

Behind the ruling class demands for a Royal Commission into the Bondi attack

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Over recent weeks, demands for a Royal Commission into the December 14 terrorist attack at Bondi Beach have grown to a crescendo.

Every day, the major corporate publications, led by the Murdoch outlets, are publishing a stream of articles insisting that the federal Labor government must immediately call such an inquiry, with some suggesting that Anthony Albanese's prime ministership hinges upon it.

The push for a Royal Commission encompasses broad sections of the ruling elite. Industry groups, such as the Business Council of Australia, have issued statements, as have some of the wealthiest individuals in the country. The opposition Liberal-National Coalition has made the demand the centrepiece of its campaigning. Leading Israeli government figures, implicated in war crimes, have insisted on a Royal Commission, as have Australia's Zionist lobby groups.

The campaign assumed a somewhat farcical character over the weekend, with a cohort of prominent sportspeople, few of whom are known for their political commentary, adding their voices to the demand.

Thus far, the Labor government has resisted the calls, raising that the protracted character of a Royal Commission would delay action purportedly required to prevent further atrocities and would supposedly risk platform antisemitism.

Labor has instead initiated a review into the actions of the federal policing and intelligence agencies. It is essentially an in-house, behind-closed-doors investigation, being conducted by former defence and intelligence chief Dennis Richardson. The New South Wales Labor government has also convened a state Royal Commission.

The terrorist atrocity, claiming fifteen lives and injuring dozens at a Chanukah celebration, has horrified masses of people. There are also widespread suspicions over the official narrative of the attack and the role of the security agencies.

One of the gunmen, Naveed Akram, was investigated by ASIO, the domestic spy agency, for six months in 2019 over connections to the prosecution of an Islamic State terrorist. Despite that, his father Sajid, the other perpetrator, was granted a gun license, and the two were able to plan and prepare the attack without hindrance.

No answers have been provided to the questions raised by those facts, and many people correctly fear a cover-up. Under those conditions, calls for a Royal Commission may resonate.

The ruling class campaign for such a Commission, however, has

nothing to do with probing the role of ASIO and other state agencies. Instead, it is a cynical attempt to exploit the attack to deepen a massive assault on democratic rights, centring initially on a bid to outlaw all opposition to Israel's genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza.

In fact, many of the loudest voices in favour of a Commission are warning against excessive scrutiny of the intelligence agencies, not insufficient probing.

In a comment published in the *Australian*, Peter Jennings, a prominent national security figure, bemoaned the Richardson review. Its terms of reference, he complained, are "tightly limited to establishing what the agencies knew about the Bondi Beach attackers, how information was shared and 'judgments were made and actions taken.'"

The review, Jennings wrote, would not examine the "wider context" of "antisemitism" and the supposed failure of the federal government to deal with it. Richardson made clear what he meant, noting that the intelligence review would likely not examine "why angry protests were tolerated" for the past two years.

Former Coalition Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and others campaigning for a commission have made identical statements, demanding a ban on all protests against Israeli war crimes, and asserting that the failure to suppress them previously created the conditions for the Bondi attack to occur.

Those demands have already been acted upon by one Labor government. The NSW administration of Premier Chris Minns immediately recalled the state parliament after the Bondi attack and passed unprecedented legislation providing the Police Commissioner with the power to ban all public demonstrations in the wake of a terrorism designation.

In doing so, Minns explicitly blamed peaceful protesters for the terrorist attack. Minns referred to an August march across the Sydney Harbour Bridge, centrally opposing Israel's deliberate starvation of the Palestinians, and said "we can't risk another mass demonstration on that scale in NSW. The implications can be seen, in my view, on Sunday," i.e., in the Bondi shooting.

That remark, which sums up the position of those calling for a Royal Commission, amounted to a slander on the population. Up to 300,000 people, more than 5 percent of Sydneysiders, participated in the Harbour Bridge rally. Like the broader protest movement against the genocide, the crowd was peaceful, motivated by humane sentiments, multi-religious and multi-ethnic.

The assertion that peaceful political protest is responsible for

violent terrorism is drawn straight from the playbook of dictatorship and can be used to outlaw all opposition.

Concretely, in the case of the Bondi attack, its perpetrators were apparently motivated by the reactionary, communalist ideology of the Islamic State terror group. A sectarian Sunni outfit, it is not only antisemitic but has a homicidal hostility to large numbers of Muslims, including all of those adhering to the Shia school, as well as to secularism, socialism and democratic rights. The suggestion of any connection between the protest movement and the shooters is therefore an inversion of reality.

Undeterred, those calling for a Royal Commission are pressing ahead. They are insisting that it should examine, not only the street protests, but opposition to the genocide among university students and academics, in the cultural sector and virtually everywhere else. What is being demanded, in other words, is not an examination of the Bondi attack, but a protracted witch-hunt against mass opposition to war crimes.

The framework being outlined is closely connected to the recommendations of Jillian Segal, a Zionist lobbyist who last year was appointed by the Labor government to be its “special envoy to combat antisemitism.”

Segal’s recommendations are premised on a definition of antisemitism that includes criticism of Zionism and of the Israeli state. She has demanded measures of a police-state character, including the reduction or elimination of funding to broadcasters, universities and other public institutions that fall foul of her strictures and of a censorship regime overseeing the entire press.

The Labor government, in the wake of the Bondi attack, stated that it would implement Segal’s recommendations. A Royal Commission is intended to ensure that Labor follows through on that, and to provide the authoritarian measures with the weight and backing of a supposedly impartial and authoritative inquiry.

The push for a Royal Commission reflects frustration with the Albanese government from powerful sections of the ruling class. For the past two years, it has supported Israel’s genocide and has attacked popular opposition, including through the passage last year of sweeping “hate speech” laws which could potentially outlaw strident condemnations of Zionism.

But more is being demanded. The inability of the government to shutdown the protest movement is seen as a failure in establishment circles. The issue is not simply suppressing opposition to the genocide, but of how the government will deal with broader social and political opposition, above all from the working class.

That is a crucial question, given the crisis of capitalism in Australia and globally, and the reactionary agenda being imposed by governments everywhere.

Labor is completing Australia’s transformation into a frontline state for war with China, a policy that is provoking hostility that will only grow as its disastrous implications become apparent to masses of people. Despite its increases in military spending and in US basing arrangements, frustrations have been expressed by the Trump administration and national security figures within Australia that the pace of militarisation is not fast enough.

The decision of industry and business leaders to back a Royal Commission into an event completely unconnected to their sectors

is unusual and potentially unprecedented. There too, unstated concerns are a motivating factor.

While the Labor government has slashed social spending, far deeper cuts are being demanded. And frustrations have repeatedly been voiced by corporate figures that Labor has not implemented a “productivity” agenda, aimed at slashing corporate regulations, intensifying exploitation and boosting profits, with sufficient vigour.

Beyond the immediate issues of the Bondi attack and opposition to the genocide, there is a sense in which the government is being put on notice. It must accelerate the assault on democratic rights, militarism and austerity, or it will face attacks and destabilisation campaigns from powerful sections of the ruling class. Albanese, while thus far resisting the calls for a Royal Commission, has sought to implement this program throughout his tenure in office.

This must be a warning to workers more broadly. The Royal Commission is seen as a vehicle for imposing increased and relentless pressure on the Labor government to enact a program of austerity, intensified exploitation and productivity measures far more intense than those already in place. There is an unstated threat that if Albanese is unable to carry out this perspective then they will replace him with someone in the government who will.

The broader context of the campaign for a Royal Commission underscores the need for workers to take an independent standpoint, opposed not only to the Labor government, but to the entire political and media establishment. Revealing the truth about the Bondi attack, opposing all forms of communalism and racism and defending democratic rights are all entirely dependent on building a socialist movement of the working class.

The Socialist Equality Party invites workers, youth and WSWS readers to an online meeting this Sunday, January 11 at 2 p.m. AEDT, to examine the political significance of the Bondi Beach terrorist attack, which is being exploited to implement a raft of anti-democratic measures that will inevitably be used against the working class. Register now.



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