

Victoria Police Use of Anti-riot Weapons Condemned

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Asia-Pacific Research, October 21, 2021
[Green Left](#) 30 September 2021

Region: [Oceania](#)

Theme: [Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

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Criticism of the Victorian Police’s use of non-lethal weapons against anti-vax and anti-lockdown protesters is growing.

Police first deployed non-lethal weapons in August and have more recently used them against protesters, including at the War Memorial on September 22.

The non-lethal weapons include foam baton rounds, which are foam-tipped bullets deployed from a semi-automatic rifle, and pepper balls, cylindrical balls containing an irritant powder that is dispersed on impact.

Victoria Police used a semi-automatic weapon to shoot these, as well as pellets containing dye, to be able to identify the person for arrest.

Stinger grenades are also being used. These are rolled into a crowd to explode with light and smoke, also releasing nine rubber bullets that disperse to waist height with a range of five metres.

Sue Bolton, Socialist Alliance councillor on Moreland City Council, condemned the use of these weapons, saying the party opposes police using such weapons at any protest.

“The police have a record of using extreme violence against protesters, especially those who can be portrayed as unpopular, to try to get public support for their operations, which include more lethal weapons”, she told *Green Left*.

“We don’t support the anti-vaccination/anti-lockdown protests, but neither do we support police violence against protests.”

While some anti-vaccination/anti-lockdown protesters were violent, instances of unprovoked police violence were also witnessed.

A video of an unprovoked take-down of a protester at Flinders Street Station on September 22 showed excessive force being used by police. The offending officer is under investigation and has been stood down pending the investigation.

Other extraordinary measures taken by police include stopping public transport to central Melbourne between 8am and 2pm on September 18.

This is not the first time. In 2016, the police stopped tram services heading to Coburg in an effort to prevent people attending an [anti-racism rally](#), organised by Bolton along with local residents.

On September 22, police instructed the [Civil Aviation Safety Authority](#) to temporarily declare the airspace over the protesters a “restricted zone”. The reason given was that the protesters may be able to monitor aerial live-streams and compromise police operations, thereby posing a “safety risk”.

The decision was reversed after journalists questioned whether police wanted to avoid scrutiny of their interactions with protesters.

There is little public sympathy for the anti-vaccination/anti-lockdown protesters and the police are pushing to justify their use of such weapons against the public. [Former Victoria Police riot squad head Jeff Mawkes](#) told the *Herald Sun* on September 24 that police should be able to use water cannons, and more, on the anti-vaccination and anti-lockdown protesters. “Sometimes you’ve got to think outside the square ... My gut feeling is to bring out the tear gas and give it to them.”

The police have other crowd dispersal weapons, such as the controversial long range acoustic device weapon, which emits a high-frequency sound that temporarily disables those in its vicinity by causing nausea and hearing impairment.

“Right now, Victoria Police is using weapons on a group of people with little public sympathy. But they have a history of using violence against peaceful protesters, such as the Blockade IMARC rally in 2019”, Bolton said.

“After lockdown and as inequality rises, it is likely that the police will deploy the same weapons against people protesting against the end of the disaster payment, for a higher rate of JobSeeker or for real action on the climate. We need to say no to the state government’s creeping militarisation of the police.”

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Featured image: Police at Northcote Plaza on September 24. Photo: Still from @therealrukshan

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