

# Australia: Labor government conducts police raids against anti-genocide protesters in Melbourne

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The Labor Party governments in the Australian states of Victoria and New South Wales (NSW) are presiding over deliberately threatening and intimidating police raids to arrest protesters against the ongoing US-Israeli genocide in Gaza and the complicity of the federal Albanese Labor government.

Early on the morning of March 27, Victoria Police Public Order Response Team (PORT) officers in full combat gear conducted eight raids upon homes around Melbourne to detain eight women who had taken part in a March 6 protest outside the Victorian Trades Hall building. Because the police went to a wrong address, one of the women was raided and arrested on April 1.

Just a day before the eight raids, on March 26, heavily-armed NSW police commandos stormed the home of a woman who had joined the large demonstration at Sydney Town Hall on February 9 against the visit by Israeli President Isaac Herzog. She was dragged out of bed at 5 a.m. and handcuffed after the police smashed open her front door. At least four similar raids were mounted across Sydney.

These developments are a warning that the Labor governments, state and federal, are escalating their assault on anti-genocide and anti-war opposition as the US offensive intensifies and extends to Lebanon and Iran, with the political and material backing of the Albanese government.

The Melbourne raids targeted women who draped a statue of 1960s and 1970s feminist equal pay activist Zelda D'Aprano at the Victorian Trades Hall in an apron that said: "Difficult Woman." They also painted this slogan on an adjoining path. That was first an allusion to how Prime Minister Anthony Albanese personally condemned and branded Grace Tame, a sexual assault victims' campaigner, as a "difficult woman" after she chanted "Globalise the Intifada" at the February 9 anti-Herzog Sydney Town Hall rally.

It was also an allusion to how the trade union bureaucracy had sacked and disowned D'Aprano, who had been a meatworkers union official, in 1969 after she chained herself to the federal Arbitration Commission building in Melbourne to call for equal pay for women.

Herzog had been invited by the Albanese government despite

being named by a United Nations inquiry for inciting genocide against the Palestinians. The invitation was an open show of support for the US-backed Zionist regime, under the cover of mourning the December 14 Sydney Bondi Beach shootings, in which two alleged ISIS-linked gunmen killed 15 people.

Aged between 34 and 71, the eight women were then taken to various police stations, where they were held for hours before being released on anti-democratic bail conditions. The charges include criminal damage to property, behaving in a riotous manner in a public place, marking graffiti on a residence without consent, recklessly damaging part of a registered place without a permit and refusing to leave a scheduled public place after a warning.

The bail conditions imposed on the women, now known as the Zeldas, include staying away from the Melbourne city centre, the usual location of political protests, not communicating with their co-accused and not speaking to the media. These bans last at least until October, when their court cases are first listed for mention.

Speaking on their behalf, a Whistleblowers, Activists and Communities Alliance (WACA) spokesperson told Sydney Criminal Lawyers journalist Paul Gregoire that the women were woken from their beds, just before 7 a.m., with a call that if they did not open the door immediately, their doors would be knocked down.

The women were arrested and handcuffed, whilst they were still in their nightclothes. The police had warrants for searches for electronic devices, clothing, shoes, as well as red liquid chalk pens. The women were then held in their homes and handcuffed, for about an hour. Two women were denied the right to take their medication.

One of the most politically significant features of the police operation, conducted under Labor Premier Jacinta Allan's government, is the central role of Victorian Trades Hall Council secretary Luke Hilakari, who called in the police.

Hilakari took photos of the women as they left the statue on March 6, and while they were in a car changing out of their "Difficult Woman" t-shirts. Hilakari provided the photos and a five-page statement to police.

In a March 6 Facebook post, Hilakari falsely labelled the women as “vandals” and declared: “We’ve had enough of this attention seeking performative stunts dressed up as activism. We’ve are now reporting this type of vandalism to the police.”

This must be taken as a vow that trade union officials will act as police informers against anti-genocide and anti-war demonstrators.

According to the WACA representative, Hilakari suggested that the statue protest was an antisemitic attack, because D’Aprano was Jewish. That line was taken up in Zionist media outlets, as well as the *Australian* newspaper, which depicted the event as anti-Jewish.

That is a further blatant conflation, by the corporate media and the Labor governments, of anti-genocide outrage with antisemitism. This is Labor’s chief pretext for cracking down on dissent and introducing anti-democratic “hate speech” laws that can outlaw political groups and lead to lengthy imprisonment.

The police raids in Melbourne and Sydney take further the violent police rampage against the February 9 anti-Herzog protest in Sydney. The demonstration had been joined by about 10,000 people, as part of events across Australia that also involved more than 20,000 people in Melbourne, 5,000 in Brisbane and thousands more in other capital cities and regional centres.

Albanese and NSW Premier Chris Minns defended the police violence, underscoring Labor’s support for the US-Israeli crimes against humanity and intent to shut down opposition. The Minns government had invoked two sweeping anti-protest laws to ban the demonstration and hand the police expanded powers to suppress it.

NSW police arrested 27 people at the Sydney Town Hall protest, with nine charged and others eventually released. Now, with the recent police raids, at least 26 people have been charged with offences such as assaulting police.

That is despite widely-circulated footage showing police officers punching, pepper-spraying and charging at attendees. Among those assaulted was 76-year-old journalist and documentary filmmaker James Ricketson, who was attacked by riot cops and pinned to the ground.

This has all occurred with the backing of union bureaucrats like Hilakari. In December, after the Bondi Beach terrorist attack, he and others, such as Health Services Union (HSU) national president Gerard Hayes, demanded an end to Gaza protests. Hilakari told the Murdoch media’s *Australian* newspaper that pro-Palestine protesters had “made all the points they need to make about Gaza” and “they just need to back off.”

The reality is that Benjamin Netanyahu’s Zionist government, armed by Washington, has continued to not only murder and starve the population of Gaza, but to expand that barbarism into Lebanon and Iran, helping the Trump administration to broaden US imperialism’s criminal bid to

assert unchallenged control over the Middle East through the carnage in Iran.

Hilakari’s support for the police-state powers rushed into law by the federal and state Labor governments takes to a new level the more than two-year record of Australia’s trade union apparatuses in blocking all calls for industrial action to block the supply of weapons components or other war-related goods to the Israeli regime.

His turn to the police against protesters is all the more revealing because Hilakari had been a featured speaker at pro-Palestine demonstrations for two years. Like the other union leaders who have been promoted by pseudo-left groups as opponents of the genocide at these rallies, his contributions were cynical empty platitudes.

Hilakari’s record is far from an aberration or simply an individual betrayal. It personifies the part being played by all the union bureaucrats as the Albanese government has supported and joined the Trump administration’s onslaught on the people of Iran, most recently by secretly dispatching 90 Special Air Services (SAS) troops to a war base in the United Arab Emirates.

Not a single union, from the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) down, has opposed Labor’s role in this illegal war, let alone called for industrial action to halt the supply of war materials, despite widespread hostility to the war among workers and youth, reflected in media polls showing 72 percent opposition.

The unions are also trying to keep imposing real pay cuts on workers through enterprise agreements in the face of even sharper rises in the cost of living, fuelled by the war.

Far from succumbing to leftward “pressure” through protests that promote the line of appeals to Labor and the unions, they are backing authoritarian measures to silence protests. This is accompanied by Australia’s ever-deepening integration under the union-backed Labor government into AUKUS and other US-led plans for a catastrophic war with China.

The international working class is the only social force that can stop war. Coordinated mass strikes across ports, logistics, weapons manufacturing and more broadly would bring the machinery of war to a grinding halt. That requires building new forms of working-class organisation—independent rank-and-file committees—and a new socialist movement of the working class, in opposition to Labor, the unions and the capitalist system, which is plunging humanity toward barbarism.



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