Australia: Queensland LNP government matches Labor by banning “prescribed phrases”

Mike Head
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The right-wing Liberal National Party (LNP) government in the state of Queensland is vying with the federal and state Labor governments to become the first in Australia to explicitly outlaw the phrases “from the river to the sea” and “globalise the intifada,” which oppose the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

The Queensland legislation is similar in an essential respect to the “hate speech” and “prohibited groups” laws already imposed in recent months by Labor governments nationwide. It will hand power to the state’s attorney-general, a government minister, to unilaterally declare and ban “prescribed phrases” by issuing regulations.

The Queensland bill, like federal and state laws, could create the conditions for mass arrests and imprisonment of people for chanting or displaying these or similar phrases, as has happened under the Starmer Labour government in Britain, with the thousands of arrests of people displaying messages opposing the proscription of the Palestine Action group as a terrorist organisation.

Likewise, the laws rushed through federal parliament by the Albanese Labor government last month allow the minister in charge of the Australian Federal Police to designate and outlaw so-called “hate groups” by decree and potentially have their supporters jailed.

In tabling the LNP’s bill in the state parliament, Queensland Attorney-General Deb Frecklington used her second reading speech to declare that regulations, already drafted alongside the bill, will specifically list the two prominent phrases and any variations of them.

While clearly seeking to suppress anti-genocide protests, the bill also goes further. It creates an open-ended political power that can be used to criminalise by regulations any phrase that, in the attorney-general’s opinion, “might reasonably be expected to cause a member of the public to feel menaced, harassed or offended.”

Anyone who publicly recites, distributes, publishes or displays a prohibited expression will face up to two years’ imprisonment.

Like the federal legislation, this is an historic attack on basic democratic rights, handing sweeping executive powers to governments to proscribe political groups or statements. It bypasses even parliamentary scrutiny by giving governments the power to add phrases or groups to banning lists behind closed doors.

Frecklington claimed that the two phrases to be immediately banned call for the extermination of the Jewish people. In reality, they are widely understood to be calling for a worldwide movement to end the Washington-backed extermination of Palestinians by the racialist Zionist state of Israel and for global freedom from oppression.

The Queensland legislation, formally titled the Criminal Code (Combatting Antisemitism and Hate Speech) Amendment Bill 2026, was introduced into the state parliament on Tuesday. As with Labor’s legislation, it is based on the false branding of anti-genocide and anti-Zionist dissent as antisemitic, even though many Jews have courageously joined the Gaza protests in Australia, as they have internationally.

The Queensland bill’s accompanying “Human Rights Statement of Compatibility” document explicitly states that the safety of the “Jewish community” and the prevention of “civil unrest” outweigh the right to use prescribed expressions in public.

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The government seeks to justify such methods—using regulations to ban specific phrases to prevent "civil unrest"—by citing the need for agility to address evolving "hate speech." This is a blueprint for criminalising any expressions of dissent that the capitalist class and its governments consider a danger to their rule.

An existing state ban on the display of certain symbols, such as swastikas, will be extended to any flags or emblems associated with an organisation prescribed by regulations as supporting terrorism. This will include Hamas and Hezbollah symbols. The maximum penalty for displaying prohibited symbols will increase from six months to two years' imprisonment.

The bill also introduces a new offence for impeding or harassing people attending religious services, carrying a maximum penalty of three years' imprisonment. Penalties for assaulting or threatening a person officiating a religious ceremony will increase from two to five years, while damage to a place of worship will carry a maximum sentence of seven years.

The bill grants police extraordinary powers to stop, detain and search people and vehicles without a warrant if a police officer merely "reasonably suspects" that a person possesses material conveying "prescribed expressions" or has committed or is committing any related offence.

Like the Albanese federal Labor government and its state counterparts in New South Wales and Victoria, Queensland Premier David Crisafulli claimed that the bill was a direct response to the December 14 terrorist attack at Sydney's Bondi Beach, in which 15 people were killed during a Hanukah celebration. This echoes the efforts of the Labor governments, as well as the visiting Israeli President Isaac Herzog, to blame anti-genocide protests for the reactionary Islamic State-inspired shootings.

At the 5,000-strong demonstration at Brisbane's King George Square on Monday evening to protest against Labor's invitation of Herzog, the rally organisers provided a platform for Greens representatives, including federal Greens MP Michael Berkman, to try to divert the outrage over the Herzog visit into denunciations of the state LNP government's bill.

This was a blatant attempt to channel the hostility away from the Albanese Labor government, with whom the Greens are increasingly seeking a partnership in Canberra. On the same evening, the state Labor government in neighbouring New South Wales, was orchestrating a police rampage on thousands of people demonstrating in Sydney against Herzog's visit and Labor's anti-protest laws.

The bipartisan character of this vicious assault on basic democratic rights, spearheaded by Labor governments, in order to suppress opposition to the mass slaughter and destruction in Palestine, underscores the political reality: The fight against the genocide and other US-backed militarism cannot be taken forward by appealing to, or trying to pressure, these same governments.

What is required is the mobilisation of the strength of the working class against these governments, connected to a socialist perspective directed against the source of the descent into such barbarism, dictatorial forms of rule and war—that is, the capitalist system itself.

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