Australian “antisemitism” envoy demands further assault on democratic rights

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A report by Australia’s Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, Jillian Segal, marks a watershed in the Australian ruling elite’s protracted campaign to vilify and outlaw mass opposition to Israel’s genocide in Gaza.

But its significance goes further. Segal, an appointee of the Labor government, has launched a frontal assault on “the left,” specifically targeting socialists and Marxists.

The report has aptly been described as “Trumpian.” Like the fascist in the White House, Segal portrays left-wing opposition as an impermissible threat to the “existing social structures and institutions of Western societies,” and advances a sweeping program of state repression extending into the media, universities, workplaces, healthcare, immigration and cultural life.

The document is ostensibly a report into antisemitism and a plan to counter it. But the pretence is exceptionally thin. Running to just 40 pages, including multiple pictures, the report is a collection of provocative and unsubstantiated assertions, followed by calls for police-state restrictions on the population.

For the past three years, the political establishment has conflated hostility to Israeli war crimes with antisemitism. As masses of people have recognised, that has been a fraud, used to justify sweeping attacks on democratic rights. Segal’s report is entirely premised on that conflation. But because it is so frank, it inadvertently gives the lie to the official narrative.

The most significant sections of the report bluntly state that opposition to Israeli crimes is antisemitic, without even attempting to demonstrate a connection to anti-Jewish bigotry.

For instance, the report declares: “The claims that Israel has committed humanity’s worst crimes – including genocide, ethnic cleansing and apartheid – allow for the depiction of anyone who associates or aligns with Israel as complicit in its purported evil.”

Nowhere does the report consider whether the claims of genocide, ethnic cleansing and apartheid are true. But they plainly are. That is attested to, not only by United Nations bodies, genocide scholars and human rights organisations, but by the statements of Israeli leaders themselves who have repeatedly described the Palestinians as “human animals” and boasted of their desire and plans to “remove” them from Gaza.

By presenting even the accusation of genocide as illegitimate, the report echoes the Israeli government’s claim to be conducting a just war. The report is thus premised from the outset on the implicit defence of a criminal state that is violating international law.

To the extent that Segal advances an argument, it is essentially that being accused of supporting a genocide is upsetting to supporters of the Israeli state, and so is therefore automatically antisemitic.

Elsewhere, Segal comes close to opposing the very conception of human rights, which is cast as suspicious.

The report bemoans references by the “far-left” to Israel as a “colonial project that is inherently racist,” and continues: “This framing allows longstanding antisemitic motifs to be repackaged in the academic language of anti-racism, decolonisation, human rights, social justice and intersectionality, often in service of a traditional Marxist revolutionary agenda.”

The report is declaring that when opponents of Israel speak about the human rights of the Palestinians, they are secretly venting their hostility to Jewish people. There is no proof. No explanation of what the “antisemitic motifs” are or how they relate to “social justice,” for instance.

The argument is on the level of a paranoid conspiracy theory, detecting sinister meanings and intentions behind benign phrases. The report even uses language associated with such theories, warning of “coded antisemitic language” and “proxy words.”

Its reference to a “traditional Marxist revolutionary agenda” somehow being connected to antisemitism is a grotesque historical falsification.

The Marxist perspective is to unify the working class across all the artificial racial, national and religious divisions, in a struggle against capitalist exploitation and all forms of oppression. That has always entailed an implacable fight against every form of bigotry, used by the ruling classes to divide workers.

Historically, the Marxist and socialist movement led the fight against antisemitism, while the leaders of the Zionist movement appealed to the imperialist powers, including those that promoted anti-Jewish bigotry, to collaborate in the establishment of a colonising Israeli state.

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Segal's reference to Marxism is an indication of, and an appeal to the concerns of the ruling class and its political representatives. Amid a massive global crisis of capitalism, marked by war and austerity, the powers-that-be are terrified of social and political opposition developing in a revolutionary direction.

The report invokes these fears, presenting opposition to the oppression of the Palestinians as a dangerous "gateway" issue "used by far-left activists to magnify their appeal and prominence and to attempt to introduce traditionally moderate Australians to radical and anti-Jewish propaganda that would previously have been of little interest." The reference to "anti-Jewish propaganda" is nonsense. This is a warning that opposition to Israeli crimes is contributing to a broader political radicalisation.

Segal's recommendations are aimed at combatting that mass shift to the left, through dictatorial measures.

The report demands "measures relating to protests – such as effective restrictions on identity concealment and move-on powers," i.e., measures to ban protests, under conditions where Labor governments have already gone far in that direction.

Student organisations and academics are particularly targeted, with demands for their public funding to be cut if they are found to be promoting "antisemitism," which the report itself indicates can include strident condemnation of Israel. The same threat is to hang over the head of all publicly funded cultural and artistic organisations.

Segal demands Zionist oversight of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Special Broadcasting Corporation, again backed by potential defunding. School and university curricula must be subjected to the same oversight and transformation.

The report singles out health staff, a key section of the working class, where there has been widespread opposition to Israel's decimation of Palestinian hospitals and mass murder of doctors and nurses. The entire sector is to be subjected to a 12–18-month inquisition, by a "national Healthcare Antisemitism Taskforce."

The report also demands a targeted crackdown on immigration, beyond the massive assault that is already underway. Using its own "coded" language, the report warns that prospective migrants from certain unstated regions who are particularly liable to "bring to Australia ingrained antisemitic views," and insists on more stringent examinations of them.

The unmistakable implication given the context, and the report's earlier warnings of Islamists, is that it should be made impossibly difficult for Palestinians in particular and Muslims in general to enter Australia.

The idea that is floated, but not fully elaborated, is a parallel to the Islamaphobic travel ban instituted by Trump in his first presidential term. That, together with the endless denunciations of "the left," the warnings against universities and human rights organisations as nests of subversion, underscores the reality that the report is a far-right document.

So too does its treatment of actual Jewish bigotry. Having declared in opening that "Modern, progressive antisemitism is the most pervasive manifestation of antisemitism facing Australia today," the report largely dismisses the danger posed by fascist forces declaring that "the far right has tended to be widely rejected across society and the political spectrum" and that "far-right antisemitism has not been the primary source of concern."

That is an extraordinary assertion under conditions where far right and fascist parties are coming to prominence all over the world, exploiting mass disaffection with the old establishment parties and being promoted by sections of the ruling class. The same dynamic is evident in Australia, with the rapid rise to prominence of the frothingly anti-immigrant One Nation party, among whose base there are undoubtedly anti-Jewish bigots.

In issuing her demands, Segal hailed the repressive measures that the Labor government has already adopted, including hate speech laws that potentially outlaw strident condemnations of Zionism and imperialism and parallel legislation that can illegalise organisations and political parties on the same grounds.

Labor has supported the genocide in Gaza politically, diplomatically and materially, including through the ongoing export of weapons components to Israel. But it has sought to shield that complicity behind mealy-mouthed statements of "concern" over the "humanitarian crisis" that is the inevitable and intended consequence of the genocide.

The Segal report, which could have been produced by the Trump administration or the Netanyahu regime, exposes the fraud of that posturing. The report, produced by an appointee of Labor, demonstrates that this is a government of frothing reaction, including brazen support for imperialist war crimes and for massive repression.

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