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# Media Beat-ups

## Newspapers and Television at the S11 Protests

The satirical film *Wag the Dog* (Barry Levinson, 1997) has shown how 'spin-doctors' can manipulate the public's knowledge of national issues. Something similar, on a smaller scale, happened in real life in Australia in the year 2000. Students of media will find

Inside the complex was a private meeting for eight hundred corporate high-rollers, convened by the World Economic Forum (WEF), which is a non-government organization representing the world's global corporations. Outside, on the surrounding streets,

tion of working conditions; and the downgrading of education, health and community services.

From early 2000, the protest convenors (a temporary coalition of diverse organizations with the umbrella label 'S11 Alliance') resolved to use



it interesting to compare how various news outlets reported the S11 protests, which were held outside Melbourne's Crown Casino complex for three days beginning on the 11th of September.

were thousands of citizens, protesting against corporate-led globalization. Their grievances included: the growth of non-elected, unaccountable global corporations, richer and more powerful than many governments; the downsizing of employment; the deregula-

non-violent tactics because, they said, any violence would detract from their cause. They held workshops about how to protest peacefully.

In June, newspapers began publishing regular stories about the proposed protest, building up an expectation of violence. For six months, I collected all S11 stories from Melbourne's two local daily newspapers – Rupert Murdoch's mass-circulation tabloid *Herald Sun* and the more 'upmarket' Fairfax-owned broadsheet, *The Age* – in order to compare their coverage. I also videotaped news bulletins on five Melbourne television stations, to see if newspaper stories and television

at first, became neutral after police used batons to injure protesters and news photographers on the 12th of September.

In television news bulletins, the scripts were generally anti-protester but the accompanying visual footage did not support the scripted claims about 'violent protesters.' Television showed substantial footage of police punching and kicking civilians but no footage of any civilians punching or kicking the police. In general, the TV footage of

trade unionists during demonstrations on the Melbourne docks in April 1998 (*The Age*, 16th September, 2000). Furthermore, the police officers' union had an interest in emphasizing the 'dangers' of duty at the WEF protests. The Police Association lodged an industrial claim in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission for two extra days off, which could be redeemed in cash, for officers working at the WEF (*Herald Sun*, 6th September, 2000).

The stories often mentioned a

Herald Sun, 11 September 2000

# FORUM FORT

## Summit security tightens in city

By MARK DUNN, MARK BUTTLER and MIKE EDMONDS

CROWN casino and parts of central Melbourne have been turned into a fortress as the World Economic Forum begins today amid fears of violent protests.

Three-metre steel and concrete fences surround the forum venue and nearly 2000 police are enforcing a protest exclusion zone.

Hundreds of one-store barricades, used to create the F1 Grand Prix track at Albert Park, were installed around the casino in a pre-dawn operation.

More than half of the state's police – 5000 officers – are on duty should violence flare.

Yesterday, police were out in force at city hotels including the Sheraton Towers, Grand Hyatt, Westin, and the Hilton, as international business and govern-



Out in force: police on duty at Crown yesterday behind a three-metre concrete and steel fence. Pictures: PHIL WEYMOUTH

scripts about 'protester violence' were supported by evidence in the television footage.

From June 2000, the *Herald Sun* campaigned persistently against the proposed protest, insisting that it would be violent. 'Police Fear Protest Riots,' said a typical *Herald Sun* headline on the 10th of June, labelling the protest 'violent' long before it took place. Rupert Murdoch's Sydney-based national broadsheet daily, *The Australian*, was anti-protester but not as fiercely as the *Herald Sun*. *The Age*, although critical of the protesters

the 11th-13th of September supported the moderate account eventually given by *The Age*, not the *Herald Sun*'s more partisan version.

### Pre-emptive Tactics

The media stories before the 11th of September usually involved input from the Victoria Police media office or the police officers' union. Dr David Baker, lecturer in criminal justice at Monash University, has pointed out that the Victoria Police wanted to perform well at the WEF because they had been criticized for 'caving in' to

huge protest that was held outside a meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle, USA, in November 1999. Police Superintendent Peter Halloran said Victorian police 'had been in contact with their Seattle counterparts' to prepare for the WEF meeting (*The Age*, 4th of June, 2000). Thus, American advice was available to the Victoria Police about how to outsmart the protesters.

Meanwhile, several other large protests were occurring in the United States throughout 2000, outside the Republican and Democratic party



conventions and at meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. American protesters claim that police and corporate interests pre-empted these protests by planting media stories about 'violent protesters', thereby preparing public opinion for a brutal crackdown by 'riot' police.

In August 2000, during protests in Philadelphia, American environmental activist Tim Ream wrote: 'Mass media and public perceptions are being systematically manipulated by police departments and other government agencies faced with upcoming mass protests in their cities. These manipulations are designed to squelch protest and thereby the message of dissent'. Ream described how U.S. police departments have 'released videos of protests from other cities, held meetings with individual media organizations and created a mythic notion of an organization dedicated to violence'. (This article is available at: [http://www.la.indymedia.org/display.php3?article\\_id=543](http://www.la.indymedia.org/display.php3?article_id=543))

Similarly, in Melbourne in August and early September 2000, all TV channels showed footage from the Seattle protests. This footage, however, depicted violence by the police, not the protesters – for example: police firing tear-gas at citizens, police roughly dragging a limp citizen along the ground, police hitting citizens with batons and police kicking a bystander's bicycle. This footage looked like a riot by the police, not by citizens.

On the 21st of August the *Herald Sun* published the first of several stories speculating that protesters would throw urine at the police. It said: 'Police may refuse to guard Melbourne's World Economic Forum next month, fearing they will be bombarded with blood and urine'. On the 28th of August, the *Herald Sun*'s Andrew Bolt referred to previous demonstrations where 'police said they had urine thrown over them'. On the same date, conservative commentator Imre Salusinszky wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that the S11 protesters 'may choose to spray police with their own urine'. On the 31st of August, Bolt speculated that protest-

ers would be armed with marbles. If marbles are rolled in large quantities, he wrote, police horses are unable to walk. Stories about urine and marbles were to become a constant theme in the *Herald Sun*.

On Saturday the 9th of September the *Herald Sun*'s front page (headed 'Police Vow to Stop S11 Violence') said that 'fire and ambulance crews have been instructed to be ready for any threat from radical protesters, including arson and chemical attacks'. On Monday the 11th of September, the *Herald Sun* claimed that 'radical demonstrators have vowed to scale barricades and break the police cordon';



Batons versus flowers

although the protest convenors had already said this was not on their agenda.

In early September *The Age*, *The Australian* and ABC radio featured some discussion about corporate globalization but the *Herald Sun* neglected this aspect of the event. Radio talkback hosts followed the *Herald Sun*'s lead and treated S11 purely as an outbreak of criminal violence and traffic snarls. One of these hosts was not aware until September that 'S11' was short for September 11.

The S11 protests were aimed against some of the world's largest corporations, causing them concern. The national daily *Australian Financial Review* (29th of August) reported that

one of the world's largest public relations firms, Hill and Knowlton, was 'offering WEF-related crisis management services' to Australian corporations. Hill and Knowlton confirmed that it had circulated a 'background brief' to clients about S11. This brief stated incorrectly that the 1999 Seattle protest occurred outside a meeting of the World Economic Forum, when in fact it was the World Trade Organization. It said: 'The last WEF [sic] meeting held in Seattle, Washington State, US, from the 29th of November to the 3rd of December last year resulted in serious rioting and civil disobedience'. It is interesting that the same mistake

was later repeated in newspapers. An editorial in *The Australian* on the 12th of September said: 'Melbourne's demonstrators have followed the lead of those at WEF [sic] meetings in Seattle and Davos, Switzerland. A front-page story in *The Sunday Age* (10th of September) also referred to 'violence at the WEF [sic] meeting in Seattle last year'.

Before and during S11, newspapers published anti-protester articles by writers who are associated with two privately funded pro-corporate think-tanks: the Institute of Public Affairs (in Melbourne) and the Centre for Independent Studies (in Sydney). A conservative organization called 'Free Trade Youth' announced on its

web site in early September that it would 'wag[e] a counter-protest' at the WEF meeting. Rupert Murdoch's News Limited web site reported on the 6th of September that 'opponents of S11, Free Trade Youth, were planning to hand out several thousand anti-protest leaflets at metropolitan train stations' on the 11th of September. The leaflets urged the public to 'oppose the violence at the World Economic Forum', even though the WEF meeting had not yet occurred.

With all these predictions of violence, the counter-protesters (including the tabloid press, television and talk-radio) needed to be able to report violence on the 11th-13th of September to prove that their predictions were right.

### Monday's Events

By Monday the 11th of September, the Casino complex was surrounded by 3-metre concrete-and-wire barricades, with only about a dozen openings, guarded by two thousand police, including a troop of mounted police and a squad of paramilitary 'special operations' police, the Force Response Unit (FRU). The gateways were reminiscent of Checkpoint Charlie in the Berlin Wall.

The protesters, who crowded around all the gateways, had their own public stage and public-address system, erected on public land opposite the Casino's east end.

News photographers and television camera crews were stationed inside and outside the complex, and the various outlets pooled or exchanged footage and photographs, so that all locations were covered.

Summing up Monday's events, Tuesday's *Age* referred to 'the largely peaceful crowd' and said: 'Despite a crowd estimated at 10,000, violence was isolated'. Similarly, in Tuesday's *Australian*, reporter Elizabeth Wynaugh described Monday as largely peaceful. She added: 'In fact the TV focus on confrontation left out the atmosphere of much of the World Economic Forum blockade, a sort of carnival of the Left'. The Perth *West*



*Australian*, the only metropolitan daily not owned by Murdoch of Fairfax, said that Monday 'was essentially peaceful' and added: 'At times it took on the atmosphere of a carnival – music, dancing, group hugs and bubble bath in the fountain at the Casino's main entrance'.

The main exception to the peaceful day was an incident involving two conservative politicians – West Australian Liberal Party premier Richard Court and Victorian Liberal Party leader Denis Napthine – who were delegates to the WEF meeting. Police had instructed all delegates to arrive by bus, helicopter or boat and not individually by car. Court and Napthine ignored this directive and, after 9am, they obliged the media by arriving (separately) by car. Each tried to drive into the crowd but the crowd was too dense. Napthine gave up and

soon left to give media interviews about his brave ordeal but Court remained in his stationary car as TV cameras recorded the scene. Court, as a premier, provided the 'better' story.

TV footage showed Court, uninjured, sitting quietly inside his car, with the window closed, as the crowd heckled him. Someone deflated the car's tyres. An Aboriginal demonstrator from Western Australia stood on the car's roof, denouncing Court's record on land rights and the mandatory jailing of Aborigines. Finally, FRU police arrived and cleared a path for Court to retreat. All TV channels showed footage of FRU police hitting people with batons and also footage of police horses charging into the crowd. There was no footage of civilians punching or hitting police.

The Court incident, together with other crowd scenes, dominated



Monday evening's TV bulletins. At last, the media had the 'violence' that it had promised. The TV scripts talked about 'violent protests' but the accompanying footage was inappropriate. For example, in the opening seconds of the Channel Nine bulletin, during the theme music, the newsreader began reciting the headline: 'Violence at the Crown Complex ...' – but this was illustrated by footage of a police officer punching a civilian on the head. Nine's script stated: 'Up to 10,000 protesters fought with police on the barricades around the Crown Casino today'. But this 'fighting' claim was not supported by Nine's accompanying footage – the punches, blows and kicks depicted were all from the police, not from the protesters.

Furthermore, Monday's 'noisy crowd' footage on all TV channels was mostly from the Casino's western entrances. The channels neglected to show quiet scenes at all the other entrances or at other times. ABC-TV's 7pm news said: 'There has been little trouble this afternoon [as distinct from this morning]. Tonight the protesters are in party mode [footage of dancing and singing]'. Despite this report of a largely quiet day, the ABC producers ended their bulletin (during the closing theme music) by re-showing footage of police assaulting civilians with batons and horses. This finale gave the impression that it had been 'a day of violence'.

Although Monday's footage showed no civilian hitting the police, there was evidence of a policeman being hit, inadvertently, by a colleague's baton. This was in freelance footage, shown on Channel Nine's 'Sunday' programme on the 17th of September. In this, several rows of police, with batons lashing out indiscriminately, were attacking a crowd, but a policeman in a rear row was striking out so enthusiastically that his baton landed on a colleague in front of him.

### 'Shameful' Scenes in the *Herald Sun*

Tuesday morning's *Herald Sun* triumphantly demonstrated that its

'violence' predictions had come true. The paper had a one-word banner headline: 'SHAMEFUL'. This story began: 'Ugly protests forced Crown Casino to shut last night as the World Economic Forum was held hostage to violence'. Across pages 2 and 3, the *Herald Sun* had another banner headline: 'Mob Rule Causes Chaos'. The accompanying story referred to 'an ugly outbreak of violence', 'a wave of vandalism', 'several ugly episodes' and 'violence flaring'. The *Herald Sun* stories relied largely on the Premier Court incident. Whereas *The Age* gave the incident one paragraph on page 1 and one on page 8, the *Herald Sun* ran it at much greater length on pages 1, 2, 18 and 19.

Regarding Premier Court's flat tyres, the *Herald Sun* stories claimed that the tyres [plural] 'were slashed'. Unfortunately, this claim was negated by an adjoining photo of someone removing a tyre valve, with a caption saying that a protester 'lets down the premier's car tyre'. The *Herald Sun* had no photo of a slashed tyre. Regarding the Aborigine, Ian Wyatt-Ring, twenty-nine, who made a speech from atop Premier Court's car, the *Herald Sun*'s presentation implied that Wyatt-Ring was merely engaging in hooligan-type behaviour, rather than protesting on significant national issues.

In other media outlets, police deputy commissioner Neil O'Loughlin declared that Premier Court and Denis Napthine had been 'foolish' to take their own cars to the Casino. The *Herald Sun* omitted this. All other media outlets quoted O'Loughlin as saying: 'There has been minimal disruption to the conference'. The *Herald Sun* also omitted this.

O'Loughlin admitted that many police had removed their name-tags on Monday and that this was against police regulations. The *Herald Sun* suppressed any mention of the name-tags. O'Loughlin promised that all police would wear their name-tags on the next two days; this promise was not kept.

The *Herald Sun* published a photo showing several young protesters

wearing scarves across their mouths – these protesters were presented as being unidentifiable and unaccountable. The same photo showed a friendly-looking police officer who, unlike many of his colleagues, happened to be wearing his name-tag – i.e. he was identifiable and accountable. This photo is the opposite of reality. In fact, the TV footage showed hardly any protesters wearing scarves or masks but numerous police without name-tags. (According to the *West Australian*, the scarves could serve as makeshift gas-masks if, as the Melbourne media expected, the police attacked protesters with capsicum spray or tear gas. The protesters' web site [<http://www.s11.org>] advised protesters that, if such an attack occurred, the scarves would be more effective if soaked with vinegar.)

Whereas all other media outlets were unanimous in estimating Monday's crowd at about 10,000, the *Herald Sun* gave estimates of only 1500 to 6000. On page 5, the *Herald Sun*'s John Hamilton continued the attack on the protesters. He referred to 'clowns', 'bozos', 'an ill-assorted rabble', 'thugs', 'biff and bover boys', 'Loonyville', 'human ferals', 'unwashed dreadlocks' and 'a crazy circus'. On page 18, a *Herald Sun* editorial repeated the various allegations about 'protester violence' from the earlier pages (there was, however, an admission here that Premier Court's tyres were merely 'let down', not slashed). Beside the editorial was an article contributed by Des Moore, director of the pro-corporate 'Institute for Private Enterprise' (Melbourne), attacking the protesters and defending 'free' market policies. There was no article giving an alternative to Moore's pro-corporations view. On page 19, journalist Andrew Bolt reiterated what he had been writing for weeks, that the protest 'was always going to be violent'.

### The Story of an Ambulance

The media obtained much of their information about the protests through public relations handouts. It is interesting to examine a news

story that the Metropolitan Ambulance Service (MAS) gave to radio on Monday morning. MAS commander Paul Holman has since told me how this story originated. He said the MAS had established an ambulance centre inside the Casino to cater for Casino staff, WEF delegates, police and the public but it neglected to place any resources outside the barricades. With Monday's dense crowds, the MAS had difficulty getting ambulances and paramedics in and out of the Casino. About 9.30am a paramedic took an ambulance to a patient (a member of the public, Holman said) in Clarendon Street. The paramedic was 'roughed up' in the crush, and someone in the crowd stole the keys to his ambulance. Holman phoned talk-radio hosts and related

*Australian* bothered to mention the ambulance story, but it became a major point on the *Herald Sun* front page: 'Protesters [plural] also attempted to disrupt paramedics by stealing the keys of an ambulance'. The same information was repeated, in a longer form, on page 3; this stated that 'the paramedic had been called by protesters to treat somebody at the scene when he was pushed and shoved by the surge of people'. A few pages later, in the paper's editorial, the incident had escalated. The injured civilian suddenly became a police officer and the 'surge of people' became a cowardly assault. The editorial said: 'Law-abiding citizens will not forgive the cowards who attacked a paramedic who was treating an injured policeman'.

Throughout Monday, the media pursued the office of Victorian Labor premier Steve Bracks. Was the premier going to tolerate this 'violence' or was he going to show leadership? Bracks took the tabloid view and, that evening, he authorized police to 'crack down' on the protesters the next day.

## Tuesday's Events

Early on Tuesday, about fifty protesters assembled quietly at a vehicle gateway at the Casino's east end. TV footage showed them sitting passively on the pavement, with their backs to the police, because (as they explained later) they did not wish to be accused of abusing or assaulting the police. At 7am, this group was suddenly attacked by baton-wielding FRU police. The



Police, with name-tags removed, leap from the barricade onto the crowd, Tuesday evening

this incident on air. The protest marshals promptly guaranteed better access for the MAS, solving the problem. As for the missing keys, Holman told me that another set of keys was readily available and the ambulance went on its way.

TV news had also obtained footage of Holman's statement and this was shown in the evening bulletins, even though the need for the MAS public relations tactic was now less urgent. On Tuesday neither *The Age* nor *The*

The paper's Andrew Bolt continued this theme in his article on page 19: 'So this is what a "non-violent" protest ... looks like. It means sending two police to hospital. It means roughing up a paramedic who tries to help one [i.e. a policeman], and stealing the keys to his ambulance'. Thus, a public relations release from the ambulance service took on a life of its own in the *Herald Sun*, preparing public opinion for punitive action against the 'cowardly' protesters.

police wore large 'riot' helmets and plastic visors – for the first time ever at a Victorian protest. This made their faces unrecognizable. And most police had removed their name-tags from their jackets, thereby becoming unaccountable. This protected individual officers from complaints.

The TV footage showed the FRU police trampling over the seated civilians from behind, kicking and punching heads and bodies, knocking people to the ground, dragging people along



by the hair, hitting people with batons and smashing a news photographer's camera. Meanwhile, mounted police surrounded the protesters, preventing any escape from the FRU attack. Channel Nine's reporter said: 'Those in the path of the baton-wielding force had nowhere to run.'

In Channel Nine footage, a policeman raises his baton high above his head and then swings it down towards the head of a standing civilian; a 'cracking' noise is clearly audible on the soundtrack. Hitting someone in this manner is contrary to directions given by the suppliers of police batons in the United States. (See <http://www.policebatons.com/mptc/uof3.html>.) Channel Nine showed an FRU man ramming the end of his baton at a photographer's chest, knocking the man and his camera to the ground. Again, there were no pictures of any civilian hitting a police officer. No police were injured in this incident but Channel Two said eleven protesters were taken to hospital and another fifty required first aid at the scene.

The police had given these fifty citizens no forewarning about this baton-charge and had not directed them to move. Victoria Police regulations restrict officers to using only 'reasonable' (that is, minimum) force to make an arrest or to prevent a crime. This attack resulted in no arrests or charges. At worst, the citizens were obstructing a vehicle thoroughfare; the lawful penalty for this is perhaps a fine, not a thrashing. Punishments are supposed to be administered by the courts, not by police. And corporal punishment is not normally practised in Victoria.

## More Batons

By 6pm on Tuesday, many protesters had departed, leaving several gateways deserted. Channel Nine News said: 'There are bands playing. It has taken on something of a party atmosphere.' After 7.30pm, under darkness, the FRU police ran from the Casino and carried out another, more ferocious, baton-charge against a remain-

ing group of about one hundred people standing at a gateway. The TV footage again showed police (again with helmets and visors, mostly without name-tags) hitting people on the head with batons, punching people, knocking them to the ground and kicking them.

This time, the police also targeted news photographers, especially TV crews using lights. SBS-TV showed how its cameraman was attacked from behind by police wielding batons. His footage showed the police advancing on him, then threatening him, before assaulting him, as his camera fell to the ground, still filming. Cameramen from Channel Seven, Reuters, *The Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* were bashed by police during this attack. Wednesday's *Age* reported these as-



A policeman leaps onto the crowd, Tuesday evening. Photo: Wade Laub

saults and added: 'Earlier in the day [Tuesday], *Herald Sun* photographer Trevor Pinder reported that he had camera gear smashed by a uniformed policeman when he tried to take a picture of a group of plain-clothes men – either security or police – dragging a young woman by the hair inside the barricades, where, he said, she and others were roughed up'. The journalists' union urged its injured members to take civil action against the Victoria Police.

Not a word about this *Herald Sun* photographer (or any other media casualties) appeared in Wednesday morning's *Herald Sun*. The only men-

tion of news media being assaulted was in a report by John Hamilton – and he claimed these attacks were made by protesters, not police. Hamilton wrote: 'Among the [protesters'] targets yesterday was the media – now accused [by the protesters] of telling lies because it is exposing the truth. Reporters, photographers and cameramen were abused and jostled [by the protesters]'. Unfortunately for the *Herald Sun*, TV channels showed footage of the police attacking the media.

Media outlets said that about seventy protesters were injured in Tuesday's two big baton charges, including twenty-four who were taken to hospital. ABC News said no police required treatment. Again, no arrests were made during Tuesday's baton

attacks. Judging by TV footage, both baton attacks look like a riot by the FRU police, aided by the mounted police and others, not a riot by civilians.

Wednesday's *Herald Sun* implied that the baton attacks occurred while the protesters were throwing missiles. It claimed: 'The second day of violence began as protesters threw rocks, ball-bearings and nails at police'. In fact, however, Tuesday began with a baton attack, not the throwing of anything.

The *Herald Sun* also alleged that protesters (plural) 'poured urine over police', thereby implying that this offence was widespread. The paper's presentation leaves the impression that

the injured civilians had been throwing urine at police. No other media outlet mentioned urine.

Premier Steve Bracks, questioned by the media, repeatedly defended the baton attacks, saying the police did 'an outstanding job' while the injured citizens 'deserved everything they got'. On the 5th of October, a Labor member of Federal Parliament, Harry Quick (Tasmania), denounced Bracks in Parliament:

Bracks praised police for an 'absolutely outstanding' job on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September. What part did he find outstanding? The unannounced baton charge? The failure of police to wear identification? The inability of protestors to identify police and hold them accountable for their actions? The response to alleged individual acts of violence by protestors with violence against the demonstration as a whole?

## Wednesday's Events

At midday on Wednesday, thousands of protesters left the Casino precinct for a 'victory march' through Melbourne's central business district as the climax of the protests. An Australian Associated Press story at 2.54pm (on the News Ltd web site) said: 'There were no incidents in the peaceful march'. Thursday's *Herald Sun* used much the same material as the AAP story but omitted the information that 'there were no incidents in the peaceful march'. Instead, the *Herald Sun* reported the march in a more sinister tone, saying that protesters 'threatened to ransack Melbourne's city centre' and they 'marched through the city threatening damage'.

AAP's 2.54pm story, containing quotes from deputy commissioner O'Loughlin, alleged: 'A bag of marbles was taken off a protester this morning'. This AAP story affirms that these marbles were confiscated, in a bag, not thrown. However, for the benefit of the evening TV news, the marbles were removed from the bag so that they could be displayed in a policeman's hands – eleven marbles in one hand

and three nuts and a screw in another hand (Channel Ten). Viewers were left with the impression that the marbles had been thrown.

Thursday's *Herald Sun* also reported that the marbles had been 'thrown' (thereby 'confirming' another of the paper's August predictions), omitting the information about the marbles being confiscated in a bag. The *Herald Sun* and the TV stations need to explain what happened to the 2.54pm AAP story about the marbles being confiscated and in a bag, rather than thrown. Nobody published pictures of missiles or urine being thrown.

As a point of comparison, at international one-day cricket matches at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), spectators sometimes throw missiles on to the arena. The police, however, do not conduct baton attacks at the MCG. Instead, they spot the offence through closed-circuit television cameras and then evict the offenders from the ground.

On Channel Nine on Wednesday, Police Chief Commissioner Neil Comrie spoke about 'mindless violence' on the part of the S11 protesters, but unfortunately the accompanying footage depicted a senior constable (with his name-tag removed) dragging a civilian along by the hair. This somewhat undermined Mr Comrie's claim.

At last, on Wednesday's Channel Nine 6pm news, I found evidence of one protester committing an assault on a police officer. This bulletin showed a police officer with a dollop of saliva or phlegm sliding down his face after apparently being spat upon. This officer was not blameless himself: he had removed his name-tag, thereby breaching regulations.

## Complaints About Police Violence

Late on Wednesday, protest organizers held a media conference, announcing that complaints had been lodged with the Victorian State Ombudsman about Tuesday's baton attacks and about police removing name-tags. These complaints were reported on

all TV news bulletins on Wednesday evening, with all channels showing footage of many police without name-tags and footage of police hitting people on the head and face.

Thursday's *Age* reported the Ombudsman story on page one but not a word about this (or about the removal of name-tags) appeared in the *Herald Sun*. Instead, the main angle in Thursday's *Herald Sun* was that 'Victorian taxpayers and businesses face a bill of more than \$20 million' for the three-day protest. This included \$10 million lost by the Crown Casino because it was closed to the public.

In fact, the loss of business at Crown and in other businesses on the 11th-13th of September was largely the



Protesters encircle the Casino

result of the expectation of violence, which had been talked up in the preceding months by the media, especially the *Herald Sun*. ABC-TV News had reported on the 6th of September that 'Crown expects to lose' several million dollars over the WEF; some high-rollers were staying away from Crown because of the bad publicity about anticipated 'violence'. Ironically, much of the hysterical expectation of 'violence' had been generated by Channel Nine, whose owner, Kerry Packer, also owns the Casino. Packer's own TV channel was hurting his Casino.

In Thursday's *Herald Sun*, Andrew Bolt wrote yet again about protesters pelting police with 'rocks, rubbish, ball bearings and urine'. These claims of protester violence are weakened by the arrest count. In three days, according to AAP, only twelve protest-





ers had been arrested, all on minor charges. This is less than the number who would normally have been arrested in the Crown Casino vicinity in three days. The low number of persons arrested or charged is in stark contrast with the high numbers of persons injured by police. (By contrast, at a one-day cricket match at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on the 11th of January 2001, police arrested thirty-six spectators and evicted one hundred and sixty-six.)

About 6pm on Wednesday, as the remaining protesters were walking to the Yarra River bank for a post-protest party, an unmarked stationary police car suddenly moved forward and barged into a group of people outside the Casino, injuring a woman. The car, carrying four plain-clothes police, then failed to stop. An AAP story (in Thursday's *Age*) said the incident marred an 'otherwise peaceful final day' of the protest, but the concept of peacefulness was omitted from the *Herald Sun*. The *Herald Sun* claimed on Friday: 'The alleged hit-and-run happened as protesters swarmed around the car hitting and kicking it'. The paper's claims are contradicted by freelance footage, shown on Channel Nine's 'Sunday' programme on the 17th of September. This footage shows: that the protesters were not physically threatening the police officers in the car while it was stationary; that the police car suddenly took off and barged into the crowd; that the woman's body became jammed under the front of the car; that nobody hit the car until after the woman became jammed; and that the hits on the car roof were clearly intended to get the driver to stop, so as to prevent the car from causing any more harm to the woman.

### Later Coverage

On Friday the 15th of September, *The Age* and *The Australian* again reported on the complaints about police baton attacks and confirmed that the Ombudsman's inquiry would begin immediately. The *Herald Sun*, at last, was forced to mention the baton

complaints and the Ombudsman – long after all the other media outlets. Still, it put its own spin on the story, emphasizing the cost of the inquiry. 'Taxpayers', the *Herald Sun*'s item began, 'will foot a hefty bill for an inquiry into claims of police brutality from this week's World Economic Forum'. The *Herald Sun* also chose the Ombudsman's inquiry as the topic for the paper's daily opinion poll, inviting readers to phone in to vote on this question: 'Should *taxpayers' money* be spent on an inquiry into police behaviour during the S11 protest?'

Friday's *Age* reported complaints, from the media union, about photographers injured and cameras damaged in Tuesday evening's baton attack. Friday's *Herald Sun* continued to suppress the information about its own photographers being attacked by police. Instead, the *Herald Sun* reiterated its story about the protesters using 'disgusting and violent tactics, including attacking cars, spraying urine on officers, spitting and hurling rocks, marbles, ball bearings, metal nuts and glass'.

On Saturday the 16th of September, the *Herald Sun* continued to engage in spin-doctoring with two stories by one reporter. The first, headed 'Police Protest Toll', was a story about the brave police who were injured at the WEF protests. The story, evidently prepared with co-operation from police public relations, is accompanied by a picture of police Chief Commissioner Neil Comrie 'examining a senior constable's injuries'.

By contrast, the second story, headed 'Ratbag Militants', was about the 'cowardly' protesters. The story claimed:

They didn't mind punching and kicking the men and women in blue ... And, in an ultimate insult, they burned the Australian flag ... The ratbag army of red militants, fiery ferals and clueless snipers asked for any war they may have received at the hands of a dedicated police contingent this week.

On the 2th of October the *Herald Sun*'s Andrew Bolt had a story about Sergeant Mark Reid, of the Force

Response Unit. Bolt claimed that when the FRU members rushed to the barricades in the Tuesday evening baton attack, Reid's task was to rescue a man in the crowd carrying 'a curly-haired boy about two years old'. While doing this, claimed Bolt, the gallant sergeant fell to the ground, was kicked in the head and body by protesters and 'suffered a splitting headache'. Bolt did not explain why the protective helmet did not prevent the splitting headache. Nor did he bother to disclose the fate of the curly-haired boy.

Bolt's story was further embellished by a member of the Federal Parliament, Stewart McArthur (Liberal, Victoria). In a speech in the House on the 9th of October, Mr McArthur said: '*Herald Sun* journalist Andrew Bolt has written a human account of a police sergeant beaten by protesters in his battle to protect a two-year-old child caught in a *stampeding* crowd'. Mr McArthur was referring to an incident in which FRU police rushed from the Casino to surround the stationary protesters. Thus, the story of the baton attack evolved from stampeding police to stampeding protesters. Mr McArthur had learned the art of journalistic 'beat ups'. The producers of the film *Wag the Dog* would be impressed.

Two weeks before S11, Ben Potter of the *Australian Financial Review* wrote that global corporations are losing the public relations war 'among a significant minority of young and not-so-young people who've rejected the pre-digested, heavily filtered reporting they reckon we're forced to swallow by the mainstream media' (the *AFR* web site, 27th of August). After analyzing the coverage of S11, I am not surprised people are sceptical about the mainstream media.

*A longer version of this article appears on the web site of the Victorian World Trade Organization Watch: <http://www.vicnet.net.au/~gcforum/BarrettReport.htm>*