

Australia: Antisemitism Education Taskforce to attack democratic rights and academic freedom

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In the aftermath of the December 14 Bondi terrorist attack, which claimed 15 lives and injured dozens, the political establishment is cynically exploiting the atrocity to implement a raft of anti-democratic measures.

The offensive is being led by the federal Labor government. Last week, it announced a Royal Commission, which has nothing to do with investigating the circumstances of the attack, but has the character of a witch-hunting body directed against mass opposition to the Israeli genocide in Gaza and Australia's complicity in it.

The Royal Commission is the spearhead of an authoritarian campaign that is to extend into every area of social and political life. The educational system is a particular target.

Just four days after the Bondi attack, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced the creation of the Antisemitism Education Taskforce, chaired by corporate figure David Gonski and featuring the government's Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism Jillian Segal.

Albanese also committed to fully implementing Segal's pro-Zionist, Trump-style recommendations announced in July 2025. Among other attacks, the recommendations call for the defunding of universities and other public institutions that fail to stamp out criticism of Israel and the introduction of Zionist propaganda into the schools.

As with the entire campaign, the targeting of the schools is based on cynical double-speak. Under the guise of educating children about antisemitism and preventing its spread, the aim is to stamp out oppositional, anti-genocide and anti-war sentiments, and to impose a regime under which educators at all levels are in fear of being targeted if they step out of line.

The taskforce is led by two entrenched figures of the Australian establishment. Gonski, a longstanding corporate executive and government adviser on education has been appointed chair for the 12-month term. Working alongside him is Segal, a prominent and outspoken representative of the pro-Israel Zionist lobby and the Albanese government's special envoy to combat antisemitism.

Its aim spans early childhood education, schools, universities and higher education providers, with direct involvement from national curriculum authorities, teacher-training bodies and tertiary regulators. Far from a symbolic stand against racism or terrorism the taskforce is designed to restructure curriculum, professional standards, funding arrangements and disciplinary regimes, with far-

reaching implications for democratic rights.

Educators, students and academic staff must recognise this initiative for what it is: an attempt to establish conditions in the schools and universities that are of a police-state character.

Segal's appointment as Special Envoy and her role on the taskforce underscore its overtly political character. She has defended Israel's bombardment of civilian infrastructure in Gaza, including hospitals, actions that violate international law and constitute collective punishment, and has accused universities of fostering antisemitism for permitting pro-Palestinian protests and criticism of Zionism.

At the universities she has pushed for disciplinary action against staff and students and for the adoption of the contested IHRA definition of antisemitism, which reclassifies opposition to Zionism and the Israeli state as hate speech, legitimising state and administrative repression of anti-war dissent.

Gonski, a supporter of the Israeli state, represents the managerial wing of this agenda. A corporate insider rather than an educator, he reshaped schooling through the so-called "needs-based" funding model, entrenching market mechanisms, standardised testing and performance management while deepening inequality. Together, Segal and Gonski personify the ideological policing of campuses and the subordination of education to corporate, Zionist and military priorities.

At its first meeting on December 19, chaired by David Gonski and attended by Education Minister Jason Clare, the Antisemitism Education Taskforce launched its plan of how the education system will "respond" to antisemitism.

The taskforce brings together state, territory and federal education departments, non-government, Independent and Catholic school authorities, Jewish school bodies, curriculum agencies, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and the interim Australian Tertiary Education Commission.

The meeting finalised the terms of reference, governance arrangements and a timetable for initial recommendations to be delivered to education ministers by February 2026. Central to its work is implementing the government's response to the Special Envoy's Plan to Combat Antisemitism, an agenda of expanded censorship and state monitoring across all levels of education, from early childhood to universities.

The Terms of Reference adopted at the first meeting made four

main points.

- Firstly, the taskforce calls on national agencies, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority; and the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, to be tasked with reviewing the Australian Curriculum and Early Years Framework. The stated goal is to reject “all forms of antisemitic thought and action,” strengthen content regarding “Jewish Australian’s history and culture” and promote an “understanding and expression of Australian values.”

Given Segal’s explicit conflation of antisemitism and anti-Zionism, that is a call for a curriculum that defends the Israeli state even as it is perpetrating a genocide against the Palestinians.

The reference to “Australian values” underscores the right-wing character of the push to overhaul curricula. The slogan has always been associated with a right-wing dogwhistle against immigrants, in recent decades particularly those from the Middle East and areas of the world with a large Islamic population. Under the guise of combatting bigotry, the taskforce is promoting a right-wing concept embraced by racists, including those who are classically antisemitic.

- The second reference point concerns teacher training. The taskforce is developing new professional learning requirements to train teachers to “recognise and respond” to antisemitism, including compulsory modules and the adaptation of UNESCO-linked programs to enforce the government’s definitions of permissible speech. This includes the establishment of a national online hub supplying schools and teachers with officially approved resources, described as “trusted voices,” along with guidance aimed at promoting “social cohesion.”

The plan effectively is creating a state-sanctioned narrative, promoting fear within the classroom, opposing any critical thought and suppressing freedom of speech.

- The third reference point is the delivery of the Special Envoy’s first University Report Cards where institutions will be graded on their progress in suppressing pro-Palestinian sentiment and the enforcement of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism. This will also include complaints processes that may “incite discrimination.”

- The fourth reference point is the “strengthening of the powers and penalties” of bodies such as the TEQSA, Australia’s national regulator for higher education. Universities and other publicly funded bodies that fail to “monitor compliance,” in other words persecute dissent, face the restriction or total cutoff of federal funding.

The taskforce operates alongside the government’s agenda of tougher hate-speech laws, expanded police and regulatory powers, and moves to criminalise or defund organisations accused of “extremism,” positioning schools and universities as frontline institutions of state control.

While suppressing mass opposition to the genocide is the immediate aim of this program, its purpose is broader.

The Labor government, as part of its lockstep alignment with US imperialism and the Trump administration, is seeking to subordinate universities to a war agenda, centred on the preparations for conflict with China. Funding and courses at universities are increasingly tailored to that aim, along with

pumping out graduates who can meet the immediate workforce needs of the major corporations.

The material forces driving the taskforce go beyond the aims of the Zionists against the Palestinian people, but rooted in the deeper contradictions of capitalism. Central is the Albanese governments alignment with US-led wars, its commitments under AUKUS, and preparations for conflict with China, all of which demand ideological conformity and the suppression of dissent.

This government’s program, of war abroad and a war against social conditions domestically, is incompatible with basic democratic rights, including academic freedom and freedom of speech. As in 1930s Germany and in Trump’s America, the universities and schools are to be subordinated directly to the state, authoritarianism and war.

The defence of academic freedom and democratic rights cannot be entrusted to the very parties, regulators and institutional leaders implementing this program.

Nor can it be left to union bureaucracies, such as the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), and teacher unions which have repeatedly collaborated with governments and management enforcing restructures and suppressed rank-and-file opposition.

Rank-and-file committees of staff and students must be built across campuses and schools to coordinate resistance. These committees should demand: no gag clauses tied to public funding, oppose victimisations and censorship, full restoration and expansion of funding for humanities and other courses, employ thousands of additional teachers, protection of jobs, workloads and tenure, and the repeal of anti-protest and politicised “hate speech” laws.

Above all, the defence of democratic rights and academic freedom must be tied to a broader struggle against war, and austerity. The task is not to reform capitalist institutions, but to mobilise the independent social power of the working class against them.

The Segal-Gonski taskforce is not a benign review. It is an assault on the right and capacity of workers and students to think, learn and oppose imperialist violence. The only effective defence lies in building democratic, independent rank-and-file organisations and waging a determined and unified fight for a free, high-quality education for all.

If you would like further information forming rank-and-file committees in your schools, we encourage you to contact the CFPE to discuss this perspective.

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

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