

Australian PM incites attacks on pro-Gaza student encampments

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Australian Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese is the chief instigator of a foul campaign of lies, intimidation and slander directed against students protesting Israel's genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza. Albanese's repeated declarations that the peaceful university encampments are antisemitic and dangerous is clear incitement of attacks against them.

That is precisely what has happened. Activists at the University of Melbourne reported that the pro-Palestinian encampment there was besieged on Sunday night by pro-Israel thugs, wielding bats and fire extinguishers and hurling glass bottles. That was the third serious assault on encampments nationally in less than a fortnight, each involving a similar *modus operandi* of highly aggressive attacks late at night.

The very next day, on Monday afternoon, Albanese told Labor's federal caucus there was "no question" that antisemitism was "being expressed more openly" than at any point in his lifetime. In remarks that were immediately relayed to the Murdoch-owned *Australian*, Albanese reportedly stated that he was "concerned people did not understand the history of antisemitism and believed the Jewish community needed to be supported."

Albanese has previously branded chants for the liberation of Palestine as "dangerous." His Education Minister Jason Clare has claimed without evidence that protesters are not really students, and has called on university administrations to "throw the book at them."

Albanese's remarks on Monday though were perhaps most glaring, given the timing. He clearly did not mention the assault on the University of Melbourne encampment. Instead, his assertion that the wave of protests expressed unprecedented antisemitism directly repeated the line of the thugs who carried out the attack.

The claim that the encampments are antisemitic is a fraud. They have been established to protest the genocide, including the current onslaught against Rafah, and to

demand an end to ties between universities and Israel. Their opposition is to the fascistic Zionist regime and its barbaric war not to the Jewish people. Indeed, anti-Zionist Jewish activists have been prominent in the encampments.

The attacks against them have involved an alliance of Zionist groups, evangelical Christians and far-right forces. In the first attack on an encampment, middle-aged men carrying Israeli and Australian flags ambushed students at Melbourne's Monash University in the early hours of May 2. At least some of the men, who threatened students, including young females, appeared to be right-wing Australian nationalists.

Zionist counter-protests at the University of Melbourne have been attended by Avi Yemeni, of the far-right Rebel News outlet. A former Israeli Defence Forces soldier, Yemeni was particularly active in the anti-lockdown movement during the pandemic, in which he rubbed shoulders with various far-right and fascistic organisations.

In other words, as in the US, the assault on students is involving the same right-wing forces whose stock in trade is antisemitism and other forms of racism. They are being directly inspired by similar attacks carried out in the US. Last week, for instance, the Adelaide University encampment had fireworks hurled at it, in an imitation of a similar attack on a protest encampment at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Amid the media furore over the supposed threat of the encampments to campus "safety," Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition have not mentioned the violent attacks on the encampments and the corporate media has completely blacked them out.

Instead, official discussion has been dominated by assertions that the protests are making Jewish students feel "unsafe" and "uncomfortable." No evidence whatsoever has been provided and not a single violent incident has been ascribed to those involved in the

encampments.

The politicians and media outlets denouncing the encampments are clearly not talking about the feelings or safety of the Jewish and other students participating in them and protesting the assault on Gaza. Instead, to the extent that there is any logic to the official line, it is that students who support Israel would prefer that there were no protests against its war crimes. That is the pretext for an anti-democratic campaign that could have been used to shut down any protest movement.

The talk about safety and “violent rhetoric” covers the fact that it is the student protesters who are being vilified. Murdoch outlets such as the *Australian*, as well as supposedly liberal papers like the *Sydney Morning Herald* have repeatedly branded students as terrorist sympathisers.

Pro-Israeli Zionist lobby groups, with a direct line to the government, have likewise denounced the protesters as Hamas-inspired and even Nazi.

One of them, the Australian Jewish Association (AJA), issued a statement on May 7, declaring: “It should surprise nobody that Nazi encampments on Australian universities make many people angry. We never condone anything illegal but with the Albanese Govt and university heads missing in action, nobody should be surprised if members of the public take matters into their own hands.”

That is a barely-veiled incitement of political violence. Were the AJA an Islamist organisation, instead of a fanatical, far-right Zionist group, there is little doubt their offices would be visited by counter-terrorism police. Instead, the leaders of the AJA, having issued their threat against protesters last week, were this week welcomed in the federal parliament, where they met with prominent MPs, such as Liberal Party Senator Dave Sharma.

Albanese’s latest statements are aimed at creating a political climate where the demands of the Zionist groups and the Murdoch press for the encampments to be dispersed can be carried out.

This morning, it was reported Deakin University in Melbourne had issued an ultimatum for the immediate removal of the small encampment there. The encampment, management asserted, was compromising the rights of students and staff to an “environment free of impediment, intimidation and harassment.” Those rights evidently do not include freedom of speech.

On Friday, it was reported that Victoria Police had written to university managements warning of a high likelihood of violence if encampments remained.

Despite the intimidation, opposition is growing. The encampments have spread to a dozen universities, including in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania. An open letter, initiated by Monash University staff, defending the encampments, has been signed by almost 600 academics and university workers across the country.

The letter declares: “We reject the characterisation of these peaceful and urgent student-led protests and encampments by sections of the popular media and politicians as antisemitic. These camps are open spaces of learning, solidarity, and support for everyone, with many organisers and leading activists being Jewish themselves...”

It demands “that political leaders and media representatives cease their rhetorical attacks on, and vilification of, the student encampments, which only serves to foster hate, divisiveness, and ultimately violence in our community, as several attacks on the peaceful student encampments have already demonstrated.”

The letter is an important stand. As the Socialist Equality Party and the IYSSE have insisted, the working class must mobilise to defend the student encampments, the right to protest more broadly, and democratic rights, all of which are under attack. Such a mobilisation requires a political struggle against Labor, which is backing the genocide and the assault on protests, and against the corporatised unions, which have refused to take any industrial action against the mass murder in Palestine or the associated crackdown on civil liberties.

Above all, the turn to increasingly police-state measures against peaceful protests shows the need for a new political perspective. The resort to authoritarianism is inseparable from the developing global war, including the genocide in Gaza and the US-led war against Russia in Ukraine and military build-up against China. The threats can only be met and defeated through the development of an international socialist movement of the working class directed at the abolition of the capitalist system.



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