

# Australian political, media establishment threatening pro-Palestinian student encampments

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The Australian political and media establishment is escalating a hysterical campaign against pro-Palestinian encampments at university campuses. Each day brings new warnings that the relatively small and peaceful protests pose an unacceptable threat and must be dealt with by the authorities.

Over recent weeks, encampments have spread from the University of Sydney and the University of Melbourne, where they were first established, to at least nine other campuses across the country, including in Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Tasmania.

While inspired by the mass student protests in the US that have been brutally attacked, the encampments in Australia remain relatively small, generally involving only dozens of people directly.

That has not prevented the government, media and Zionist forces from denouncing the encampments and calling for them to be shut down. As in the US, the predominant official line is that the encampments are antisemitic and jeopardise the “safety” and “feelings” of Jewish students.

This racist line, based on the false conflation of Jewish people with the militarist Israeli state, continues to be trotted out even though significant layers of Jewish students are directly involved in the encampments. At a protest at the University of Sydney encampment last week, for instance, an absolute majority of speakers were themselves Jewish.

The campaign is being spearheaded by the federal Labor government, which continues to support Israel’s genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza, including the catastrophic offensive against Rafah that is currently underway. Senior government representatives have vilified student protesters, while suggesting that basic slogans supporting the Palestinians are beyond the pale.

On Monday, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese denounced the slogan “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” It was an attack on the supposed two-state solution, he said, rejecting Israel’s purported “right” to exist as an increasingly fascist ethno-state.

Albanese’s comment was followed by a frothing denunciation of the slogan by Dennis Richardson, former head

of the domestic spy agency ASIO. In statements reported by the *Australian* on Tuesday, Richardson said the “From the river to the sea” chant was a “very violent statement” which could “easily flow over into actions of violence against communities.”

Albanese reportedly agreed with those characterisations in an interview for an upcoming Sky News documentary by former Liberal parliamentarian Josh Frydenberg, which is aimed at slandering all opposition to Israel as antisemitic.

Such comments, from the prime minister and Richardson, who remains a prominent figure in intelligence circles, amount to a declaration that support for the Palestinians will be treated as a threat to “national security,” and even as terrorist incitement.

In fact the chant, which has been used for decades, is a call for an end to the suppression of the Palestinians’ fundamental democratic and human rights, and for the abolition of what prominent human rights organisations, including within Israel, have deemed to be an apartheid system. It would be as though calls for an end to apartheid in South Africa were smeared as the advocacy of violent terrorism.

It is Israel, moreover, which is seeking to establish untrammelled hegemony from the “river to the sea,” as declared in the official platform of the governing Likud Party, by completing the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians.

Parallel with this broader ideological offensive, senior Labor figures have called for direct attacks on the encampments. On Wednesday, Labor’s Education Minister Jason Clare asserted that many of the protesters were not students. He demanded that university administrations “throw the book” at such “blow-ins” and clear them off campuses.

There are indications that such a physical clear out is being prepared. This morning, the *Age* reported that Victoria Police had written to university authorities in that state, warning that unless the encampments were dispersed there would be “a strong likelihood of violence.”

Monash University in Melbourne informed students yesterday that they will face “immediate academic discipline” if they use the “from the river to the sea” chant. Management at the

University of Queensland has confirmed to the media that it has referred unspecified “incidents” involving the student encampment there to state police.

The accusations of “violence” are a sham, with not a single incident emanating from the encampments having been identified.

There have, however, been two violent attacks on the camps by Zionist thugs. In one incident at Monash, in the early hours of May 2, men carrying Israeli and Australian flags threatened and intimidated those in the encampment and damaged property as security looked on. Activists have reported that on Monday night, the camp at Adelaide University was attacked with fireworks. These incidents have been almost universally blacked out by the official press.

While governments, pro-Israeli Zionist organisations and the corporate media clearly want an end to the encampments, it is increasingly clear that they are being used as the pretext for a far broader attack on protests and opposition. That is in line with the initial response of Labor governments at the state and federal level in October, which was to threaten to ban all demonstrations opposing the Israeli onslaught.

The Murdoch media has published a continuous stream of deranged and frothing condemnations of the protests. But it was an article in the supposedly liberal *Sydney Morning Herald* yesterday that summed up the authoritarian character of the campaign.

Under the headline “When university students endorse terror, it’s time for political intervention,” its author David Crowe repeatedly asserted that the encampments were in support of Hamas, which he noted is a proscribed terrorist organisation in Australia.

Crowe combined this line, suggesting that the encampments be treated as a terrorist threat, with a dose of rabid McCarthyism, denouncing the involvement of groups that claim to be socialist in them.

Getting to the crux of his argument, Crowe asked “The question for anyone who demands action is simple: what law would you use? How can it be suddenly illegal to shout ‘intifada’ at the University of Melbourne when nobody has been charged for saying it outside the State Library?” There were laws against incitement to violence, he noted, but perhaps they were not enough.

Crowe wrote: “One logical step is to move fast to ban hate speech. The Coalition is now calling for the reform, while Labor has promised to put the draft law to parliament. Dreyfus has not put a time frame on when he will reveal the bill, which means Labor will be exposed to claims that it is taking too long on a pressing problem. There is now a very strong case to make the change as soon as possible.”

That is a call to ban all opposition to the genocide, not only on university campuses, but across society. It has a far broader application than even the question of the onslaught on Gaza, as significant as that is.

Australia’s support for the Israeli war crimes is inextricably tied to the US alliance, including in this region, advanced preparations for a catastrophic war directed against China. The Labor government, together with national security commentators, including in the *Herald*, have insisted that the military build-up in preparation for such a war must be a “whole-of-nation” and “whole-of-society” effort. They have explicitly warned against political opposition obstructing the war drive, and insisted on the need to subordinate civil society to the military effort.

The far-reaching attacks on democratic rights that are underway underscore the urgent necessity of a struggle in defence of civil liberties, against the genocide and the broader program of imperialist war, of which it is a part.

While the student encampments are of symptomatic significance, pointing to the opposition that exists, they are dominated by a completely bankrupt political perspective. The pseudo-left tendencies that are centrally involved have limited the encampments to appeals to each individual university administration to cut ties with Israel. That is in keeping with the attempts of the fake-left to limit all opposition to the genocide to impotent appeals to the Labor government and the powers-that-be to change course.

As the Socialist Equality Party and the IYSSE have insisted, the student encampments and protests must be defended from the state and Zionist attacks being launched against them. Workers in the universities and more broadly must take independent action to oppose these blatant attacks on democratic rights.

Australia’s corporatised trade unions have not taken a single industrial action against the genocide, despite a desperate appeal by Palestinian unions on October 16 for strikes and other measures to halt the transport of weapons and supplies to Israel.

That underscores the need for workers to form rank-and-file committees independent of the union bureaucracy to mobilise their profound strength to defend the student protests and to stop any supply to Israel that enables the continued genocide against the Palestinian people.

This poses the need for a socialist program directed against the source of war and authoritarianism, the capitalist system.



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