

Australian state Labor government bans pro-Palestinian teacher

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Last Friday, the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education, enforcing the policies of Premier Chris Minns' state Labor government, barred Sydney teacher John Morris from working in the state's public schools, citing social media posts condemning Israel as a "murderous Zionist state" and expressing solidarity with the Palestinian resistance.

Morris, a maths and IT relief teacher in Sydney's southwestern suburbs, a NSW Teachers Federation councillor, and a member of the Teachers for Palestine group, was immediately suspended, without pay, just a day after the Murdoch-owned *Daily Telegraph* notified the department of posts he had allegedly made more than two years ago.

The department's action was taken without any hearing, charge or conviction. Instead, it rushed to tell the newspaper it had "taken action to ensure this person is not working in NSW public schools."

While an investigation is supposedly ongoing, the *Telegraph* published prejudicial allegations claiming that Morris supports Hamas, which Australian governments have proscribed by decree as a "terrorist" organisation.

This is a serious attack on basic democratic rights. It is an attempt to intimidate educators, warning that any political opposition to the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, even expressed in a private or political capacity outside classrooms, will cost them their livelihood.

None of the allegations relate to anything Morris did or said as a teacher, or to his ability to teach, but solely to past alleged social media posts, presented misleadingly and out of context.

For example, the *Telegraph* claimed that Morris had reposted a statement on X by an expelled Australian National University student in June 2024 expressing

"unconditional support" for Hamas. According to Teachers for Palestine, however, Morris added: "unconditional, but critical."

Morris is not being barred for supposed support for Hamas's program, but for expressing solidarity with an oppressed people fighting a genocidal occupier and defending their right to resist.

The *Telegraph* accusations appear to be derived straight from Zionist organisations that have trawled through social media accounts to concoct evidence of supposed antisemitism, which they and the media equate with opposition to the genocide.

The newspaper cited several Zionist representatives denouncing Morris. Among them, for example, Australian Jewish Association chief executive Robert Gregory was quoted as saying Morris' posts were "deeply disturbing."

Morris's banning cannot be understood in isolation. In December 2023 the Labor governments in Victoria and New South Wales issued thinly veiled threats of dismissal against teachers who expressed any solidarity with the Palestinian people.

In February this year, the Minns government amended its code of conduct for teachers to prohibit conduct, including social media posts and participation in protests, that "would incite hatred towards a person or a group of persons on the grounds of race." This gives the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) power to deregister teachers without any police prosecution or conviction.

In an interview with the *Guardian*, Minns declared: "If it's clear to NESA that there's been a breach... then sanctions will apply." In a radio interview, Minns proclaimed: "If you participate in hate speech, even if it's not on the school grounds, then you're not the kind of person that we want shaping young minds."

This is in line with anti-democratic state and federal Labor government “hate crime” and anti-protest laws imposed in the wake of last December’s Bondi Beach terrorist attack. Labor governments seized on the reactionary Bondi killings, committed by two alleged Islamic State-linked gunmen, to justify far-reaching curbs on protest and speech. This includes the outlawing of political groups by ministerial decree and imprisonment of their supporters on the false basis that opposition to the genocide constitutes antisemitic hatred of Jews.

The Labor governments are also imposing the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism on government employees. This definition equates criticism of Israel with antisemitism. In July, the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency adopted the IHRA definition, establishing an apparatus designed to intimidate and silence doctors, nurses and healthcare workers who oppose the genocide.

The NSW Teachers Federation, the trade union covering the state’s educators, has not only refused to defend Morris. It immediately lined up behind his blacklisting, insinuating that he voiced antisemitism. It issued a statement that “The Federation condemns antisemitism and all forms of racism, without qualification.”

The union declared: “Individual council members do not speak for the Federation on their personal social media, and their personal views are not endorsed by the union.” It did not call a single meeting of members to discuss its response, let alone propose any action against the department’s political victimisation.

This is the same union bureaucracy that, as the WSWs documented in February, was *consulted* on the code of conduct changes and provided “feedback” supporting them, telling members the new rules were “unremarkable.”

Morris is a member of Solidarity, a pseudo-left organisation, with which the Socialist Equality Party has well-documented differences, including on its insistence that the trade union apparatuses, including the Teachers Federation, can be reformed. However, his banning is a direct attack on fundamental democratic rights which we strongly condemn. We urge all educators, students and workers to demand his immediate reinstatement.

The defence of Morris, free speech and basic democratic rights necessarily requires a political fight against the Labor and union bureaucracy. The Labor government of Chris Minns, like the Albanese government federally, is fully complicit in the US-led imperialist war drive and the Israeli genocide it underwrites.

Rank-and-file committees (RFCs) of teachers, students and parents are needed—independent of the union apparatus—to defend Morris’s right to work, oppose every victimisation and insist on free discussion of the Gaza genocide and the wider plunge into war.

The defence of Morris is inseparable from the struggle against war, austerity and the police-state measures that the entire political establishment is implementing.

To discuss these issues and how to form RFCs, 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:

wsws.org/contact