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Australian Labor government doubles down on support for Israeli war crimes

As in the imperialist centres of the US and Europe, the Australian political and media establishment has used the October 7 anniversary to aggressively promote Israel and demonise the mass opposition that has developed over the past 12 months to the onslaught against Gaza.

The federal and state Labor governments have been in the forefront of this propaganda offensive, as they have been throughout the genocide. If anything, they have become more bellicose. The fraudulent line that Israel has “the right to defend itself” has more or less openly been replaced by declaring that Israel has the right to ignite a region-wide war in league with its American imperialist sponsors.



Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese at ASEAN-Australia Special Summit press conference in Melbourne, Australia, March 5, 2024 [AP Photo/Hamish Blair]

Speaking in parliament yesterday, Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese again depicted the Hamas military operation of October 7, 2023 as an irrational act of antisemitic violence. The entire context of 76 years of Israeli occupation and a 16-year siege of Gaza was buried.

Information that has emerged over the past 12 months contradicting the Israeli narrative has never been acknowledged by Albanese. That includes the fact that Israel had detailed knowledge of the October 7 attack plan before it occurred and conducted a security standdown. The clear aim was to exploit the attack to carry out a long-planned offensive aimed at ethnically-cleaning Gaza of Palestinians.

That program was always connected to plans for a “Greater Israel,” including through military action in the occupied West Bank and against a host of regional states. The US and its allies, including Australia, have backed the Israeli genocide because it is part of their broader war aims, particularly directed against Iran.

This context has become clear with repeated Israeli attacks on Iran over recent months, and now a full-scale onslaught on Lebanon. That has included Israeli terrorist attacks on Lebanon last month, through the remote detonation of tampered pagers, a ground invasion of southern Lebanon and the most intensive bombardment in decades, which has claimed more than 2,000 lives.

While prattling on about “peace” and “cycles of violence,” Albanese fully endorsed this wider war, declaring: “We unequivocally condemn the actions of Iran and Hezbollah. Iran must cease its destabilising actions, including through terrorist proxies the Houthis, Hezbollah, and Hamas.”

Having denounced the targets of the Zionist regime’s aggression and military provocations, Albanese proclaimed: “Amid their attacks on Israel, Australia steadfastly maintains support for Israel’s right to defend itself. We always have and always will.” That is a carte blanche commitment to support every Israeli war crime going forward.

That position was put even more explicitly by Labor Health Minister Mark Butler at an October 7 commemoration in Sydney organised by Zionist groups. Butler stated that “no self-respecting nation would fail to defend itself if attacked the way Israel has been.” Referencing the recent Iranian missile strikes on Israel, Butler said “Of course, Israel has the right to defend itself and respond to these attacks.” In practice, that means support for a full-scale Israeli war on Iran, which would inevitably involve the US and the other imperialist powers.

Butler said that antisemitism was “growing and spreading here in a way we’ve never seen before, in a way that is simply unique in its scale and its character.” He asserted that Jewish Australians have been compelled to live under guard in schools, aged care facilities and virtually everywhere else, for fear of antisemitic attacks since October 7.

Those comments were a continuation and deepening of the attempts to conflate opposition to Zionist regime’s war crimes with anti-Jewish bigotry. That is a cynical and deliberately

dishonest weaponisation of claims of antisemitism. There is simply no evidence to support Butler's assertions.

The suggestion that antisemitism in 2024 is "unique" and unprecedented downplays the horror of genuine antisemitism, including the Holocaust. It falsely equates the Jewish people as a whole with the militarist Israeli state and erases the fact that significant layers of Jewish people have been active and prominent in the movement against the Gaza genocide.

Butler's frothing comments were hailed by the Murdoch-owned *Australian* newspaper, which has led the charge in support of the Zionist regime, as "Labor's strongest defence of Israel" yet and an expression of "moral clarity." Butler's remarks were the culmination of a week-long attempt to whip-up an atmosphere of hysteria surrounding the October 7 anniversary.

On September 29, the weekly anti-genocide protests in Sydney and Melbourne were attended by substantial numbers of people of Lebanese ancestry. Together with other demonstrators, they condemned the Israeli bombardment of Lebanon. Some carried pictures of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, murdered in an Israeli airstrike two days earlier, and a handful of Hezbollah flags were present.

Despite being one of the largest political parties in Lebanon, Hezbollah was proscribed as a terrorist organisation in Australia in 2021, in an opaque and hasty process that included input from Zionist lobby groups.

The Labor governments, the police and the media responded to the presence of the Hezbollah flags by threatening a witch-hunt. Police in New South Wales (NSW) released the photo of a young woman who had attended the September 29 rally in Sydney, calling on the public to help identify her. The 19-year-old was then arrested and charged with the alleged display of a terrorist symbol, a serious criminal offence.

Albanese, NSW Labor Premier Chris Minns and Victorian Labor leader Jacinta Allen then all issued statements demanding that protests defending Gaza and Lebanon not proceed on October 6 or 7.

The NSW Police, backed by Minns, brought a case before the Supreme Court seeking to ban the Sydney protests, vaguely claiming a threat to public safety, despite pro-Palestinian rallies having been held in the city without incident for the preceding 51 weeks. The police eventually dropped the case and mediated with organisers in a tacit admission that there was no legal basis for the authoritarian bid for an outright ban on opposition.



Police billboard at anti-genocide vigil, Sydney Town Hall, October 7, 2024

The protests over the weekend had large attendances, including an estimated 10,000 in Sydney and similar numbers in Melbourne. There was a massive police deployment, including riot cops, while in Sydney police set up billboards warning that any display of support for Hezbollah “may” be a criminal offence.

The moves to ban protests and the hysteria were an almost exact repeat of the response of the Labor governments to mass protests against the Gaza genocide when they first erupted a year ago. This demonstrates that the Labor administrations have not shifted their position one iota, despite Israel’s genocide in Gaza having claimed at least 42,000 lives and by some estimates, almost 200,000.

Labor’s backing for the war crimes, including diplomatic, political and military assistance for Israel, is inseparable from its involvement in the broader eruption of imperialist militarism which is developing into a global war. That includes active support for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and the transformation of Australia into a central base of operations for conflict with China, which is viewed as the chief threat to American imperialist hegemony.

This context, and Labor’s aggressive actions over the past week, have again underscored the bankruptcy of the line advanced by the Greens and various pseudo-left groups, which have politically dominated the anti-genocide movement. Their claim that Labor can be pressured to end its backing for Israel has been exposed in practice as a fraud. Its purpose is to subordinate opposition to the very political establishment responsible for the war crimes.

What is required is an international anti-war movement, which mobilises the vast social and political power of the working class and is based on a socialist program directed against the source of the resurgent barbarism, the capitalist system itself.

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