

Australian state Labor government invoking neo-Nazi march to justify sweeping anti-protest laws

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About 100 masked neo-Nazis marched through the central business district of Australia's second-largest city, Melbourne, in the early morning hours of Saturday, August 9. Police watched on, allowing the "pop-up protest" to continue, even as a 26-year-old was assaulted by the far-right goons and had to be taken to hospital. No arrests were made.

The members of the neo-Nazi, antisemitic National Socialist Network (NSN) held a banner inscribed, "White Man Fight Back." The extreme-right group has held several similar marches in recent years, including during the nationalist January 26 holiday Australia Day .

While the numbers involved remain small, and the sentiment among the broader population who know of the NSN's existence is deep disgust, the extreme-right group's march highlights the cultivation of a far-right layer who have been emboldened by the rightward shift of all of the political parties and their mouthpieces in the corporate media.

The anti-immigrant xenophobia and nationalist chauvinism presented by the fascistic layers involved in Saturday morning's march is in line with the policies pursued by governments in Australia, above all led by the Labor Party.

In a video shared in private messaging app Telegram, leader of the NSN, Joel Davis, boasted, "People say that Melbourne is the left-wing capital of Australia—it's becoming the Nazi capital of Australia."

"It was quite something because the police just had to accept our presence," he said. "We've been treated very poorly by the police in the past. We've now grown large enough that they simply have to accept the fact that we want to march and that we will march. ...

We're all on a dopamine rush because we know this is just the beginning."

Davis is currently facing a charge in South Australia for displaying a Nazi symbol on a belt buckle at a march in January.

The tepid response of the police to neo-Nazis marching through Melbourne's streets is in stark contrast to the treatment of protesters calling for an end to the Israeli state's war crimes against the Palestinian people—a genocide which has been supported politically and materially by the Australian government.

This includes the mobilisation of riot police by the Victorian state Labor government to forcefully block an attempt by about 25,000 pro-Palestinian protesters from marching across Melbourne's King Street Bridge, less than a week prior to the neo-Nazi march. This, the government claimed, was to protect the public from "unacceptable risk."

The King Street Bridge demonstration was timed to coincide with a pro-Palestinian march in Sydney, where the state Labor government of New South Wales attempted to prevent a march across the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

The Sydney protest went ahead, attracting possibly 300,000 people who called for an end to Israel's campaign of ethnic cleansing. The government and media attempted to smear the protesters both before and after the march, using the cynical fraud that the march would be a threat to public safety and attempting to present protesters as "antisemitic."

In Victoria, at least five pro-Palestinian protesters have been charged with spurious offences aimed at suppressing the right to protest.

The government of Premier Jacinta Allan has gone so

far as to join a right-wing demonisation campaign against school children, who have been compelled to strike against the horrific scenes of genocide they are seeing on social media.

The fact that this is the response of governments to millions—including Jewish people—who have spoken out against genocide, while genuine neo-Nazi antisemites are allowed to spout their filth with minimal repercussions, is yet another exposure of the fraud of the campaign of the political and media establishment to feign concern for Jewish people.

Jacinta Allan's government has invoked the neo-Nazi march to justify sweeping planned anti-protest laws.

These laws will not be used to clamp down on the far right. The laws will instead be used to target the broad mass of workers and youth who are increasingly coming into struggle against declining living standards, falling wages and imperialist war.

In a statement on the day of the far-right march, Allan said: "Our criminal anti-vilification laws come into effect next month. We will introduce powers for police to unmask cowards at protests after that."

Shadow police minister from the state's opposition Liberal-National Coalition, David Southwick, called for further police powers, including the introduction of a permit registration system and police move-on powers. Victoria is the only state in Australia without protest permit requirements, in addition to the Australian Capital Territory, and move-on laws.

Human rights organisations have hit back at the Allan government's planned anti-protest laws, leading to mild revisions according to a *Guardian* article published on Wednesday.

Anti-masking laws would endanger immunocompromised protesters, those who have been victims of abuse and those who cover their faces for religious or cultural reasons.

The *Guardian* article says the government's original plan of a full ban on face coverings at protests, with a \$2,000 fine for those in violation, would be replaced with penalties only for those wearing face coverings who the police say, in conveniently vague language, are "refusing to cooperate" or "believed to be committing a criminal act."

These moves are part of a wholesale attempt to suppress democratic rights and the right to protest by the federal and state governments in Australia, led by

the Labor Party, which are initially targeting demonstrations against the ongoing US-Israeli genocide against the Palestinian people, but will be used above all to censor any and all anti-government, anti-war dissent among workers and youth.

Internationally, such anti-democratic laws are being accompanied by the promotion of the far right in official politics and the corporate media, and its elevation into state power.

The sharpest expression of this is the fascist Donald Trump's second term as president of the most powerful imperialist country in the world, the United States. His administration has unleashed a war against the working class at home and abroad through an assault on education, public health, immigrants and the promotion of "America First" economic and military confrontations.

Governments in Australia, while not led by fascists, are implementing the same anti-working-class policies, which are expressed in their most naked form in the politics of extreme right-wing organisations like the NSN.

For that reason, the struggle against fascist thugs and neo-Nazis cannot be taken forward one iota through the bolstering of the capitalist state and its police. To take forward the fight against the promotion of fascism and the associated attacks on democratic rights, the working class must unite in a common struggle against the source of war and authoritarianism: the capitalist system itself.



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