

In Australian tour, US journalist Chris Hedges denounces media complicity in Gaza genocide

Martin Scott
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American journalist Chris Hedges delivered a speech in Sydney on Monday, titled, “The Betrayal of Palestinian journalists.” As part of his Australian speaking tour, Hedges had been booked to give this talk at the National Press Club in Canberra, but the event was abruptly called off in a blatant act of political censorship.

Just as remarkable as the Press Club’s refusal to let the Pulitzer Prize winner speak is the fact that the cancellation received virtually no coverage in the Australian media.

The differences of the *World Socialist Web Site* with the political positions of Chris Hedges have been amply documented. But we unequivocally denounce his censorship. The suppression of Hedges is part of a broader campaign by the corporate press and the entire political establishment to justify and cover up the monstrous crimes being carried out by the Israeli regime with the full support of world imperialism, including the Australian Labor government.

Workers and young people have been radicalised by the unmistakable evidence online of an unfolding genocide, including Israel’s deliberate murder of aid workers and medical personnel as well as journalists, targeted bombing of hospitals and schools, and systematic starvation of the Palestinian population.

In the face of sustained mass protests, the corporate press has sought to demonise all opposition to the genocide, including through fraudulent claims it is “antisemitic,” aiding the efforts of state and federal Labor governments to ban protests and criminalise dissent.

Whatever the exact machinations behind the Press Club’s cancellation of Hedges’ appearance, it is highly likely that Zionist lobbyists, the Press Club’s corporate sponsors, the Labor government, or all three were involved. However, the content of Hedges’ address on Monday was reason enough for the Australian media establishment to want him silenced.

Hedges said: “There are two types of war correspondents. The first type does not attend press conferences. They do not beg generals and politicians for interviews. They take risks

from combat zones. They send back to their viewers or readers what they see, which is almost always diametrically opposed to official narratives. This first type, in every war, is a tiny minority.

“Then there is the second type: the inchoate blob of self-identified war correspondents who play at war.... They slavishly disseminate whatever they are fed by officials, much of which is a lie, and pretend it is news.”

Hedges was speaking specifically of so-called “embedded” reporters, who “dress up and play soldier and visit outposts where everything is controlled and choreographed.” His characterisation of their role as obedient stenographers for the Israeli war machine and its imperialist backers is a perfect fit for the Australian press corps.

“The mortal enemy of these poseurs,” Hedges said, “are the real war reporters, in this case, Palestinian journalists in Gaza,” who “expose them as toadies and sycophants, discrediting nearly everything they disseminate.”

Hedges spoke of the monstrous price paid by courageous Palestinian journalists, more than 270 of whom have been murdered by Israel in the past two years.

“Since October 7th,” he reflected, “Israel has killed more journalists than [died in] the US Civil War, World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War—including the conflicts in Cambodia and Laos, the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the post-9/11 war in Afghanistan combined.”

Hedges highlighted how some of these journalists, targeted and murdered by the Zionist regime, were then subjected to a final betrayal: their deaths became part of the Israeli propaganda onslaught as the international media dutifully reported its official lies about Hamas involvement or that reporters themselves were terrorists.

Hedges referred to the killing in August this year of five journalists, along with 15 others, at Nasser Hospital in a “double-tap strike designed to kill first responders following the initial strike.” The journalists, Hussam al-Masri, Mariam

Abu Dagga, Mohammed Salama, Moaz Abu Taha and Ahmed Abu Aziz, worked for various international media outlets, including Reuters and Associated Press.

Hedges listed some of the headlines used to report this story around the world, including by the agencies whose own correspondents were killed. “‘Israeli military says strikes on Gaza hospital targeted what it says was a Hamas camera,’ the Associated Press reported.... ‘Initial inquiry says Hamas camera was target of Israeli strike that killed journalists,’ Reuters reported.”

In fact, Hedges explained, the camera belonged to Reuters, and “Israel was fully aware they were filming from the hospital.”

Just two weeks earlier, Al Jazeera correspondent Anas al-Sharif and five other journalists were killed in their media tent outside Al-Shifa Hospital by an Israeli drone.

Again, Hedges denounced the response of the international press: “German newspaper *Bild* published a frontpage story headlined, ‘Terrorist disguised as a journalist killed in Gaza.’” Most egregiously, Reuters reported, “Israel kills Al Jazeera journalist it says was Hamas leader,” “despite the fact that Anas was part of a Reuters team that had won a 2024 Pulitzer Prize.”

Hedges explained that this was part of a wider campaign to discredit reporters in Gaza, noting that, “the Israeli military has a special unit called the Legitimisation Cell, which carries out campaigns to portray Palestinian journalists as Hamas operatives in an effort to justify their assassination.”

Hedges recalled, “In every war I covered, I was attacked as supporting or belonging to whatever group the government, including the US government, was seeking to crush.”

While noting that “many Palestinian reporters I know in Gaza are in fact quite critical of Hamas,” Hedges was scathing of the conception that local journalists’ supposed biases prevented them from objectively and honestly reporting the news. “The assumption that, if Western reporters were in Gaza, the coverage would improve is risible.”

Hedges explained the pressure on journalists and news outlets to knowingly serve as part of the propaganda machine.

“The decision by Western reporters to give credibility to these lies, to give them the same weight as documented Israeli atrocities, is a cynical game....

“Call those lies out, and you will swiftly find your requests for briefings and interviews with officials rebuffed. You won’t be invited by press officers to participate in staged visits to Israeli military units. You and your news organisation will be viciously attacked....

“Your editors will terminate your assignment and maybe

your employment. Your talks will be cancelled at press clubs. And this is not good for careers. And so the lies are dutifully repeated, no matter how absurd.”

This sort of “reporting,” Hedges said, “violates a fundamental tenet of journalism, the duty to transmit the truth to the viewer or reader. It legitimises mass slaughter. It refuses to hold Israel to account. It betrays Palestinian journalists, those reporting and being killed in Gaza.”

The response of the Australian media establishment to the Press Club cancellation—that is, total silence—is a stark expression of their participation in exactly the kind of betrayal Hedges was speaking about.

The sole exception to the media blackout was a segment on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s “Late Night Live” radio program, which was recorded just prior to Monday’s presentation and broadcast several hours later.

From the outset, the interview was an attack—described later by Hedges as a “lynching.” Host David Marr opened by demanding to know whether Hedges was “troubled at all” by the fact that his Australian tour was “sponsored by the Australian Palestine Advocacy Network,” provocatively suggesting this was “a fundamental breaking of the rules.”

Marr proceeded to dispute Hedges’ account of the cancellation, despite acknowledging that he had personally seen the confirmation letter setting a date for the appearance. Outrageously, Marr questioned Hedges’ “credibility” on the basis of claims made by the Press Club in a statement that falsely denied having booked Hedges in the first place.

Marr also attempted to discredit Hedges’ substantive claims about media promotion of Israeli propaganda, defending false headlines on the absurd basis that, “whether we like it or not as journalists, we have to report the excuses made by outfits like the IDF.”

Marr’s attack on Hedges is further confirmation that the Australian media establishment, with very few exceptions, has spent the past two years whitewashing the imperialist-backed crimes of Israel and is deeply hostile to anyone who dares to oppose or criticise the Zionist regime.



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