

Australia: Hundreds rally against Labor's anti-protest laws

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Hundreds of demonstrators gathered on Monday night in Sydney and Melbourne to show their support for the victims of the Bondi Beach terrorist attack, while opposing the moves by Labor governments at state and federal level to use the tragedy as a pretext to introduce draconian new anti-protest laws.

Since the horrific shootings on December 14, there has been a concerted effort by the political establishment to exploit the gunmen's reactionary targeting of Sydney's Jewish population to clamp down on opposition to the Israeli government's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.

Central to this has been the phoney equation of anti-genocide protests—or indeed any criticism of the Zionist regime of Benjamin Netanyahu—with antisemitism.

The New South Wales (NSW) Labor government, led by Premier Chris Minns, has been at the forefront of attacks on anti-genocide protests ever since it provocatively projected the Israeli flag onto the Sydney Opera House on October 9, 2023.

Seizing on the opportunity provided by public horror, outrage and fear over the Bondi shootings, Minns recalled the state parliament on Monday in order to pass harsh new anti-protest laws. Foreshadowed “hate speech” laws, among other anti-democratic measures, would specifically ban the slogan “globalise the intifada.”

In Victoria, Labor Premier Jacinta Allan has vowed to implement similar measures, while the federal Labor government of Anthony Albanese is likewise stepping up the crackdown on freedom of speech and assembly, under the pretext of combatting “antisemitism.”

The Sydney event, outside Town Hall, was jointly organised by Jews Against the Occupation '48 (JAO48), an anti-Zionist Jewish organisation that has consistently opposed Israel's ongoing genocide, and Stop the War on Palestine, an activist front of the pseudo-left Solidarity organisation.

Around 300 attendees included workers, youth and retirees, hailing from all over the world, reflecting the broad opposition that exists towards the Labor-led campaign to use the attack on Sydney's Jewish population to justify the further suppression of democratic rights.

All those who attended did so in defiance of threats and intimidation from Minns, Albanese and the NSW Police ahead of the protest. The Jewish people who attended—many of whom have regularly participated in the anti-genocide protests over the past two years—expressed particular courage, standing up against

accusations that opposing the brutal Netanyahu regime made them “self-hating Jews” or even the equivalent of collaborators with the Nazis.

One of the speakers in Sydney was Michelle Berkon, a Jewish activist who the previous day had been dragged away by police from the official memorial in Bondi, apparently after complaints that her wearing of a keffiyeh was “hostile.”

Berkon told media she had only decided to wear the Palestinian scarf to counter the blatant efforts by pro-Zionist layers to exploit the tragedy for their own political ends, virtually wallpapering Bondi Beach with Israeli flags.

Berkon said on Monday: “We're here this evening to hold a different kind of vigil for the people massacred last weekend. We're here for those who wanted to show up for the victims, for their loved ones and for the community, but couldn't, because they wouldn't compromise their humanity by associating themselves with the flag of an apartheid state committing genocide.”

Berkon denounced “the manipulation and exploitation of this Australian tragedy by those who want to suppress the voices calling for justice and destroy our democratic freedoms.”

Allon Uhlmann, also from JAO48, said, “when it comes to disrupting ‘social cohesion,’ Chris Minns and [federal antisemitism envoy] Jillian Segal have just set a new record for demagoguery, duplicity, obfuscation and malice.

“They claim that the anti-genocide movement is responsible for the attack in Bondi and proceed to vilify hundreds of thousands of Australians who marched to protest over the genocide in Gaza and the political establishment's complicity with it.”

Uhlmann pointed to the fraudulent character of these attempts to identify the Bondi shooters with opposition to Israel's genocide, noting that the alleged gunmen “were affiliated with Islamic State, a staunch opponent of the Palestinian movement,” and that “the security agencies have so far not found any link between the assailants and the pro-Palestine movement.”

Uhlmann called out Segal's hypocritical silence over the November rally outside NSW Parliament by the openly antisemitic and white supremacist National Socialist Network. He said, by attacking protests against the genocide while at the same time allowing neo-Nazi demonstrations “without a pipsqueak,” Segal and Minns were exercising “politics that seeks precisely to encourage violence against Jews.”

Sara Saleh, a human rights lawyer of Palestinian descent who

has been prominently involved in the anti-genocide protests, said, “The right to protest is not a gift from this government. It is a foundational democratic freedom recognised under international human rights law.”

Saleh warned that the criminalisation of protest “in one context” would be “expanded to others,” including striking workers: “Anyone who challenges power becomes a target.” Anti-protest laws, she continued, “do not prevent harm, they ensure that violence carried out by the state, or sanctioned by it, happens without resistance.”

Tim Roberts, president of the NSW Council for Civil Liberties, said, “When we say that the Minns government is attacking our social cohesion, that’s not a joke.” He warned, “as we silence communication, as we oppress communities, we increase the risk of that damage growing and that hate spilling over.”

Having urged attendees to “oppose these laws vocally, loudly and persistently,” Roberts quickly made clear that this opposition could be carried out within the parliamentary framework. He commended the Greens, as well as “members of the Labor caucus” and “other members of the cross bench” for “fighting and pushing” against the tide of repression, and urged attendees to “write to your MP” to register their opposition to the anti-protest laws.

The political limitations of the protest, and the pernicious role of Solidarity itself, were expressed even more starkly by the speakers that followed. From the outset, the pseudo-left organisation has insisted that supposedly “pro-Palestine” Labor figures must be given a platform at protests against the genocide.

Peter Moss, of the Labor Friends of Palestine, claimed the government could be reformed from the inside, boasting that “hundreds of Labor members, including MPs and ministers from the state government marched across the Harbour Bridge in August” as part of the anti-genocide protest.

The bankrupt politics of this group, whose purpose is to cover for and keep workers tied to Labor governments that are complicit in Israel’s genocide, were quickly exposed. In the early hours of this morning, the very Labor MPs who claim to be “friends of Palestine” did not hesitate to vote for the government’s anti-protest legislation.

Closing the rally, Solidarity’s Adam Adelpour vociferously denounced the anti-protest laws, but put forward no viable perspective to fight against them. This is bound up with the fact that, for all its denunciation of the Minns and Albanese governments as complicit in Israel’s genocide, Solidarity is not opposing Labor but defending it.

Adelpour painted a confused picture, in which Albanese and Minns were being led unwittingly by Segal. In reality, Labor is spearheading the attack on democratic rights. The Zionist lobbyist was appointed by Albanese as the “Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism” in 2024, for the exact purpose of leading a witch-hunt against political opposition to the genocide.

Despite more than two years of protest against the Israeli genocide, the state and federal governments have not only maintained their support for the Zionist regime and its daily atrocities, but are now enacting anti-democratic legislation to suppress further opposition. What is required is the mobilisation of

the working class, independent of Labor and the unions, in opposition to the genocide and in defence of democratic rights.

Giovanna (not her real name) told *World Socialist Web Site* reporters at the Sydney protest, “I’m here to show my solidarity with the Jewish people who were attacked in the awful massacre in Bondi. It was a terrorist attack, and everyone here today condemns it.

“It’s important though to have a sense of proportion. Children are dying every day in Gaza—starving to death—something that the media doesn’t even bother to report these days. But because we demonstrate week after week against the genocide, we’re called antisemitic. And now the Minns government and the media are trying to blame us for the Bondi massacre. This is outrageous.

“Minns has done everything he could to try and stop us from protesting. He tried to stop the Sydney Harbour Bridge protest and failed, and so now he’s trying to use the murders in Bondi to stop all demonstrations. This is not about fighting against antisemitism but to undermine our support for the Palestinians and democratic right to protest.

“Antisemitism doesn’t come from nowhere. It’s being encouraged by Netanyahu and the Israeli government who insist that Judaism and Zionism are the same. This is false.

“Look at the people here today. Many of them are Jews, and they’re appalled about what has been carried out in their names by Israel. They are horrified by what happened last Sunday but also by what they see being done, day in and day out, in Gaza and the West Bank against the Palestinians. And Israel is not just destroying Gaza but has been attacking Lebanon, Yemen and Syria.

“I’m very encouraged by what the dockworkers did in Italy in support of the Palestinians and the national strike action by all Italians. This is what should be happening here and in every other country.”



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