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National Victoria Racism

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## Neo-Nazi salutes at protest could prompt changes to anti-vilification laws

Simone Fox Koob and Roy Ward

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The Victorian laws that ban displaying the swastika might be toughened after a group performed Nazi salutes on the steps of Parliament House during a protest on Saturday.

British anti-trans rights campaigner Kellie-Jay Keen-Minshull had organised to speak to her supporters at Parliament House on Saturday afternoon, prompting a counter-demonstration protesting against her views.



Neo-Nazis, led by Thomas Sewell, marched on Spring Street on Saturday. CHRIS HOPKINS

About 30 people from neo-Nazi group the National Socialist Network, dressed in black and most with their faces covered, attended the protests on Spring Street supporting Keen-Minshull, repeatedly performing the salute and holding up a sign using offensive anti-trans language.

On Saturday night, a state government spokeswoman described the behaviour from the neo-Nazi group as a cowardly act of hatred and intimidation.

“Not only have Victorians made it clear they have zero tolerance for these disgraceful beliefs, we’ve made it clear in law with the ban of the Nazi hate symbol,” she said.

“We will continue to monitor the use of hate symbols and may consider the inclusion of additional symbols to the legislation at a later stage.”

Last year, the Andrews government [outlawed the Hakenkreuz](#), or Nazi swastika, and became the first jurisdiction in Australia to do so. Anyone who intentionally displays the Nazi symbol in public faces a year in prison or a \$22,000 fine.

The ban acted on the recommendation from a cross-party parliamentary inquiry into anti-vilification laws, which called for the display of Nazi symbology to be criminalised.

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Earlier this year, Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes said the government was also considering banning the Nazi salute after a series of recent incidents where white supremacists performed the gesture in public spaces, including at a ceremony for Indigenous Australians on January 26.

The salute is already restricted in Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Switzerland and Sweden.

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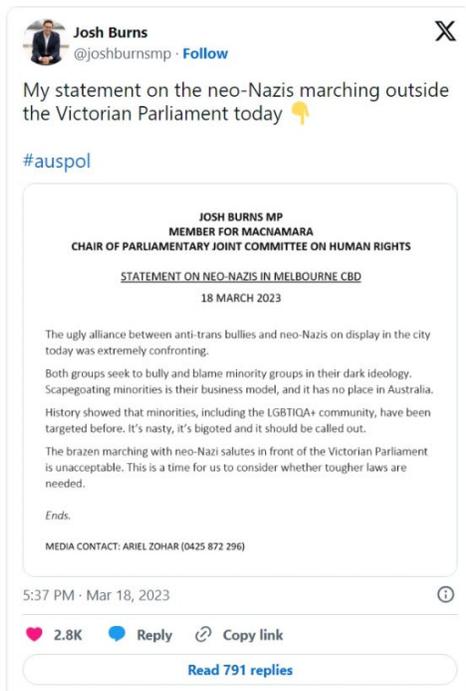
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**Josh Burns**  
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My statement on the neo-Nazis marching outside the Victorian Parliament today 🗨️

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**JOSH BURNS MP**  
MEMBER FOR MACNAMARA  
CHAIR OF PARLIAMENTARY JOINT COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

STATEMENT ON NEO-NAZIS IN MELBOURNE CBD  
18 MARCH 2023

The ugly alliance between anti-trans bullies and neo-Nazis on display in the city today was extremely confronting.

Both groups seek to bully and blame minority groups in their dark ideology. Scapegoating minorities is their business model, and it has no place in Australia. History showed that minorities, including the LGBTQIA+ community, have been targeted before. It's nasty, it's bigoted and it should be called out.

The brazen marching with neo-Nazi salutes in front of the Victorian Parliament is unacceptable. This is a time for us to consider whether tougher laws are needed.

Ends.

MEDIA CONTACT: ARIEL ZOHAR (0425 872 296)

5:37 PM · Mar 18, 2023

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Federal Labor MP Josh Burns said now was the time to consider whether tougher laws were needed.

He told ABC radio it made no sense that it was illegal to display the Nazi symbol in Victoria but people could still walk along Spring Street doing the Nazi salute.

“We need to look across governments about what laws are required ... to ensure the bigoted and ugly scenes in Melbourne don’t happen again,” he said on Sunday. “What was happening yesterday crosses a line.”

The opposition said the display from the neo-Nazi group amounted to a deliberate attempt to incite hatred and violence.



Liberal MP Moira Deeming attended the anti-trans protest on Saturday. JASON SOUTH

“These shameful individuals and the hateful ideology they push have no place in our state and must never be tolerated,” said Liberal MPs David Southwick and Brad Battin in a joint statement. “Victoria is better than this.”

Southwick, whose seat of Caulfield includes Victoria’s largest Jewish population, said on Sunday he had people calling him in tears about the vision they saw of the protest.

“We have the largest population of Holocaust survivors here in Caulfield and the last thing they want to be confronted with is Nazis saluting and goose-stepping outside parliament,” he said.

“The Liberal-Nationals will stand side by side with the government to ensure that police have the powers they need to make sure they don’t behave in this way.”



Liberal MP Moira Deeming attended the anti-trans rights event and tweeted on Saturday of her disappointment with police for allowing the neo-Nazis to enter the protected area where Keen-Minshull was speaking.

Southwick said he did not share Deeming’s views on transgender women, and

said the party would speak with the upper house MP.

"I had some initial discussions with Moira and I will have more," he said.

"I'm told many of those at the protests also felt unsafe from these neo-Nazis. There is one thing to protest, but it is another thing to incite hate.

"Her views are not my views and I don't think the views of the Liberal Party or most of mainstream Victoria, but she has a right to her views.

Deeming was contacted for comment.

*The Age* revealed on Saturday that the Australian Army has [launched an urgent investigation](#) after discovering serving soldiers have links to neo-Nazi groups.

The inquiry was triggered by an investigation by *The Age* into white supremacist groups, which unearthed links between extremist groups and Australian Defence Force members, as well as state police forces.

The investigation also established the identities of emerging or previously unknown neo-Nazi leaders around the country, some with a keen interest in obtaining firearms and training in their use.

Premier Daniel Andrews condemned the Nazi salutes and anti-trans protesters in tweets on Sunday: "They were there to say the trans community don't deserve rights, safety or dignity. That's what Nazis do. Their evil ideology is to scapegoat minorities – and it's got no place here. And those who stand with them don't, either."

Opposition Leader John Pesutto also condemned the group's actions in a speech at the Victorian Multicultural Gala Dinner on Saturday night.

Andrews, who also spoke at the event, said the group's views were vile and represented the worst of Victoria. "I condemn that in the clearest terms."

Pesutto, who is also the shadow minister for multicultural affairs, described what happened on the steps of parliament as an abomination.

"I too will stand against it, I condemn it and I will work tirelessly with my colleagues to make sure it never gets a foothold here in our country or anywhere else."

Victoria Police said at least six groups attended the protest on Saturday, and officers were aware of the potential for multiple clashes between the opposing groups.

"Consequently, officers were required to form many lines between the different groups to protect the safety of all involved, stop breaches of the peace and prevent any physical violence," a spokeswoman said.

Three people were arrested, including a 22-year-old man from Point Cook who allegedly put a female officer in a headlock and dragged her to the ground, and a

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Both are expected to be charged with assaulting police. A third person was also arrested for unlawful assault.

A group of trans, LGBTIQ+, multicultural, women's and other civil society organisations together on Sunday condemned the "hate speech and transphobic displays" that took place during the rally



AFR

...page that took place during the rally.

Trans Justice Project founder Jackie Turner said: "Trans people deserve to thrive. Yet right now, we are facing unprecedented attacks on our rights, lives and health care from anti-trans hate groups. I encourage everyone to stand in solidarity with the trans and gender diverse community in calling out these attacks."

Aleph Melbourne co-convenor Michael Barnett said: "White supremacy of this nature led to the persecution and murder of millions of Jews, LGBTIQ+ people and other minorities in World War II. There is no room for this ugly behaviour in Melbourne, or anywhere else. Transgender, gender diverse and all LGBTIQ+ people have a right to live in peace and safety, without fear of bigotry, tr

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Victoria's police union boss, Wayne Gatt, said the government would need to consider whether more action was needed to curb the rise of far-right extremism.

"I think more broadly, what governments have to ask themselves is, if left unchecked, do movements like this actually pose a significant threat to the community? And what we've seen thus is far-right extremism around the world lead to a new form of terrorism that emerges," Gatt told 3AW radio.

"So there is a broader question, do you get to a point where you have to outlaw the membership of this sort of group, and as challenging as that sounds, if the fundamental purpose of these groups is to cause hatred of other human beings in our community, if that becomes the sole purpose of their activities ... what place to they have?"

Gatt said police wanted to be able to stop Saturday's kind of offending. He also responded to criticism from some attendees that police seemed to be protecting the neo-Nazi groups during the protest, and argued that officers would have been disgusted by the salutes but had to do their job regardless of their beliefs.

"They've got to be impartial in their approach and doesn't matter whether they agree with a protest group or otherwise, they've got to take an apolitical position when they stand there," he said.

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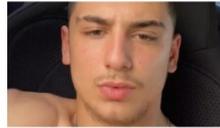
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