

Australia: Labor government threatens arrests, deportation over protests against Israel's attacks on Lebanon

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30 September 2024

Thousands of workers and young people took to the streets in cities across Australia on Sunday, protesting Israel's ongoing imperialist-backed genocide against Palestine and broader Middle East offensive.

The demonstrations, larger and more intense than the ongoing weekly protests against the Gaza genocide have been in some months, provoked threats of arrest and deportation, spearheaded by the federal Labor government.

The rallies reflected mass anger over the Netanyahu regime's airstrikes against Lebanon, which have killed hundreds and displaced hundreds of thousands, and the assassination of Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. At the Sydney rally, Lebanese flags were as numerous and prominent as Palestinian ones. Some of the demonstrators, many visibly upset and in tears, held placards depicting Nasrallah.

Several protesters in Sydney and Melbourne waved Hezbollah flags, although in Sydney, rally organisers had warned, "we cannot have any illegal flags on the demonstration." Hezbollah, one of the largest political parties in Lebanon, is officially designated as a terrorist organisation in Australia.

The presence of a few Hezbollah flags was seized upon as a pretext for a stepped-up denunciation of the mass anti-genocide protests, which have been slandered as "anti-semitic" and subjected to police surveillance and threats since they began on October 9 last year.

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) announced late yesterday that at least six instances of protesters displaying "hate symbols" at the Melbourne rally will be investigated, with criminal charges a possibility. NSW Police said they had seized two flags "displaying a terrorist organisation symbol," but had not referred the cases to the AFP.

The AFP had said hours earlier that merely waving a flag would not meet the threshold for prosecution under "anti-terror" laws that criminalise the display of "hate symbols" to incite violence or hatred.

This draconian legislation was introduced by Labor late last year, under the pretext of combating Nazism, but the real target was the growing anti-war sentiment and broader class struggle. The laws carry a penalty of one year in prison for the "public display of prohibited terrorist organisation symbols."

The rapid reversal of the AFP's position on Sunday's rallies was in line with the demands of the federal Labor government, as well as Zionist lobbyists and Liberal-National opposition leader Peter Dutton, who declared it was "unacceptable that the government wouldn't be arresting people already."

Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese decried the protests as threats to "multiculturalism and social cohesion," saying, "We've seen worrying signs over the weekend; we do not want people to bring radical ideologies and conflict here."

Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong wrote on X/Twitter: "We condemn any indication of support for a terrorist organisation such as Hizballah. It not only threatens national security, but fuels fear and division in our communities. All of us—including every political leader—must stand together to reject terrorism and extremism."

This is a fraud. Just as Wong and the federal Labor government have fully backed Israel's genocide in Gaza, they have tacitly condoned the Zionist state's use of outright terrorist methods against Lebanese civilians. By contrast, every mealy-mouthed call for a "ceasefire" or "peace" has been prefaced with a condemnation of Hamas, and now Hezbollah.

The hypocrisy is staggering. Anti-war protesters are threatened with being thrown in jail for simply holding the flag of a major political party. Meanwhile, pro-Zionist politicians, media commentators and lobbyists have free rein to cheer on Israel's war crimes and murder of tens of thousands of civilians, including women and children.

Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke declared, "any indication of support for a terrorist organisation is unequivocally condemned. It draws the immediate attention of our security agencies."

The threat is clear: The full weight of Australia's state apparatus will be deployed against anyone who expresses opposition to Israel's expanding genocidal rampage, which has included flagrant war crimes and the use of terrorist methods, such as the recent pager bombings.

Burke threatened to deport non-residents who took part in the protests: "I won't hesitate to cancel the visas of visitors to our country who are spreading hate."

Burke said he had "sent the message, and we've done this before, to the different police forces, in this case NSW and Victoria, and just said that if anybody who they're concerned about, if they can check their visa status as well, and if someone is on a visa, then that'll come to us."

The comments are unmistakably racist dog-whistling. The suggestion, picking up on a line first used by Dutton late last year, is that protesters opposing the Israeli war crimes are "foreigners" threatening Australia's "social cohesion." As the government well knows, the genocide is opposed by masses of workers, wherever they are from.

If Burke is implying that some of those who carried Hezbollah flags are Lebanese nationals, is he suggesting they be deported to face bombardment by the criminal Zionist regime?

This forms part of a broader attempt to whip up anti-immigrant hysteria to divert growing opposition to Labor's pro-war program and its broader assault on working-class living conditions.

Labor's denunciations and threats have nothing whatsoever to do with combating "terrorism." In response to a resurgence of the anti-war rallies, the Labor government is attempting to use trumped-up "anti-terror" laws as a further step towards outlawing protest altogether.

The response of the Labor government to Sunday's protests, and to Israel's expanding genocidal war, underscores that the perspective advanced by speakers at the rallies since October is a political dead end.

The protest organisers, affiliated with Socialist

Alternative and other pseudo-left organisations, have argued from the start that the struggle against genocide and war can be taken forward through appeals to Labor and other imperialist governments worldwide. But every increase in barbarity by the Zionist regime in Israel has been met with a redoubling of material and political support from these very same governments.

Meanwhile, opponents of Israel's imperialist-backed brutality are branded by these governments, including Labor in Australia, as "antisemites" or "terrorist sympathisers" and threatened with arrest and deportation.

Israel's attacks on Lebanon also expose the attempts of the pseudo-left to present the genocide in Gaza as an isolated single issue. They have consistently downplayed the well-documented fact that, for Israel, the US and its allies, the assault on Palestine is just one front in a Middle East war, with Iran as a primary target.

The pseudo-left have consciously covered up the direct connections between the horrors in Gaza, the broader drive by US and global imperialism towards a third world war, and the assault on the working class at the domestic level by governments worldwide.

The response of the Australian political establishment to Sunday's rallies is a sharp warning of the deepening attack on democratic rights that is being prepared.

As the Socialist Equality Party has insisted since Israel began its onslaught on Gaza, the struggle against imperialist war and genocide cannot be waged through appeals to the Labor government, but requires a fight against it. This can only go forward as part of a global anti-war movement of the working class, based on a revolutionary socialist perspective and a fight to overthrow capitalism, the root cause of imperialist war and barbarism.



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