

Australia: Mounting opposition to Zionist-instigated witch hunt against Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah

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Widespread hostility is developing to the targeted victimisation by Zionist groups and the Albanese Labor government of Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah, a well-known pro-Palestinian academic at Sydney's Macquarie University.

Like many other opponents in Australia and internationally of the intensifying and ever-more blatant US-backed Israeli mass killings and ethnic cleansing in Palestine, Abdel-Fattah has been falsely accused of antisemitism because she has spoken out against the genocide and the Zionist state of Israel itself.

Outrage is being voiced by university staff, as well as students and working-class people more broadly across Australia, to the fact that the Labor government has thrown its weight behind the witch hunt.

In Labor's latest moves, Education Minister Jason Clare asked the Australian Research Council (ARC) to investigate cooked-up allegations that Abdel-Fattah breached a requirement of her current ARC research grant, and Labor MP Josh Burns, the chair of a parliamentary "antisemitism" inquiry, demanded to know why Macquarie University had not sacked her.

Yesterday, the Labor and Liberal-National Coalition-dominated committee headed by Burns issued a report recommending draconian amendments to the Fair Work Act to enable universities to more easily sack staff and researchers accused of antisemitism.

This is part of an escalating offensive to silence dissent, as the US Trump administration and Israel's Netanyahu government threaten to unleash "hell" in Gaza—an even greater slaughter—to permanently remove its more than two million people and annex it by force.

Abdel-Fattah is far from alone in being targeted. In Australia, other critics of Israel being tarred as anti-Jewish bigots and persecuted by governments, the corporate media and Zionist organisations include journalists Mary Kostakidis, Antoinette Lattouf and Peter Lalor, Sarah Schwartz, the executive officer of the Jewish Council of

Australia, University of Sydney academics John Keane and Nick Riemer, as well as the same university's sociology professor Sujatha Fernandes and sacked academic Tim Anderson.

There is growing opposition to Abdel-Fattah's victimisation, and that of other anti-genocide academics and journalists. An online petition, already signed by more than 5,200 people, is demanding that Clare "immediately retract his directive for an investigation into Dr. Randa Abdel-Fattah's research."

An open letter by "Scholars against political repression," posted on the *Overland* magazine site, signed by over 400 academics, including more than 40 from Macquarie University itself, has condemned Clare's intervention.

The Jewish Council of Australia, a group of Jewish academics, lawyers, writers and teachers, has issued an open letter to Clare, denouncing the "anti-democratic, racist and insidious attacks" against Abdel-Fattah and "all other academics who speak out against Israel's atrocities."

The online petition, posted on change.org by "Muslim Votes Matter" on February 3, declares solidarity with Abdel-Fattah "against political interference and the growing suppression of academic freedom in Australia."

It declares: "This is not just about Dr. Abdel-Fattah. It is about the future of academic independence in Australia. If we allow political interests to dictate what research is deemed 'acceptable,' we jeopardise free thought, critical inquiry, and the right to challenge injustice."

The petition demands a commitment from the ARC to "uphold its independence and protect scholars from politically motivated attacks" and that "Macquarie University reaffirm its support for academic freedom and reject any external pressure to censor critical scholarship."

Hundreds of signatories have posted comments, voicing their defence of academic freedom and free speech, and attacking the conflation of opposition to the genocide with antisemitism.

“I support Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah wholeheartedly against the hostile and unjustifiable campaign against her,” one wrote. “The deliberate conflation of the serious accusation of antisemitism is being cynically used to silence criticism of Israel.”

Another wrote: “I find it very concerning that any challenge to the actions of the Israeli government is branded as anti-semitism when the reality is that Zionism does not equate with being Jewish!”

Some comments expressed disgust at the Labor government for spearheading the witch hunt, along with the corporate media and the Liberal-National Coalition. “Criminalising and attacking criticism of genocide by calling it anti-semitic is 100% inhumane, and a disgrace to Australia’s Labor Party, LNP, and media shills,” one stated.

The *Overland* open letter, published on February 10, condemns Clare’s decision to request the ARC investigation of Abdel-Fattah and demands that he “instead guarantees the independence of the Council and defends the academic freedom of scholars in the face of political attacks.”

It states: “In the context of Israel’s monumental destruction of Gaza in a genocidal campaign that is part of its almost century-long occupation of historic Palestine, academics who have criticised Israel’s conduct in Gaza have faced relentless attacks by the Coalition, the Murdoch Press, and pro-Israel organisations.”

The Jewish Council of Australia open letter further demonstrates that many Jews oppose the reactionary nationalist program of Zionism. It voices particular concern at Clare’s intervention against Abdel-Fattah, saying it represents “severe political interference” into the ARC.

“As a group of Jewish academics, lawyers, writers and teachers, who represent a significant and growing number of Jewish people in Australia, we urge you not to cave to these campaigns which are anti-democratic, racist in nature, and based on the deliberate spreading of misinformation,” it states.

“Any political or institutional action taken against academics, at the behest of Israel lobby groups and Murdoch press smear campaigns, would represent a severe intrusion into all of our rights to free speech and academic freedom.”

Such statements and petitions are important, but appeals to the Labor government and authorities such as the ARC will not defeat this offensive.

To defend Abdel-Fattah, and the wider threat to free speech and basic democratic rights, requires a broader political fight throughout the universities and the working class as a whole against all those pursuing the witch hunt, and that includes the Albanese government.

Clare’s intervention is not an aberration. The moves against Abdel-Fattah are part of a wider attack on anti-war

and other political dissent in Australia and internationally. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and state Labor leaders have repeatedly equated anti-genocide dissent with antisemitism and called for the shutting down of student encampments and other anti-genocide protests.

Most recently, the Albanese government joined hands with the Liberal-National Coalition to rush sweeping supposed “hate speech laws” through parliament that could be used to prosecute Abdel-Fattah and others.

Now working closely with the fascistic Donald Trump, the Labor government is totally committed to US militarism, including the AUKUS pact preparations for war against China.

On January 21, the Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee (RFC) issued a statement calling on academics, university workers and students at Macquarie University and more broadly to build a powerful campaign for the defence of Abdel-Fattah and all the victimised academics, journalists and students.

It 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.”

The statement issued this call: “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.”

To discuss how to take forward this campaign, the rank-and-file committee is holding a meeting at Macquarie University next Thursday February 20 at 1pm in Room 110, 11 Wally’s Walk. All are welcome to participate in this meeting, which can also be joined via Zoom.

Click here to register for the meeting. To send statements of support, email the committee at macquarierfc@gmail.com, or the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file educators’ network, at cfpe.aus@gmail.com.



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