

State to outlaw Nazi salute

MITCH CLARKE

THE Nazi salute will be banned in Victoria as a result of neo-Nazis storming the steps of state parliament over the weekend to perform the offensive gesture.

Jewish organisations have welcomed the move, but warned a "broader approach" is needed to combat threats from the far right movement.

Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes revealed the Andrews government would fast-track plans to outlaw the public display of the salute.

On Saturday, a large group of masked men in black clothing gatecrashed an anti-transgender rally where they performed the gesture, which was used in Nazi Germany to signal obedience to and support for Adolf Hitler.

Last year, Victoria became the first Australian jurisdiction to outlaw the Nazi swastika.

Ms Symes said the Andrews government would expand that legislation to include the Nazi salute because "everyone deserves to feel safe, welcome and included in Victoria".

"The behaviour we saw on the weekend was disgraceful and cowardly," she said.

"It's clear this symbol is being used to incite hatred not just towards Jewish people but our LGBTIQ community and other minority groups.

"Victorians have zero tolerance of this behaviour and so do we.

"We'll look at how this can be done carefully, with considered consultation with a variety of groups, and will have more to say on the details of this legislation as we undertake that."

The laws are likely to pass parliament, with Opposition Leader John Pesutto declaring he is open to working with the

government. "We need to take this very seriously," he said.

Anti-Defamation Commission chairman Dvir Abramovich said the proposed law was a good step towards curbing the "disease of extremism".

"The passing of this law will be a resounding triumph for justice and a thunderous blow to the solar plexus of an angry neo-Nazi movement that will now realise that the law is no longer on its side," he said.

"Performing the Hitler salute is a call for murder, and for a Holocaust survivor, seeing it tears a hole in their heart and is as threatening as being held up with a gun."

Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation director David Slucki said a "broader approach" was required to combat the rise of the far right.

"Banning the Nazi salute will help to reduce the presence of Nazi symbolism in public places, but it will do little to eradicate Nazism, which thrives in online spaces," he said.

"These Nazis will continue to target vulnerable groups and it is incumbent on political and community leaders not to use those groups as political pawns, which only empowers them."

Jewish Community Council of Victoria president Daniel Aghion welcomed the move to ban the salute but also called for a "broader discussion about vilification of all minorities".

"It should not be lost in the debate that, on this occasion, the proximate target of this hateful conduct was transgender people and not Jews," he said.

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Neo-Nazis deliver their offensive salute at Saturday's anti-trans Let Women Speak rally on the steps of state parliament; (below) British activist Kellie-Jay Keen about to speak alongside Liberal MP Moira Deeming (left); and (inset) a "post event chat" between (from left) Moira Deeming, Kellie-Jay Keen, Katherine Deves and Angie Jones.

Moira Deeming is looking like Bernie Finn 2.0, and it could also

OPINION
SHANNON DEERY

WILL they ever learn?

The Victorian Liberals should have spent this week challenging the Andrews government on a range of corruption issues.

Instead, they will spend it talking about Moira Deeming and themselves.

Who knows what was going through the minds of those in

Liberal HQ when the statement announcing moves to expel Deeming was issued at 8.42pm on Sunday.

Until then there had been much discussion and media coverage of Saturday's Let Women Speak rally that was gatecrashed by a group of neo-Nazis. Almost none of it mentioned Deeming. But this is a party that has made an art form of focusing on itself.

The party's attention this

week should have been on prosecuting government corruption. On Wednesday, the upper house will vote to establish a select committee to investigate concerns of government corruption raised by former IBAC chief Robert Redlich.

Under the proposal, witnesses would be called in an attempt to prove claims of government interference in the parliament's Integrity and

Oversight Committee. Mr Redlich has explicitly accused the government of launching revenge attacks on IBAC in retaliation for a series of investigations into its dealings.

The opposition needs seven votes to get the motion over the line. It is confident it has the support of the four Greens, meaning there are just three more needed. One Nation's Ricki-Lee Tyrrell has said she will support "any inquiry into

alleged corruption within our governing bodies". That leaves just two more votes. It shouldn't be hard.

It will be the first major test of the new upper house that has lost government-friendly MPs in Fiona Patten and Andy Meddick.

Pesutto's problem is that even if Deeming is booted from the parliamentary wing of the party, sources say there's no appetite to expel her

from the broader party.

Whatever you think of her views, Deeming enjoys a vast amount of grassroots support.

Booting her from the party won't eradicate that support, or the views of those inclined to offer that support. This is a broader Liberal brand issue that Pesutto is taking on.

Having won the party leadership by a single vote in December, he has now set a huge test of his own



NOT TAKING A BACK SEAT



Moira Deeming

The anti-abortion crusader replaced controversial MP Bernie Finn in the upper house seat of the Western Metropolitan Region at last year's election after he was expelled from the party. The former Melton City councillor and teacher was at the centre of another controversy after explosive emails she sent between 2020 and 2022 were released under Freedom of Information. In them, she expressed a fervent opposition to the LGBTQBTQ+ community, in particular the transgender rights movement.

Kellie-Jay Keen-Minshull aka Posie Parker

Prominent British anti-transgender activist who founded the organisation Standing for Women. Ms Parker has appeared in a video with French Canadian white nationalist Jean-François Gariépy, who has previously had former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke appear on his YouTube channel. It's understood Parker claimed she didn't know they were members of the far-right movement.

Katherine Deves

Failed federal Liberal candidate who has harboured ultra

conservative views on transgender people. Ms Deves has previously described trans teenagers as "surgically mutilated".

Angie Jones

Self-proclaimed women's rights activist. Organiser of the Let Women Speak rally on March 18. Ms Jones recently posted on Twitter that "Nazis and women want to get rid of paedo filth. Why don't you?" in response to a social media user who suggested that neo-Nazis attended the rally because they agreed with anti-transgender activists. Ms Jones later said her tweet had been taken out of context and that she did not support Nazis.

Risky bid to expel sitting MP

Opposition leadership on the line

SHANNON DEERY
MITCH CLARKE

OPPOSITION Leader John Pesutto could face calls to resign himself if he loses a bid to expel controversial MP Moira Deeming from the Liberal party room.

In his boldest move since taking over the leadership in December, Mr Pesutto will bring on a vote to have Ms Deeming expelled from the party room after she attended a rally on the steps of parliament on Saturday that was crashed by neo-Nazis.

Mr Pesutto said the decision to expel her had nothing to do with the transgender debate, but concerned her association with extremists.

He said he could not accept that Ms Deeming did not know the organisers of the Let Women Speak event had links with neo-Nazis and white supremacists.

"I just can't satisfy that Moira didn't know," he said.

"It wasn't just that Moira had escorted organisers through the precinct of parliament. It wasn't just that Moira stayed at the protest when Nazis turned up. It was the celebration that you can see on social media afterwards, which tells you perhaps all you need to know about why it's necessary to bring this motion.

"It's saying that 'I am prepared to associate with those people and not take the opportunity to walk away from them despite the odious things they have shared'.

"Any question of an association, even indirectly, to Nazis, white supremacists, ethno-fascists or whatever else, is so odious in 2023, as it should be, that I can't see a way back."

But the move has split the



Opposition Leader John Pesutto during Question Time.

party, with some sources confident the motion to expel Ms Deeming could be defeated in a move that would be a huge blow to Mr Pesutto's authority.

Some party figures backing the move also fear it may not have enough support. "It's close, but there are unexpected opposers," one source said.

Several party sources said if the motion was defeated, Mr Pesutto's position would be untenable.

It is understood Liberal Party members spent Monday lobbying Mr Pesutto to abandon the move.

However, others threw their full support behind the leader, saying it was a clear sign he was serious about reforming the party.

A dossier of evidence has been compiled by party officials.

"I don't think the opposers have understood the severity of this," one source said.

Ms Deeming has vowed to fight the move.

"I condemn the actions of the masked men in black who were later identified as neo-Nazis, who gatecrashed the Let Women Speak event," she said.

"Most of the LWS support-

ers did not realise who they were until they were being escorted out by Victoria Police when they did the despicable Nazi salute.

"I completely reject the beliefs of National Socialists (Nazis) and I have seen firsthand the impact that the Holocaust had on a family member.

"None of those organising the event had any involvement with these men."

The move to expel Ms Deeming cannot be put to the party room before Friday, because five days' notice must be given.

It is expected the vote could be held early next week.

Mr Pesutto said he was confident he would have the support of his party room, but added that "every day is a test of leadership".

"I would consider it a great failure of leadership if I didn't take this action," he said.

"It will be for the party room alone, and each member of the party room, to make a decision.

"I'm confident it will pass but I'm also respectful of the fact that they will decide the answer to that."

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be John Pesutto's make-or-break moment

leadership. Just a month ago Pesutto was throwing his support behind Deeming.

The party knew what it was getting with Deeming, complete with ultra-conservative views on topics such as abortion and trans rights. Some Liberals dubbed her "Bernie without a penis" – a crude reference to the man she replaced in the upper house. Finn was a thorn in the side of the Liberals for years,

flitting nonchalantly between controversies.

Both former leaders – Matthew Guy and Michael O'Brien – had been eager on more than one occasion to boot him from the party.

But they knew it came with grave political risk. The last thing any leader wants to do is to take a stance and then be seen to be weak when they can't follow through.

When Finn broke party

ranks to call for a winding back of abortion laws last May, Guy bit the bullet. After giving Finn an ultimatum to fall into line or leave the party, Guy ultimately backed a push to expel him from the party.

Pesutto has bitten the bullet early, keen to avoid a Bernie 2.0 situation. It's also clear he's keen to send a strong message he's reforming the Liberal Party, and able to make the tough decisions to do it. You

can't do that by saying it, you need to live it.

More moderate Liberals firmly believe Pesutto had no choice but to act in an attempt to appeal to mainstream Victorians who oppose Deeming's views.

It could hurt him. It might even kill him. But Pesutto has picked the hill he's willing to die on.

SHANNON DEERY IS STATE POLITICS EDITOR



Bernie Finn caused headaches for former leader Matt Guy.