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Australia

'Australia Day of shame': Thousands march in 'Invasion Day' protests

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Thousands of people have gathered across Australia to march the streets in support of Indigenous rights that protesters have labelled 'Invasion Day'.

Updated Updated 26 January
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Thousands of people have gathered across Australia to march the streets on a holiday protesters have labelled as "Invasion Day".

Protests were held across all the capitals with Sydney and Melbourne attracting some of the largest crowds.

Sydney

The streets of Redfern were transformed by a sea of red, black and yellow flags with thousands gathering in Sydney to march for Indigenous rights.

Sydney Organiser Ken Canning, from Fighting In Resistance Equally, said he hoped the Invasion Day rally would draw attention to Indigenous deaths in custody and was grateful for the support of non-Aboriginal Australians.

Protesters gather for an Invasion Day Rally in Redfern on January 26, 2018 in Sydney, Australia.
Getty Images

"The idea here is to engage the general public because our political spectrum around the country, except for maybe the Greens party ... ignore the calls of Aboriginal people," he told AAP ahead of the march.

Scores of police escorted the march through closed-off streets as onlookers and tourists stopped to film the event.

"Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land" was chanted by the crowd, with Aboriginal flags flying high and not an Australian flag in sight.

Madeline Hayman-Reber
@MadelineHayman

HUGE crowds in Melbourne's Spring Street ahead of the march to Federation Square.

10:17 AM - Jan 26, 2018

24   20 people are talking about this

The march was one of many across the country, as tensions again flared over the date to celebrate Australia Day.

NSW Greens MP David Shoebridge was adamant the campaign to change it would be successful, despite Indigenous Affairs minister Nigel Scullion recently saying Indigenous people had not raised the issue with him.

"Aboriginal people that I meet with - in Redfern, Moree, Tamworth, around this state - say January 26 is deeply disrespectful," Mr Shoebridge told AAP.

A general view of protestors marching holding placards and shouting chants during a protest by Aboriginal rights activist on Australia Day in Melbourne.
Getty Images

Melbourne

Thousands of Victorians have turned out to spurn and celebrate Australia Day.

The largest crowd gathered in front of Parliament House in Melbourne on Friday protesting the national day with scathing slogans on banners and props, including a giant cardboard coffin painted with 'colonisation' and a sign reading 'pay the rent'.

Event organiser Tarneen Onus-Williams shouted to the crowd, "F*** Australia" and "I hope it burns to the ground".

The action took place a short distance from official Australia Day festivities, hosted by the City of Melbourne and attended by guests including Premier Daniel Andrews.

"Australia Day is a time that we all come together, regardless of our backgrounds, to celebrate how fortunate we are to be Australian," acting Lord Mayor Arron Wood told the gathering, where 108 residents from 36 nations became Australian citizens.

Protestors holding placards march during a protest by Aboriginal rights activist on Australia Day in Melbourne, Australia 26 January 2018.
Getty

[Turnbull says 'not many' people oppose Australia Day despite 'Invasion Day' marches](#)

Two inner-Melbourne councils - Yarra and Darebin - were banned by the federal government from hosting citizenship ceremonies after controversially voting not to recognise Australia Day on January 26.

Those councils, along with Moreland City Council, did not schedule any events, but instead referred residents to an Indigenous-themed music festival in Melbourne.

Hundreds of people gathered at Treasury Gardens throughout the afternoon for the Balit Narrun Share the Spirit festival, where Indigenous musicians performed in front of families spread out on the grass at the relaxed event.

At St Kilda, a community barbecue was hosted by a right-wing group who dismissed as "nonsense" people referring to January 26 as "Invasion Day".

Police keep eye on the crowd for the Australia Day parade down Swanston Street in Melbourne, Friday, January 26, 2018
AAP

"Don't get sucked in by the brainwashing that's coming from the political and mainstream media, which is legitimising and promoting this invasion day nonsense," spokesman Blair Cottrell said.

Federal Labor leader Bill Shorten attended a citizenship ceremony in his Melbourne electorate of Maribyrnong on Friday and called for calm across Victoria.

"(It) doesn't matter if you're on the far right or the far left, Australia Day shouldn't be an idiot magnet for a few yobbos and idiots," he told reporters.

There was a strong police presence across Melbourne, including at St Kilda, on Friday, but a spokeswoman said there had been no arrests in connection with Australia Day events.

A fireworks display from the Docklands Harbour Esplanade capped off the day.

Craig Foster
@Craig_Foster

9:33 AM - Jan 26, 2018

38   See Craig Foster's other Tweets

0:00
Australia Day represents 'Australia divided', says Richard De Natale.

00:00 / 00:00
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Australia Day represents 'Australia divided', says Richard De Natale.

Brisbane

Meanwhile in Brisbane, thousands marched in the city's centre holding up signs with slogans such as "Australia Day of Shame" and "Change the date".

There was also a small group of officers overlooking the protest as they marched on the streets.

People also carried Aboriginal flags and wore face paint as well as performing dances.

Protestors participate in a Invasion Day March in Brisbane on Australia Day , Friday, January 26, 2018.
AAP

Canberra

Aboriginal protesters who marched through Canberra to the historic Tent Embassy have described Australia Day as a "day of mourning".

The Canberra march culminated in a smoking ceremony at the 46-year-old embassy, just outside Old Parliament House.

There were cockatoo flags flying around the camp fire and some protesters carried signs stating, "Friends don't let friends celebrate genocide".

"It's a day of mourning," fire keeper, Kumba, told reporters, wearing white ochre and a possum skin loin cloth.

He said January 26, 1788, marked the beginning of his people being massacred.

"People say we need to come together - well, Australia Day needs to change," Kumba said.

Police estimated 350 people turned out and praised crowd behaviour.

Perth

Hundreds of people marched against Australia Day through Perth's CBD after a small pro-Australia Day march held on the city's foreshore.

Adding their voices to thousands across the nation, Invasion Day marchers chanted "change the date" as they headed on a short walk from Forrest Chase to shade tents in front of the Supreme Court Gardens, where the Birak Indigenous concert began at 3pm.

Earlier in the day, a pro-Australia Day rally of more than 30 Reclaim Australia and Western Australia Nationalists marched from Elizabeth Quay to show their support for the date.

There was a significant police presence at both events, with mounted and uniformed officers helping direct protesters at the Invasion Day rally.

Adelaide

Thousands turned out to head towards Elder Park for South Australia's largest Australia Day celebration.

A parade including over 150 community groups preceded a family concert and a fireworks show.

A call-to-action rally for conversations about the impact of Australia Day celebrations was held in front of Parliament House, and a Survival Day event was presented by the Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute.

A number of events were cancelled by local councils after soaring temperatures in the late 30s and early 40s were predicted.

Hobart

Several thousand people have protested in Hobart, adding to nationwide calls to change the date of Australia Day.

An Invasion Day protester in Hobart labelled January 26 celebrations racist and hypocritical, joining nation-wide calls for the Australia Day date to be changed.

Thousands of people rallied on the lawns of Hobart's parliament house on Friday waving Aboriginal flags and banners reading "Survival Day".

Aboriginal activist Nala Mansell told the crowd it was a day of mourning for her people.

"It's hard to fathom how a country can proudly hold a day of remembrance with the slogan 'lest we forget' in honour of those who lost their lives fighting in a war overseas," she said.

"Yet when it comes to the thousands of black lives lost right here under our feet, we're all forced to celebrate.

"It's hypocritical and it's bloody racist."

The crowd, believed to be one of the largest in recent years, chanted "always was, always will be, Aboriginal land" as it weaved through the streets.

Among the group was Greens senator Nick McKim, Tasmanian Greens leader Cassy O'Connor and state Labor MP Madeleine Ogilvie.

"We must change the date. It is symbolically very important, it shows respect for our first people," Ms O'Connor urged.

Elder Jim Everett and Tasmania Aboriginal Corporation president Dave Warrener called on governments to sit down and meet with the Aboriginal community.

Ms Mansell praised a crowd of diverse backgrounds for marching together.

"It's not just Aboriginal people but our non-Indigenous friends who know the difference between right and wrong," she said.

"No matter how January 26 is dressed it will always signify the victory of the white race over ours."

Source: AAP - SBS

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