

Australian Labor government bans pro-Palestinian protest, threatens police rampage in Sydney

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Australian governments, led by the Labor Party, are overseeing the most significant crackdown on the right to protest in the country since World War II. With the support of the entire political establishment, and a media that is cheering on the evisceration of civil liberties, they are moving to outlaw all demonstrations opposing Israel's genocidal bombardment of Gaza and defending the Palestinian people.

In the starkest development, the New South Wales (NSW) Labor administration and its state police have effectively banned a demonstration in Sydney this Sunday, proclaiming it to be unauthorised.

The move has been carried out on an explicitly political basis. NSW Police moved against the demonstration after state Labor Premier Chris Minns declared on Wednesday morning that supporters of Palestine would not "commandeer our streets." Labor's police minister had stated on Tuesday: "I don't want to see protests on our street at all, from anybody. I don't think anybody really does."

The statements underscore that this is not a one-off. As Israel continues to bomb densely-populated civilian neighborhoods and its fascistic Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks the language of genocide, public displays of opposition will be forbidden.

That is entirely in line with declarations by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and many other senior politicians that protests should not occur. It is in keeping with similar measures in Germany, France, Britain and a host of other imperialist countries, where protests have also been banned.

The NSW Police are making menacing threats, clearly signaling that if the protest proceeds, as organisers have said it will, they will be met with draconian measures. What is being prepared is a massive show of force that threatens to become a police rampage in support of the Israeli war.

Police have stated that 1,000 or more officers will be dispatched to the central business district, where the demonstration is to take place. In a statement today, acting

NSW Police Commissioner David Hudson said that "extraordinary powers" may be deployed.

Hudson stated: "[P]owers we are considering authorising will include any person who attends Hyde Park on Sunday with the intention to assemble and perhaps protest... [they] will be subject to searching powers where we don't need reasonable cause to search. We will also be demanding that they provide us with their identity, and if they fail to do so it is an offence—these are extraordinary powers."

These are police state measures aimed at terrorizing anyone inclined to show their solidarity with the Palestinian people. The police are threatening to harass and violate anyone in the vicinity of Hyde Park, one of Sydney's busiest landmarks.

Inevitably, such measures will also involve racial targeting. Anyone who can read between the lines knows that NSW Police will be stopping and searching everyone who appears to be of Middle Eastern ancestry.

Today, Amnesty Australia issued a statement, warning that the powers deployed could include sweeping anti-protest measures that were passed by the NSW parliament last year with bipartisan support. They were introduced at the behest of the mining and other fossil fuel corporations to crack down on actions by climate activists but can be used much more broadly against social opposition.

Amnesty stated: "By denying Palestinian activists a permit for their planned demonstration, people who attend could face \$22,000 in fines and up to two years in prison under amendments to the Crimes Act made in 2022/NSW's harsh anti-protest laws." The organisation said it was "deeply concerned that people peacefully expressing their right to protest could face such severe penalties."

NSW Police have already established a specific task force aimed at "monitoring," i.e., spying on, those who support the Palestinians. At the federal level, the Labor government has activated a trigger for closer coordination between federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

Home Affairs Minister Clare O’Neill has declared that “ Hamas is listed as a terrorist organization in Australia, and anyone providing support to Hamas could be committing a crime.” Her statement did not specify whether that had to be material support or could cover statements of support for the Palestinian uprising and resistance.

The scale of the police threats explodes the claims that the crackdown is aimed at “protecting the public” or preventing expressions of anti-Semitism.

As is the case internationally, people are not demonstrating because they are anti-Semitic. They are signalling their opposition to the murderous levelling of Gaza that is underway. What occurred over the weekend, moreover, was not terrorism but a legitimate uprising by a population that has been subjected to the longest colonial occupation in modern history.

The Australian Labor government has given carte blanche to Netanyahu, continuously proclaiming “Israel’s right to defend itself,” and refusing to condemn any of the war crimes underway, including the shutting off of electricity, water and food to Gaza.

While banning pro-Palestinian demonstrations, senior members of the federal Labor government, along with Liberal-National leader Peter Dutton and Premier Minns attended a pro-Israeli event on Wednesday night. That gathering, organised by Zionist groups, was packaged as a vigil for those who died in the Palestinian operation. It had, however, the character of a rally in support of the Israeli state and its bombardment of Palestine.

While repeatedly claiming that Australian Jewish people are under threat from supporters of Palestine, the governments and their media mouthpieces have come up with remarkably little proof.

A Palestinian solidarity protest in Sydney on Monday evening was momentarily gatecrashed by an unrelated group, which has yet to be identified. They briefly shouted despicable anti-Semitic slogans, which were immediately condemned by the organisers and by all well-known Palestinian solidarity organisations.

The footage that was captured, however, has been replayed endlessly. The condemnations have largely been ignored. The handful of individuals have been depicted as emblematic of all Palestinian supporters. Where backwardness and stupidity end and police provocation begins is hard to know.

In any event, the fight against anti-Semitism will not be conducted by governments that are backing a genocidal onslaught on an oppressed Palestinian population that recalls nothing so much as the crimes of the Nazis.

As the WSWS has noted, the Palestinians had nothing to do with the Holocaust. It was a product of the European

ruling elites in their war against the working class and the socialist movement. The very European powers responsible for the crimes of the 1930s are returning to the same path, including arming, funding and training Ukrainian neo-Nazis in the proxy war against Russia.

The conflation of Israel and Judaism is itself anti-Semitic, falsely identifying all Jewish people with a reactionary and fascist regime that does not represent their interests and that many oppose.

While hypocritically declaiming against the threat of anti-Semitism, the governments are stoking anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab racism. Dutton stated that those who chanted the anti-Semitic slogans at the Monday evening rally should have their “visas revoked,” i.e., be deported from Australia. But there is no reason to assume that they are not Australian citizens, except for the fact that some appeared Middle Eastern. Dutton’s remarks have not been explicitly condemned by any Labor leader.

An atmosphere is being created that recalls that which was whipped up by Labor and Liberal politicians in 2006, prior to racist riots against Middle Eastern people in the Sydney suburb of Cronulla. One need only look at prominent right-wing social media accounts, to see a stream of racist filth against people of Middle Eastern descent. These right-wing forces, while they may solidarise themselves with the genocidal actions of Israel, are also saturated with anti-Semitism.

The banning of protests goes far beyond the current situation in the Middle East. Governments are exploiting the crisis to institute long planned measures of a police-state character. The target is growing social opposition in the working class. That underscores the fact that workers, students, young people and all supporters of civil liberties must oppose and fight the current crackdown.



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