests. White lost consciousness and was pronounced dead shortly afterwards.

In Melbourne, the rally was addressed by White's grandfather, Ned Jampijinpa Hargraves, who declared: "We can't go on like this, we can't live like this. My jaja (grandson) was killed for no good reason."

At the Melbourne rally, these sentiments were directed towards appeals to governments. For all its supposed radicalism, the BPU accepts and operates entirely within the framework of capitalism. The main speaker in Melbourne was former Greens and now Independent senator Lidia Thorpe, who is heavily promoted by the BPU.

Thorpe declared what was lacking was "political will" to implement the recommendations of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody.

The Royal Commission, established by the Hawke-Keating Labor government in 1987 was never intended to deliver justice. As the SEP's forerunner, the Socialist Labour League, warned, its purpose was to contain public anger within a government inquiry. No police or corrections officer was charged, a precedent unbroken for more than 30 years.

The Commission's 339 recommendations expanded the state apparatus, creating Aboriginal consultative bodies and "watch" committees now integrated into mechanisms of repression. These are the policies Thorpe wants enacted, not because they protect Aboriginal lives, but because they could expand the lucrative avenues open to Aboriginal elite.

Even as the protests were underway, another Indigenous man, aged 68, died in intensive care after being arrested for allegedly being intoxicated. Aboriginal incarceration rates continue to rise—an indictment of every Labor and Liberal government that has presided over this ongoing crisis.

Significantly the only investigation that has exposed the real circumstances surrounding the police murder of an Aboriginal was the Workers Inquiry into the police killing of Daniel Yock in 1993 by the Socialist Labour League—the forerunner of the SEP. It not only proved that the police were directly responsible for Yock's death but exposed the official cover-up by the police and the state Labor government.

While the Workers Inquiry won considerable support from workers—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal—it was bitterly opposed by Aboriginal elite which supported the Queensland Criminal Justice Commission inquiry and bear political responsibility for its whitewash. The Workers Inquiry demonstrated concretely that the only means for addressing the oppression of Indigenous people is through a unified struggle of the working class based on a socialist perspective.



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