

Australian universities on trial: The Albanese government's "report card" against dissent

A Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee member
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The Albanese Labor government is preparing an "antisemitism report card" on Australian universities that will grade institutions on their success in suppressing dissent and policing campus politics, backed by the threat of reducing their funding.

The immediate purpose of the report card regime is to silence opposition to the ongoing US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza and violent attacks in the occupied West Bank of Palestine, by falsely branding it as antisemitic. But the broader intent is to establish a framework to stifle all dissent as part of a wider assault on basic democratic rights, protests and free speech.

The significance of the report card is underscored by the plan to deliver the outcomes directly to Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, as part of a report to be transmitted by the Labor government's "Special Envoy on Antisemitism," Jillian Segal, a Zionist corporate lawyer.

A leaked document on the report card states that, as the "first priority area," universities must "effectively address access to campus grounds, regulate outdoor protests, encampments and display of flags, imagery and promotional materials."

That clearly demands the prohibition of any anti-genocide protests or display of support for opposition to the intensifying killings, dispossession and oppression of Palestinians by the racist Zionist regime, and the Labor government's complicity in these historic crimes.

These restrictions apply "both in educational and non-educational contexts." In other words, every aspect of life within a university is to be controlled. This is a further step in the subordination of higher education to government and corporate priorities.

Far from being a neutral safeguard against bigotry, as the Labor government claims, the plan presents political opposition to the Israeli state's crimes in Gaza as a principal target, while treating universities as sites to be disciplined into producing politically conformist graduates.

The report card demands that universities enforce the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)

definition of antisemitism or the slightly modified version of that definition adopted by Universities Australia, the peak body representing university managements. These definitions, which some university managements have already imposed, essentially ban criticism of the Israeli state itself.

The leaked document outlines how far the political policing will extend. Universities will be scored across multiple domains, including complaints handling and disciplinary processes, curriculum and course content review, staff and student training programs, public communications and governance and oversight structures.

The document details a scoring methodology that privileges managerial and surveillance responses—complaint logs, training attendance records, centralised policies—over the genuine educational aims of fostering critical inquiry and debate. This converts academic life into an audit trail: syllabi are reviewed, speakers are vetted, and academic judgements become the subject of institutional risk assessments rather than scholarly debate.

The report card process, the first stage of which is already underway, envisages desk reviews, documentary evidence, interviews with named individuals, and the production of a public score and narrative report for each institution.

Universities that fail to meet prescribed benchmarks can be publicly shamed, recommended for sanctions and effectively branded as problem institutions—undermining their reputations and providing a pretext to withhold or redirect public funding.

The Albanese government has vowed to implement in full its envoy Segal's Plan to Combat Antisemitism, which includes government oversight of curriculum, teacher training and university governance, using funding levers as a means of enforcement.

Segal appointed Greg Craven, a right-wing former university vice-chancellor, to supervise the report card regime. Craven has a long record of demanding the shutting down of anti-genocide dissent. Most recently, he has been in the forefront of falsely identifying opposition to the Gaza

genocide with the December 14 terrorist shootings of Jewish people at Sydney's Bondi Beach by Islamic State-linked gunmen.

In the Murdoch media's *Australian*, Craven recently insisted that silencing anti-genocide dissent, at the expense of civil liberties, was essential for Australia's "national defence." He wrote: "The crucial necessity is to understand that this is no longer simply a debate about law and order and civil liberties. This is a debate about national defence."

As those remarks indicate, while suppressing mass opposition to the genocide is the immediate aim of this program, its purpose is broader. In the days after the Bondi attack, Albanese announced the creation of a year-long Antisemitism Education Taskforce, chaired by corporate figure David Gonski and featuring Segal.

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 and students at all levels are in fear of being targeted if they step out of line.

This offensive is occurring under conditions where the Albanese government is increasingly subordinating public universities to the needs of the military-industrial complex, AUKUS commitments for a US-led war against China and corporate profit—prioritising STEM, defence research and workforce pipelines for the state and big business while cutting humanities and critical social science.

The report card and education taskforce are a continuation of processes set out in the government's Universities Accord which is a political blueprint to subordinate higher education to the imperatives of corporate profit and militarisation. The Accord features "mission-based compacts" for university funding, requiring universities to serve "national priorities," including AUKUS-related projects, while financially pressuring universities into line, including through cuts to international student enrolments. This has been accompanied by the destruction of almost 4,000 jobs via university restructurings over the past year.

Labor's agenda parallels that of the fascistic US Trump administration, which has gutted public education funding and is imposing "patriotic curriculums" in schools and universities, along with mass public sector layoffs, censorship and book bans.

The implications for the working class are grave. Academic freedom, freedom of speech and the capacity of staff and students to organise politically are under direct attack. Report cards, codes of conduct, the Labor government's witch-hunting royal commission into the Bondi attack and "hate speech" legislation are being developed to create chilling conditions for staff and students.

The Labor government, as part of its lockstep alignment with US imperialism and the Trump administration, is seeking to transform universities according to an AUKUS and war agenda, centred on the preparations for conflict with China.

The only effective response is the rank-and-file organisation of educators, students and workers, independent of the trade union apparatuses, which have demonstrated their willingness to collaborate with the Labor government.

National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) president Alison Barnes has embraced the report card plan, merely criticising the appointment of Craven to run it. "We need an independent expert to give us a sober analysis, not a partisan commentator with a track record of pitting universities against each other," Barnes told the *Guardian*.

This is a warning of the readiness of the NTEU to enforce the outcomes of Labor's offensive, just as it has blocked any unified fight against the job destruction and restructuring throughout 2025.

Staff and students must establish rank-and-file committees (RFCs) to defend academic freedom, oppose gag clauses tied to public funding, and demand the restoration and expansion of staffing and courses in the humanities and social sciences. These committees should expose the political character of the report card regime, refuse to participate in submission processes that normalise surveillance, and coordinate national campaigns to defend staff and students victimised for political views.

The defence of free speech and basic democratic rights is part of a broader necessary struggle against capitalism itself and its program of ever-greater oligarchic wealth and turn to war and Trump-style dictatorial rule. It means a fight to take genuinely democratic working-class control of society and reorganise it along egalitarian, that is socialist, lines in the interests of humanity, not the corporate ruling class.

To discuss these issues and how to form RFCs, please contact the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file educators' network:

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

Twitter: [CFPE_Australia](https://twitter.com/CFPE_Australia)



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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