

Australian Aboriginal nationalist leader Marcia Langton backs Israeli onslaught on Gaza

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16 November 2023

In an article on Wednesday, indigenous academic Marcia Langton solidarised herself fully with the Israeli bombardment of Gaza, and expressed complete contempt for the Palestinians who are being mass murdered there. Langton's screed was published in the Murdoch-owned *Australian*, the most belligerent of all the corporate press in its legitimisation of the unfolding war crimes.

Langton's position has caused a deal of surprise, shock and outrage. She was one of the chief proponents of the Labor government's failed referendum last month to enshrine an indigenous Voice to parliament in the Australian Constitution. Supporters of the Voice claimed that establishing the advisory body would help redress the crimes of colonialism, perpetrated against indigenous people. But now, Langton, one of its chief advocates, is defending the worst manifestation of neo-colonialism in the world today.

In fact there is no contradiction. As the Socialist Equality Party insisted, the entire Voice referendum was a sham. One of its central aims was to further elevate an indigenous elite into the corridors of political and corporate power. Langton's article has the benefit of underscoring the utterly reactionary character of this narrow layer, whose interests are diametrically opposed to those of oppressed Aboriginal workers and youth.

Langton denounced indigenous figures for having "entwined two extraordinary propositions—one that is simply untrue and one that is a moral outrage. First, they claim that 'Indigenous Australians feel solidarity with Palestinians.'"

To this, Langton bluntly responded: "This is false; it is the view of a tiny few, if put in those words. Most of us are aware of the complexity and that there is very little comparable in our respective situations, other than our humanity." In other words, unlike the millions of people around the world mobilising against the Israeli onslaught, Langton, a wealthy and feted academic, feels no connection with the oppressed Palestinians.

In fact many ordinary indigenous people, and others, have noted the parallels between the brutal dispossession of Aboriginal Australians and the ongoing attempts to displace the Palestinians. The commonalities are obvious to anyone opposed to the crimes of colonialism.

The second proposition, to which Langton responded with moral outrage, is, inevitably, the refusal of some indigenous activists "to condemn Hamas. I am aghast and embarrassed. They do not speak

for me."

As with every other piece of right-wing tabloid commentary in the *Australian*, Langton presented the events of October 7 as a manifestation of "evil," "terrorism" and the like, completely unconnected to the 75-year occupation and oppression of the Palestinians. In this quasi-religious depiction, the Palestinians involved in resistance are irrational and even demonic, the militarised industrial state raining down bombs on Gaza, virtuous and acting out of the purest of motives.

Of course, that argument is essentially identical to those that have been deployed against all colonised populations, including indigenous people in Australia. Colonial authorities presented the Aboriginal people as sub-human and therefore, incapable of reason. Their justifiable acts of resistance to British rule were depicted as primitive savagery.

The most striking feature of Langton's article was not its indifference to the plight of Palestinians, more than 12,000 of whom have been murdered over the past month. Rather it was that Langton went further than almost any other Australian commentator in blaming the Gazan civilian population for its situation, legitimising Israel's slaughter.

In one of her few references to the mass killing unfolding in Gaza, Langton wrote at the beginning of her article of "the innocent Palestinians who are being used as human shields by Hamas."

But several paragraphs later, Langton decided that the population of Gaza was not so innocent. Langton wrote: "When 44 per cent of Gazans voted for Hamas in 2006, they precipitated a series of crises, such as the Israeli imposition of siege conditions, and with Iranian military aid to Hamas, their status as human shields."

That paragraph can only be described as extraordinary.

In the first instance, it is worth recalling that an estimated 70 percent of Gazans are under the age of thirty, almost half are children. They had no involvement in the 2006 election; most had not even been born.

But that is a minor point. Of far more note is that Langton ascribes responsibility for the entirety of the current conflict to its victims! It is the fault of the Palestinians that bombs are falling on their heads, and killing thousands of children. The decades of occupation, the mass displacement, the Israeli incursions and war crimes preceding 2006 are all erased.

Langton's statement undermines and calls into question key tenets of international law developed in the aftermath of the horrors of World War II. The clear thrust of her argument is that by voting for Hamas in 2006, the residents of Gaza transformed their status from innocent civilians to something else.

"Human shield" is a stock term of Israel to justify the bombardment of anything and everything Gazan.

Gaza is one of the most densely populated areas on Earth. The aim and inevitable consequence of carpet bombing an area of 365 square kilometres (141 square miles/about 90,000 acres) is maximum death. So far, 1.5 million people from a population of 2.3 million have been displaced.

Usually, when they trot out the lie about "human shields," pro-war commentators shed crocodile tears about the fate of civilians supposedly used as such "shields."

But Langton goes one step further. She asserts that by voting for Hamas 17 years ago, the people of Gaza themselves confirmed "their status as human shields," presumably in perpetuity.

This is one of the most explicit and clear justifications made in the Australian press for the collective punishment of civilians, which is a war crime.

Langton's position dovetails with the statements of Israeli officials that all of Gaza is fair game, because "there are no civilians, they are all terrorists." The targeting of residential buildings, schools, and hospitals is in line with the aims of the Israeli government, as stated by Defence Minister Yoav Gallant: "we will wipe them off the face of the earth."

As the SEP warned during the referendum, one of the key aims of the Voice was to put a humane gloss on Australian capitalism, to justify its involvement in predatory US-led operations and wars, especially the preparations for conflict with China. Langton, with her diatribe, has confirmed that assessment of the pro-imperialist character of the Voice and its proponents.

Langton, together with Tom Calma, another indigenous academic, co-authored a 2021 report that served as the basis of the Voice policy.

In her article, Langton writes: "Australians like me can do little about the disaster unfolding in the Levant except to support our government..."

Of course the Labor government, like Langton, is full-throated in its support of Israel. That was on display late last month, when Prime Minister Anthony Albanese travelled to Washington for meetings and a state dinner hosted by President Joe Biden. Albanese and Biden came together to give the greenlight to Israel's genocide, and to plot the next stages of the US-led confrontation with China. Among those at the dinner was none other than Calma, who was singled out by Biden for a brief conversation.

The attitude of the indigenous elite to the events in Gaza is not a Middle Eastern question. Their venomous antipathy to oppressed Palestinians is essentially no different to their hostility to oppressed indigenous people and the working class as a whole.

Langton was a vociferous supporter of the 2007 Northern Territory intervention, a police-military occupation of indigenous lands, based on lurid and concocted assertions of rampant sexual abuse in oppressed Aboriginal families. She has promoted

regressive social attacks associated with the intervention, including welfare quarantining, under which the government essentially takes control of a welfare recipient's monies.

Langton, like other representatives of the indigenous elite such as Noel Pearson, has enjoyed extremely close relations with mining companies. In a series of 2012 lectures, she credited these gigantic corporations and their oligarchic magnates with creating "a new Aboriginal middle class." This layer has also established lucrative commercial relations with the defence industry and the Australian Defence Force.

The defeat of the Voice referendum was a blow to the indigenous elite and its aspirations. The failure of the initiative was not a result of anti-Aboriginal prejudice in the population. In fact there is a mass sentiment in favour of redressing the crimes against indigenous people.

Instead, the Voice was voted down because broad sections of the working class, including many Aboriginal people, did not think it would improve anything for oppressed indigenous or anyone else. There was deep distrust among the population that the Labor government, the political establishment, or the Aboriginal leaderships would enact any measures to redress the decades of oppression of Aboriginal people. The revelations of Langton's positions on the Palestinians only confirms the correctness of their suspicions.

The Voice was advanced by a Labor government that has ruled for the rich and rejected calls for any substantial measures to address the worst cost-of-living crisis in decades.

Langton and other indigenous elite leaders responded to the failure of the Voice with a week of silence/mourning. They ascribed the loss to rampant racism and prejudice among ordinary people.

How hollow does all of that sound now that Langton is legitimising the unfolding genocide of an oppressed people, and Calma is rubbing shoulders with the criminal in the White House who is overseeing it?



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