

Australian Labor government refuses to condemn Israel's terrorist attacks in Lebanon

Oscar Grenfell
21 September 2024

Israel's terrorist atrocities in Lebanon last week, involving the remote detonation of thousands of pagers, have shocked and horrified ordinary working people around the world. The response of the US and allied imperialist powers has been the diametric opposite, with their governments tacitly endorsing the carnage while significant sections of the political and media establishment openly glorify the barbaric violence.

Australia is no exception. The federal Labor government, having supported Israel's almost year-long genocidal onslaught on the Palestinians in Gaza, has refused to condemn the Zionist regime's use of clear-cut terrorism inside Lebanon.

As many as 3,000 people were injured in the pager attacks. At least 37 have been killed, including two children, with hundreds more remaining in a critical condition. The onslaught was the main item of international news for several days, but Labor and its senior ministers have treated the terrorism as a non-event. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese does not appear to have mentioned the attacks, or to have been asked about them in his multiple media interviews since they occurred on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The most extensive comments by a government leader seem to be in two media interviews with Foreign Minister Penny Wong on Thursday. Her remarks were so similar in both that Wong was clearly reciting prepared talking points.

In a doorstep appearance, the foreign minister began "Obviously we've seen the attacks, the pager events and deaths in relation to Hezbollah." Wong is a cold and colorless political operative, but even by those standards, "pager events" is an extraordinary euphemism for a deliberately perpetrated mass casualty incident.

The focus on Hezbollah, the Lebanese political movement that Israel targets, continued. "First, Hezbollah is a terrorist organisation," Wong declared, before again calling on any Australians still in Lebanon to leave the country.

Asked a follow-up question as to whether Israel should confirm or deny its involvement in the attacks, Wong responded "Well, I don't speak for the Government of

Israel, that's a matter for them. What I would say is we know that Israel lives in a unique security environment, and we also know that we see a cycle of violence in the Middle East."

Taken together, the denunciations of Hezbollah as "terrorist" and the references to Israel's "unique security environment" were clearly intended to legitimise the atrocities carried out. Wong came as close as she could to an endorsement of the pager attacks, without explicitly defending the terrorist violence.

The remarks, very similar to those of the Biden administration in the US, were a greenlight for the stepped-up Israeli aggression that has followed, including intensive bombardment of southern Lebanon on Thursday and strikes in its capital Beirut on Friday.

Wong's reference to a "unique security environment" has a broader significance. If supposedly "unique" circumstances justify state terrorism, then international law is a dead letter. Virtually every government crime in history has been justified on the basis that it was necessary due to "exceptional" circumstances. As the WWSW has noted, the tacit imperialist backing for Israel's pager attacks marks a new stage in the legitimisation of terrorist attacks targeting political opponents and entire civilian populations, amid an eruption of militarism globally.

That was on display in the more explicit responses to the bombings from sections of the political and media establishment. Murdoch-owned outlets including the *Australian* have hailed the attack as an audacious and groundbreaking masterstroke, including with moronic references to James Bond.

There is no fundamental difference between exploding pagers and other weapons in the terrorist arsenal. When resistance fighters used homemade bombs against occupying US and Australian troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, "improvised explosive devices" (IEDs) were presented in the Western press as the epitome of evil. But when IEDs are detonated in Lebanon, they are a technological and logistical marvel.

The state-funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) ran an “analysis” headlined “The Hezbollah pager attack not only disabled the group’s communications, it has exposed, killed, wounded and humbled its members.” That description could have been drafted by the Mossad operatives responsible for the attack. After an outcry on social media, the word “humbled” was changed to “terrified,” but without any explanation or apology.

It should be recalled that last December, ABC management, acting in collusion with Zionist lobbyists, sacked journalist Antoinette Lattouf. The excuse they fixed on was that she had shared a post by Human Rights Watch, documenting and condemning Israel’s use of starvation as a weapon of war in Gaza. Distributing material from an authoritative human rights organisation resulted in an enormous controversy and meltdown, but running headlines implicitly endorsing state terrorism passes with barely a murmur.

Significantly, leading Labor Party figures were among those who most crudely promoted the Israeli attacks.

In an appearance on “Sky News,” Graham Richardson was asked for his response to the pager bombings. “This is brilliant, that’s the only word for it, absolutely brilliant! It means that if you’re against Israel over there, you are worrying every minute of every day: ‘Will I be alive tomorrow,’” he exclaimed.

Richardson has for decades been one of the leading figures in the powerful New South Wales (NSW) Labor right faction, and remains influential. He was involved in boosting the early careers of several Labor politicians who are now leaders of the NSW and federal governments.

Former federal Labor MP David Feeney took to X/Twitter, with a vile post. Above a picture of Greens leader Adam Bandt looking shocked/surprised, Feeney wrote: “Unconfirmed report that Greens Party Leader @AdamBandt narrowly avoided injury today when his pager exploded.”

Feeney too is a powerful factional figure. US diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks showed that during his tenure in parliament, he functioned as a secret informant for the American embassy. Feeney and several other Labor and union informants played the decisive role in the 2010 backroom coup that removed then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and installed Julia Gillard.

Rudd had aroused the ire of Washington for having suggested that the US make limited accommodations to China’s rise, at the very time American imperialism was preparing a vast diplomatic, economic and military confrontation against Beijing.

The comments of Richardson, Feeney and others are revealing, because they paint a picture of what is no doubt

said in ruling circles every day behind closed doors. The violent and unhinged ravings of these figures give a far better indication of the character of the Labor Party as a brutal instrument of imperialism, than do Wong’s hand-wringing statements about “peace” and “cycles of violence.”

Over the past 23 years, successive Australian governments have passed a battery of anti-terror laws. In practice, these have been used to entrap and victimise mostly Muslim youth, and increasingly, to criminalise political activities and speech.

Last year, for instance, Labor introduced legislation that makes it an offence to “praise the doing of a terrorist act or the commission of a terrorism offence in circumstances where there is a substantial risk that such praise might have the effect of leading another person to engage in a terrorist act or to commit a terrorism offence.”

That is exactly what those celebrating the Israeli attacks are doing. But, to the extent that they were compelled to respond, such forces would reply that Israel is an “ally,” Hezbollah is a “terrorist organisation,” so the legislation does not apply. That only underscores the intensely political, and hypocritical, character of the entire anti-terror framework.

For the past eleven months, the genocide in Gaza has been legitimised by hysterical and often entirely inaccurate references to the October 7 Palestinian military operation. That event has been torn out of its context and presented as an act of irrational evil, completely unconnected to the previous 76 years of Israeli occupation and oppression and the crippling 16-year siege of Gaza.

But now, the very forces that have deluged the population over the purported “terrorism” on October 7 are openly glorifying clear-cut terrorist attacks in Lebanon.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)