# Australian Labor state government charging protesters over anti-Zionist slogan

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In an escalation of attacks on the right to protest and free speech, police in the Australian state of Victoria have arrested more opponents of the genocide against Gaza for publicly denouncing Israeli war crimes and Zionism.

The latest arrests occurred on April 29 outside the Magistrate's Court in the state capital Melbourne. According to reports, about 60 protesters had gathered at the court to oppose the prosecution of pro-Palestinian activist Hash Tayeh. He has been hit with criminal charges for completely legitimate political speech in which he stated that "all Zionists are terrorists."

Tayeh has been charged with four counts of "using insulting words in public" under the Victorian state Summary Offences Act—legislation which has until now been used to charge people for offences during verbal altercations or swearing at police. This came after police failed to have Tayeh charged under the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act, effectively admitting that he had not violated what are essentially hate speech laws.

In support of Tayeh, protesters outside the court led chants of "all Zionists are terrorists." Victoria Police responded by arresting another two individuals—a 79-year-old man and a 48-year-old man. In an interview outside the courtroom with Turkish-based Anadolu Agency, the 79-year-old, Alan, said: "I explained to the crowd why all Zionists are terrorists. If you're a Zionist, you must be a terrorist. You support terror. You mightn't actually kill people yourself, but you support terror and there's no doubt about it."

Images show Alan's hands covered in blood from the handcuffs used by police in the arrest outside the courtroom.

According to statements posted by Tayeh on his social media pages on May 4, the arrests bring the total number of anti-genocide activists charged under the Summary Offences Act in the state to five. That the use of this legislation has been expanded to other anti-genocide protesters confirms that the charging of Tayeh was intended to set a precedent and bring Victoria into line with a broader assault on free speech across the country.

Labor governments have spearheaded this attack on democratic rights.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has ferociously denounced pro-Palestinian protesters and his Labor federal government passed sweeping "hate speech laws" in February under the guise of tackling a supposed "national crisis" of a wave of supposed antisemitism.

The Criminal Code Amendment (Hate Crimes) Act 2025—which includes mandatory minimum sentences of up to six years' jail time—can be used against any opponents of the US-Israeli assault on Palestinians, or any hostility to increasing government support for US-led militarism.

Similar laws were passed at the same time in the country's most populous state New South Wales.

Under conditions where using hate speech laws has thus far proven unsuccessful in Victoria, there has clearly been a policy decision made at the highest levels of the state's Labor government in consultation with the Labor federal government that the Summary Offences Act be the vehicle for silencing anti-genocide protesters. In other words, the decision had been made months ago that Tayeh and others must be silenced, and a suitable legal means retrofitted to ensure this outcome.

The Australian media and political establishment—as with those of all the major imperialist powers which have all supported the Israeli state's genocide of

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Palestinians—have justified these draconian laws by equating Judaism and Zionism, suggesting that anti-Zionism is therefore antisemitism. This is a lie, strongly opposed by many anti-genocide protesters including anti-Zionist Jews and Tayeh himself.

Zionism is a right-wing and ultra-nationalist political ideology which has for 80 years been predicated on ethnic-cleansing and oppression of Palestinians.

Tayeh and others are not anti-Jewish, but are taking up a fight against oppression.

Outside the courtroom, Tayeh said: "Fighting for Palestine is not a crime. Demanding freedom for the oppressed is not controversial.… I will stand for any people who are persecuted—Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, atheist and beyond—because injustice against any is injustice against all. Silence is not an option."

Tayeh and others, including the *World Socialist Web Site*, have warned that the attacks against him are a precedent.

In his May 4 statement, Tayeh said: "They are testing the waters. Silencing voices. Criminalising truth. This is not about one person. This is not about one protest. This is a crackdown on pro-humanity, anti-apartheid, and free speech advocacy in Australia."

The assault on democratic rights is intended to create an atmosphere in which protesters are intimidated into silence and actively suppressed by the government which has thrown its full weight behind the genocide.

But, while the first targets of these measures are pro-Palestinian protesters, the dangers confronting workers and youth go far beyond hostility to the Gaza genocide.

Albanese's Labor government was re-elected into office last week, not on a wave of support, but as a by-product of mass hostility to the Liberal-National Coalition, which was associated with the fascistic administration of US President Donald Trump. Many voters linked Dutton's extreme right-wing politics with the anti-immigrant, militarist and anti-working-class policies of the Trump administration.

Labor, however, is no less committed to the interests of Australian capitalist class which demands increased militarism and a stepped-up assault on working-class living and working conditions.

In fact, Labor is deeply hated by many workers. It barely increased its all-time low vote from 2022, winning barely a third of primary votes in this year's election.

The Australian ruling elite and its parliamentary representatives understand that they sit atop a social powder keg. As the cost of living continues to soar, and billions of dollars are siphoned out of social spending such as education and healthcare to fund Australian involvement in imperialist wars in the Middle East and preparations for war with China, broad masses are going to come into conflict with the political establishment and the capitalist profit system itself.

It is this broad-based movement of the working class against war and austerity that is the ultimate target of the suppression laws being tested and developed in response to the anti-genocide protests.

It is, therefore, critical that workers and youth learn the lessons of the last 18 months of protests against the Gaza genocide. As long as opposition is confined by the Greens, unions and pseudo-left groups like Socialist Alternative to the bankrupt perspective of appealing to the same Labor government which is complicit in war crimes, the witch hunt against protesters will intensify.

These same groups have covered up the role that Labor has played in deepening the country's role as a frontline state in US-led war plans against China, which are intimately linked to the broader drive of imperialism to redivide the world—a drive which includes the Gaza genocide as part of a broader strategy of controlling the resource-rich Middle East.

Only through a fight against the entire political establishment—including Labor, the Liberal-Nationals and the Greens—can basic democratic rights, including the right to protest, be defended. The drive for profits under the capitalist system is the source of war and genocide abroad, and the related assault on anti-war sentiment against the working class and youth at home.

A new perspective is needed—one based on abolishing capitalism and replacing it with workers' governments based on socialist internationalism. This is the program of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) which ran the only anti-war platform in the Australian federal election.

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