

Far-right commentator Candace Owens barred from entering Australia

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The Australian Labor government's immigration minister Tony Burke announced late last month that US pundit Candace Owens, a prominent figure on the extreme right, had been denied a visa to travel to Australia, where she had been scheduled to speak in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide later this month.

Owens is still due to speak in neighbouring New Zealand on November 14, although the opposition Labour Party is calling for her to be banned from entering that country.

Burke declared on October 27: "From downplaying the impact of the Holocaust with comments about [Nazi physician Josef] Mengele through to claims that Muslims started slavery, Candace Owens has the capacity to incite discord in almost every direction ... Australia's national interest is best served when Candace Owens is somewhere else." Burke had indicated in August that he would prevent Owens from entering the country, before she had even applied for a visa.

Owens is notorious for her antisemitic statements. She was fired from the right-wing *Daily Wire* in March after she declared that "a ring" of powerful Jewish people was operating in Hollywood and committing "horrific acts." In September she was suspended from YouTube for posting an interview with her friend, the Hitler-admiring rapper Kanye West, in which the latter declared that Jewish people control the media.

The decision to ban Owens from visiting Australia, however, is completely anti-democratic and should be opposed by anyone who defends free speech and political freedom. While Burke highlighted Owens' embrace of far-right conspiracies, the minister's statement sets another precedent for banning anyone who the government decides "has the capacity to incite

discord" or who it labels a threat to "Australia's national interest."

Australia has some of the most draconian border policies in the world. Immigration authorities have sweeping powers to deny entry to anyone who is deemed to be not "of good character," including people who have committed no crime.

In a video responding to Burke's announcement, Owens claimed that she had been denied a visa due to Zionists wanting to silence her criticism of the massacre of Palestinians in Gaza.

Zionist organisations in Australia have in fact been publicly calling for Owens to be banned for months. They are now demanding that similar actions be taken against anyone who opposes the genocide being carried out by Israel against the Palestinian people.

In a statement which conflated antisemitism with opposition to the crimes of the Israeli state, Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC) executive director Colin Rubenstein told media outlets: "We hope the same principled policy will be applied to other extremist propagandists seeking to visit Australia, such as the two pro-Hamas speakers apparently now due to come in January, Shaun King and Mansour Shouman."

King is an activist associated with Black Lives Matter, who has been involved in pro-Palestine events, and Shouman is a Palestinian Canadian journalist and activist who focuses on raising funds for charities aiding displaced and starving people in Gaza.

The Australian Labor government is supporting the US-led imperialist intervention in the Middle East and Yemen and providing diplomatic and military-intelligence support for Israel's bombing of Gaza and Lebanon. Like the Biden administration in the US it has unleashed an unprecedented witch-hunt against pro-

Palestine protesters, which includes attacks on students at university campuses. Journalists and academics have also been sacked for criticising Israel.

Burke has repeatedly threatened to deport non-residents for protesting against the atrocities carried out by the Israeli military. Last month he cancelled the visa of Khaled Beydoun, a visiting law professor from Arizona State University, for addressing a Stand 4 Palestine event on October 7 at Lakemba mosque in Sydney.

Beydoun stated that the anniversary of the Hamas operation against Israel was “not fully a day of mourning, today is also a day that marks considerable celebration, considerable progress and in some respects, considerable privilege. ... The level of global literacy around what’s taking place in [Palestine] has exponentially risen.”

The event was denounced by Burke, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and New South Wales Premier Chris Minns. The corporate media whipped up an hysterical campaign against Beydoun, falsely accusing him of “celebrating” the Hamas attack and of supporting “terrorism.”

The banning of Owens, meanwhile, has played directly into the hands of the extreme-right, including real antisemites, by providing her with international publicity.

It remains unclear whether Owens will speak in New Zealand, where she has received considerable promotion by the right-wing media company The Platform. Its founder Sean Plunket, a full-throated supporter of the Zionist regime in Israel and its murderous actions in Gaza, was scheduled to introduce Owens at her Auckland event.

The main Zionist organisation, the Jewish Council of New Zealand, has denounced Owens’ statements but is not opposing her visit.

The opposition Labour Party is calling on the right-wing National Party-led coalition government to follow Australia in denying Owens a visa. In a statement on October 29, Young Labour declared that Owens’ “divisive, hate-filled rhetoric threatens New Zealand’s values of inclusivity and compassion.” It noted that Owens is mentioned favourably in the manifesto of Christchurch terrorist Brenton Tarrant, who massacred 51 Muslim worshippers in March 2019.

There is nothing remotely progressive about NZ

Labour’s position. Like its Australian counterpart, it supports US imperialist operations in the Middle East, as well as its war against Russia and the US war preparations against China. When it was still in government last year, Labour endorsed Israel’s genocidal onslaught against Gaza and smeared pro-Palestine protesters.

The Young Labour statement, echoing Burke, demands that New Zealand Immigration Minister Erica Stanford implement tougher entry restrictions not only for Owens but for other “individuals who incite division and disrupt social harmony.”

This formula can and will be applied to anti-war activists and socialists who oppose the capitalist system and seek to mobilise the working class against imperialist war and genocide. The real target of such immigration bans, as with all attacks on freedom of movement and free speech, is not far-right individuals like Owens but the working class and its socialist leadership.



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