

# Bracks under fire on S11 police violence

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Picture BY SEAN HEALY

**Victorian Premier Steve Bracks is under heavy fire over his enthusiastic support for the vicious assaults by the Victoria Police on S11 protesters. The uproar has caused him to cancel a planned barbecue to thank police for their efforts and forced him into damage control mode.**

Bracks described the protesters, who blockaded the World Economic Forum's summit at Crown Casino September 11-13, as "un-Australian" and said they engaged in "fascist behaviour".

The demonstrators, viciously beaten by riot police on several occasions, "deserved everything they got", the premier claimed. The police were congratulated on their "sterling and outstanding job under enormous provocation".

Bracks claims that the barbecue, to have been held at Parliament House, was cancelled because it was logistically impossible, and has downplayed the extent of popular opposition to his actions.

But Victorian unions, community groups and even sections of the Labor Party are up in arms about the police violence and Bracks' stance.

The executive of the Victorian Trades Hall Council, on September 15, backed a motion condemning the government's statements.

The state secretary of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Craig Johnston, who moved the motion, said, "I just think what they did is wrong and it's crook, and obviously my colleagues in the trade union movement agree because [the motion] got up unanimously".

The Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia's Michele O'Neil backed Johnston, describing Bracks' statements as a "disgrace". Her union's members are asking, "What does it mean for us next time we are on a picket line?", she said.

Harsh voices have also been raised within the Labor Party. The premier's own branch, in Williamstown, overwhelmingly adopted a motion on September 18 which "condemns the state government's statements endorsing the police violence against protesters at the World Economic Forum".

Other branches have adopted similar motions, while many party members have resigned from the ALP in disgust.

The police action is now under investigation by the Victorian ombudsman, Barry Perry, who announced on September 14 that he would investigate 200 complaints of excessive force by police.

The inquiry is also likely to investigate who ordered the baton charge in the evening of September 12, the single most violent police assault during the protests. This may confirm S11 organisers' belief that the order came from government figures, possibly Bracks himself.

It has already been revealed that, during the evening of September 11, organisers of the WEF summit threatened to cancel the conference if police could not ensure more delegates could enter Crown Casino on September 12. Legal observers and protesters detected a clear change in policing tactics on the second and third days of the blockade.

Marcus Clayton, a partner at law firm Slater and Gordon, which represents 30 protesters attacked in the last such similar incident of police brutality, at Richmond Secondary College in 1993, said the violence against S11 blockaders was far worse. "From memory, three people were taken to hospital at Richmond. This time we have 30 people taken to hospital."

The independent legal observers' team, which monitored police actions at the protests, is still taking statements from people who were attacked or who witnessed such attacks.

If you have information that could be of use, including photographs or video, email [<s11legal@yahoo.com>](mailto:s11legal@yahoo.com) (<mailto:s11legal@yahoo.com>), telephone (03) 9419 7427 or post to Pauline Spencer at the Fitzroy Legal Service, PO Box 297, Fitzroy Vic 3065.

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