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Romper Stomper fails to understand the rising tide of racism in Australia

Collective Action

January 15, 2018

In the lead up to its streaming debut Romper Stomper, a sequel to the 1992 film of the same name, has been heavily promoted and it has been impossible to escape its advertisements both online and on billboards. The show comes at the right time, at a moment when the recrudescence of the far-right in Australia has resulted in attacks on Muslims and a more confident neo-Nazi presence on our streets.

Unfortunately, the show itself is a dreadful, turgid, and poorly written affair that gets much wrong and is a terrible missed opportunity. There is much that anarchists should take away from this.

Romper Stomper sets the conflict between the far right Patriot Blue and the anti-fascist Antifasc against the race to stop an immigration reform bill that would restrict immigration to Australia. The show portrays the rise of the far-right as the struggle of a small cell of loosely knit skinheads and extrem-

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ists under the banner of ‘Patriot Blue’, modelled clearly on the now largely defunct United Patriots Front.

They carry out violent street patrols and hoard heavy weapons to gun down African ‘gangs’ and plot to build an army to take back the country from ‘foreigners’. In a bizarre instance of life imitating art, the Melton based True Blue Crew have since launched a project (seemingly inspired by the Stan TV series) to recruit “concerned citizens” into “street patrols” targeting migrant youth. In the CBD, a local franchise inspired by the Finnish neo-Nazis group Soldiers of Odin, have been doing the same for nearly two years. These thuggish groups are a reality and present a real danger to the minority groups they detest.

They are opposed by ‘Antifasc’. Seemingly inspired by Herald Sun coverage more than reality, they are a small group of inner-city student activists led by a mysterious academic named Mckew, obviously intended to represent anarchist blogger Slackbastard. The group monitor the far-right, disrupt a rally outside a halal food festival (based on a similar event at the Halal Food Expo in April 2016), and carry out other agit-prop actions, such as hacking into a billboard to display a pro-immigration message and trash the house of racist talk show pundit Jaygo

Nonetheless, their motivations are never explained and we are left with no real understanding of Antifasc’s politics nor any realistic portrayal of *why* they organise the way they do. Given this, they too are an inexplicably violent group of misfits, and Antifasc and Patriot Blue are presented as being two sides of the same coin. This narrative that anti-fascists and the far right as ‘both as bad as one another’ is misleading and draws a false moral equivalence between fascists and those trying to stop them. The one-dimensional portrayal of South Sudanese youth as wannabe gangsters and street thugs in the show feeds into the racist hysteria currently spreading across Victoria with a populace increasingly confident in demanding deportations

for African teenagers. Given that Melton-based thugs True Blue Crew are holding public meetings to organise vigilante mob attacks on Africans this portrayal is particularly irresponsible.

The show's promotion boasts of it being confrontational and shocking. However, as one reviewer has already noted, to be truly confrontational it would have to interrogate the ideas and notions it depicts. As an audience we are never shown why people organise as anti-fascists nor why people join the far-right. Instead, they exist in a vacuum divorced from the racist political landscape that surrounds them. Patriot Blue are presented as extreme and dysfunctional outliers in an otherwise peaceful nation, not a group that has emerged on a political landscape where right-wing nationalist party One Nation has won seats in successive Federal and State elections and where there is a consensus by both major parties on the racist offshore detention program for asylum seekers.

As a result, *Romper Stomper* mistakenly presents the problem of racism in Australia as one of small groups of extremists bashing one another.

While extremist groups do pose an immediate physical threat to minorities within Australia, in particular Muslims, they are not the cause of racism in Australia.

That remains the capitalist state with its affiliated media and security apparatus. The Herald Sun and other Murdoch papers' round-the-clock fabrication and 'reporting' on 'African youth gangs', is nauseating and must be combatted. The bipartisan consensus of both Liberals and Labour on mandatory offshore detention still exists and signals a capitulation by the Labour movement to anti-refugee policy. This must be disrupted. Pauline Hanson's increasingly confident movement of the 'silent majority' and its links to far-right figures also goes unnoticed.

Just as the problem of the far right is misrepresented so is the solution. Small cells of black-clad activists, no matter how

devoted they are, cannot win political struggles. As anarchists we must work to build a large and militant movement of the oppressed classes to make far-right organising impossible. This is the most effective way to strangle the far-right and deprive it of the space it needs to organise physically. It is also the safest way. And given the audacious violence of the far right this is important.

It was large-scale mobilisations that smothered Reclaim Australia and have clamped down on other attempts right-wing groups to stage public protests. It is telling that this was not given any space or time in Romper Stomper since this galvanised display of popular counter-power is far more militant and radical than a small group of people launching fist-rights with skinheads. Popular shows of solidarity and strength allow for more diverse participation of people as well, which means anti-fascist activism is not limited to the able-bodied. Safety and political force is in the working class gathering in numbers.