

Scott Morrisons' Authoritarian Streak: Crushing Anti-Mining Protest in Australia

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*The Prime Minister of Australia is fuming. Having made his mark on Australian politics by being the mining sector's most avid defender, **Scott Morrison** was disturbed by the week's events in Melbourne that saw clashes between police and protesters outside the [sixth annual international mining and resources conference](#).*

It made sense for the protesters to kick up a fuss at the big ticket event. IMARC, as [the site states](#), "is where the global mining leaders connect with technology, finance and the future. It is Australia's largest mining event bringing together over 7,000 decision makers, mining leaders, policy makers, investors, commodity buyers, technical experts, innovators and educators from over 100 countries to Melbourne for four days of learning, deal-making and unparalleled networking."

The [welcoming note](#) from Victorian **Premier Daniel Andrews** was enthusiastic and distinctly not green in colouring. This was a chance to celebrate what Australians do best; no, not sustainable energy, nor technologies of ecological soundness, but boast "world class talent in the resources field", "a sector that continues to grow and provide jobs for many Victorians, especially in country areas." The Australian economy was inseparable from the resources sector, "creating jobs and driving investment".

An ideal opportunity had presented itself for climate change protesters who converged on the Melbourne Convention Centre. By the third day, the patience of the cordoning police had worn thin. The blood was rushing, the red haze had descended. Batons and capsicum spray were deployed. Over sixty protesters were arrested. "I haven't seen this kind of aggression before," [observed](#) Emma Black, a self-proclaimed seasoned veteran of the protest scene. Channel 7 journalist Paul Dowsley was [more than bemused](#) by being jostled by officers. "Incredible. I was obeying their direction to move to another area. I'm stunned."

The [response](#) from Victoria Police was dismissive: "In this case, the reporter involved did not follow police instructions to move away from the area. This was a safety issue and Victoria Police believes an appropriate amount of force was used to move the reporter from the area."

On Thursday, the anti-mining protesters turned their attention to the PwC's Southbank offices. The conduct on the part of officers preventing disruptions to arriving delegates had been zealous enough to pique the interest of the Professional Standards Committee. In the [words](#) of a police spokesman, "Protesters have raised several concerns in relation to the

police response during the protest. These concerns have been noted and are being assessed by our Professional Standards Committee.”

A sense about where that investigation will go can be gathered by the next remark. “A number of groups have engaged in more deliberate tactics including blocking disabled access... and ignored police directions. These protesters have been dealt with swiftly and effectively by the police.”

Another police statement addressing the second day of the blockade [stressed that](#), “Whilst we respect the rights of people to peacefully protest, the unlawful action taken today is a drain on police resources from across the greater Melbourne.

The protesters proved sufficiently disruptive for Prime Minister Morrison to suggest a dark force at work: the “Quiet Australian”, that fictional confection he never tires of, is under siege. But what from?

In a speech to the Queensland Resources Council on Friday, Morrison suggested that a “new breed of radical activism” was harrying those in mining and businesses associated with it. “I am very concerned about this new form of progressivism... intended to get in under the radar but [which] at its heart would deny the liberties of Australians.” This breed of activism was “apocalyptic in tone, brooks no compromise, all or nothing, alternative views not permitted – a dogma that pits cities against regional Australia, one that cannot resist sneering at wealth creating and job creating industries, and the livelihoods particularly of regional Australians including here in Queensland.” The wedge politician par excellence.

Morrison was a touch too keen to inflate the level of threat posed by such groups, who are “targeting businesses of all sizes, including small businesses, like contracting businesses in regional Queensland.” This was far more serious than a “street protest”. (The distinction in Australian law and policy is rarely made, in any case.)

His suggestion was as simple as it was authoritarian: protesters seeking to disrupt the chain of supply should be punished as saboteurs. They, he stressed, were the undemocratic ones, the silencers. His government, [he explained](#) on Melbourne radio 3AW, had “already taken action against their cousins who want to invade farms and we put legislation through to protect our farmers from that type of economic vandalism.” Instead of taking credit for having sparked interest in such protests, indifferent as he is to those obscene and rarely said words “climate change”, he was going to take credit for crushing the dissent, putting the outrage to bed.

It was enough to [disturb](#) Katharine Murphy of *The Guardian*. “As he rails against activism, Scott Morrison is turning a bit sinister, a bit threatening.” The prime minister [had treated](#) Australians to a spectacle of complaint “against intolerance while in the same breath foreshadowing his own bout of government sanctioned intolerance – the type where police might be involved, and people might be bundled away in vans.”

As in other countries where fossil fuels and natural resources reign, Australia is hamstrung, an aspiring banana republic in the deceptive guise of a first world country. Environmental pressure to alter their influence is not just seen as a matter of dissent but a threat. To go green is to turn gangrenous. To worry about environmental ruin and human causes is to be, in Morrison’s view, “indulgent and selfish” rather than responsible and cognisant. A true upending of logic, and a potentially imperilling one. Rather than confronting it, Morrison’s

solution is drawn from the tradition and precedent of history: to protect resource industries, call in the police.

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