

# Australian Labor governments escalate repression of pro-Palestinian protesters

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The past week has seen a deepening onslaught against pro-Palestinian protesters in Australia, involving arrests, restrictions on gatherings and other measures of a police-state character. The rapid succession of such attacks and their similarities point to a nationally coordinated crackdown, involving the highest levels of the state.

The attempt to intimidate and suppress protests has been spearheaded politically by the federal and state Labor governments.

Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and other Labor leaders demanded that demonstrations opposing the Gaza genocide not proceed on October 6 and 7, the one-year anniversary of the Palestinian military operation. New South Wales (NSW) Police, acting with the explicit support of the state's Labor Premier Chris Minns, initiated court action to prohibit rallies against the Gaza genocide and the war on Lebanon in Sydney on those dates.

The attempts at an outright ban were deferred and the court action dropped, because it had no legal basis. But it is clear that, far from abandoning these authoritarian measures, governments are in practice proceeding with them.

In the sharpest expression of this, two students were violently arrested by NSW Police while participating in a peaceful protest at Western Sydney University (WSU) last Wednesday. The Parramatta South campus, in Sydney's west, was swarmed by officers, including two undercover police who displayed their guns having previously pretended to be students.

On Friday, another protest on campus, opposing the police attack two days earlier, was met by large numbers of police, including from the Riot Squad. The two students arrested on Wednesday have been charged with offences including assaulting security guards and resisting arrest.

On Friday morning, another WSU student was

reportedly arrested at her home, with similar charges levelled against her. All of the students have been subjected to onerous bail conditions, including that they have no contact with other members of the WSU4Palestine group.

WSU management has claimed that it did not call police to campus, but has aggressively defended the attack, slandered protesters and pledged to collaborate further with police. Its claim that police arrived without being called by the university, however, could suggest a high-level decision of NSW Police command, which would likely have involved the NSW Labor government.

The operation was clearly intended to intimidate opposition at a university with a large working-class cohort, including many students of Middle Eastern descent.

Other incidents have shown that what occurred at WSU was not an isolated development.

At the weekly mass protest opposing the genocide in Sydney last Sunday, two activists with Students for Palestine were detained by NSW Police. The young women had put up posters in Hyde Park, where the rally was held, advertising a subsequent demonstration.

Despite such postering having occurred at the weekly protests for the past year, NSW Police on Sunday decided to treat it as a criminal offence. The activists were searched, before being fined and issued move on directions, compelling them to leave Sunday's protest under threat of arrest. Like the attack at WSU, that is intended to send an intimidatory message that the exercise of basic civil liberties can be met with punishment.

Other universities besides WSU have also taken repressive actions.

A statement issued by the Students for Palestine group at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Sydney on Sunday reported, "We have had a speak-out for Gaza and Lebanon banned by the university." They had also

been “dragged into a meeting” with Arc, which manages student activities on campus, “to threaten our affiliation as a club.”

The group also stated: “And, due to an all-student email on 3 October, we believe that disciplinary proceedings have begun in response to the Student General Meeting [SGM].” That SGM had been attended by hundreds of students, who overwhelmingly passed a motion condemning the war crimes in Gaza.

An event was also barred at Monash University in Melbourne. The Islamic Society reported that management had canceled permission for a previously-approved event it was to hold on October 7, to raise funds for medical care in Gaza. The event had come under attack from the right-wing Sky News as well as Zionist supporters of Israel.

Also in Victoria, state police are continuing a crackdown on those who participated in a protest against the International Land Defence Exposition last month. Demonstrators had been met with a massive police mobilisation to protect the weapons fair. Cops used serious weaponry against protesters, including rubber bullets and flash-bang grenades, and deliberately provoked clashes.

At the protest itself, police carried out mass arrests, fining or charging a total of 89 people. But the dragnet is continuing. More than a month after the demonstration, Victoria Police today announced charges against four people, including for assaulting police. One is accused of throwing horse manure at a mounted police officer. Police have also publicly released the images of a number of other protesters that they are seeking to identify.

The attacks on widespread opposition to the genocide parallel similar crackdowns in all the imperialist centres that have supported and facilitated the Israeli war crimes, including the United States and the major European powers. Under conditions of a far broader eruption of imperialist militarism, including the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and Washington’s confrontation with China, there is an attempt by the ruling elites to outlaw widespread and growing opposition to war.

In Australia, the Labor government has backed Israel’s atrocities for more than a year. Over recent weeks, it has supported the Zionist regime’s expansion of the war to Lebanon, as well as its threats against Iran. That was summed up this morning by a statement from Foreign Minister Penny Wong, denouncing Iran and outlining new sanctions against it, at the very point that Israel, together

with the US, is moving towards a direct conflict with Tehran.

That alignment, and the accompanying police crackdown, further expose the bankrupt position advanced by the official protest movements, including the various Students for Palestine groups which are politically dominated by the pseudo-left Socialist Alternative organisation. For the past year, they have sought to limit opposition to the genocide to plaintive appeals to the Labor government to change course. At the same time, they have promoted the Labor-aligned and corporatised trade unions as a basis of opposition to the war drive.

Labor, however, has demonstrated its full commitment to war, not only against Gaza, but everywhere, including through its rapid militarisation of Australia for a catastrophic conflict with China. The unions fully support this program. They have not held a single strike against Australia’s complicity in the genocide, and they have done nothing in response to the latest police attacks. The pseudo-left’s protest politics serve to subordinate those opposed to the genocide to the very forces that are responsible for it.

A diametrically opposed perspective was advanced at an SGM at WSU last Tuesday, initiated by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality. A motion overwhelmingly adopted by the more than forty students insisted that the genocide was not an isolated event, but part of an eruption of war stemming from the breakdown of global capitalism. Students had to take up the fight to mobilise the working class, the revolutionary force in society, against war, authoritarianism and their source in the profit system.

What was required was the development of a mass socialist movement, not appealing to the Labor government, but politically fighting it.



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