

Australian Broadcasting Corporation under fire over its pro-Israeli Gaza coverage

Richard Phillips
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Since October 7, Australia’s mainstream media, in line with its international counterparts, has maintained a constant stream of misinformation and lying justifications for the criminal Israeli onslaught against Palestinians in Gaza. This includes the non-stop slander of pro-Palestine protesters as “antisemitic” and censorship of the ever-growing mass anti-war demonstrations across Australia and globally.

While Murdoch-owned publications present the foulest contributions to the pro-Israeli media barrage, the most politically significant player is the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

Since its founding almost a century ago, the ABC has functioned as a pillar of Australia’s ruling elite, manufacturing, moulding and mobilising public opinion in line with its national requirements. Over the past two decades, particularly since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, consecutive Labor and Liberal-National governments have transformed the ABC into one of the most tightly regulated and controlled public institutions in Australia.

The ABC claims to provide “balanced” reportage, insisting it is the most trusted media outlet in Australia—a low standard in the country’s highly monopolised media landscape. These assertions, however, now lie in the gutter as tens of thousands of Australia workers, youth and students witness, and are shocked by, the network’s blatant pro-Zionist reportage.

Over the past five weeks, the ABC has bombarded audiences with numerous soft-ball interviews with Israeli military and government spokesmen. These individuals have not been challenged over the mass murder of thousands of innocent Palestinian men, women and children or the Israeli government’s stated aim of ethnically cleansing Gaza—war crimes under the Geneva Conventions.

That ABC audiences can see the consequences of Israeli Defense Forces’ (IDF) barbarism—thousands of dead or seriously wounded women and children on social media—is of little consequence to the network’s news heads. The pro-Israeli message continues.

Israeli officials are allowed to regurgitate bogus claims that Hamas has beheaded babies, uses Palestinians as “human shields,” and is somehow responsible for the bombing of Gaza hospitals and all other essential infrastructure. These smears are

presented as “facts” while statements from Palestinian spokespeople are brushed off as “allegations.”

No context was or is provided about the well-documented dispossession of Palestinians since 1948, and the constant persecution, jailing, torture and murder of Palestinians by Israel. The world simply began on October 7.

High-profile journalists, such as ABC-TV’s Sarah Ferguson and Radio National’s Patricia Karvelas, have conducted bullying interviews with Palestinian spokespeople, interrupting and distorting responses.

Ferguson constantly interrupted Palestinian National Initiative secretary Mustafa Barghouti and Palestinian UN deputy ambassador Majed Bamyia during interviews, demanding again and again that they condemn Hamas “terrorism.”

ABC management, moreover, treats its own journalists with contempt.

Tom Joyner, one of their Middle East correspondents, dared to challenge Israeli claims that Hamas fighters had beheaded Israeli babies on October 7.

The highly professional and experienced video journalist, who is based in Turkey but reporting from Israel, commented on a private social media platform used by journalists that there was no evidence for the Israeli allegations and said it was “BS.” ABC management directed Joyner to return to Turkey and is currently conducting an internal investigation.

Likewise, network management remained silent for over a week about the death of 31-year-old Palestinian journalist Roshdi Sarraj, who was killed on October 22 by an Israeli missile in the Gaza City neighbourhood of Tel al-Hawa. Sarraj died after being struck by shrapnel while protecting his wife Shuruk and one-year-old daughter Dania.

This callous indifference to Sarraj’s death, whose previous report was broadcast a few days earlier on ABC-TV, prompted a 100-strong protest outside the ABC’s Melbourne headquarters on October 30.

The next day former Palestinian ambassador to Australia Alia Kazak published an open letter to ABC managing director David Anderson, denouncing the network.

Kazak wrote: “The ABC deals with the Israeli Palestinian conflict from an Israeli perspective, adopting all its claims,

propaganda, and deceptions without examining their credibility, as if Israel is an innocent party and the victim of Palestinian and Arab aggression, overlooking the fact that Israel is a colonial apartheid state established on the destruction and occupation of Palestine and ethnic cleansing of over 70 percent of its people on racial grounds.

“Israel is an aggressor and occupier, racially discriminating against the Palestinian people and denying them their inalienable right to return to their country, equality, and self-determination.”

Six days later, on November 5, thousands of protesters in Brisbane called for an end to Israeli attacks on Gaza and marched to the ABC’s Queensland offices at South Bank chanting “Free Palestine.” Organisers issued a statement denouncing the network for its “biased reporting of the situation in Gaza and the under-reporting of the protests in Australia against our own government’s complicity.”

These developments and the growing international mass movement against the Gaza genocide have given rise to opposition and concerns by honest ABC journalists, forcing editorial chiefs last Wednesday afternoon to convene an online and in-person meeting of staff.

The 200-strong meeting was angry and emotional, according to a report in the *Age* and other newspapers owned by the Nine group.

The *Age* reported: “Journalists argued that the ABC’s coverage of Israel’s ground invasion of Gaza was too heavily reliant on the talking points of the Israel Defence Forces. They also raised concerns around the ABC’s unwillingness to use language such as ‘invasion’, ‘occupation’, ‘genocide’, ‘apartheid’ and ‘ethnic cleansing’ regarding Israeli government policy and allegations made by human rights groups.”

Editorial policy manager Mark Maley, who convened the meeting, told journalists that there was “no single, easy universally recognised definition of apartheid that is necessarily fulfilled by what Israel is doing.” He said the war crime allegations against Israel were “credible,” but “it’s only an opinion.”

The *Age* also reported that journalists were concerned “that there was a blanket ban on reporters using the word ‘Palestine’, and general confusion about what language the broadcaster had signed off on.

“A number of journalists from Muslim and Arab backgrounds expressed concern that a perception the ABC was too pro-Israel had impacted their relationships with communities and their ability to do their jobs. Another staff member voiced concerns the broadcaster has made ‘possibly irreparable damage’ to the trust it has built with the Australian Muslim community over the years with its reporting.”

Others raised concerns about Sarah Ferguson’s interviews with pro-Israel individuals, pointing out that their claims were “unchallenged, unlike interviews with pro-Palestinian voices.”

News director Justin Stevens defended Ferguson, however, insisting that she had done a “superb job” covering the conflict. “She’s broken news, set the agenda with her interviewing and applied the highest editorial standards... Her reputation and record speaks for itself over decades,” he said.

Ferguson’s record is clear. She is a right-wing figure—hostile to Julian Assange, Edward Snowden and others who have exposed imperialist crimes and unwavering in her pro-war imperialist positions, including promotion of the escalating preparations for a US-led war against China.

In September 2018, Ferguson conducted a sycophantic ABC-TV “Four Corners” interview with American neo-fascist and genuine antisemite Steve Bannon. The program was titled “Populist Revolution.” Bannon, like Stevens, praised Ferguson’s “professionalism.” After the interview, Ferguson posted a smiling picture of herself with Bannon to Twitter, beneath the caption: “What’s wrong with this photo? NOTHING.”

The *Age* concluded its report by suggesting that ABC editorial chiefs were likely to circulate an updated “editorial guidance note” on “certain forms of language, ensuring adequate context and addressing the issue of false balance.”

Translated into plain English, network management will slightly modify its editorial guidance notes to feign “balance” and try to disguise its pro-Zionist reportage. While the *Age* did not reveal whether officials from the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) were present at the meeting, ABC editorial chiefs will have consulted with the union.

ABC journalists seeking to expose the truth about Israel’s imperialist-backed genocide against the Palestinians not only confront the network’s management but the MEAA itself. The union will not defend any journalists victimised for speaking out about the Gaza genocide or mobilise its members to fight the mass murder being unleashed by the IDF in Gaza.

Honest journalists wanting to speak out about the situation in Gaza and what is happening inside Australia’s tightly controlled corporate media—corporate and state-funded alike—should contact the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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