

Australia: NSW Police permitted Nazis to rally outside state parliament in Sydney

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The avowedly neo-Nazi National Socialist Network (NSN) held a demonstration outside the New South Wales (NSW) state parliament in the centre of Sydney on Saturday. Several dozen black-clad thugs held an antisemitic banner calling for the “abolition of the Jewish lobby” and chanted fascist slogans demanding mass deportations and the return of a “white Australia.”

As with other stunts by the NSN, the protest pointed to the emboldening of the Nazis. Amid a growth of the far-right internationally, promoted by sections of the political establishment, including in Australia, they are completely open in their worship of Hitler and are conducting increasingly provocative public interventions.

The most striking aspect of the rally, though, was that it was effectively authorised by the NSW Police. The NSN, using the name of their front organisation, “White Australia,” submitted a notice of intention to hold a public assembly. The police did not object, allowing it to go ahead.

Since the protest and the shock it has generated, NSW Police command have claimed that a low level officer was responsible. The whole thing was a mistake, they had no knowledge that this would occur, etc.

That is simply not credible. The NSN, whose members venerate not only Hitler but multiple fascist terrorists, would be on every high-level policing watch-list conceivable. Last week, just days before the protest, Mike Burgess, the head of the domestic spy agency ASIO, explicitly named the NSN in a speech on threats to “national security.”

The obvious reality is that a high-level political decision was made for the Nazis to be allowed to rally. That is part of the increasing normalisation of the far-right forces, whose anti-immigrant demagoguery mirrors that of governments and the major parties themselves.

And it was aimed at creating a new pretext for attacks on democratic rights, targeting left-wing and anti-war opposition, with the NSW Police and the NSW Labor government immediately insisting after the rally that even more stringent laws limiting the right to protest and to engage in political speech are required.

NSW Police Commissioner Mal Lanyon, for instance, has told the media that he was unaware the protest would be held

due to a “communication error,” but that even if he had known, there would have been no means of preventing it.

Those claims display a staggering double standard. For more than two years, the NSW Police, acting with the state Labor government, have repeatedly sought to ban protests against the Israeli genocide in Gaza, and have used brutal violence against a number of them.

In October, 2024, for instance, NSW Police took unsuccessful court action to have a pro-Palestinian protest in Sydney forbidden. Their submission included absurd claims that the rally would somehow be a threat to public safety, because it would be held in an area where “a dozen new planter boxes” had been installed. It would also inconvenience commuters.

Last August, the NSW Police again applied for the courts to ban an anti-genocide demonstration. They asserted that the planned march across the Sydney Harbour Bridge, centrally protesting Israel’s deliberate starvation of Palestinians, could result in a crowd crush.

After the NSW Supreme Court rejected that argument, the protest went ahead without incident, with as many as 300,000 participants, making it one of the largest political actions in Australian history.

This October, the police were back in the courts. This time they successfully petitioned for a pro-Palestinian protest at Sydney Opera House to be banned. The police were once more fearful for public safety, warning, amongst other things, that people could trip over one another.

Having invoked all of these ridiculous safety concerns for years now against the anti-genocide movement, the police claim they could not have mounted a safety argument over a protest by literal Nazis, in the centre of Sydney, many of whom have been involved in violent attacks and all of whom are dangerous racists. The claim does not hold water.

The NSN rally, having been approved, was not met by any great police presence. In their frenzied attacks on pro-Palestinian protests, which are explicitly anti-racist and have involved many anti-Zionist Jews, police and NSW government officials have slanderously claimed that the demonstrations may intimidate Jewish people.

But those concerns, false in the case of the pro-Palestinian protests, were apparently non-existent when they would have

been justified in the case of a Nazi mobilisation.

The soft touch for the Nazis was very different to the violent fist presented repeatedly to pro-Palestinian protesters. In the most notorious, but not the only case, NSW Police last June set upon a small protest in the Sydney suburb of Belmore, outside a company that is alleged to be involved in the global weapons supply chain.

Police declared the protest “unauthorised,” a false claim they have not been able to substantiate since. They brutally assaulted the protesters, with one officer punching Hannah Thomas, a legal observer, in the face, causing injuries so severe they threatened the loss of her sight. In September, after months of lies and cover-up, the police were compelled to charge the officer over the assault.

NSW Labor Premier Chris Minns has immediately responded to the NSN protest by threatening legislative measures directed against civil liberties. Earlier this year, his government passed sweeping “hate speech” laws, transparently aimed at illegalising strident condemnations of Zionism.

It also pushed through anti-protest laws, providing for demonstrations to be banned if they occurred near places of worship. Elements of that legislation were deemed unconstitutional by the NSW Supreme Court last month, because the ubiquity of religious institutions could be invoked to ban any public assembly.

A reasonable hypothesis is that the NSW government and police allowed the NSN rally to go ahead, because they needed a pretext for their anti-democratic agenda after that setback. A parliamentary inquiry over the past month, moreover, has shown that in trying to identify the pro-Palestinian movement with antisemitism, the NSW Police assembled a false list of antisemitic incidents which was repeatedly referenced by the government.

In foreshadowing new legislation, Minns declared: “It’s illegal to have Nazi symbols in New South Wales, but not... Nazi speeches or Nazi slogans. We know what [the NSN] message is, it’s adherence to a fascist ideology that is corrosive, racist, anti-Semitic and designed to rip Australians in two.”

That is not a threat primarily directed against the NSN and fascists, but against political speech. If speeches can be deemed unlawful because they are “corrosive” or “divisive,” only pro-government statements could be made. Any range of political speech, including socialist denunciations of war and of capitalism, could be targeted.

The fact that such discussions are underway in ruling circles is clear. In his speech to the Lowy Institute last week, ASIO spy chief Mike Burgess not only warned against the NSN. He also stated that “revolutionary extremism,” which he identified with opposition to the Gaza genocide, is a threat that must be combatted.

The Murdoch-owned *Australian* put forward a similar line. In crude and offensive terms, its commentator Chris Mitchell

warned that antisemitism was spreading on the right, and on the left, with the latter identified with “keffiyeh-wearing students, academics, gays and Aboriginal activists.”

The casual homophobia and anti-Indigenous racism of that line, which would not be objected to by the NSN, makes clear that Mitchell is not interested in combatting bigotry, but in branding left-wing opposition to genocide and war as beyond the pale.

In reality, the NSN is a bastard offspring of the political establishment itself. It has fed off the official demonisation of immigrants by Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition, and its activities are a barometer of a broader shift to the right of official politics.

That was evident in August, when the far-right held a “March for Australia,” attended by up to 10,000 people in Sydney and thousands in other cities. The NSW Police made no attempt to ban that protest and were accused of an indifferent and lax response to the fascists assaulting passersby and in Melbourne violently attacking an Indigenous encampment.

Senior federal politicians, who have collaborated with Labor and the Coalition, addressed the rallies including Bob Katter and Pauline Hanson. Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese condemned the rallies, but declared that there were “good people” who had attended them.

The NSN was in attendance, and its leaders spoke at the Sydney and Melbourne demonstrations. But that was far from the extent of their involvement. It was later revealed that the NSN had initiated the March for Australia and served as its central organiser.

The legitimisation of the NSN and the assault on civil liberties are two sides of the same coin: a growing turn to authoritarianism, directed against the working class. This process finds its sharpest expression in the attempts of US President Donald Trump to establish a fascist dictatorship.

But the assault on democratic rights and the creation of a reactionary, nationalist environment in which forces such as the NSN can grow, by a Labor government in Australia, shows this is not a uniquely American phenomenon. Amid a breakdown of capitalism, the ruling elite and all its political representatives are again turning to the barbarism of the 1930s and 40s, from support for genocide, to militarist policies threatening world war and the promotion of fascism and dictatorship.



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