

Zionist group sues two Australian academics for opposing the Gaza genocide

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A group of pro-Zionist staff and students, backed by a high-profile legal team, is suing University of Sydney academics Nick Riemer and John Keane in the Federal Court of Australia for making public statements opposing the Gaza genocide.

If the case is upheld, it will set a legal precedent that could outlaw any opposition to the worsening US-backed Israeli mass slaughter and ethnic cleansing in Gaza as “antisemitic.” It therefore has far-reaching implications for free speech and other basic democratic rights in Australia and internationally.

On Riemer and Keane’s [chuffed.org](#) appeal page, Michael Bradley, who is their lawyer and managing partner at Marque Lawyers, states: “The legal stakes could not be higher.”

The court case follows on from a complaint lodged by law firm Levitt Robinson last year with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). It alleged that Riemer and Keane had violated Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, which prohibits public acts that “offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person” based on their race.

According to the *Australian*, the legal team backing the complaint includes former Federal Court judge Ron Merkel and barrister Adam Butt. The newspaper reported last November that the evidence presented by Levitt Robinson consisted of social media posts made by the academics after the October 7, 2023 Hamas-led attack in southern Israel.

Riemer had tweeted that “No progressive should feel the need to publicly condemn any choices by the Palestinian resistance.” Keane had posted a green flag, which the complaint claimed was associated with Hamas.

The complaint alleged that Riemer and Keane’s criticisms of Israel and of Zionism “individually or

cumulatively were reasonably likely ... to offend, insult, humiliate, or intimidate Jewish persons or Israeli persons in Australia and elsewhere.”

In April this year, the AHRC terminated the complaint on the request of Riemer and Keane, who had pointed out that the complainants had already been fundraising for many months to sue them in the Federal Court, regardless of the outcome of the AHRC process.

There is widespread and deepening opposition across Australia and internationally to the genocide, as well as anger over the role of the Albanese Labor government in supporting it.

Last month witnessed some of the largest anti-war demonstrations since the global anti-Iraq war protests in 2003. Defying attempts at intimidation by the police and the state Labor government, up to 300,000 people marched over the Sydney Harbour Bridge on August 3, denouncing the genocide and the Albanese government’s continued complicity in it.

Three weeks later, about a quarter of a million people joined rallies in cities and towns across the country, marked by deepening outrage and hostility not just toward the mass killings and starvation in Palestine but the active support for the US-backed onslaught by the Labor government, including through continuing exports of F-35 parts and other military items to Israel.

This sentiment is also reflected by the support for Riemer and Keane. According to a press release, they raised \$60,000 within 48 hours of starting a fund appeal to cover their legal costs.

As of writing, the total had almost doubled to over \$112,000 from some 1,200 individual donations. This is without any publicity by the corporate media, pseudo-left groups, or trade unions, including the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU).

In an online statement, Keane and Riemer said: “At

this dark moment in world affairs, with over 60,000 Gazans murdered, most of Gaza itself flattened to the ground, and two million dispossessed and bereaved survivors currently being deliberately starved, vocal defenders of Israel are perpetrating a classic bait-and-switch. They want us to believe that black is white, perpetrators are victims, and pro-justice and anti-genocide advocates are aggressors.”

Significantly, in May, a long list of Jewish university staff and students signed a statement defending Riemer and Keane, saying: “We repudiate the attempt by those making the complaint to conflate Zionism, a political ideology with Jewish and non-Jewish adherents, with Jewish identity.”

The statement explained: “The attempt to silence Dr Riemer, Professor Keane and other academics who seek justice for Palestine forms part of concerted and coordinated efforts to silence critics of Israel across Australia’s university campuses and public squares, trammelling fundamental democratic rights of assembly, protest, expression, and dissent. It is just such moves to suppress free speech and to silence dissenting intellectuals that Jews have so often experienced in our history...

“These complainants do not speak for us as Jewish people. Dr Riemer’s and Professor Keane’s criticisms of Zionist ideology and Israel’s actions in Palestine and Lebanon do not offend, insult, humiliate, or intimidate us, as the complainants allege... As Jewish university staff and students, we reject the notion that criticism of either Israel or Zionism on the one hand, or support for Palestinian and Lebanese people on the other is antisemitic.”

Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act has already been used to try to silence opponents of the genocide. Last year the Zionist Federation of Australia lodged a complaint against well-known journalist Mary Kostakidis for retweeting a speech by former Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah, who was subsequently assassinated by Israel.

The Keating Labor government introduced Section 18C in 1995, and its use against right-wing commentator Andrew Bolt in 2011 was celebrated by pseudo-left groups. However, the *World Socialist Web Site* correctly warned that the finding against Bolt meant that “all manner of politically-motivated prosecutions may follow.”

The WSWS gave the hypothetical example of opponents of the Israeli state being prosecuted on the basis that Zionist groups found their comments “offensive.” The WSWS’s warning is being borne out with the case against Riemer and Keane.

A negative outcome for Riemer and Keane would be used to try to suppress and intimidate all opposition to the genocide.

The Labor government has spearheaded the false claim that opposition to the genocide is fuelled by antisemitism. In May last year, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese stated that anti-genocide student encampments demonstrated there was “no question” that antisemitism was “being expressed more openly” than at any other point in his lifetime.

This opened the way for direct attacks on students protesting Israel’s mass murder. This has included the violent arrest of three Western Sydney University students by the police and the suspension of four University of Melbourne students.

Labor’s Education Minister Jason Clare directly called for Macquarie University academic and children’s book author Randa Abdel-Fattah’s research funding to be investigated after she voiced opposition to the genocide.

Despite these attacks, the NTEU has organised no national action in defence of Abdel-Fatah, Riemer, Keane and other victimised university workers and students, and has opposed calls for such action by the rank-and-file committees at Macquarie and Western Sydney universities.

We have fundamental political differences with Riemer, but we unequivocally oppose this attack against him and Keane. It is a political frame-up aimed at delegitimising opposition to the most blatant crimes against humanity since the Holocaust. We urge all educators, students and workers to come to their defence.



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