

Australian government threatens to defund universities that fail to suppress anti-genocide dissent

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As the Gaza genocide intensifies, the Albanese Labor government is making unprecedented threats to strip accreditation and funding from any university that it alleges fails to sufficiently silence anti-genocide campaigns by staff and students.

In recent weeks, Education Minister Jason Clare has repeatedly used the media to warn university managements that they risk losing their registration and funding unless they fully implement new standards to combat alleged antisemitism on campus.

Labor is stepping up a witch-hunting atmosphere against opponents of the mounting Israeli assault on the people of Gaza, as it escalates alongside Israel's onslaught on Lebanon and the US-Israeli war on Iran. Gaza's Health Ministry put the death toll in Gaza at more than 73,000 as of July 6, with the Israeli military extending its more than 60 percent occupation of the Palestinian enclave.

Clare this week imposed, by ministerial regulations, Threshold Standards that require institutions to adopt formal definitions of antisemitism, demonstrate ongoing action to prevent it and establish "transparent" complaints processes for staff and students who claim to feel threatened by anti-genocide activity.

Clare has also introduced legislation to further boost the powers of the government's policing agency, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Authority (TEQSA), including to fine or otherwise sanction universities that fail to adequately comply.

These moves were declared a top priority by an interim report by the government's Antisemitism Education Taskforce, which Labor set up after last December's Sydney Bondi Beach terrorist attack that claimed 15 lives.

Together with the corporate media, the government seized upon the killings, allegedly carried out by two Islamic State-supporting gunmen, to blame anti-genocide protests for the atrocity and to step up its efforts to conflate opposition to the genocide and the racist Zionist state of Israel with

antisemitism.

The government's Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, corporate lawyer and businesswoman Jillian Segal, recommended that the government require universities and other public institutions to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism.

This definition effectively outlaws political criticism of the Israeli state and its criminal decades-long oppression of the Palestinians. The definition's examples of antisemitic behaviour include "claiming that the existence of a state of Israel is a racist endeavour" and "drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis."

Last year, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese endorsed the IHRA definition, throwing his personal weight behind the drive to blackguard and punish anti-genocide dissent.

Now Clare has utilised ministerial powers under a Tertiary Education Quality Act, imposed by the previous Gillard Labor government in 2011, to impose new Threshold Standards. He can alter these standards by regulations, supposedly after receiving advice from the new government-appointed Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC).

While Clare's current decree focusses on measures against antisemitism and other alleged expressions of racism, these powers can be invoked to change the standards to target other forms of dissent, such as anti-war protests.

In February 2025, Universities Australia, the management peak body, officially adopted a definition of antisemitism on behalf of its 39 member institutions, drawing on a "range of definitions" including that of the IHRA. Some university managements have not followed suit, however, fearing the opposition among staff and students.

Earlier this year, Segal, who also co-chairs the government's Antisemitism Education Taskforce alongside David Gonski, another corporate lawyer and business figure, released a University Report Card, declaring that the sector

had failed to adequately address antisemitism. It was drafted by a right-wing assessor, former Australian Catholic University vice-chancellor Greg Craven, who said none of the universities he assessed had met the report's requirements on adopting a definition of antisemitism.

A leaked document from Segal's office revealed that the Report Card scheme's "first priority area" is that universities must "effectively address access to campus grounds, regulate outdoor protests, encampments and display of flags, imagery and promotional materials." That is a demand for the prohibition of protests against the genocide and the Labor government's complicity in these historic crimes.

Craven had written an opinion piece for the Murdoch media stating that shutting down such protests was vital for "Australia's defence." That underscores the intent to establish a framework for a wider assault on basic democratic rights, protests and free speech

In January, Labor joined hands with the Liberal-National Coalition to impose far-reaching "hate group" legislation. It gives a minister arbitrary powers to outlaw organisations, including political parties, simply the basis of being "satisfied" that they support vaguely-defined "hate crimes" or even "may do so" in the future.

The legislation can apply to any expression of dissent that allegedly makes members of any group defined by race, ethnicity or nationality feel threatened by fear of suffering harm of any sort, including to their mental health.

The moves to shut down opposition also applies to university research funding. A government-appointed Commonwealth Research Grants Working Group will deliver advice to the government by October on "aligning grant decisions with a policy of combating antisemitism, hate and extremism."

The main campus trade unions, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) and the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), have opposed any fight against Labor's agenda. In a statement in May 2025, the NTEU sowed illusions that Clare would prevent "political interference" in funding decisions.

The statement also said the NTEU was confident "that the Albanese Government will maintain that position and not put Australia on the Trumpian path of suppression of universities, and punitive actions against their students and staff for exercising their rights."

Labor's record has proven the opposite. Its measures mirror those taken by the fascistic Trump administration, which has cut funding to universities that do not sufficiently comply with its reactionary and militarist agenda.

In May, far from preventing political interference, Clare invoked ministerial powers to veto and overturn Australian

Research Council funding for 13 university research projects amid a media campaign against any collaboration with researchers from alleged enemy countries, notably China, Iran, Russia and North Korea.

By publicly announcing his move, Clare sent a further message of the Labor government's commitment to US militarism, whether it be the war against Iran, the genocide in Gaza or the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.

Clare indicated then that the Threshold Standards legislation amendments would also compel universities, under threat of deregistration, to enforce a growing barrage of national security and foreign interference laws and regulations that ban such research partnerships.

Labor's 2024 Universities Accord demands the restructuring of universities to satisfy the employment and research demands of the corporate elite and preparations for war. It ties funding to universities signing "mission-based compacts" with Labor's new ATEC, above all to serve "national priorities" such as defence and critical minerals.

To fight this offensive, students and university workers, including the majority who are not trade union members, need to work together to build genuinely democratic new forms of organisation—rank-and-file committees, totally independent of the complicit trade unions.

To discuss these issues, participate in this online lunchtime meeting:

Oppose the sellout union agreements at WSU! Build rank-and-file committees!

Tuesday July 21, 12:30 to 1:30 PM (AEST)

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