

Political witch-hunt against Socialist Alternative on Australian campuses

Will Morrow
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This month, administrators and a student club association at two Australian universities have carried out a political witch-hunt against the pseudo-left organisation Socialist Alternative (SAIt), using fraudulent accusations of anti-Semitism as a pretext.

Notwithstanding the well-documented and unbridgeable political differences that exist between the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and SAIt, we call on students and young people to defend the organisation against these attacks, which set the stage for an ever deeper assault on the democratic rights of all students.

On September 2, the Clubs and Societies association (C&S) at Monash University in Melbourne deregistered the SAIt student club on campus. The previous day, disciplinary action had been initiated against a student and member of SAIt at La Trobe University, also in Melbourne, who is threatened with expulsion.

None of SAIt's accusers have provided any evidence that the organisation, or any of its members, are proponents of anti-Semitism. The reason it has been targeted is because it has publicly opposed the criminal Israeli war against Gaza. The C&S at Monash and university administration at La Trobe have bowed to a concerted months-long campaign against SAIt mounted by extreme right-wing Zionist forces, acting in collaboration with the federal Liberal government and the media. Their aim is to intimidate and silence opponents of the Gaza war and vilify protests against the Israeli state's policies as anti-Semitic.

This is in line with a campaign that has been conducted all over the world in response to the deep revulsion felt by millions of people to the recent murderous events in Gaza.

Over a period of 50 days from July to August, Israeli armed forces, backed by the US, carried out a war of terror against an entrapped and defenceless population of 1.8 million people in Gaza. More than 2,100 Palestinians were killed, the vast majority of them civilians, including

at least 504 children. The Australian government and opposition parties, which have historically lined up with the Israeli state, once again backed the onslaught on Gaza.

In Germany, the media and political establishment have exploited claims of growing anti-Semitism in order to harass and intimidate opponents of the war in Gaza and justify their own increasingly militarist orientation (see: "Charges of war used to intimidate and criminalise opponents of war in Germany").

The equation of anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism is utterly fraudulent. Anti-Semitism involves the vilification of Jewish people because of their ethnicity and religion. Zionism, a political perspective based upon Jewish nationalism and exclusivism, was the political program upon which Israel was founded and the forcible and violent expulsion of its Palestinian population carried out.

At Monash University, as part of its campaign against SAIt, the Zionist Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS) falsely alleged that its members were barred from attending a SAIt meeting in early August because they were Jewish. The meeting was held in opposition to the Israeli war on Gaza. In fact, according to SAIt, a small group of AUJS members was barred entry after they sought to disrupt the meeting. The SAIt member speaking at the meeting was, in fact, Jewish.

Nonetheless, the AUJS claims have been amplified and embellished by the media. In an interview with AUJS spokesman Matthew Lesh—also a secretary of the Australian Liberal Students Federation, the youth organisation of the Liberal government—3AW Radio Host Tom Elliott declared that Monash students had been bullied from "lectures" because they were Jewish.

The Murdoch-owned *Australian* newspaper has played a particularly filthy role. In an article published on September 3, for example, the newspaper declared: "Jewish students say events in Gaza have unleashed unprecedented levels of anti-Semitism on university

campuses, with students verbally abused, intimidated and, in one case, falling victim to a concerted campaign of vilification.”

Monash C&S finally justified its decision to disaffiliate SAIt on the spurious grounds that the club’s act of barring students from a meeting for “political reasons” made it “prejudicial to the interests of Clubs & Societies.” SAIt members can now no longer book rooms to conduct meetings or other activities, and are barred from reregistering their club for 12 months.

At La Trobe University, SAIt member Ryan Higginson received a summons on September 1 to attend a disciplinary hearing because of his role in SAIt’s campaign on campus against the Gaza war. The complaints against him were issued by Jessica Cornish, the general secretary of the La Trobe Student Union.

While Cornish’s complaints have not been published, the charges are clearly political. Cornish claims she was “vilified” by Higginson’s and SAIt’s campaigns following her role in voting down a resolution—put forward by SAIt at a July 31 student union meeting—opposing the Israeli war in Gaza.

Cornish is being represented by Arnold Bloch Leibler, a law firm with close connections to the Liberal government of Prime Minister Tony Abbott. According to a September 9 article in *Redflag*, the submission was drafted by Mark Leibler, a senior partner in the firm, who is also a former head of the Zionist Federation of Australia lobby group, the current national chairman of the Australia-Israel & Jewish Affairs Council, and the governor of the Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce.

The Abbott government is centrally involved in this witch-hunt. On August 29, just two days before the attacks on SAIt, the *Australian* newspaper published a comment written by Education Minister Christopher Pyne, titled “Unis hit by anti-Semitism,” which declared that the “growth of anti-Semitism in our universities is extremely worrying.”

The main target of Pyne’s article is SAIt. He provocatively declared that SAIt “has sided with Hamas, a recognised terrorist organisation whose goal is the destruction of Israel and the creation of an Islamic state.” He falsely claimed: “Recently five Jewish students were refused entry to a Socialist Alternative discussion on Israel because they were Jewish.”

Pyne concluded with a direct call to university administrators: “Anti-Semitism has no place in Australia and our universities must act quickly to condemn it. University administrations should be very careful not to

invoke freedom of speech to allow speech that vilifies students.”

The entire Australian political establishment—including Labor and the Greens—is complicit in this witch-hunt; not a single political figure has opposed it. All of the official parties are united in their fear of the anti-war sentiments in the Australian working class and youth and the widespread opposition to their bipartisan agenda of militarism and war.

The reactionary campaign is not confined to the university campuses. Last month complaints were lodged under section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act against journalist Mike Carlton of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, for an article he wrote criticising the Israeli war in Gaza. Carlton eventually felt compelled to resign from his position, citing a protracted campaign against him by the Zionist lobby and the Murdoch-owned news outlets.

Pyne’s linking of SAIt to the “terrorist organisation” Hamas is an ominous sign of what is being prepared. As it prepares to engage in a new US-led neo-colonial war in the Middle East, the Abbott government, with the support of the opposition parties, is attempting to manufacture a crisis atmosphere. That is the significance of yesterday’s announcement of a new national high terror alert, which will be used to ram through yet another raft of draconian anti-terror laws. Pyne and the government are setting the stage for branding critics and opponents of the new wars in Iraq, Syria and beyond, including students, as “terrorist” sympathisers or supporters, potentially opening them up to the full gamut of anti-democratic measures in the anti-terror legislation.



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