

# Australian Labor Party ex-premier supports Zionist witch-hunting in the arts sector

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Daniel Andrews, the former Australian Labor Party (ALP) premier of the state of Victoria, recently accepted a Zionist award and used the occasion to issue a full-throated support for the genocide in Gaza and demand the de-funding of any organisation that criticises Israel.

Andrews' diatribe underscores the Labor Party's active complicity in the slaughter of the Palestinian people. Now retired from office, the former premier dispensed with his federal and state colleagues' occasional expressions of humanitarian concern over Gaza.

Andrews' speech was the highest profile statement he has issued since resigning as Victorian premier in September last year. The World Zionist Organisation, the Zionist Federation of Australia (ZFA), and Zionism Victoria awarded him the "Jerusalem Prize" at an event that was held as part of the ZFA's biennial conference last month. The event was organised in secret, to evade anti-genocide demonstrators.

Underscoring the bipartisan support for the Israeli genocide in Gaza, the conference was addressed by ALP Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles and Shadow Foreign Affairs Senator Simon Birmingham. Attendees included federal Attorney-General Mark Dreyfuss and Labor MP Josh Burns. Previous recipients of the Jerusalem Prize include former Labor Prime Ministers Bob Hawke and Julia Gillard and the Liberal Party's John Howard and Scott Morrison.

Andrews painted Israeli society in the rosiest of colours. "My support for Israel has always been grounded in simple and fundamental logic," he declared. "Israel is the only democracy in a despotic region. The only place with gender equality at law, the only place where people are free and safe to love who

they love, criticise their government if they wish and organise in their workplaces. Over these last 12 months, I, like all of you, have been angered and saddened by those who know nothing of the history of this region yet opine about its future, those who know little of Israel or the Jewish people, yet feel obliged and able to criticise."

In reality, the crisis-ridden Zionist state is now governed by extreme rightwing and openly fascist figures. These have extended the enforcement of an effective apartheid system where all Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are denied the most basic rights.

Andrews' evoking the issue of gay rights as an alibi for his support for genocide was especially abhorrent. He related how he had recently seen a pro-Palestine protester wearing a rainbow T-shirt: "She was obviously a supporter of the LGBTQI+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex] community, as I am. Try wearing that t-shirt in Gaza and see how that works out for you."

The biggest danger facing everybody in Gaza today is being shot or bombed by the Israeli military. Andrews has absolutely no concern for the annihilation of LGBTQI+ or any other Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

Andrews effectively told the assembled Zionists and ALP supporters that he supported financial boycotts and professional witch-hunts against Israel's opponents in the arts and culture sector.

He declared: "If people won't speak out against antisemitism, defund them. If people are happy to take your money while being antisemites, defund them... If you want to support Hamas, then get them to pay your bills, get them to fund your programs and build your buildings. I am serious. We are beyond tropes. Silence and much worse are only possible if there are no

consequences.”

In other words, any organisation that does not loudly enough proclaim its support for the Zionist genocide of the Palestinians must be de-funded.

On that basis Andrews would have opposed the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (MSO) backdown after they cancelled the second concert of world-renowned pianist Jayson Gillham. Gillham at his first concert in Melbourne acknowledged the humanity of journalists killed in Gaza, noting the illegality of a government deliberately murdering reporters. MSO musicians opposed the censorship and the MSO Managing Director was forced to resign.

Andrews claimed that he would “publicly and loudly” back any Jewish philanthropist that de-funded a cultural body for its failure to support the genocide, let alone one that uttered a word of support for the Palestinian victims.

Andrews also stated, “The ferocity and brazenness of anti-Jewish and anti-Israel sentiment is like nothing that I have seen in my lifetime. It is a stain on the nation, and it shames us all.” The former premier’s conflation of anti-Israel opinion with antisemitism is one of the characteristic lies promoted by Zionist forces.

The speech underscores his Labor government’s right-wing, pro-business record. Andrews privatised many of the few remaining publicly owned assets such as the Port of Melbourne and VicRoads vehicle registration and licensing. Just a week before he resigned, Andrews announced the demolition of all 44 public housing tower blocks housing 10,000 vulnerable Victorians. The prime inner suburban sites are being handed over to property investors who will make windfall profits re-developing them.

While Andrews was demonised by right wingers and the Murdoch media for his government’s limited and flawed attempts to control the COVID pandemic, his eventual adoption of the “let it rip” policy in collaboration with NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet and the subsequent avoidable deaths of thousands of Victorians is in line with his deep hostility to democratic rights as evinced in his full-throated support for genocide.

Andrews’ claim that anti-Zionism is the equivalent of antisemitism comes from a long tradition. The Labor Party has backed Zionism from the outset of Israel’s establishment.

As Labor’s longest serving premier of Victoria from 2014 to 2023, Andrews followed the New South Wales Liberal government in adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism.

The anti-Zionist Jewish Council of Australia objected to the IHRA definition based on its “unsound conflation of antisemitism with criticism of Israel.” It said the IHRA examples “have been weaponised globally to chill criticism of Israel and Zionism, with a particular impact on silencing Palestinian voices...”. The right wing of the UK Labor Party used the IHRA definition to drive out Jeremy Corbyn. Andrews’s proposals would have backed Corbyn’s removal.

Andrews’ successor, Premier Jacinta Allan, has picked up where he left off in vociferously backing Israel. Allan has repeatedly taken to social media with deranged rants against pro-Palestinian protesters who she has slandered as antisemites and threats to “social cohesion.”

Over the past week Allan was prominent in the denunciation of the Disrupt Wars group that threatened to protest at the Myer department store launch of its Christmas themed shopfront windows. Allan said, “That there was a group of people that chose to politicise ... what is a beautiful annual tradition and event for children, we condemn it.”

Allan called the protesters “morons” and said her government will introduce new “anti-vilification and social cohesion laws” that will give police extra powers to suppress opposition to the genocide.



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