

What happened in Melbourne yesterday?

Collective Action

November 25, 2017

Yesterday's Manus solidarity rally in Melbourne did not "turn violent", it was attacked first by a known fascist and then by the police.

The racist violence of the Australian state, directed at Indigenous peoples, Muslims, and anyone who would dare seek asylum whilst non-white, continues to embolden far-right thugs.

Earlier this month, neo-Nazi publicity hound Neil Erikson, abused a Labor senator in a bar. Last night he and two wannabe ubermensch decided to have a go at a Manus solidarity rally organised by the Refugee Action Collective (RAC).

Erikson shoved aside a RAC chairperson and seized the mic to announce that all "refugees are rapists". He was quickly cut off when a nearby hero stepped in, pushed him aside and reclaimed the mic.

The response of the police was telling. One of Erikson's goon mates grabbed our hero around the neck to choke him. The police rushed forward and leaped on... the person being choked. This person has since described how police shoved him to the ground, stomped on his calves, kicked his legs and pushed his elbows into his back.

Neil Erikson and his thug friend were calmly led away, whilst police escalated violence against demonstrators. Hundreds of demonstrators stood up and demanded the police release the demonstrator they had pinned on the ground, chanting "let him go!"

As police marched the hero they had wrongly arrested to a divvy van, supporters stood in front of them and continued chanting. The police response was to lash out, and a comrade from the Melbourne Anarchist Club was hurled to the ground, sustaining a head injury.

You have doubtless seen the photos shared on Facebook and in the media. Our comrade, surrounded by police, pinned to the ground, blood flowing from his head. Victoria Police held the MAC comrade in this position for over thirty minutes, and after the comrade was removed from the scene he was not taken to an ambulance or a hospital, but rather to a police station.

At a moments like this we face a choice, do we accept the right of the police to brutalize with impunity, or do we push back?

Last night, we pushed back. Hundreds of demonstrators, joined by a number of angry bystanders, surrounded the police, and demanded the release of our comrades. The police responded with punches and pepper spray. They were successful in removing the demonstrators they had assaulted and arrested, but they were not successful in their secondary objective

For three weeks Victoria Police have moved to prevent Manus solidarity rallies from undertaking the most routine of protest marches. For two weeks, police have deployed in their hundreds to block Swanston Street and prevent a march from the State Library to Flinders Street.

Last night, after being attacked first by fascists and then by the police, demonstrators demanded the right to march. Chanting “we will march” hundreds of demonstrators faced off against the police, before sidestepping police down Bourke Street and then running to the Flinders Street intersection.

The outcome was an important demonstration of principle. After weeks of over policing, despite the deployment of hundreds of “public order response” units, and in defiance of police violence, demonstrators forced their way to Flinders Street, surrounded police in the intersection, and held the sit-in that police have been so determined to prevent. This was no symbolic sit-in, demonstrators held the Flinders Street intersection in defiance of Victoria Police for two hours.

The ongoing campaign in solidarity with refugees detained on Manus and Nauru requires a sustained and determined campaign of direct action and civil disobedience. We must sit-in, blockade, demonstrate and march, and we must create a situation that the Australian government simply cannot ignore.

This campaign has been overwhelmingly non-violent, bordering on obsessively polite. But our tactics of occupation, blockade, sit-in and march are opposed by racist bigots and authoritarian police. In order to both defend rights to protest and continue this campaign, we must refuse police and opponent demands that we stop. There are occasions where this imperative will require acts of defiance.

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