

# Labor governments support brutal police assault on Sydney pro-Palestinian protest

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As thousands have expressed their shock and anger at a violent assault on a small pro-Palestinian protest in Sydney last Friday, senior representatives of the New South Wales (NSW) state and federal Labor governments have defended the police rampage.

The response is all the more striking, given that it follows the exposure of the lawlessness of the police actions and the horrific injuries suffered by one of the participants.

Hannah Thomas, who stood as a Greens candidate in the May federal election and was at the protest as a legal observer, had one side of her face battered when the police charged the group. After surgery over the weekend, she is still at risk of losing sight in her right eye.

“Nobody is above the law,” responded Labor’s federal Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke, not in reference to the police maiming a young woman, who is a political rival of Labor, but in condemnation of the peaceful protesters. NSW Labor Premier Chris Minns essentially declared that demonstrations were impermissible if they risked hindering the activities of businesses.

The rally was held in the Sydney suburb of Belmore outside the SEC Plating factory. Activists have repeatedly protested outside the facility, over its alleged involvement in the manufacture of parts for F-35 fighter jets, the main warplane used to drop Israeli bombs on Gaza. The company denies current involvement, however its website continues to list defence and aerospace as industries it services.

While multiple other protests at the facility occurred without incident, it was clear that a high-level decision had been made not to allow Friday’s rally to proceed. A small group of around 30 activists was immediately met by a police contingent, which they state numbered 50 or more.

That the decision was made by the NSW Labor government was indicated by Minns’ defence of the police actions on Monday. People were “entitled to protest,” Minns said, “but businesses in NSW are entitled to run their companies as well.” The government and the police would be “in a terrible position,” were protests able to disrupt the activities of “private firms” at any time.

For his part, Burke, whose federal electorate includes Belmore, touted the supposedly lawful character of the police attack. “When people were asked to move on by the police they should have followed the police direction. Apparently they didn’t.”

The statements of Minns and Burke, however, do not accord with video footage, or the accounts of activists and police. The police have been unable to provide any coherent explanation whatsoever of the legal grounds they were employing to disperse the demonstration.

Video footage posted to Instagram shows police issuing the protesters with a move on direction, barring them from Belmore for 24 hours. One activist demanded to know the legislation and specific grounds under which police were making the direction. He stated that it was a violation of the Law Enforcement Powers and Responsibilities Act.

The cops responded, not with legal arguments, but by forcefully grabbing the activist, who was standing calmly with his hands in his pockets, and by charging at all the other demonstrators.

As for Minns’ claim that the police onslaught was necessary to prevent SEC Plating’s business activities from being hindered, that too is nonsense. Protesters who crossed the street and thus could not conceivably hinder SEC’s operations were similarly set upon and told to leave the suburb.

The NSW Police leadership has attempted to justify the dispersal by claiming that the protest was “unauthorised.” As civil liberties advocates have noted, police do not “authorise” protests. Such a conception, which has no legal foundation, is simply an argument for a police state.

Questions have been raised over whether the police actions were based upon one or another of two sets of draconian anti-protest laws in the state.

Minns’ reference to the disruption threatening businesses hinted at 2022 legislation passed by the then-Liberal government with the support of the Labor Party of which he was state leader. It can be used to prohibit protests if they are likely to impede “major facilities,” government operations

or the economy, with punishments of up to two years' imprisonment and/or major fines.

One of the arrest sheets for a protester, reported by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, noted that opposite SEC Plating, there is an Islamic religious facility. That hinted at the possibility that the state's other anti-protest laws, passed in March 2025, may have been employed. The recent legislation can bar any public assembly near a place of worship.

As the WWSWS and defenders of democratic rights stated at the time, given the ubiquity of churches and other religious institutions, the law is a catch-all for illegalising protests altogether.

After questions were raised in the press about whether powers under either legislation were used, NSW Police command said they were not. One is left with a situation where there was simply no clear, legal basis for a police move against the protest.

Thomas released a courageous video from hospital over the weekend, sheeting home responsibility to the NSW Labor government, noting that it had created a climate in which police are emboldened to attack lawful protests.

"I'm five foot one. I weigh about 45 kilos. I was engaged in peaceful protest, and my interactions with NSW Police have left me potentially without vision in my right eye, permanently."

Pointing to her horrific eye injury, Thomas stated: "I look like this now because of Chris Minns and [Police Minister] Yasmin Catley and their draconian anti-protest laws and their attempts to demonise protesters, especially protesters for Palestine. They've emboldened the police to crack down with extreme violence and brutality, and they were warned that those laws would lead to this outcome."

Extraordinarily, Thomas was charged with resisting arrest over the weekend, while her wounds were being treated in hospital, as were four other protesters.

Even though they potentially blinded a peaceful protester, NSW Police refused to declare a "critical incident," which would require a review of what occurred. Only after a growing public backlash was such an incident declared yesterday. It simply means, however, that the police will investigate themselves, with a whitewash the certain outcome.

The police attack has a broader political significance. It underscores the fact that the Labor governments in Australia are increasingly turning to the same police-state and authoritarian measures being undertaken by openly dictatorial administrations, such as the fascistic Trump regime in the US.

In America, peaceful protesters defending immigrants are set upon by heavily armed cops and federal troops deployed

by Trump. In Australia, similarly peaceful demonstrators are brutalised and maimed by the police.

The Labor governments have repeatedly sought to ban pro-Palestinian protests over the past 19 months, employing the Big Lie that opposition to the Zionist regime's war crimes constitutes antisemitism.

They are repeating that lie because they are fully complicit in the genocide. Much as it has sought to distance itself from the unfolding horrors, Labor, at the federal level, as well as in the states, has politically, diplomatically and materially aided Israel as it has carried out some of the worst atrocities since the Holocaust.

That is part and parcel of its backing for a broader eruption of imperialist militarism globally. That was again on display last month, when the Labor government explicitly backed US strikes on Iran, an illegal act of imperialist aggression, based on lies, which threatened to set the region and the world aflame.

In the Indo-Pacific, Labor is fully committed to the US confrontation with China, completing the transformation of the continent into a staging base for such a catastrophic war. The entire preoccupation of the Labor government is to ensure the continuation of the AUKUS military build-up, directed against China, and to deepen relations with the Trump administration further.

That underscores the reality that the fight against authoritarianism and war is a political fight against the Labor governments. The perspective that has dominated the Gaza protest movement, of appealing to Labor to change course, is a bankrupt and failed one. What is required is the development of a revolutionary, socialist movement of the working class directed against imperialist war, authoritarianism and their source, the capitalist system.



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