

Australian establishment hysterically denounces pro-Palestinian protests

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The Australian political and media establishment is on an increasingly frenzied rampage, vilifying the Palestinian people and signaling full support for the Israeli regime's bombardment of Gaza.

Over the past 24 hours, the campaign has taken a particularly sinister turn, with senior political figures and media commentators branding protests in support of the Palestinians as illegitimate and suggesting they be banned. While basic civil liberties have been under attack for decades, in line with the growth of social inequality and escalating militarism, it is difficult to recall a recent precedent for such open advocacy of dictatorial and police-state measures.

The federal Labor government has led the charge. Its leaders, including Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Foreign Minister Penny Wong, vociferously denounced the heroic Palestinian uprising over the weekend as an "unprovoked" attack, as though the 75 years of Israeli occupation and oppression has never occurred. They have since given carte blanche endorsement to whatever crimes the Israeli government will commit, as its fascistic Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatens the destruction of the entire Gaza strip.

Labor has consistently backed Israel, beginning with its formation in 1948 by imperialist-backed Zionist groups, which waged a campaign of terrorism and ethnic cleansing against the Palestinians. Support for Israel has been a touchstone in Australian and Labor Party politics, signalling full alignment with American imperialism.

But even given that record, Labor's response has been extraordinarily bellicose. Hypocritical calls for "de-escalation" and respect for "human rights" have largely been dispensed with.

The line was summed up by an Australian Broadcasting Corporation radio interview with Wong this morning.

The interviewer noted: "The Israeli defence minister has ordered a complete siege of Gaza, the cutting off of goods, fuel and electricity. Do you think that level of response is justified?" Wong responded: "Well, Israel has a right to

defend itself, and this was an abhorrent attack."

When the interviewer pressed the point, stating that the siege "looked like collective punishment," Wong blithely replied: "Well, I think it's always very difficult from over here to make judgements about what security approach other countries take. We've said Israel has a right to defend itself."

It is not difficult to judge the consequences of Israel's blockade or its indiscriminate bombing of densely-populated civilian areas. The outcome will be massive levels of death and destruction, far exceeding anything associated with the Hamas military operation over the weekend.

That underscores the utter hypocrisy of the Australian establishment's newfound concern for civilian casualties in a conflict. So, too does the entire record of Australian imperialism, from its involvement in the predatory US-led onslaughts against Korea and Vietnam to its participation in the criminal invasion of Iraq, a war for oil that claimed up to a million lives.

The last Labor government joined the Obama administration's 2010 troop surge in Afghanistan, which directly led to war crimes by Australian special forces, including documented murders of Afghan civilians. Representatives of the current Labor administration have declared that it is time to "move on" from those atrocities because they occurred "over a decade ago" and are impacting troop morale amid Australia's integration into US plans for a catastrophic war against China.

A component of the country's militarisation to further the preparations for conflict with China has been a crackdown on anti-war opposition. That included the bipartisan passage in 2018 of draconian foreign interference laws that could be used to criminalise much anti-war activity.

While Australian governments have not yet invoked that legislation, an atmosphere is being whipped up in which any support for the Palestinians and opposition to Israel is condemned as anti-Semitic and beyond the pale.

In an extraordinary intervention on 2GB radio, Albanese yesterday called for a Sydney protest that evening to be

cancelled.

Albanese instructed prospective demonstrators to “step back.” Asked by the right-wing host if the protest should proceed, Albanese replied: “I absolutely believe it should not.” Albanese cynically added that Australia is “a democratic nation,” and that he supports “people’s right to demonstrate their views.” But such rights are meaningless if they can be unilaterally threatened by the prime minister, acting outside of any legal framework.

Opposition leader Peter Dutton backed Albanese’s statements, but condemned the prime minister for not taking any actions to prevent the march from occurring. Other political figures have made similar comments, including federal “Teal” independent Allegra Spender, falsely presented as a progressive. She declared: “I am seeking an urgent explanation of how this was allowed to happen.”

Senior Labor and Liberal-National leaders have since branded the protest as “abhorrent” and “un-Australian.”

An emergency rally in the Sydney suburb of Lakemba last Sunday night has also been subjected to hysterical denunciations. The protest had been called by the Islamist Hizb-ut-Tahrir group. But it was attended by a broader layer of around 700 people, including Palestinians, workers and young people voicing their hostility to the Israeli crackdown on Gaza.

The rally was denounced by Wong, other national politicians and the media.

An editorial in the Murdoch-owned *Australian* this morning declared: “The grotesque spectacle of Palestinian supporters in Lakemba and Greenacre in southwestern Sydney celebrating the Hamas attacks on Sunday showed Australia is not immune from jihad fanaticism. It is deeply disturbing that some in our nation are so comfortable with terror that they let off fireworks to applaud the murder and maiming of civilians.”

An accompanying comment declared: “Australians welcome freedom of speech and mature, constructive debate. But these scenes in Sydney are an ugly stain that the majority of Australians, who abhor terrorism, will not tolerate.” It added: “The opportunism of activists and some political groups will come under the spotlight in coming days.”

Such statements are clearly aimed at creating an atmosphere for state attacks, including raids, arrests and the banning of demonstrations.

There is more than an element of racist dogwhistling to the frenzied attacks on residents of southwestern Sydney. For years, the far-right has denounced Lakemba, for instance, which has the largest Muslim population in the country, as an “Islamic enclave.”

The racist bent of the official campaign, clearly targeting

Middle Eastern people and Muslims, underscores the cynicism and fraud of any claim that the governments are combatting “anti-Semitism.” Instead, they are inciting anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian hatred, itself a staple of the fascist right.

Supporters of Palestine are not seeking to demonstrate because they are hostile to the Jewish people, but because they oppose the policies of the Israeli state. What occurred over the weekend was not terrorism, but a popular uprising of a people who have been oppressed for three quarters of a century.

The continuous conflation of Zionism and Judaism is itself anti-Semitic, falsely identifying the entire Jewish people with a right-wing and oppressive regime that many of them oppose.

The statements about anti-Semitism have an added hypocrisy, given that Australia has given hundreds of millions of dollars to Ukraine, as part of its support for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia. That has included weapons shipments for irregular and volunteer militias, many of which openly present themselves as the continuators of Ukraine’s Nazi collaborators in World War II.

A struggle against genuine anti-Semitism, wherever and whenever it emerges, will not be conducted by capitalist governments funding and arming Nazi militias. History has demonstrated that defeating all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism, requires the development of a unified, socialist movement of the entire working class.

Workers and young people must oppose the official onslaught against protests and demonstrations. The campaign, directed in the first instance against supporters of Palestine, is intended to create a far broader precedent for attacks on the entire working class. Amid an unprecedented cost of living crisis and growing social opposition, capitalist governments everywhere are turning to the same authoritarianism so nakedly displayed by the Israeli regime.



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