Australian Labor government rushes through bill to outlaw protests at war facilities

Mike Head
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The Albanese Labor government, joined by the Liberal-National Coalition, pushed through parliament on Monday night a massive bill that bans protests or even photograph-taking at or near any military-connected "security zone" declared by ministerial decree.

The bill criminalises protesting near, entering or filming a declared zone or a person or thing within, entering or leaving it, with a maximum penalty of up to seven years' jail time, a $152,880 fine, or both. If an anti-war act supposedly causes "serious harm" to a military operation, imprisonment of up to 15 years can apply.

The swift passage of the Defence Legislation Amendment (Accelerating Capability and Protecting Bases) Bill 2026 since the Labor government first unveiled it on October 27 is a further warning of preparations for war, accompanied by moves to outlaw and suppress anti-war opposition.

The bill was rammed through both houses of parliament via guillotined sessions and was expected to quickly receive royal assent by the Governor-General, activating its main provisions immediately.

Security zones can include military bases and surveillance and war-targeting facilities like the key US-Australian Pine Gap base in central Australia. But the defence minister can rapidly extend the zones, even by secret declarations, to cover war game exercises, troop movements, weapons-making plants, cyber warfare facilities and any other military-related activity.

Vast tracts of land across the continent, used for military exercises, can be shielded from public view, as well as all the army, navy and airforce bases and ports and related intelligence and HQ locations, many of which are in and around major cities.

The defence minister can also issue "capability declarations" that can permit any designated military-related activity, including computer hacking and electronic surveillance, to override any other law, federal, state or territory.

The government and the Coalition rushed the legislation through the House of Representatives on Monday evening with five minor government-backed amendments made in the Senate, such as to hold a token official review of the laws by a government-vetted individual in five years' time. Only a handful of independents and other crossbenchers voted against the bill.

Earlier in the day, at a media conference, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese accused critics of the bill of "jump[ing] at shadows" and making "absurd" claims. At the same time, he insisted that far-reaching government powers were essential because "we live in unsafe times." Significantly, he invoked wartime conditions, saying "there are more conflicts in the world today than at any time since World War II."

Far from containing "shadows," the bill overturns basic democratic rights. Strict or absolute liability applies to many of the new criminal offences, so the motives of charged people cannot be raised as a defence, whether they are protesting against war or seeking to report on and expose war-related activity.

The bill also gives police, intelligence and government-nominated defence security officials—potentially including military contractors, consultants and foreign military personnel—powers to coercively demand ID, search people and their devices, with or without consent, and detain them if they have "reasonable suspicion" that they could commit a security zone offence.

Lethal force is permitted in exercising these powers if deemed necessary to prevent "harm" to a facility or to

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stop someone fleeing from arrest.

Ministerial "electronic capability declarations" can allow defence officials and military contractors, such as BAE Systems, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Rheinmetall, Northrop Grumman, Thales, Raytheon or Palantir, to intercept communications and access stored communications while developing, testing or training with a capability.

Such measures have not been seen since World War II, when anti-war advocacy and protests were criminalised and socialists were jailed under the National Security Act and regulations.

Albanese's reference to wars erupting internationally is revealing. A new world war is metastasising across the globe with multiple fronts already ablaze, including US or US-backed wars against Iran and Russia, and threatened against China, posing the threat of a nuclear catastrophe.

All the imperialist powers are remilitarising, including Australia, where the Labor government is carrying out the largest military build-up since World War II. Every branch of the armed force is being equipped with strike capabilities, above all longer-range missiles.

The AUKUS military pact alone involves Australian governments spending hundreds of billions of dollars to acquire US and UK nuclear-powered attack submarines, long-range missiles and other hi-tech weaponry, intended for use against China.

The Albanese government is transforming Australia into a base for a US-led war against China, creating a continent-wide network of airfields, ports, fuel depots, munitions stores and logistics facilities. The US has access to 110 of them, according to data compiled by the Nautilus Institute and reported by the *Guardian* in September.

This entire network will be protected from public scrutiny, let alone protests, under the legislation. Labor's bill is another demonstration, as the Socialist Equality Party has warned, that the plunge into another world war also means a war against the social and democratic rights of the working class. This has been witnessed already in Labor's efforts at federal and state levels, such as anti-protest and "hate speech" laws, to suppress the mass opposition to the ongoing US-backed Gaza genocide.

In the Senate on November 18, the Greens leader, Senator David Shoebridge, called the Bill "a massive power grab" with provisions that "would even be troubling in wartime." But he attacked the legislation from a nationalist standpoint, describing it as a "war against Australians" at the behest of the United States.

"This is all so you can give some US personnel, some brigadier or major from the US, some trumped-up arrest powers over Australians," Shoebridge said. "It's bloody treasonous what you're doing."

This is an attempt to divert the opposition to the bill in a reactionary Australian nationalist direction. In reality, Australia is a middle-order imperialist power itself. Its alignment with the US build-up against China reflects the fact that Australian imperialism has always advanced its own neo-colonial and predatory interests, particularly throughout the Indo-Pacific region, under the umbrella of an alliance with the dominant power of the day, first Britain, and then the United States.

The threat posed by the Accelerating Capability and Protecting Bases Bill, and other war preparations around the globe, can be answered only by a unified struggle of the international working class against imperialist war. That requires the building of a revolutionary socialist leadership worldwide to overturn the source of war—the profit-driven capitalist nation-state system itself.

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