

Oppose Zionist witch hunt against Australian academic Randa Abdel-Fattah

Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee
21 January 2025

The Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee calls on academics, university workers and students at Sydney's Macquarie University and more broadly to come to the defence of Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah against a continued witch hunt by the corporate media and Zionist lobby groups.

A pro-Palestine activist, Abdel-Fattah is an academic in sociology at Macquarie University. She holds a four-year Future Fellowship (research grant) from the Australian Research Council and is an award-winning author of books for children and young adults.

The latest attack on Abdel-Fattah has been spearheaded by the Murdoch media, which has conducted a campaign of bullying and harassment against anti-genocide voices, slandering them as antisemitic.

At the end of December, following a tweet by Abdel-Fattah, articles in the *Australian* falsely accused her of endangering the health and safety of Jewish students and called for her to be immediately sacked and stripped of her research funding.

Abdel-Fattah had tweeted: "May 2025 be the end of Israel. May it be the end of the US-Israeli imperial scourge on humanity. May we see the abolishment of the death cult of Zionism and the end of US empire and finally a world where the slaughter, annihilation and torture of Palestinians is no longer daily routine."

The tweet was linked to a news story about the appalling deaths of children in Gaza due to the cold and the continuing US-backed Israeli genocide.

In response, Alex Ryvchin, co-CEO of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, told a Murdoch tabloid, the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*: "She has created an unacceptable risk for the welfare and health of Jews and Israelis at the university. It is intolerable that our taxes are propping this up."

The newspaper also featured Liberal Party Senator Sarah Henderson accusing Abdel-Fattah of anti-Jewish hatred and calling for her research funding to be withdrawn, declaring: "Australian taxpayers should not be funding activism and hate speech under the guise of so-called research."

To call for the abolition of the Zionist state, based on ethnic discrimination and the violent dispossession of Palestinians, and an end to the Israeli regime's US-armed atrocities is not anti-Jewish. In fact, the apartheid-style Israeli state is inimical to the interests of working-class Jews themselves. It is based on pitting them against their Arab brothers and sisters, functioning as a garrison entity for the plundering interests of US and European imperialism.

The witch hunt against Abdel-Fattah is not just a question of an individual academic. Internationally, Israel's genocide against the Palestinians has been accompanied by an assault on free speech. Opponents of the war crimes being carried out by the Zionist regime are being subjected to intimidation and slander by the governments, the corporate media and Zionist organisations.

In Abdel-Fattah's case, the attacks have escalated. Last February and March, calls were made in the media for her to be removed as a speaker at an international woman's day event and from a book award judging panel. In each instance she was branded an antisemite.

Last April, Abdel-Fattah attended the pro-Palestine encampment at Sydney University with other parents and children from the Families for Palestine group. She was accused in the *Australian* of "indoctrinating children with vile, hateful, anti-Semitic slogans and chants."

This was followed by demands that Abdel-Fattah's research funding be withdrawn and that she be sacked by Macquarie University. The university's management then launched an investigation into whether she had breached the university's code of conduct. Although the conclusions of that investigation were confidential, Abdel-Fattah is currently still employed by the university and holds her research grant.

In July, in an article published in nine media newspapers, the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Abdel-Fattah and journalist Mary Kostakidis were accused of being "7 October deniers" and "rape apologists," and compared to Holocaust deniers. The following week the Zionist Federation of Australia launched a complaint with the

Human Rights Commission accusing Kostakidis of breaching the Racial Discrimination Act.

Abdel-Fattah made a formal complaint to the Australian Press Council about the misleading claims and factual inaccuracies in the article and demanded a retraction. The complaint was based on the Press Council's code of practice, which speaks of accuracy and clarity as well as balance and fairness. Despite Abdel-Fattah providing evidence that the article was misleading, her complaint was dismissed out of hand.

Following the latest attack, Macquarie University management has again initiated an investigation into whether Abdel-Fattah has breached the university's code of conduct. The management is one of a number of Australian universities that have adopted the repressive International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism.

As the WSWs wrote in 2020: "The IHRA definition is a mechanism for outlawing political criticism of the Israeli state, its criminal oppression of the Palestinians and the right-wing religious nationalism on which it is founded."

Internationally, there is a coordinated campaign to silence anti-genocide voices on campuses. In Britain, for example, university staff and students have come under attack, including James Dickens, a retired University of Leeds professor, who was subjected to a coordinated campaign for his removal as an honorary professor for criticising Israel.

In the United States, many staff and students have been sacked or expelled, among them Jewish anthropology professor Maura Finkelstein. She was dismissed by Muhlenberg College after a discrimination complaint was made to the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, citing an anti-genocide post she made on social media.

In Australia, the Full Federal Court last May backed the University of Sydney's 2019 sacking of academic Tim Anderson, primarily for comparing Israel with the Nazi regime and criticising US war propaganda. A month later, the University of Sydney management placed sociology professor Sujatha Fernandes under investigation on accusations of breaching the university's policy by calling into question lying media reports about alleged Hamas atrocities on October 7, 2023.

Last November, a law suit was filed under Australia's Racial Discrimination Act against two University of Sydney academics, John Keane and Nick Riemer, directly equating their public opposition to Zionism and genocide with antisemitism.

These slanders are not aimed at opposing genuine antisemitism, but at silencing opposition to the US-Israeli mass killings, which the Albanese Labor government, like

other imperialist governments, fully backs under the fraudulent banner of supporting the occupying state's "right to defend itself."

The Macquarie University Rank-and-File committee unequivocally opposes the attacks on Abdel-Fattah, which are aimed at delegitimising opposition to some of the worst war crimes since the Holocaust. We reject and condemn the false accusation that support for the Palestinian people and opposition to Zionism amounts to antisemitism.

The National Tertiary Education Union cannot be relied on to conduct a principled defence. It has not issued a single statement in defence of anti-genocide academics. While it has acted for some academics individually, these processes have been kept confidential and isolated. There has been no concerted campaign to defeat the assault on free speech.

That is in line with an NTEU National Council resolution of October 2023, which claimed to commit the union to "active solidarity with Palestine" but proposed no action by workers against the genocide. Collectively, Australia's union bureaucracies have not called a single strike in defence of the Palestinians, or against the witch hunt of genocide opponents.

That underscores the need for educators and students to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the union apparatuses, to discuss and organise.

The defence of basic democratic rights, including academic freedom, is essential. As universities become increasingly enmeshed into serving the research needs of both Australian and US militarism via the Labor government's Universities Accord, the rights of academics to speak out against imperialist war is more important than ever.

The defence of free speech is inseparably linked to the fight against the capitalist profit system itself, which is the root cause of military aggression, war and barbarism.

To discuss how to take forward this fight and defend Abdel-Fattah and all other witch-hunted educators, please contact us via the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file educators' network.

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

Twitter: [CFPE_Australia](https://twitter.com/CFPE_Australia)

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/opposeaeusellout



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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