Australian Labor government escalates Zionist witch hunt against academic Randa Abdel-Fattah

Mike Head
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Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's Labor Party government has thrown its full weight behind the mounting Zionist-led media demonisation of Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah, a pro-Palestinian academic at Sydney's Macquarie University. She has been falsely accused of antisemitism, along with many others, for opposing the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Yesterday, in a reactionary and overt political intervention, Education Minister Jason Clare wrote to the Australian Research Council (ARC) asking it to investigate "as a matter of urgency" Abdel-Fattah's current ARC $870,000 research grant, based on phony allegations that she breached the grant rules.

Clare's act marks a further ramping up of the role of the Labor government, like its counterparts in Washington and other imperialist capitals internationally, in backing the ongoing Israeli mass murder in the Middle East and seeking to witch hunt, outlaw and persecute participants in the mass global opposition to it.

This is being accompanied by an incendiary media-government blitz to declare that Jews are threatened by a wave of antisemitism in Australia. This is all based on extremely murky incidents of graffiti and arson, without a skerrick of evidence linking the incidents to any of the large demonstrations in Australia against the Israeli genocide.

Today's screaming headline in the *Australian*, a Murdoch media flagship that has spearheaded the Zionist campaign, was "Anti-semites are winning." It demanded stepped up police-state measures by the federal and state Labor governments against anyone allegedly involved in the still-unexplained incidents.

Alongside that, the newspaper's editorial insisted that Abdel-Fattah's "Grant funding must be stripped."

The editorial proclaimed that Clare or the ARC must apply the ARC's "national interest" test to Abdel-Fattah's research grant for a study of "Arab-Muslim Australian social justice activism." That sends a wider chilling message also against any university research which is deemed not to be in the interests of Australian capitalism and the bipartisan Labor and Liberal-National Coalition alignment behind US militarism.

These developments, echoing those taking place rapidly under the Trump administration in the United States, underscore the necessity for a powerful campaign to defend Abdel-Fattah and every other educator and commentator being threatened by what is an escalating offensive to silence all voice against the ongoing US-backed Israeli atrocities and political dissent as a whole.

The Albanese government, urged on by the openly right-wing Coalition, has been defaming and denouncing genocide opponents since the Israeli onslaught on Gaza began in October 2023, as have its partners in Washington and Europe.

Labor is now intensifying moves similar to those in the US, where the fascistic Trump administration is going beyond the Biden-Harris White House to demand nothing less than the suppression of all political opposition on university campuses and the deportation of students who have taken part in anti-genocide demonstrations.

The Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee (RFC) issued a statement on January 21 calling on academics, university workers and students at Macquarie University and more broadly to come to the defence of Abdel-Fattah. The events since then have demonstrated the need for this call to be taken up urgently.

In Australia, this was Clare's second recent blatant intervention. Earlier, he personally phoned Queensland University of Technology (QUT) vice-chancellor Margaret Sheil last week to demand that the university management instigate disciplinary action over a three-day "National Symposium on Unifying Anti-Racist Research and Action" held by QUT's Carumba Institute during the third week of January.

Abdel-Fattah spoke at that event. She did so alongside other academics and activists, some of them indigenous, and Sarah Schwartz, a human rights lawyer and executive officer of the anti-Zionist Jewish Council of Australia. Schwartz, who is Jewish, has also been denounced as an anti-Jewish bigot. As the WSWS explained, this is a particularly revealing exposure of the bogus character of the worldwide drive to conflate opposition to Israel's war crimes with antisemitism.

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As the Macquarie University RFC statement calling for Abdel-Fattah's defence also explained: "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."

In response to Clare's demands, QUT's vice chancellor Sheil has already issued a grovelling apology for "hurt and offence" supposedly caused by the event, and menacingly promised to "review the circumstances of this presentation and take any action necessary."

Now the ARC, which is chaired by Peter Shergold, who headed the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet under Liberal-National Prime Minister John Howard, has followed suit.

An ARC spokesman yesterday told the *Australian* that the ARC had "significant concerns" about Abdel-Fattah's speech at the QUT conference "and other previously reported activities."

The spokesman declared that the ARC had the power to terminate its research grants and was "engaging directly, and as a matter of priority, with Macquarie University to ensure, as the administering organisation, it is properly managing the grant and is actively complying with the terms of the agreement."

This is nominally based on Abdel-Fattah's remarks at the QUT conference, in which she explained that she had substituted the ARC grant's requirement to hold an academic conference on her research with an online "Jars for Preservation" workshop, to which she invited women from different backgrounds to send statements.

In reality, the government's seizure on her innovative approach is a pretext for intensifying months of slander and harassment against Abdel-Fattah, a sociology educator who holds a four-year ARC Future Fellowship grant and is an award-winning author of 12 books for children and young adults.

At the end of December, following a tweet by Abdel-Fattah, articles in the *Australian* again falsely accused her of endangering the health and safety of Jewish students and insisting that she be immediately sacked by Macquarie University, as well as being stripped of her research funding.

Abdel-Fattah's tweet had called for the end of Israel and "the US-Israeli imperial scourge on humanity" and for "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 barbarism.

Abdel-Fattah is far from alone in being targeted. In Australia, other critics of Israel being persecuted by governments, the corporate media and Zionist organisations include journalist Mary Kostakidis, University of Sydney academics, John Keane and Nick Riemer, as well as sociology professor Sujatha Fernandes and the same university's sacked academic Tim Anderson.

These attacks are not aimed at opposing genuine antisemitism. As the Jewish Council's Sarah Schwartz wrote last week: "Trump appeared happy to host neo-Nazis and Holocaust deniers at Mar-a-Lago for dinner. His right-hand man, Elon Musk, gave two fascist-style salutes at Trump's inauguration and has recently endorsed the extreme far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) political party."

The aim of the Zionist-instigated witch hunt is to silence opposition to the US-Israeli mass killings—some of the worst war crimes since the Holocaust—which the Albanese government fully backs under the fraudulent banner of supporting the occupying state's "right to defend itself."

The main campus trade union, the National Tertiary Education Union, has not issued a single statement in defence of anti-genocide academics. That demonstrates the need for educators and students to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the union apparatuses, to discuss and organise.

As the Macquarie University RFC statement concluded: "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 the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file educators' network.

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com
Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation
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