

Call to outlaw gesture after abusive Parliament House 'protest'



NEO-NAZI SALUTE TO BIGOTRY

Right-wing activists perform Nazi salutes at Parliament House yesterday, led by Thomas Sewell, as counter-protesters (below) demonstrate against anti-trans activist Kellie-Jay Keen (bottom). Pictures: David Crosling



BRIANNA TRAVERS, GRACE BALDWIN, REGAN HODGE

MASKED right-wing fanatics giving Nazi salutes on the steps of Parliament House on Saturday have prompted calls for the gesture to be outlawed.

A group of anti-transgender activists and neo-Nazis faced off with a larger contingent of counter-protesters, with abuse being hurled as police kept them apart.

The neo-Nazis performed Nazi salutes while holding a sign that read: "Destroy Paedo Freaks". They were led by the founder of the far-right European Australia Movement Thomas Sewell.

During the protest, a female officer was placed in a headlock while another was slapped on the neck.

Victorian Police Association secretary Wayne Gatt said police had no choice but to keep the peace during such

demonstrations, which included keeping people with views of "hatred and prejudice" safe.

"It's deeply offensive in the community but it's not something that police can actively intervene on, and that's difficult for us," he said.

Federal Labor MP Josh Burns said it was "time for us to consider whether tougher laws are needed".

"The ugly alliance between anti-trans bullies and neo-Nazis in the city was extremely confronting," he said.

"Both groups seek to bully and blame minority groups in their dark ideology. Scapegoating minority groups is their business model, and it has no place in Australia."

The state opposition called for police to have more power to intervene when the Nazi salute was made.

One protester, who riled up another rival group, was seen

being kicked and having her hair pulled. Prior to their arrival, Kellie-Jay Keen, a British trans-exclusionary women's activist, had been speaking on the steps of Parliament House.

She was surrounded by people holding signs including "Men can never be lesbians" and "Woman is a fact not a gender identity".

Former Animal Justice MP Andy Meddick, who appeared to be pushed by a police officer while the neo-Nazi group paraded down Spring St, said he was concerned the alt-right demonstrators "were given a platform". He said it was "outrageous" that police allowed the white supremacists on to the steps of Parliament House.

"The line of police facing us had these Nazis to their backs – people who espouse violent rhetoric," he said.

"The seat of democracy and human rights in this state was used as a platform for Nazis –

willingly. It's outrageous. I've spoken to some of my friends in the Jewish community and they are absolutely fearful of a new wave of anti-Semitism."

Mr Meddick also called on the Andrews government to follow up its banning of the swastika by outlawing neo-Nazi organisations.

"These white supremacist organisations, it should be illegal to be a member of them," he said.

Also at the rally was failed Liberal candidate Katherine

Deves, who shared pictures on social media, calling her opponents "anti-woman protesters". She said "armed and mounted police" were needed to protect what she described as the "women's rights rally".

A police spokesman said the protests were "dynamic". "Consequently, officers were required to form many lines between the different groups to protect the safety of all involved ... and prevent physical violence," he said.

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Fire alert for Eildon

A WATCH-AND-ACT notice was last night in place for Lake Eildon residents as firefighters battled a bushfire.

The blaze was burning at Delatite Arm Reserve, about 2.5km south of Parsons Point, and heading south. Fire authorities said leaving was the safest option, but those who choose to stay were urged to watch wind conditions, smoke and visibility overnight and today.

Unusually hot and windy March weather has hit Victoria, leading to total fire bans for much of the state.

Firefighters also spent the day protecting properties from fires on the Surf Coast, with the threat to homes easing late in the afternoon.

Love your work, I'm in

ACTOR Nicole da Silva couldn't say "yes" quickly enough when the call came to join the second season of Australia drama *Love Me*.

"Season one set such a beautiful tone and it's such a wonderfully-made show," she said. "So, when I got the call, I was just like, 'Yes, sign me up, I'll do anything and everything, please.'"

Nicole da Silva

The former *Wentworth* star is one of three new cast members joining the six-episode second series of the Binge Australian original drama. The show, the most nominated drama at last year's Logies, also features Hugo Weaving, Bojana Novakovic, William Lodder, Kim Gynell and Eryn Jean Norvill.

Trump returns to Facebook

FORMER US president Donald Trump has written his first posts on Facebook and YouTube, more than two years after he was banned.

"I'M BACK," Trump exclaimed, alongside a video clip that appeared to show him giving his victory speech after winning the 2016 election saying: "Sorry to keep you waiting – complicated business." The platforms benched him days after the 2021 Capitol insurrection for posting content that they said had incited unrest.

PANEL UNCOVERS GIFTS, P17

Regional tourism cleans up at awards

ALEXANDRA MIDDLETON

VICTORIA'S regional areas have been recognised as leaders in the tourism sector, taking home 11 medals across 25 categories at the Australian Tourism Awards on Friday.

The Geelong Gallery nabbed a gold medal in the cultural tourism category, while the City of Greater Bendigo won best tourism marketing and campaign for its "Viva Ben-

digo" initiative. Ocean Grove bush cabins The Woods won gold for the best self-contained accommodation.

The Macedon Ranges Autumn Festival and the Dandenong Ranges Tesselaar Ka-Bloom flower festival snapped up silver medals in the festivals and events categories.

Back in the city, Urban Camp Melbourne won gold for the best 3 to 3½-star accommodation, while Centrepiece at

Melbourne Park won a silver medal for new tourism business.

Searoad Ferries, which takes passengers between Sorrento and Queenscliff, and the Tallawarra Homestead in Gippsland rounded out the Victorian silver medal winners, while Billson's Brewery and Bendigo Visitor Centre took home bronzes.

Victoria Tourism Industry Council chief executive Felicia Mariani said it was incredible to see the state recognised in such

a way. "To see 11 of the 25 gold winners from our Victorian Tourism Awards achieving status as gold, silver and bronze in this prestigious recognition of the best in show across Australia is just wonderful," she said.

Tourism, Sport and Major Events Minister Steve Dimopoulos said all nominated businesses deserved "praise and thanks" for their crucial role in cementing Victoria as a world-class tourism destination.

Aussie eagle a kangaroo killer

AN eagle that soared over southern Australia more than 60,000 years ago had a wingspan up to 3m and talons big enough to hold a kangaroo, according to new research.

It was the largest bird of prey to live on the continent, and probably the largest continental eagle globally.

The raptor was the top avian predator in the late Pleistocene period.

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