Australian PM Albanese, opposition leader exploit Holocaust to legitimise Gaza genocide

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In an event dripping with cynicism and hypocrisy, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and opposition leader Peter Dutton came together on Wednesday in a bipartisan display of unity for the reopening of Melbourne's Holocaust Museum. It had been closed since the beginning of hostilities in the Middle East last month.

Among those in attendance were elderly Holocaust survivors, victims of the worst crime of the 20th century. That the atrocities they suffered and the horrors they witnessed must be continuously recalled and brought to the attention of new generations is clear. Their experiences have a particular relevance today, under conditions of the growth of fascist and far-right movements internationally, and an eruption of imperialist militarism reminiscent of the 1930s.

But that was not the aim of Albanese or Dutton. Instead, the transparent purpose of their presence was to exploit the worst imperialist atrocity of the last century, to legitimise the worst imperialist atrocity of the 21st, the genocide in Gaza. The two leaders, moreover, sought to blackguard opposition to the mass murder of the Palestinians as antisemitism, in line with a filthy official campaign that has only escalated over the past month.

Albanese declared: "This Museum stands because we must never forget the Holocaust. Not the scale of it, not the depths of its cruelty. A savagery that was long in the planning and cold in its calculation."

Dutton said it was necessary to visit the museum "To hear the voices of those who died and those who survived. To understand how hateful ideas so easily transform into evil deeds." He recalled the refrain "never again" and stated that it was of particular importance now.

Of course, the government and the opposition have no interest in hearing "the voices of those who died and those who survived" the last six weeks in Gaza. Whatever their differences on secondary questions, Albanese and Dutton have been as one in their complete support for the Israeli bombardment, their angry hostility to any suggestion of a ceasefire and their denunciations of those protesting the war crimes.

Albanese has repeated, as a mantra, Israel's "right to defend itself." Liberal opposition defence spokesman Andrew Hastie described, without rebuke from his party leader, Israel's genocidal response to the October 7 uprising as one of "great restraint."

One of the defining characteristics of the Holocaust, the use by an advanced state of industrial methods of mass murder against an oppressed population, is clearly what has occurred in Gaza.

The Israeli bombing has targeted residential buildings, schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure, with the deliberate aim of murdering civilians, including children, at least 5,500 of whom have been killed. United Nations and other legal experts have noted that what is usually the most difficult element of a genocide to establish, intent, is very plain, with senior Israeli leaders openly proclaiming their plans to clear Gaza of Palestinians and describing them as "animals" worthy of death and displacement.

In that context, the use of the refrain "never again," as they are supporting "again" right now, sounds like the cruel and twisted humour of a sadist. How will figures such as Albanese, Dutton and others greenlighting the Israeli onslaught be depicted in a future Gaza genocide museum?

Both connected the Holocaust to the present, but in the most twisted manner.

Albanese declared: "Since the atrocities of October 7, Jewish Australians have been bearing a pain you should never have had to bear again. And you are feeling fear. Anxious that the long shadows of the past have crept into the present." He added: "As the conflict continues, antisemitism is on the rise. But we will not let it find so much as a foothold here."

Socialists, as part of their fight for the international unity of the working class, are the most intransigent opponents of all forms of racism, including antisemitism. Antisemitism, moreover, as a modern political phenomenon, has particularly been associated with attempts by the ruling elite to mobilise declassed petty bourgeois layers against the workers' movement and its socialist leadership identified with the most far-sighted elements of the Jewish intelligentsia, beginning with Karl Marx.

Socialists are thus more committed than any political tendency to an irreconcilable struggle against antisemitism, understood as racial and/or religious prejudice against Jewish people and its incitement.

This is, however, not what the political and media establishment is talking about. Instead, they are branding as antisemitic any opposition to Israel, its genocidal war and Zionism.

That was made more or less explicit by Dutton, who declared: "We stand here today having been filled, through our television screens, of the hate-fuelled mobs marching through major democratic cities, calling for the slaughter of Jews." Despite the awkward and grammatically incorrect character of the remark, it was clear that Dutton was talking about the mass protests that have

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erupted globally opposing the bombing of Gaza, against which he has railed for weeks.

Those protests are not "calling for the slaughter of Jews," but for an end to the slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza. Some of the most powerful actions, especially in the United States, but also in Australia, have been organised by anti-Zionist Jews, who have angrily condemned the exploitation of their historical suffering to justify an unfolding genocide.

Dutton's comment was a particularly crude enunciation of the general campaign by the media and political establishment to label opposition to Israeli crimes as antisemitism. This line is itself antisemitic, falsely identifying Jewish people with the garrison state of Israel as it commits atrocities. It also goes hand in hand with the denial and downplaying of the actual dangers of antisemitism, manifested in the rise of fascistic and far-right forces in a number of countries.

In that context, it may be noted that Dutton is associated with moves in the direction of transforming the Liberal Party, amid its deepgoing crisis, into something approaching the alt-right populism of Donald Trump.

Dutton's leadership has long been associated with right-wing dog-whistling, including to anti-Aboriginal and anti-refugee prejudice, positions that have currency in far-right circles that are also saturated with genuine antisemitism.

It is striking, moreover, that forces associated with the promotion of the far-right are among the leaders of the campaign branding hostility to Israel as antisemitism.

The Murdoch-owned *Australian* publication has been at the forefront, publishing increasingly hysterical articles on a daily basis, denouncing opponents of the genocide and justifying every act undertaken by the Israeli military.

In its weekend edition of November 10, the *Australian* published a feature, "Anti-Semitism is having a rebirth. But did it ever die?" It declared that "European antisemites fall into three categories." First on the list were "affluent bourgeois Leftists who, marinated in anti-racist discourse but unwilling to give up any material privilege, launder their souls using Jews." The second were "Muslim fundamentalists."

Under conditions where fascistic and far-right parties are in the parliaments of a growing number of European countries, including Germany, the article made the astounding assertion that "There is the old style [of antisemitism], which is waning." In other words, fascism is of no great concern. The dangers are the left and Muslims. That such a position has nothing to do with a fight against antisemitism should be self-evident.

Some of the most strident *Australian* commentators on the issue of antisemitism themselves have troubling views and connections.

In recent weeks, the *Australian* has published two articles by Claire Lehmann, again accusing "the left" of antisemitism because of its opposition to the Israeli war. Lehmann is the founder of Quillette, a right-wing online publication.

In 2019, Quillette published an article targeting anti-fascist activists. It accused several national reporters in the US of relying on the activists as sources in their reportage of the far-right. The story was predictably picked up by fascist groups, and two of the reporters claim they received death threats.

And, as per Wikipedia: "Quillette has published articles supporting the 'human biodiversity movement' (HBM), which attempts to reintroduce ideas from eugenics and scientific racism into the mainstream. HBM refers to beliefs that human behaviours are impacted by inherited genes, and certain predispositions are unique to certain ethnic groups."

When all the verbiage and media hysteria is stripped away, one is left with extreme right-wing forces waging an aggressive campaign in support of genocide.

A final point should be made. In discussing the Holocaust, neither Albanese nor Dutton mentioned the record of their own political organisations in the 1930s and 40s, with good reason.

Dutton heads a party, whose founder and most famous figure is Robert Menzies. In 1938, Menzies toured Nazi Germany. On his return, he enthused that the "abandonment by the Germans of individual liberty and of the easy and pleasant things of life has something rather magnificent about it… they have erected the state, with Hitler as its head, into a sort of religion which produces spiritual exaltation that one cannot but admire."

Archival documents show that even into 1939, as war clouds were gathering and Hitler was unleashing mass violence against the Jewish people, the right-wing Australian politician favoured appeasement with the Nazis.

Menzies, unsurprisingly, was hostile to Jewish migration throughout the 1930s. Records have also revealed that Labor's post-war immigration minister, Arthur Calwell, sought to limit the number of Jewish refugees admitted into the country after the horrors of the Holocaust. Calwell was a notorious racist who subscribed to Labor's founding "White Australia" policy until his death in 1973.

The current support of the Labor and Liberal-National Coalition for the genocide of the Palestinians is not a deviation from this rotten and reactionary legacy but its continuation in a new garb.

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