

Australian Labor government, union bureaucrats, up in arms over minor pro-Palestinian graffiti

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A number of minor incidents, where individuals have painted graffiti on Labor Party electorate offices condemning the government's backing for the Israeli genocide in Gaza, have been blown out of all proportion.

No one has been injured, nor have there been any credible threats to safety. Labor, however, along with its affiliated union bureaucrats and the corporate media, are up in arms, presenting the small-scale acts of vandalism as “politically motivated violence” and an assault on “democracy.”

The campaign is extraordinarily cynical. The government has actively supported the Israeli mass murder, now estimated to have killed more than 40,000 Palestinians, politically, diplomatically and materially, including through ongoing defence exports that are shrouded behind “national security” secrecy provisions.

The manufactured outrage over graffiti has gone hand in hand with the burying of what is actually taking place in Gaza. The official media's coverage is now limited in the extreme. Gaza is often not mentioned on the websites of the major outlets at all. Such horrors as the Israeli massacre earlier this month of some 274 Palestinians in Rafah are reported in the most perfunctory manner and then dropped entirely.

The hysteria over the vandalism has been spearheaded by Labor at the highest levels. On June 6, its Prime Minister Anthony Albanese joined with Liberal-National Coalition leader Peter Dutton to accuse the Greens of responsibility, without a shred of evidence. Those unfounded accusations clearly have an electoral dimension, with fears that the environmentalist party's posturing against the Israeli onslaught will win votes from Labor.

More broadly though, the campaign has served to delegitimise all protest activity against the genocide. In their statements, Albanese and other senior Labor leaders have deliberately conflated acts of vandalism with peaceful demonstrations outside the electorate offices. Media articles have noted that the Greens have condemned the vandalism

but have provocatively raised that its condemnations of the genocide and the government's complicity may have “incited” the property damage.

The campaign was ratcheted up further, after unknown individuals defaced the office of Labor MP Josh Burns in the early hours of Thursday morning in Melbourne. They graffitied its front walls in red paint, including with the slogan “Zionism is fascism.” The masked group is also alleged to have smashed windows and to have attempted to tamper with the building's electrics.

The response of Labor and the media was immediately to brand this as something approaching a hate crime, on the basis that Burns happens to be Jewish. Nothing done to the office, however, suggested racial vilification in the slightest.

Albanese, appearing on Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) radio Thursday morning, nevertheless proclaimed: “For some people, they feel very strongly about issues in the Middle East. But it's no reason to target MPs half a world away in Australia, and in particular the targeting of a Jewish MP is very distressing.”

Without substantiation, Albanese sought to present the targeting of the office as part of a widespread campaign. “This is an escalation of the attacks that we've seen,” he said. “We've been talking about this. We've got to dial this down.”

Similar comments were made by other Labor leaders. Its Foreign Minister Penny Wong warned against “reproducing” the “conflict” in the Middle East in Australia. The suggestion that the onslaught on Gaza is “half a world away” and has nothing to do with Australia is a crude attempt to cover over Labor's active backing of the onslaught.

Burns, an ardent Zionist, is a case in point. In December, he led a cross-party delegation to Israel, which fawned over the same figures in the government who have declared their aim of removing the Palestinians from Gaza in a blatant ethnic-cleansing operation. The same month, Burns publicly

denounced tepid ceasefire proposals in the United Nations, insisting that the onslaught had to continue until full Israeli victory.

That record has simply been buried in the coverage of the incident at Burns' office. He has been given a host of sympathetic interviews, well-wishes from all corners of the political establishment and various platforms to declaim against "violence."

Despite having been slandered and defamed by the government for weeks, Greens leader Adam Bandt joined the nauseating spectacle, posting on X/Twitter that "Violence has no place in our community & vandalism and damage like this are completely unacceptable. My thoughts are with Josh Burns, his team, and the local community."

Victorian Trades Hall, the headquarters of the state's union bureaucracy, was also targeted twice last week. Graffiti included a call for Palestinian freedom and denunciations of the fact that the Police Association is an official Trades Hall affiliate.

After the second incident, Luke Hilakari, Trades Hall secretary, fired off an angry statement Friday morning, denouncing the "cowards" involved. "If you think graffiti will help reach peace, you're delusional," he wrote.

The comments were immediately picked up by the Murdoch-owned *Australian* newspaper, which has led the media charge to denounce all opposition to the genocide as illegitimate and antisemitic. Hilakari's diatribe was featured alongside the comments of state opposition Liberal representatives, calling for the graffiti incidents to be investigated by counter-terrorism police.

Hilakari and assorted shills for the union bureaucracy have not even been able to address why Trades Hall was targeted, instead shooting off a flood of invective.

Hilakari and the union officialdom in Australia has not called so much as an hour-long strike or industrial action to oppose the slaughter in Gaza and Australia's role in it. They have in practice rejected a desperate appeal from Palestinian trade unions for such measures to halt the genocide, and have remained completely aligned with the Labor Party that is backing it.

Having responded to the mass murder of tens of thousands of Palestinians with what amounts to a shrug of the shoulders, the union officialdom has found something to be angry about: very minor property damage to their building, with graffiti that could be removed in hours or less.

The reaction underscores the broader character of the union bureaucracy as an arm of the state and the political establishment. The suggestions by Hilakari and the union bureaucrats that the defacement of their building is some sort of attack on the working class is absurd. The union officialdom, alongside its support for imperialist foreign

policy and war, plays the lynchpin role in enforcing a continuous assault on the jobs, wages and conditions of workers.

Hilakari personifies the corporatised character of the bureaucracy. He has moved back and forth between government and union leadership for decades. Hilakari is currently on at least three committees of the Victorian Labor administration, which has a memorandum of understanding with the Israeli military, and in May brought down an austerity budget inflicting brutal cuts to healthcare, education and other essential services.

The response to the graffiti again underscores the bankruptcy of any perspective of pressuring Labor and the unions to shift course on Gaza. This has been the line presented for the past eight months by the Greens and fake-left organisations such as Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative. In practice, this has meant subordinating opposition to the very Labor government supporting the genocide, while promoting the union bureaucracy that has prevented any mobilisation of the working class against it.

It is in the context of that suppression and the dead-end of protest politics that the graffiti incidents have occurred. There are undoubtedly growing layers desperate to take action that will end the mass slaughter. It must be said, however, that the graffiti and other vandalism has shown itself to be a fruitless exercise.

It is not individual actions that will end the genocide, but only the mobilisation of the social and political power of the working class, in a struggle against the broader eruption of imperialist militarism, including Australia's frontline role in US-led plans for war against China. What is required is a political struggle against Labor, the union bureaucracy and the entire establishment, based on a socialist perspective directed against the source of the barbarism, capitalism itself.



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