

Australian Labor Party hysterically denounces pro-Palestinian protesters at its Victorian conference

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A relatively small pro-Palestinian protest at the Victorian state Labor conference on Saturday has been blown out of all proportion, with Labor leaders and the corporate media branding the demonstrators as a violent mob. That is the latest example of a broader campaign to vilify and potentially outlaw opposition to Israel's genocide in Gaza.

The issue of Palestine was only the sharpest expression of the fraudulent character of the conference. While viciously attacking opponents of the Israeli onslaught, the conference passed mealy-mouthed resolutions voicing "humanitarian" concerns. Similarly, conference delegates vaguely pointed to various aspects of the social crisis while covering up the fact that Labor is responsible, having imposed pro-business policies in the state of Victoria for over a decade and now holding office federally.

Entering the venue in Melbourne on Saturday, delegates were met by around 200 protesters who denounced Labor's complicity in the Israeli war crimes. A smaller group of about 50 got past security and into the building, briefly banging on the doors of the conference room before leaving without any arrests.

On Saturday evening, Victorian Labor Premier Jacinta Allan dashed off a Twitter/X statement, declaring: "Today, protestors and intruders brought violence, homophobia and anti-Semitism to the front door of state conference. I'm disgusted. No one should be covered by these bullies. As Premier, my priority is a cohesive society where all Victorians feel safe and respected." Federal MPs in attendance, including former federal party leader Bill Shorten, made similar comments.

As hundreds of comments beneath Allan's post noted, her claims were slanderous. They were a repeat of the lying conflation of opposition to Israeli war crimes with anti-Jewish bigotry. Two days later and no one is any the wiser as to what "homophobia" Allan was referencing. No acts of violence have been documented.

In the lead-up to the conference there were worried reports in the corporate media that contention would emerge over Palestine. Crisis talks were reportedly held to cobble together a compromise between Allan's "left" faction that is dominant,

and other wings of the party that are more open in their virulent support of the Zionist regime.

No such agreement was reached, but the motions that were passed demonstrated that the media and the federal government had little to worry about. They have not been released in final form, but the drafts which have been and "highlights" on social media show the resolutions to be tokenistic and hypocritical. The rabidly pro-Israeli *Australian* newspaper of the Murdoch stable favourably observed: "The issue of Gaza did not feature at what was a much quieter conference on Sunday."

Having defamed pro-Palestinian protesters on Saturday, the Laborites on Sunday passed motions noting the "inalienable right of self-determination for the Palestinian people" and criticising illegal Israeli settlements.

One motion hailed federal Labor's recent vote in the UN for a non-binding resolution vaguely referencing aspirations for future Palestinian statehood, and called on "Federal Government to fully recognise Palestine within this term of parliament." This is transparent nonsense under conditions where Israel is completing the ethnic cleansing of historic Palestine with the support of the imperialist powers, including Australia.

Another motion referenced the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling that Israel has a plausible case to answer that it was committing genocide. It was necessary for the "Federal Government to ensure Australia is not a party to any actions or policies that contravene the ICJ's ruling." That was encouragement for federal Labor to cover itself from any legal consequences stemming from its complicity in the mass murder.

Allan proclaimed after the conference that the motions were meaningless. Again favourably cited in the *Australian*, she said: "Foreign policy should be left to the federal government because Australia must speak in one voice on the world stage. My priority as the state's premier is maintaining a cohesive society where all Victorians are safe and respected." Allan was basically admitting that her frothing denunciations of the protesters were sincere, while the motions were not.

The Victorian Labor administration is itself complicit in the

genocide. That included its signing in 2022 of a memorandum of understanding with Israel's defence ministry, a highly unusual step for a state government, and extensive subsidies to the Australian arm of Elbit, Israel's main weapons manufacturer. Allan's comments showed her government's complete backing for federal Labor, which continues to support the Israeli onslaught politically, diplomatically and materially.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese was a featured speaker. His address consisted of a promotion of last week's federal budget which he claimed would address the cost-of-living crisis.

Three media polls have shown the vast majority of Australians think the budget will do little or nothing to address the crisis. Its headline measures are a slight adjustment of the previous Liberal-National government's tax cuts, which will still overwhelmingly benefit the wealthy, and a miserly \$300 subsidy for household electricity budgets.

The real content of Labor's domestic program, an austerity offensive, was underscored by this month's Victorian state budget. It "indefinitely postponed" 35 Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals, three community hospitals in regional Victoria first promised in 2018 and 50 new publicly-owned childcare facilities.

The budget ended a scheme providing limited sick pay for 130,000 casual workers and restricted wage growth in the public sector to 3 percent a year. Labor is reducing the public sector workforce by up to 10 percent, axing 4,000 positions.

Holding the conference less than a fortnight after the budget underscored its essentially performative function. Labor's supposed decision-making body was convened after the government had implemented its major policy measures of the year.

There was minimal opposition. One successful motion called on the government to take "reasonable steps" to keep land in public hands as it demolishes 44 public housing towers across Melbourne. Labor has already made clear these will be public-private partnerships, funnelling highly-profitable real estate to the private sector with a token provision of "social" and "affordable" rather than public housing. The cosmetic character of the motion was made clear by its unanimous passage, including support from the government ministers overseeing the demolition program.

When Education Minister Ben Carroll spoke, some trade union delegates stood in protest over Labor's privatisation of school cleaning services. That measure is only one of a slew of attacks on education, signed off on by the unions. In 2022, the Australian Education Union (AEU) joined with Labor to force through an enterprise agreement that entrenched intolerable conditions in the schools, while restricting wage increases to a sub-inflationary 1 percent every six months.

The AEU's role is replicated by all the other unions, including those covering the public sector staff slated for sacking. The union bureaucracy is the essential partner of the

Labor government in forcing the working class to pay for the growing state deficit, largely accrued through handouts to business during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The threadbare character of the conference was summed up by Premier Allan's headline measure. The government would introduce unspecified legislation, and at an unspecified time, to "crackdown" on members of the public abusing hospitality and retail staff.

A "Worker Protection Consultation Group," will "consider potential new penalties or offences" with an aim of presenting legislation "by the end of 2025." The primary threat to low-paid workers is not the general public, but the corporate-government drive to slash services, wages and conditions to which Allan is fully committed.

One article reported that Allan "received a standing ovation at Saturday's conference that left her choking back tears as she announced plans to draft laws to crackdown on the abuse of Victorian workers."

All this is desperate stuff, pointing to Labor's deepening crisis at the state and federal level. The conference was the first since the resignation last year of Premier Daniel Andrews. While having implemented pro-business policies for the best part of a decade, he retained some popularity because of the limited COVID safety measures his government was initially compelled to institute under popular demand. Those measures are long gone, with the virus allowed to spread unchecked, and the earlier program of business-directed subsidies replaced by sweeping austerity cuts.

In her address to conference, Allan took aim at the pro-Palestinian protesters, declaring: "As we've seen today, there are those who want to distract us, to silence us, to scare us, but our movement and our party is one of the oldest in the world."

There was a clear sense that the Victorian premier was not so much referring to the small numbers of protesters, as to the massive opposition to Labor's pro-war and pro-business policy, which will result in major struggles by the working class against it.



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