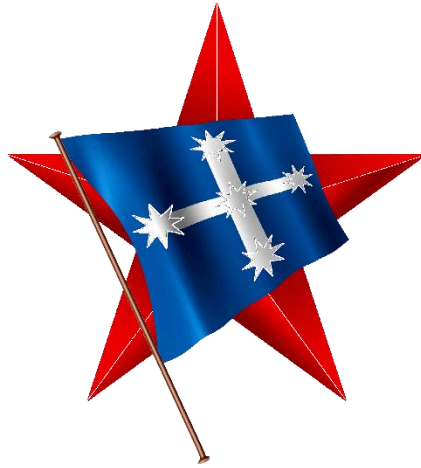




Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist)

A paper presented at the

Fifth NDFP International Theoretical Conference on Fascism in the 21st Century

At the invitation of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines

28-29 November 2025

Utrecht, the Netherlands

Fascism in the Australian context

Comrades,

We of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) are pleased to share our experiences of the growing threat of fascism in our country. This directly addresses the first theme of your Theoretical Conference, "Fascism in the imperialist heartlands and industrialised capitalist countries".

What is fascism and how do we define it in the early part of the 21st Century?

The classic definition of fascism was stated by Dimitrov at the 7th Congress of the Comintern: "the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic, and most imperialist elements of finance capital".

That definition holds true today. It was a definition of fascism in an industrialised, capitalist country. If it needs some modification for fascism in semi-feudal and semi-colonial nations controlled by imperialism, then that is a matter for the communists in such places.

Dimitrov defined fascism in 1935. At that time, the Nazis had come to power through the general elections of 1932. They staged the provocation of the Reichstag Fire in February 1933 and used it to abolish most civil liberties, including rights of assembly and freedom of the press. In an atmosphere of street level intimidation of voters by armed Nazi thugs, a general election in March 1933 saw the Nazis increase their vote but still fall short of a parliamentary majority, so Hitler passed the Enabling Act, a law that gave Hitler as Chancellor the power to make and enforce laws without the approval of the Reichstag and in violation of the German Constitution. When Dimitrov offered his definition of fascism, the German form was already in its most advanced stage.

In Italy, Mussolini had been appointed Prime Minister by the King in 1922 following the March on Rome. Between 1925 and 1927, Mussolini progressively dismantled virtually all constitutional and conventional restraints on his power and built a police state. Italian fascism was also in an advanced stage by the time of Dimitrov's address to the Comintern.

Hitler and Mussolini had the powerful backing by the monopoly capitalist class in their respective countries and internationally. Hitler's powerful international capitalist backers wanted to crush the young socialist Soviet Union and the growing support for socialism and communism amongst the world's people, especially the working class.

The emergence and growth of fascism in advanced capitalist countries today will not necessarily follow the paths or have the characteristics of the Italian and German fascisms of the 1920s and 1930s. Where it is an emerging force, it is necessary to distinguish between state fascism in its final, most advanced form, and those policies, ideologies and practices

that are fascist-like, threatening the bourgeois democratic rights of the people, the core of which is the working class.

This is important because there are some progressive people who dismiss references to fascism as scaremongering and exaggeration if the government or the actions being referred to fall short of the characteristics of the German, and to a lesser extent, the Italian forms.

They believe that unrestrained people's action against fascism is provocative, and try to restrict anti-fascism to the defence of the "integrity" of parliament, and of bourgeois democratic rights. They, and the Labor Party in particular, want to channel all people's actions into the quicksand of parliament. This objectively facilitates the emergence of fascism.

Why fascism now?

In Australia, we can discern three main fascist tendencies. On the extreme right is the National Socialist Network and like-minded bodies. On the far-right is a grouping of capitalist media barons (in Australia, mostly owned by former citizen Rupert Murdoch), think tanks and organisations partnered with and often paid for, by giant corporations, and individuals like Gina Rinehart, the powerful mining magnate. The parliamentary right is a third force, and it includes the two main parties, Liberal and Labor, and some smaller parties.

Before we look at these three fascist and fascist-like tendencies, we must understand why they have emerged in recent times.

Australian workers and working people are in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis. Real wages have not risen in years, the price of housing and the cost of rental accommodation are literally going through the roof, there is a crisis in medical services, and two-thirds of our children are in public schools that bear no relation to the resource standards of privatised education. The cost of food is increasing and it is no longer the homeless accessing free food through charitable distributors: increasing numbers of low-wage workers are having to do the same. Despite an expanded renewable energies sector, electricity and gas bills for households and small businesses are at record highs. De-industrialisation of the past 40 years has decimated Australia's manufacturing industries, jobs and skills. It is cheaper for the capitalist class to bring in lower paid overseas workers.

There is an inevitable competition for the hearts and minds of the working class. We have our Program and our immediate demands and we offer them through mass work and the struggles in which we are involved. But the ruling class needs to divide and weaken the working class and divert attention from itself and capitalism as the reason for workers' hardships, and to keep those who can see the need for struggle against capitalism isolated and divided from those who do not yet see that need. Racism and scapegoating is an age-old tool of capitalism to divide and weaken the working class.

It also needs to sharpen the weapons of state control for use against movements that take on an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist direction.

The Nazis

Australian First Peoples have occupied this continent and its islands for around 60,000 years. Their unsettlement by colonisation is only 250 years old. The attempted dispossession of their land by settlers was accompanied by force and violence, or the threat of force and violence. Its impact was genocidal. It is celebrated by Australian Nazis, who regard First Peoples as primitive sub-humans.

The modern Australian Nazis appeared about ten years ago, beginning as an Australian variant of the US Proud Boys. They are street thugs, well-disciplined and growing in numbers. Their purpose is to foster division within the ranks of the workers, develop an aggressive masculine ethos, and intimidate and harass minorities and progressive people. In addition to their anti-First Peoples position, they are also anti-LGBTQ+ and Trans people, anti-immigrant, anti-asylum seekers and misogynistic, believing that white women should be nothing but racial incubators who stay at home, raise white children, and unquestioningly obey their white husbands.

There have been several attempts by young people to confront the Nazis head on with a view to pushing them off the streets. Under pressure from progressive and migrant groups the bourgeois state has legislated Nazi salutes and insignia illegal. However, as welcome as these are, they're superficial and won't eradicate conditions that create fertile ground for Nazis. The police either connive with the Nazis and offer them protection, or use charges such as loitering, that are invariably withdrawn or dismissed by the courts. Recent investigations have exposed young men from wealthy families joining the Nazis and are an important source of Nazis groups' funding.

The Nazis have had success in taking over populist anti-immigrant "March for Australia" rallies and can be expected to grow in response to the cost-of-living crisis in which immigrants are an easily identifiable scapegoat. The "March for Australia" rallies are mainly attended by working people (including small business people) angry with the cost-of-living crisis, feeling alienated and powerless, and providing fertile ground for Nazis and the far right. The poverty gap between city and country people is deeper than ever.

Far right influencers

The proliferation of right-wing ideology is, for the ruling class and for the super-rich finance capitalists, a form of insurance taken out in advance against the danger, for them, of class struggle and a united working class. As we have said, that proliferation is undertaken by capitalist media barons (in Australia, mostly owned by former citizen Rupert Murdoch), by think tanks and organisations partnered with and often paid for, by giant corporations.

Ironically, these think tanks that promote far-right and fascist-like policies, like to present themselves as being “centre Right” or benignly Conservative, but they are part of the ongoing attack on people’s rights in the service of finance capital.

One such think tank is ASPI, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (more correctly named Australians Serving Predatory Imperialism), a body co-financed by the Australian Department of Defence and some of the worst “masters of war”: Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, BAE Systems, Northrop Grumman and the Thales Group, as well as IT giants like Microsoft, Oracle Australia, Telstra, and Google. It is regularly trotted out as an “independent” commentator on foreign policy and domestic political matters and helps generate fear of, and hostility towards, US imperialism’s main rival, social-imperialist China.

Another prominent right-wing think tank is the Institute for Public Affairs (IPA). It is affiliated to the international Atlas Network which has its fingers in many pies around the world. The IPA advocates free-market economic policies, such as privatisation, deregulation of state-owned enterprises, trade liberalisation, deregulation of workplaces, abolition of the minimum wage, criticism of socialism, and repeal of Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975. It also rejects large parts of climate science.

The IPA, like ASPI, is often called upon by the capitalist media for opinions designed to generate right-wing consensus. Like ASPI, it is presented as an independent source of opinion, yet its funding comes from corporates including ExxonMobil, Telstra, WMC Resources, Philip Morris, Murray Irrigation Limited, Visy, Clough Engineering, Caltex, Shell, Esso and British American Tobacco (BAT).

The US-based Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) has made strong inroads into the so-called “centre Right” in Australia. Its 2025 Australian conference featured speakers such as former PM Tony Abbott and a number of minor right-wing political parties representing racist and anti-immigration views.

Interlinked with CPAC members is the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship (ARC) tied to US billionaire Peter Thiel. The ARC’s international Advisory Board includes former Australian PMs Tony Abbott and John Howard, a former Deputy PM John Anderson, as well as three current members of Parliament. The ARC promotes Islamophobia, climate change denialism, and “race science”.

Both the extreme right and the far right are adept at using social media and AI to spread their messages of hate. Individual “influencers” can have thousands of followers, pushing anything from white supremacy to incel grievances and so-called “sovereign citizenship”.

There has been a push by retired unionists to have individual unions and peak union organisations develop anti-far right membership training courses to counter the proliferation of right-wing ideology. We support this, but are aware that most union training is risk-averse

and does not offer proper class analysis of issues that are identified for training, and we do not expect anti-far right training to be any different.

Fascist-like parliamentary laws – ready to be used against the people in struggle

The basis for division of the working class, and for tighter state control, is fascist or fascist-like actions. They can come from either legislation passed “democratically” through parliament, or through the thuggery, intimidation and violence of extra-parliamentary actors like the Nazis, or both.

Over the last forty years, there has been a steady attack on the hard-won rights of the working class, and on the hard-won democratic rights of the people by way of parliamentary laws. Historically, Australian workers and unions never had the right to strike, but with politically strong working class leadership they often defied the bourgeois state laws and took industrial and strike actions in the fight for workplace rights and in solidarity with communities and internationally. Today, anti-worker laws are strengthened even more by the capitalist state. Workers are legislatively prohibited from taking any other than court-approved stoppages, limited to those occasions when they are negotiating new enterprise agreements. Massive fines and jail terms are threatened for non-compliance.

Recently the Labor Government launched attacks on the “freedom of association” by putting the Construction Division of the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) into administration and turning that union into a toothless tame-cat organization. Heading down the path of Nazi Germany's labour fronts! For over 50 years the Construction Division of the CFMEU, formerly the Builders Labourers’ Federation (BLF), had been a strong militant union of class-conscious workers giving leadership to Australia’s working class. The Australian Labor Party, which has close ties to the union movement on which it relies for electoral support, has been just as guilty of taking away the rights of the working class and of attacking democratic rights as the conservative Liberal-National coalition. In some respects, it has been worse.

Since 2001 the Australian government has brought in a plethora of sweeping anti-democratic and fascist-like laws under the guise of “national security” and protection of the Australian people. The drafting of Australia’s 2001 “anti-terror” laws was supervised by the FBI which came to Australia specifically to assist the Howard government in their formulation. These laws are some of the most far-reaching “anti-terror” laws on earth. They include rights to police detention of 12-year-olds without charges being laid, ASIO’s incommunicado detention of non-suspects, criminalising whistle blowers, allowing mass surveillance, banning public gatherings and “possessing a ‘thing’ that could be used for a terrorist act” punishable by 15 years jail. The “thing” is not defined in the legislation, but can even be a pencil. Not all of these laws have been used yet, but they remain in legislation, despite numerous efforts and campaigns by democratic rights lawyers and

communities to remove them. They can be used against the people at any time and under any government.

Whilst the dictatorship of finance capital in Australia has not yet taken the form of Dimitrov's "open terrorist dictatorship", the control of Australia by imperialist finance capital, mostly from the US, sees parliamentary adoption of laws that remove the façade of bourgeois democracy and can be correctly described as fascist-like

In 1975, Australia was witness to a constitutional coup, orchestrated by US Ambassador Marshall Green and using the reserve powers of the Governor-General as British representative and head of state. An elected Labor Prime Minister who had threatened to expose CIA agents on Australia, to close the US base at Pine Gap, and to "buy back the farm" using loans from the Middle East, and who had been elected on a wave of support for Australian independence and popular reform, was sacked and replaced by the leader of the Liberal Party. This was a fascist coup, and resistance to it was betrayed and contained by the head of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, and later Labor PM, Bob Hawke.

Between the post-Whitlam Labor Party, and their parliamentary opponents, the Liberals, people's rights have been attacked and the once-influential trade union movement reduced to a shadow of its former self. Historically, the more progressive and militant unions and workers in Australia mobilised and led resistance to the rise of fascism and Nazi groups. There is correlation between the rise of fascism (institutionally and ideologically), and a weakened working class and its militant organisations.

Australia has some notoriety for denying the rights of asylum seekers. In late August 2001, the Howard Liberal government refused permission for the Norwegian freighter MV Tampa, carrying 433 rescued refugees from a distressed fishing vessel in international waters and 5 crew, to enter Australian waters. Thus began the demonising of and discrimination against refugees. The "stop the boats" rhetoric has been adopted by Labor and is fascist-like in its intentions and operation. Regrettably, it has been adopted by some other countries.

Both main parliamentary parties have trashed people's hard-won rights and removed them from the exercise of bourgeois democracy. Increased surveillance powers were given to spy agencies, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) and the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) under the guise of "anti-terror laws". Federal and state police have increased powers, and can be hardly distinguished from the army by virtue of their militarised transport and armaments. The Australia Army regularly trains for crowd control. The right to protest has been curtailed on various fronts including fines of tens of thousands of dollars and lengthy jail terms. There are no whistleblower protections and prosecution of whistleblowers is the norm.

Journalists have been sacked for pro-Palestinian comments, including on private social media. Liberal governments passed laws called Journalist Information Warrants, which were issued entirely in secret. Journalists are not informed if a warrant is taken out against them

and face jail if they publicise the fact. The laws have become so strict that journalists cannot write about security operations, or even surveillance of their reporting, without the risk of prison. As we write, the Labor government is seeking to reduce the ability of citizens to seek information on government operations using Freedom of Information laws. The bourgeois right of so-called “transparency” is evaporating by fascist-like means.

Conclusion

Worldwide, the capitalist class is increasingly moving towards more open, fascist-like bourgeois state dictatorship to suppress the people’s resistance to capitalism and imperialism. There is a world-wide resurgence of far-right and extreme-right activity. Australian workers cannot take comfort in the fact that they may still go to the polls once every three years to choose who will misrepresent them in parliament. The spread of the ideology of the right, and the appearance of disciplined ranks of Nazis on the streets, require unity and action amongst the ranks of the people. The seeds of anti-fascist resistance exist, but need nurturing and good leadership.

We are committed to building a united, class-conscious working class leadership in fighting fascism in all its forms.