

Australian educators call for defence of anti-genocide academics

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A meeting of the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file educators' network in Australia, passed a resolution on Saturday in defence of three academics who are being persecuted for opposing the Gaza genocide.

The meeting called on educators, students and workers to move similar resolutions defending Randa Abdel-Fattah from Sydney's Macquarie University, and Nick Riemer and John Keane from the University of Sydney, as well as democratic rights including free speech and academic freedom.

A group of pro-Zionist staff and students, backed by a high-profile legal team, is suing Riemer and Keane in the Federal Court for making public statements opposing the 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.

Abdel-Fattah has been subjected to a vile campaign of vilification and slander by Zionist lobby groups, right-wing media outlets and politicians for speaking out against the atrocities in Gaza.

The Albanese Labor government directly lined up behind this operation, with Education Minister Jason Clare intervening to insist on the suspension of her Australian Research Council (ARC) Future Fellowship research grant.

The ARC decision followed a blatant demand by Labor MP Josh Burns, the chair of the Labor government's witch-hunting "antisemitism" parliamentary committee, to know why Macquarie University had not already sacked her.

Zionist groups have called for Abdel-Fattah to be

fired and to be removed from speaking engagements, the latest being the Bendigo Writers' Festival. Dozens of authors, including Abdel-Fattah, then boycotted the festival following a demand by La Trobe University, a major sponsor of the event, that participants adhere to a "code of conduct" that conflates criticism of the Israeli state with antisemitism.

Abdel-Fattah was subsequently invited to write an opinion piece for the *Age*, only to have the newspaper refuse to publish it. Both the *Guardian* and the *Conversation*, a university-backed website, also refused to publish it. The article was eventually posted last month by the independent news website, *Deep Cut*.

In her article, Abdel-Fattah described the abusive Zionist-instigated attacks that have been made on her through social media, the corporate media, members of parliament and university managements, including the targeting of her personal and professional email accounts.

She wrote: "Can you imagine what it would be like to receive death and rape threats at your workplace and your home? How about having donations made in your name to the Israeli military, with receipts sent to your personal email alongside your phone number and home address? Can you imagine someone writing your name on the side of a bomb? Or the president of the Zionist Federation of Australia publicly calling for your workplace to become unsafe for you?"

Abdel-Fattah is far from alone in being subjected to such harassment and intimidation. In Australia, other critics of Israel who have been persecuted by governments, the corporate media and Zionist organisations include journalists Mary Kostakidis and Antoinette Lattouf, University of Sydney academics Sujatha Fernandes and Tim Anderson, artists, writers, musicians and many health professionals and doctors

like Miranda Robinson and Jennifer Martinez.

This assault on free speech and political dissent is taking place amid widespread opposition throughout Australia and internationally to the genocide, as witnessed by last month's Sydney Harbour Bridge march by some 300,000 people, followed by rallies in cities and towns across the country, joined by about a quarter of a million people.

These rallies were marked by deepening hostility not just toward the worsening mass killings and starvation in Palestine but the active support for the Washington-backed onslaught by the Labor government, including through continuing exports of F-35 parts and other military items to Israel.

In the face of this outrage, the Albanese government is still prosecuting the false claim that opposition to the genocide is fuelled by antisemitism. This is a vile smear campaign aimed at delegitimising and banning the growing opposition to the most blatant crimes against humanity since the Holocaust.

Moreover, the main trade union covering university workers, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), has organised no national action in defence of Abdel-Fatah, Riemer, Keane and other victimised staff and students. In fact, the NTEU has opposed calls for such action by the rank-and-file committees at Macquarie and Western Sydney universities.

The NTEU's role is completely in line with its opposition to unified national action to fight the intensifying Labor government-driven wave of job cuts and pro-corporate restructuring of tertiary education, which seeks to satisfy the profit needs of employers, develop military-related industries and prepare for war.

The CFPE resolution, which was passed unanimously, takes on added importance under these conditions. Rank-and-file working-class action is essential. The resolution stated:

This meeting of the Committee for Public Education opposes the pro-Zionist attacks on Macquarie University academic Randa Abdel-Fattah and Sydney University academics Nick Riemer and John Keane.

Abdel-Fattah has been subject to a vicious witch-hunt by the Murdoch press and pro-Zionist lobby groups for speaking out against

the Israeli government's war on Gaza, and Riemer and Keane are being sued in the federal court for making public statements opposing the Gaza genocide.

Like others who oppose the genocide in Gaza, they are being bullied and slandered as being antisemitic for speaking out in defence of the Palestinian people.

The attacks on Abdel-Fattah, Riemer and Keane are not confined to these three academics. They are aimed at silencing any opposition to the US-Israeli mass killings, the Labor government's support for the genocide and the Trump administration's criminal plan to ethnically cleanse Palestine.

We call on educators, students and workers to pass similar resolutions defending Abdel-Fattah, Riemer and Keane, the right to free speech and democratic rights, including academic freedom.

This resolution needs to be taken up throughout the working class. It is critical for the defence of basic democratic rights. The methods used against those speaking out against the genocide—surveillance, harassment, media slanders and court actions—are a warning of what will be employed against striking workers and protesters opposing the broader eruption of imperialist militarism, including Australia's role in the US-led preparations for a conflict with China.

For further discussion, or to send messages or resolutions of support, please contact the CFPE, the educators' rank-and-file network:

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

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