

Australian Labor government calls Royal Commission to witch-hunt opposition to the Gaza genocide

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Prime Minister Anthony Albanese yesterday announced that his government has called a Royal Commission to be conducted over the next 12 months.

Nominally an inquiry into the December 14 terrorist attack at Bondi Beach, every aspect of the announcement made clear that the Commission will, in fact, serve as a witch-hunting body directed against mass opposition to the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Albanese's announcement was a response to a frenzied and unprecedented campaign by powerful sections of the ruling elite. The major corporate publications, big business groups, Israeli leaders and Zionist lobbies had hysterically demanded a Royal Commission, with increasingly open signals from the political establishment that Albanese's political future depended on it.

The most striking element of that campaign, and of the Royal Commission that has eventuated from it, is that the terrorist attack itself is increasingly being relegated to the background. It is still referenced, but only in the vaguest of terms as the nominal pretext for an inquiry that has little or nothing to do with the actions of the two Islamic State-inspired gunmen on December 14.

Their atrocity is not even mentioned in the official title of the inquiry, which is instead billed as a Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion.

For more than two years, opposition to the genocide and Australia's complicity in it has been branded as antisemitic, in a gratuitous conflation of the Jewish people with the militarist Israeli state. "Social cohesion," a hitherto unknown term and one that is still never defined, has been repeated as a mantra over that period, based on the suggestion that strident opposition to war crimes, official policies or the government is an impermissible threat to the functioning of society.

The line is reinforced in the first of a four-point terms of reference for the Commission, set by the government. It is tasked with "Tackling antisemitism by investigating the nature and prevalence of antisemitism in institutions and society, and its key drivers in Australia, including ideologically and religiously motivated extremism and radicalisation."

Which institutions is the government claiming are overrun by antisemitism? The very first point in the terms of reference is a clear nod to the claims of the Murdoch press and Zionist lobbies that universities and other public institutions are hotbeds of antisemitism, based solely on the fact that protests against Israel's genocide have been held at them.

The second term calls for the Commission to examine the ways in which the police and other state agencies can tackle this purported threat. The need for more stringent immigration controls is hinted at, in what is a clear racist dogwhistle.

Sandwiched between the various calls for repression is the third which is also the shortest term of reference in the summary presented on Albanese's official webpage. The remit of the commission, it states, is "Examining the circumstances surrounding the antisemitic Bondi terrorist attack on 14 December 2025."

The fourth term calls for the Commission to make recommendations aimed at "strengthening social cohesion" and stamping out undefined "ideologically and religiously motivated extremism."

The day before Albanese announced the Commission, Sussan Ley, leader of the opposition Liberal-National Coalition, spelled out what is considered "extremism" in ruling circles. She raised the necessity for the Commission to particularly target "left-wing extremism," i.e., opposition to the genocide and to imperialist war.

There are two reasons for the sidelining of the attack itself in a Commission ostensibly triggered by the horrors of December 14.

The first is that what actually occurred has nothing to do with the aims being prosecuted by the government and the ruling elite, in seeking to shut down opposition to the genocide.

The perpetrators were not pro-Palestinian protesters or anything like it.

Based on what little has been revealed, they were adherents of Islamic State (IS), a sectarian Sunni militia that has a long history of hostility to the Palestinian national struggle, including perpetrating terrorist attacks against Hamas in Gaza. In the Middle East and Central Asia, its violent operations have

frequently dovetailed with imperialist intervention, with IS playing a key role in the US proxy war to topple the Assad regime in Syria and carrying out strikes against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Ironically, the IS terrorists would be no less hostile to the pro-Palestinian protest movement than those in the ruling class invoking their actions to shut it down. The multi-religious, multi-ethnic and secular character of the protests, and their explicit distinction between Judaism and Zionism, is anathema to religious communalism.

In other words, the Royal Commission is beginning with a big lie, conflating IS terrorists with peaceful political opposition, two phenomena that have no connection.

The other reason for the disinterest in the concrete circumstances of the attack are the many unanswered questions that it raises.

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.

For almost 25 years, since the September 11, 2001 attack in New York, ASIO has listed Sunni Islamic extremism as the most probable terrorist threat. IS has been notorious for more than a decade for perpetrating mass casualty attacks, including in the West. But despite this, the public is supposed to believe that two IS members were able to assemble an arsenal, and then plan and perpetrate their attack, under ASIO's nose without it having any forewarning.

Albanese's remarks in announcing the Commission were aimed at convincing those in the ruling class who had demanded the inquiry that he was giving them everything they wanted.

He declared that the government had accepted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism, which deliberately conflates opposition to the Israeli state with anti-Jewish bigotry. Albanese disingenuously denied that the definition outlawed opposition to Israel, stating that it merely meant that such opposition "shouldn't be different from the holding to account of other states." But by that logic, branding Israel as an apartheid regime, or noting that it is committing a genocide, would be beyond the pale.

Albanese touted his government's acceptance of the recommendations of a report prepared by its "special envoy to combat antisemitism," Jillian Segal. The report demands pro-Israeli censorship of the press, Zionist propaganda in the schools and the defunding of any institutions that permit opposition to the Israeli regime within their bounds. Segal, a Zionist lobbyist who has explicitly defended Israel's bombing of hospitals, stood alongside Albanese.

The prime minister told various lies about the anti-genocide movement, including that its regular protests were preventing

Jewish people from going to the city centres. That is simply a slander, including against the many Jewish people who have participated in the protest movement.

He declared that it was legitimate to have opinions on the Israel-Gaza "conflict," but that the "conflict... not be brought here." In reality, the Labor government is a party to the genocidal war, having backed Israel politically, diplomatically and materially throughout, including through the export of weapons components.

The suggestion that the "conflict" is confined to the Middle East, aside from being factually false, is part of the thinly-veiled racism in which the entire Royal Commission is enveloped. The none too subtle message of those demanding "social cohesion" has been that Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims are a threat to Australia and must be combatted. Behind a veil of opposing racism, the ruling elite is attempting to stoke up an anti-immigrant and even fascistic atmosphere.

The irony is that it is precisely in such an atmosphere that genuine antisemitism flourishes. In all of the discussion surrounding the Royal Commission, little mention has been made of the growth of openly fascist forces, such as the neo-Nazi National Socialist Network, which constitute a threat to Jewish people and to the entire working class.

The calling of the Royal Commission again underscores Labor's role as a spearhead of reaction, from supporting imperialist war abroad to enforcing authoritarianism domestically. The defence of democratic rights, including the exposure of the circumstances of the December 14 attack, requires an independent movement of the working class, directed against Labor, the entire political establishment and the state agencies.

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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