

Australia: Labor's royal commission intensifies slanders against Gaza genocide protests

Mike Head
19 July 2026

Last week's fourth set of public hearings of the Albanese Labor government's Antisemitism and Social Cohesion Royal Commission highlighted the anti-democratic and witch-hunting purpose of the inquiry.

Labor set up the inquisition on the pretext of responding to the December 14 terrorist attack at Sydney's Bondi Beach. However, the entire focus has been to demonise and defame mass opposition to Israel's genocide in Gaza and the Labor government's complicity in this historic crime.

This is under conditions in which the killings of thousands of people by the US-backed Israeli regime are intensifying in Gaza, the occupied West Bank and Lebanon, and Washington's barbaric aggression has re-escalated in Iran—all without mention by those conducting the inquiry.

Last week's testimony largely consisted of untested descriptions of "lived experiences" by Jewish students and academics who claimed they were subjected to antisemitic slurs or felt personally threatened during anti-genocide encampments at some universities in 2024.

None of this had anything to do with addressing the many unanswered questions about how and why the police and intelligence agencies failed to prevent two alleged Islamic State-inspired gunmen from killing 15 people at a Bondi Hanukkah event.

Instead, the proceedings were another attempt to falsely conflate Gaza anti-genocide protests with antisemitism—despite the participation of significant numbers of Jewish students in them—and blame the protests for the Bondi atrocity. This is an operation to create the political conditions for an even greater suppression of dissent and basic democratic rights, led by the Albanese government.

Throughout the five days of hearings, no substantiated evidence was presented to back the inflammatory allegations, such as that Jewish students were abused as "baby killers." Because the Royal Commission classified their testimony as "lived experiences," those witnesses were granted immunity from cross-examination.

One of the first witnesses, for example, named only as Liat, testified that she was "so scared" and shaking with fear at an Australian National University student general meeting that demanded that the university break ties with Israeli institutions and divest from weapons companies. Yet, the meeting was held online,

on Zoom.

For several months from April 2024, anti-genocide encampments spread from the University of Sydney and the University of Melbourne to other campuses, including in Canberra, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania, before being largely shut down by university managements at the behest of the Labor government and Zionist organisations.

While inspired by the mass student protests in the US, the encampments in Australia were relatively small, generally involving only dozens of people directly. But they were accompanied by large weekly anti-genocide rallies and marches around the country, and similar demonstrations internationally, giving wider expression to the outrage over the genocidal assault on the long-oppressed Palestinians.

Even the media images from the encampments showed no displays of antisemitism. Instead, the signs and slogans typically read "Free Palestine" and included "Jewish students against genocide" and "Never again for anyone"—referring to the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust.

During last week's hearings, university executives issued apologies for not acting faster and more forcibly to close the encampments. They boasted of instituting new rules to prohibit or restrict political demonstrations and pledged to go further.

One revealing exchange occurred. Acting University of Melbourne Vice-Chancellor Glyn Davis admitted under questioning that no complaints of antisemitism had been received during the encampment.

Davis also conceded that management had used the university's wifi network to spy on students and staff holding the sit-in, which the Victorian state deputy information commissioner later ruled a breach of the state's Privacy and Data Protection Act. Davis said the university policy was then amended to permit such surveillance!

Another witness, University of Sydney Vice-Chancellor Mark Scott, indicated that his administration had considered using the police to forcibly disband the campus's anti-genocide camp but feared that could have led to it "blowing up."

Scott said: "I still felt the risk of the encampment blowing up by forcibly ending it. Police in riot gear taking students away could have seen an encampment 10 times the size the day after."

That indicates that management, no doubt in collaboration with

the police and the New South Wales state Labor government, was acutely aware of the danger of triggering widespread opposition, including in the working class, to the genocide.

Scott assured the inquiry that his administration had since imposed a series of crackdowns on political demonstrations, including compelling organisers to notify management in advance, banning encampments and indoor protests and requiring authorisation details on posters.

In a submission to the inquiry, which was promoted in corporate media outlets, Western Sydney University Chancellor Jennifer Westacott, a former head of the Business Council of Australia, went further. She accused “too many” other university managements of hiding “behind the concept of free speech to avoid taking action” and using “academic freedom as cover for tolerating what was plainly abhorrent.”

Westacott alleged that the encampments engaged in “hate speech,” not free speech: “placards calling for the murder of Jews, chants calling for the annihilation of the Jewish state, behaviour designed to intimidate and to drive fear into a specific group of people.” No evidence has been produced to back these allegations.

In reality, the only known violence that occurred during the encampments was committed by Zionist thugs. In one incident at Monash University, for instance, men carrying Israeli and Australian flags threatened and intimidated those in the encampment and damaged property, as security looked on.

Zionists also have viciously attacked anti-Zionist Jewish activists in vile terms, denouncing them as traitors and the equivalent of Nazi collaborators.

The false identification of anti-genocide protest with “hate speech” underscores the threat posed by the Labor government’s “hate group” legislation, introduced in January. It gives a minister arbitrary powers to outlaw organisations, including political parties, simply on the basis of being “satisfied” that they support vaguely-defined “hate crimes” or “may do so” in the future.

These “hate crimes” can consist of 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.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has personally denounced the slogan “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” Monash University informed students last year that they will face “immediate academic discipline” if they use the “from the river to the sea” chant.

The Labor government is now 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.

One of the central demands of the Labor government and its Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, corporate lawyer and businesswoman Jillian Segal, is that universities and other public institutions must adopt and use the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism to suppress dissent.

A slightly modified version of that definition, which Universities Australia (UA), the peak national management body, sought to impose on universities last year, would ban “calls for the

elimination of the State of Israel.”

The Jewish Council of Australia, representing over 2,500 Jewish Australians, describes the definition as dangerous, saying it would mean that calls for a single democratic state, where all people have equal rights, could be labelled antisemitic.

The council said that would make the fight against real antisemitism harder by conflating it with political speech on Israel and could “harm the many Jewish students and staff whose Judaism is not defined by the State of Israel.”

The purpose of the Labor government and Zionist groups is not to defend Jewish people from genuine bigotry—it is to criminalise dissent. In fact, when the Israeli regime and its propagandists insist that Israel speaks for all Jews and that all Jews bear responsibility for its actions, they do the work of antisemites for them.

Before shutting them down, the pseudo-left tendencies that were involved in the encampments limited them to appeals to individual university administrations to cut ties with Israel and to impotent pleas to the Labor government to change course.

This has proved a complete dead-end. The Albanese government has doubled down on its witch-hunting and its commitment to US and Israeli militarism throughout the Middle East.

Labor’s 2024 Universities Accord also demands the complete restructuring of universities to satisfy the employment and research demands of the corporate elite and preparations for US-led wars.

To fight this offensive, students and university workers need to work together to build genuinely democratic new forms of organisation—rank-and-file committees, totally independent of the complicit trade unions.

The Western Sydney University (WSU) Rank-and-File Committee is hosting an online lunchtime meeting this Tuesday to oppose new union-backed enterprise agreements that further cut real pay, increase workloads and facilitate Labor’s agenda:

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

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

Register now.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact