

# Israeli President Herzog's visit to Australia: Labor governments embrace mass murder and police state repression

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The visit by Israeli President Isaac Herzog beginning on Sunday marks a turning point in Australian politics. In a manner without precedent, governments, led by Labor, are openly embracing mass murder and genocide as legitimate instruments of policy, and they are repressing opposition with police-state measures that are incompatible with democracy.

Herzog is touring the country as an official guest of the federal Labor government. Amid mass outrage over his impending arrival, every senior Labor leader has voiced their complete solidarity with this war criminal. And they have organised a massive police mobilisation to prevent public displays of hostility, including with the announcement today of a lockdown of much of central Sydney.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has demanded that the population "recognise the solemn nature" of the visit and has boasted of his own longstanding acquaintance with Herzog. Foreign Minister Penny Wong has proclaimed that the Israeli leader is "here to provide support," as though he were an embodiment of kindness and humanity. Defence Minister Richard Marles has described Herzog as "our welcome and honoured guest."

The implications of this welcome have been underscored by the response of legal figures.

Chris Sidoti, Australia's former Human Rights Commissioner, bluntly stated that if the visit were not cancelled, the Labor government should respond to Herzog's arrival by arresting the Israeli president.

A United Nations commission of inquiry, upon which Sidoti served, last year found that Herzog had incited the genocide of the Palestinians. In October 2023, as Israel was beginning its carpet bombing, Herzog declared there were no innocent civilians in Gaza. He would later personally sign bombs that were dropped upon them.

But everyone knows that Labor is not about to arrest their "welcome and honoured guest," let alone prosecuting him for his role in some of the worst war crimes since the Holocaust. Instead, any opposition to Herzog is being treated as a criminal threat to public safety.

The pretext for the visit is both false and obscene. Labor has

claimed that Herzog will provide solace to the Jewish community in the wake of the December 14, antisemitic terror attack in Bondi. Herzog, implicated in state terrorism on a grand scale, has no business shedding crocodile tears for innocent victims of mass murder, whatever their religion or ethnicity.

As numbers of anti-Zionist Jews have raised, the identification of world Jewry with the militarist Israeli state is a slander. Masses of Jewish people around the world, including in Australia, have joined demonstrations opposing the Israeli slaughter of Palestinians. The false conflation of all Jewish people with the genocidal Israeli state can only incite and promote antisemitism, not combat it.

Ignoring all of that, Labor leaders have presented their red-carpet welcome for a war criminal and the head of an apartheid ethno-state as an exercise in "social cohesion" and "unity." The application of those terms to such a visit underscores their Orwellian character.

The other tack taken by the Laborites and much of the corporate media is even more absurd. Together, they have presented Herzog's position in Israel as that of a figurehead, with limited power or involvement in daily affairs.

In reality, he sits at the very apex of the Israeli state. In that capacity, he has functioned as a protector of the fascistic government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, ensuring his continuation in office amid widespread opposition within Israel and the prospect of a corruption prosecution. Herzog, in other words, has done everything in his power to continue the war effort.

Herzog himself has refuted the phoney presentation of the visit. He is travelling with an entourage of militarists, including retired Israeli Major General Doron Almog, who has repeatedly dodged international arrest warrants over 2002 war crimes in Gaza.

And even before his arrival, Herzog had viciously slandered and attacked the Australian population. In interviews with Nine Media and Murdoch's *Australian*, the Israeli leader declared that the hundreds of thousands, or millions, of people who had protested his government's atrocities were "brainwashed" and

“purely antisemitic.” The purpose of his visit, he stated, was to combat “lies and false information” about Israel.

In effect, the Labor governments are partnering with the Israeli fascist leader to implement dictatorial measures. The New South Wales Labor government has invoked extraordinary legislation, passed after the Bondi attack, whereby it can ban any public protest for up to three months after the designation of a terrorist incident. It has declared the ban applies to a planned march from Sydney Town Hall to the NSW state parliament on Monday evening, opposing Herzog.

On Saturday, NSW Labor Premier Chris Minns went further, declaring Herzog’s visit a “major event” and imposing lockdown-style measures on most of the Sydney central business district and its eastern suburbs.

The measures allow the government to “limit the number of persons who may enter a major event area or any part of a major event area” and to ban whomever they want from the designated zone, under threat of arrest or fines of over \$5,000. As many as 3,500 additional police are to flood the centre of Sydney to enforce what can only be described as a form of martial law. Behind the talk of “social cohesion,” this is a massive provocation, setting the stage for violent confrontations.

The clear purpose of Herzog’s visit is to shut down all opposition to Israeli war crimes. For more than two years, Australian governments, led by Labor, have slandered, vilified and deployed police against protesters. But the failure to suppress the hostility entirely has been a cause of consternation, in the Australian ruling elite, from the Israeli state and its local proxies in the Zionist lobby and from the Trump administration in the United States. Now, Labor is seeking to demonstrate its ability to deal with the opposition, cynically exploiting the Bondi attack as the pretext.

Labor has supported the genocide, politically, diplomatically and materially, including through the ongoing export of advanced weapons components. But Labor has at times sought to distance itself from the atrocities that it is implicated in, with weasel-words about protecting civilians. With Herzog’s visit, the mask is off and the embrace of a modern-day Holocaust is open.

That can only be understood in the context of the eruption of imperialist militarism, in which Australia is a full participant. The Labor government is closely aligned with a Trump regime that is tearing up all the old norms of international relations and law, with open gangsterism, not only in its support for the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians, but in its attacks and threats against Iran, its assault on Venezuela and its threats against the world, including even to seize Greenland.

With the welcome to Herzog, Labor is sending a message to Trump, that it too has no “red lines,” when it comes to wars for profits, resources and markets.

There is mass anger and opposition. But the critical issue is for political lessons to be drawn.

Throughout the genocide, the mass protest movement has been dominated politically by the Greens and pseudo-left groups such as Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance. Together, they have claimed that with sufficient “pressure” and moral appeals, Labor would “see sense” and end its support for the mass murder of Palestinians. The opposite has been the case. The greater the opposition, the more the repression.

In practice, the line of the Greens and the pseudo-left has served to subordinate opposition to the very government that is complicit in the genocide. The protest politics have served to dull political consciousness, covering over the connections between Labor’s backing for the war crimes in Palestine and its broader imperialist program, including participation in US-led preparations for war against China.

The pseudo-left too has sought to foster illusions in the Labor-aligned trade unions. But the unions blocked any industrial action whatsoever against the genocide itself, and they are partners with the Labor governments that are now instituting dictatorial measures.

As the Socialist Equality Party has insisted, a new political perspective is needed. It must be based, not on appeals to the Labor governments, but on the most determined political fight against them.

The immense industrial and political power of the working class must be brought to bear, including through strikes and other actions. That means a rebellion against the corporatised union leaderships and the establishment of independent rank-and-file committees controlled by workers themselves. Such committees must connect the fight against genocide, war and repression, with the struggle against austerity and the offensive on workers’ jobs, wages and living standards, in the interests of a capitalist oligarchy.

Above all, what is required is the development of a mass socialist movement of the working class. Such a movement, aimed at uniting workers internationally, and mobilising them against the source of war, the capitalist system itself, is the only means of halting the descent into barbarism, world war and dictatorship.



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