

Rampage against Sydney pro-Palestinian protest orchestrated by NSW government, police command

Oscar Grenfell
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Amid widespread shock and anger over an onslaught against peaceful pro-Palestinian protesters in Sydney on Monday evening, there is growing evidence that the cops were instructed to brutalise the crowd by the highest levels of New South Wales (NSW) Police command and the state government.

The NSW Labor administration had, prior to the rally, done everything possible to prevent a march, including invoking two draconian pieces of legislation to ban it. Working with the federal Labor government, it was determined to prevent any public display of opposition to the visit of Israeli president and war criminal Isaac Herzog and to use his provocative trip to set a precedent for police-state repression.

The scale of the violence strongly indicates police were told that the “gloves were off” and they could do what they wished to disperse the crowd. In addition to clips of police bashing people, which have been viewed millions of times, accounts are still coming to light of other assaults that were not captured on film, many causing serious injuries.

Of particular significance, in terms of a degree of coordination and instruction underlying the violence, is the account of NSW Greens parliamentarian Abigail Boyd. In comments to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) yesterday, Boyd stated that she was set upon by police when she was standing on steps near Sydney Town Hall filming protesters.

“I told them I was a member of parliament and that I was recording things for accountability purposes,” Boyd said. “I got lifted off of the ground, thrown into somebody else, and then when I was trying to rebalance myself, I got punched in the head, and then another police officer punched me in the shoulder. This was completely disproportionate. They knew I was a member of

parliament. I’ve made it really clear—and I was just observing.”

Attacks on legal observers have been a hallmark of fascist US President Donald Trump’s rampage against protesters and immigrants in Minneapolis. An orchestrated assault on a parliamentarian, moreover, indicates very high level approval from police command and likely the Labor government itself.

The attack on Boyd appears to have occurred towards the end of the static protest at Town Hall, when demonstrators were seeking to exercise their right to march to the NSW parliament but were blocked by police. The cops kettled protesters near the Town Hall steps, pepper-spraying them indiscriminately and pushing, threatening a crowd crush as some retreated back into Town Hall square.

The timing is significant, because earlier footage shows some of the most senior NSW Police officers who were present at the rally, remonstrating with other Greens MPs Jenny Leong and Sue Higginson.

In the footage, police officials, including NSW Police Acting Assistant Commissioner Paul Dunstan, demand that Higginson and Leong instruct demonstrators to disperse and refrain from marching. When Higginson noted that they lacked that authority and that people would wish to march regardless of what the Greens MPs had told them, Dunstan responded with evident frustration. He is one of the most senior police officers in Sydney.

It would not have been all that long after the exchange that Boyd was attacked, causing the neck injuries that placed her in hospital. Leong was also affected by pepper spray.

Senior police officials, directing the response, were unusually on the frontline of these clashes and were

filmed pushing protesters. That was clearly a signal to other junior officers on how they were to proceed.

The initial clashes were followed by a series of police assaults. In one, a very young man is pinned to the ground by two officers and punched at least 18 times while prone and face down on light rail tracks. Footage of him being marched away afterwards showed deep bruises had already appeared on his torso.

In another exchange, a police officer clumsily tripped over his own bicycle. A riot cop next to him responded by punching a middle-aged man with his hands in the air repeatedly to the torso.

In one incident that has triggered enormous anger, a group of Muslim men were set upon by police as they kneeled and prayed. In what was an entirely unprovoked attack, some of the worshippers were dragged along the ground and thrown. They had retreated back into Town Hall Square, and so were away from the scene of the main clashes when attacked.

The rampage concluded with a line of dozens of riot cops charging at the remaining demonstrators along George Street, pushing, trampling and hitting those who did not get away and directing pepper spray at them.

One man told the WSWS: “I was walking a few hundred metres away from Town Hall towards Central around 8 pm when, without warning, the police rushed from behind and punched me in the head, smashing my glasses, and within seconds there were two of them on top of me, hitting me while I was face down on the ground.

“They said they were arresting me for assault and handcuffed me and walked me back to Town Hall. After pleading my innocence, I was uncuffed about 10 minutes later and let go with a warning.”

The violence included attacks on the elderly, causing serious injuries. The *Guardian* today reported that a 69-year-old woman, Jann Alhafny, remains in hospital with four broken vertebrae, after having been pushed to the ground by police.

76-year-old journalist and documentary filmmaker James Ricketson was attacked by riot cops and pinned to the ground. In an open letter to NSW Premier Chris Minns yesterday, Ricketson wrote: “During my violent arrest, I sustained several bloody injuries. I can barely walk today and my right kidney hurts very badly as a result of its being punched. Or perhaps I have a cracked rib?”

Ricketson stated that during the five hours he was held in police custody, he was denied medical attention. The cops then dispensed with sham claims that he had

assaulted an officer and told him to leave.

In aggressively defending the actions of NSW Police since their onslaught, Minns has claimed that the primary reason he wanted to block pro-Palestinian protesters from marching was for fear they would clash with Zionists who were gathered to listen to an address by Herzog.

A largely compliant press has uncritically echoed Minns’ statements. But they defy a basic knowledge of Sydney geography. Herzog was speaking at the International Convention Centre (ICC) in Darling Harbour. The pro-Palestinian protesters sought to march to the NSW Parliament. It is located from Town Hall in the opposite direction of the ICC; i.e., the protesters sought to march farther away from Herzog, not towards him.

Herzog’s ICC event had the character of a fascist rally, with the Israeli leader defaming all those who oppose his government’s mass murder as terrorist supporters and antisemites. Minns was among those who spoke at the ICC gathering, fawning over the Israeli war criminal and declaring that in the wake of the Bondi terrorist attack, “things must change in our state and our country.”

With the police rampage, Minns was demonstrating in real time what that “change” would consist of. A colourless careerist who has distinguished himself among state leaders as the most frothily pro-Zionist and hostile to protest, Minns was no doubt attempting to impress the Israeli leader.

At the conclusion of the ICC event, a police official stood up and asked the crowd if they could remain in the building for another half hour. That was how much time would be required, he stated, to disperse the pro-Palestinian protesters from Town Hall.

The coordinated rampage, and the entire Herzog visit, is a turning point in Australian politics. The Labor governments are exploiting the Bondi attack to institute police-state measures and to signal their full support for imperialist war and barbarism, not just in Palestine, but globally. This morning, the Murdoch-owned *Australian*, which has relentlessly campaigned for such a turn, hailed Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese for his defence of the police attacks, in an article headlined “Albanese’s slapdown for anti-Herzog mob.”



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