

# Australian media steps up attack on pro-Palestine workers

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14 January 2026

Since the reactionary mass murder of 15 people at Sydney's Bondi Beach on December 14, the entire Australian political and media establishment, led by state and federal Labor governments, has sought to use the horrific terrorist attack as a pretext to slash democratic rights.

The immediate target is opposition to Israel's imperialist-backed genocide in Gaza, but ultimately this campaign is aimed at stamping out all forms of political dissent by workers and young people.

Enthusiastically backing this witch hunt is the Murdoch-owned *Australian*, the journal of record for the country's ruling elite. The newspaper has waged an unrelenting campaign since October 2023 against students, academics, medical professionals and anyone else who has failed to unconditionally support the Zionist ethnic cleansing operation, but its crusade has risen to a fever pitch in the wake of the Bondi attack.

On Thursday, the newspaper's front page featured an "exclusive," headlined "Exposed: union's secret anti-Israel campaign." Citing "leaked internal documents," author John Ferguson denounces the Unionists for Palestine (U4P) group, which he claims has carried out "a systematic attack on Israeli interests in Australia and an internal struggle to gain mainstream union support for the cause."

In fact, the role of the U4P, led by the pseudo-left groups Socialist Alternative in Melbourne and Solidarity in Sydney, has been to provide left cover for the intransigent refusal of Australia's trade unions to allow workers to take action against the genocide. In explicit repudiation of the calls from Palestinian unions for solidarity actions, the bureaucracy has ensured that not a single strike aimed at blocking the supply of weapons parts or other goods to the Zionist regime has taken place.

This absence of industrial action is not because of any lack of opposition among workers to the genocide, a fact clearly attested to by the sustained and often weekly mass protests in Australia's major cities, and, in particular, the August march across the Sydney Harbour Bridge involving some 300,000 workers and young people.

The union apparatus could not have held back this tide of oppositional sentiment without the support of the pseudo-left and U4P. To the extent that U4P has carried out any actions at

all, they have been designed to create the illusion that the unions are engaged in—or could be persuaded to engage in—a struggle against the genocide. The purpose of this charade is to keep workers tied to the union bureaucracy, even as it refuses to sanction any form of industrial action, and defend the unions' ongoing support of the complicit state and federal Labor governments.

Ferguson, and the ruling class for which he speaks, understand this clearly and do not fear the U4P. This attack is part of the broader Labor-led effort to exploit the death of 15, mostly Jewish, people at Bondi to neuter broad and growing support for the Palestinian people among workers and youth.

While the article focusses on ASU for Palestine, a subset of the U4P comprising members of the Australian Services Union, it is really aimed at the working class as a whole, to which it sends a clear message: Not even the slightest, most limited opposition to Israel's genocide or the broader program of imperialist war will be tolerated.

This is underscored by the mention towards the end of the article that "scores of [union members] have their identities disclosed in the documents." This is a thinly veiled threat: Any workers who dare to get involved with ASU for Palestine—or any other pro-Palestinian organisations, for that matter—should not be surprised if they are targeted for personal retribution and intimidation.

What is most notable about the piece, aside from its hysterical tone, is how minor the supposed actions of ASU for Palestine actually are.

First on the list is the "enormous pressure" ASU for Palestine have placed on Vision Super—an industry superannuation fund partly run by the ASU bureaucracy—allegedly provoking the fund to divest from its Israeli investments last October. In fact, as the *Australian* wrote at the time, Vision Super's stakes in two Israeli banks were "really just pocket lint"—amounting to \$8 million of the \$29 billion the fund manages—and the divestment "pure theatre."

Moreover, while ASU for Palestine celebrated the Vision Super divestment announcement, they used it as cover for the fact that the fund had ignored their demand to end its investment in weapons manufacturers, "including BAE Systems, Raytheon Technologies and GE Aerospace," and

other companies assisting in or profiting from Israel's genocide and occupation.

Ferguson goes on to complain that ASU for Palestine advocated for asking coworkers what they thought about the Gaza genocide and encouraging them to join the union. In a desperate and unhinged attack on this utterly benign form of workplace activism, the writer notes that the group recently encouraged such activity "just weeks before the Bondi massacre."

Beyond this, the *Australian's* case against ASU for Palestine amounts to little more than the group holding numerous meetings since October 2023 and occasionally lobbying for Palestinian "solidarity" within the broader trade union framework, including through the temporary hoisting of a Palestinian flag above the Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC) building in Melbourne.

Not mentioned in the article is the (self-described) crowning achievement of U4P and ASU for Palestine: two brief stop-work rallies in Melbourne last year, involving no more than a few dozen staff, many attending in their lunch break before returning to work. Limited as these events were, under conditions where every union bureaucracy in the country has worked to ensure that not a single strike against the genocide has taken place, the brief stoppages were so remarkable that the organisers of the second awarded themselves a commemorative plaque.

The *Australian's* attack on ASU for Palestine is in line with a further shift to the right by the unions, which have already spent more than two years blocking any industrial action by workers, directly repudiating the desperate calls for solidarity from the Palestinian trade unions.

With the Bondi terror attack as a pretext, VTHC Secretary Luke Hilakari and Health Services Union President Gerard Hayes last month openly denounced protests against the genocide. Hayes declared it was "obscene to continue to protest at this point in time," while Hilakari said pro-Palestine protesters had "made all the points they need to make about Gaza" and "they just need to back off."

Significantly, the two union leaders made these statements to the *Australian*, which gleefully reported the news of two prominent union officials openly lining up in support of Labor's police-state measures to crush working-class opposition. Illustrating the union bureaucracy's agreement with the right-wing Murdoch-controlled outlet, Hilakari also took the opportunity to attack U4P and its pseudo-left backers, declaring, "the extreme left is horrible, absolutely horrible, and can be completely out of control."

The rapid shift to the right by the unions after the Bondi attack, in line with the entire political establishment, is a significant development, but not one that comes out of the blue.

For decades, the unions have served as an industrial police force, suppressing workers' opposition to attacks on their jobs,

wages and conditions by governments and big business. A key component of that suppression has been the unions' enforcement of the harsh anti-strike provisions contained in the Fair Work Act, drafted and refined through the collaboration of the top union bureaucrats with successive federal Labor governments since it was introduced under the Rudd-Gillard administration in 2008.

Labor's moves to criminalise protest—openly supported by Hayes and Hilakari and not opposed by a single union leader—are the logical extension of these draconian strike bans from the workplace to the political arena. As is the case with the Fair Work Act, the anti-protest laws will provide a pseudo-legal justification for what the union apparatus has already been enforcing since October 2023—the suppression of working-class struggle against genocide and war.

Despite this, the pseudo-left organisations, including their Unionists for Palestine front groups, continue to insist that the union bureaucracies and Labor governments can be reformed through polite appeals and yet more protests. Most strikingly, Socialist Alternative has characterised Labor's state and federal assault on democratic rights in the aftermath of the Bondi attack as an inexplicable "capitulation" to the far-right, against which it must be defended.

This is in line with how the pseudo-left cover for the unions in every workplace betrayal, cloaking their complicity with the bureaucracy behind periodic appeals for greater "militancy" and occasional calls for the repeal of anti-strike laws.

What has been demonstrated since the Bondi attack is that the more Labor and the unions shift to the right, the more energetically the pseudo-left seek to defend them. This exposes their role as a last line of defence for the political establishment, employing left-populist and occasionally "socialist" rhetoric to divert genuine opposition to the ruling class into the safe channels of reformism and protest politics.

Like the unions, the pseudo-left organisations' claim to represent the working class is a fraud. Instead, they speak for sections of the upper-middle class, seeking to advance their own material interests within the capitalist system.

The lesson for workers is clear: To fight genocide and war, and to defend democratic rights, workers need to take matters into their own hands. In the first instance, this means establishing rank-and-file committees in every workplace, politically and organisationally independent of the complicit unions and Labor. Through such committees, linking up across industries, throughout Australia and internationally, what must be built is a socialist movement of the working class, directed against genocide, war and their root cause, capitalism itself.



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