

Australian opposition leader spearheads bipartisan offensive against Gaza refugees

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16 August 2024

Echoing the fascistic anti-immigrant agenda of Donald Trump and the far-right in UK and Europe, Australian Liberal-National Coalition leader Peter Dutton this week demanded a total ban on Palestinians trying to flee the intensifying US-armed Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Despite some criticism of Dutton for being so blatant in his call, this is a bipartisan offensive. The immediate response of Prime Minister Antony Albanese's government was to issue statistics showing that it was achieving the same end by denying visas to the vast majority of Gazan refugees, even those with family members in Australia.

Dutton insisted that no Gaza refugees should be permitted to enter Australia. He declared that all those seeking to escape the slaughter were likely to be "terrorist sympathisers" because they came from "a war zone that's controlled by Hamas, a listed terrorist organisation in our country."

This is the same genocidal logic that the Netanyahu regime in Israel, backed by all the imperialist powers, uses to justify the mounting massacres in Gaza, by branding the entire Palestinian population as "terrorist" for resisting the decades-long Israeli occupation of their lands.

In reality, the Zionist regime in Israel is terrorising the entire Palestinian people. It is committing daily war crimes, demolishing refugee camps, entire neighborhoods, schools, hospitals, universities, cultural institutions and essential infrastructure, as well as denying medical and humanitarian aid to Gaza's population, deliberately creating the conditions for mass starvation and disease.

This week, the Palestinian Ministry of Health reported that the death toll in Gaza from Israel's offensive surpassed 40,000 people, mostly women and children, not counting the bodies buried beneath the rubble of buildings. The true figure likely exceeds 186,000, according to estimates published in the respected medical

journal, the *Lancet*.

Dutton's naked proposal for a blanket ethnically-based ban on an entire population trapped in a war zone has no precedent in Australia, at least since World War II. It marks a further rightward shift by the ruling class as a whole to try to whip up a reactionary nationalist political atmosphere, in order to prepare for war, deeper austerity and attacks on basic democratic rights.

It soon became clear that Dutton's demand, first issued on Tuesday, was no off-the-cuff comment by himself as an individual, as initially suggested by Albanese and some media coverage. Dutton's call has been aggressively supported all week by his shadow cabinet and the Murdoch media outlets, such as the *Australian* and its capital city tabloids.

In fact, Dutton is being hailed by *Australian* columnists as a courageous strongman. Today, national editor Dennis Shanahan praised Dutton for "demonstrating a superior strategic sense, a fearless confidence in his political judgment and a sense of leadership."

Buoyed by such backing, Dutton has gone further in an obvious bid to foster a far-right constituency. Yesterday, he again blamed all immigrants for the intensifying cost-of-living and housing crisis in Australia. He doubled down on his Gaza ban call, telling the Nine Network's Sarah Abo:

"It's not just this, the country's under huge pressure at the moment in the housing industry, because the prime minister's brought a million people in over two years, and we've only built 250,000 homes."

The truth, however, is that the Labor government has embraced the demonising of Gaza refugees, as well as the wider scapegoating of immigrants, whom it also has blamed for the sky-rocketing costs of housing and rents, driven by capitalist profit-making, that are feeding into the continuing cut to real wages and living conditions for working-class households.

In parliament, Albanese and his ministers boasted of already refusing visas to all but a trickle of refugees from Gaza, while granting nearly all those from Israelis.

Tony Burke, recently installed by Albanese as home affairs and immigration minister, tabled figures showing that since the Israeli onslaught began, supposedly in reprisal for the October 7 outbreak into southern Israel from the besieged Gaza enclave, the Labor government had rejected 7,111 visa applications from Gaza.

Labor had accepted less than a third of the applications—2,922 visas were granted to holders of a Palestinian Authority travel document in that same period.

And all but about 350 were short-term visitor visas, expiring within 12 months, leaving these refugees facing the danger of deportation to face death and destruction again. These visas also bar them from working, from receiving government welfare and other basic rights such as public healthcare.

Moreover, the number of Gaza refugees who have actually arrived in Australia is closer to 1,300, because the Israeli and Egyptian regimes have blocked all departures.

Labor's rejection of Gaza refugees has only intensified as the genocide has worsened. Since May 27, it had rejected 2,467 applications and granted just 236 visas—or less than 1 in 10.

By contrast, over 8,700 visas have been granted to Israelis since October 7, with only about 200 applications refused.

To legitimise this pro-genocide discrimination, Albanese has repeatedly stated that his government is relying on the political and “security” vetting conducted by the domestic surveillance agency, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), which has a notorious decades-long record of anti-democratic suppression of anti-war and left-wing dissent.

Over recent weeks, the Albanese government has announced measures to slash the annual migration intake in half, and to cut by two-thirds the numbers of international students enrolling in universities and other tertiary education courses.

The Labor government also has ramped up “Operation Sovereign Borders” to militarily repel refugee boats, reopened the barbaric asylum seeker prison camp on the remote Pacific island of Nauru, and imposed police-state restrictions, such as ankle bracelet monitoring and curfews, on previously illegally-imprisoned immigration detainees.

These are not aberrations. They continue Labor's historic record, from the openly racist White Australia

policy that underpinned the establishment of the nation-state via Federation in 1901, to the introduction of mandatory detention of asylum seekers in the 1990s, setting a global precedent.

The sharpening turn to anti-immigrant witch-hunting by the political and media establishment in Australia mirrors the shift taking place in the capitalist centres internationally.

From the US to the UK and across Europe, the fascistic and far-right agitation of the Trump-dominated Republican Party, the neo-Nazis in Britain, Le Pen in France and the AfD in Germany is being facilitated and joined by all the ruling parties, such as the US Democrats and the British Labour Party. They are the ones responsible for years of declining social conditions, imperialist wars and attacks on refugees, and for blocking the struggles of the working class against these conditions, with the help of the trade union apparatuses.

Now the ruling elites are openly promoting rabid nationalism and anti-immigrant scare-mongering. This serves inter-connected purposes: to divide workers globally, divert rising class and social tensions in right-wing, anti-immigrant directions, create wartime-style political climates and set precedents to attack the democratic and social rights of the entire working class.

Workers and youth must come to the defence of immigrants and refugees, insisting on the basic democratic right of all workers to live and work where they choose in the world. This is as an essential component of the fight to unify the working class globally against the toxic and war-mongering capitalist profit system.

The bipartisan support for the US-backed genocide in Gaza is inseparable from the equally bipartisan backing for US-NATO proxy war against Russia, and for the US-led plans for a catastrophic war against China. That is why the fight against the genocide and anti-immigrant poison requires the independent political and industrial mobilisation of the working class, the overwhelming majority of the world's population, in the fight for socialism.



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