

Australian cricket commentator sacked for noting mass deaths in Gaza

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For the second time, the cricket world has provided a petty, vindictive and downright ridiculous example of the broader campaign by the powers-that-be to silence opposition to the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

In December 2023, the International Cricket Council (ICC) forbade Australian batsman Usman Khawaja from taking the field in international matches with shoes that read “all lives are equal” and “freedom is a human right.” The bureaucrats, who run the game from the ICC’s headquarters in the dictatorial United Arab Emirates, deemed those statements to be “political” because they were regarded as a reference to Israel’s mass murder of Palestinians.

The ICC’s suspicious and hostile attitude to professions of human rights and basic decency has now been matched by the Sports Entertainment Network, which runs the popular SEN sports radio broadcaster.

Over the weekend, SEN unceremoniously dumped Peter Lalor, a widely-respected cricket commentator, over posts he made on his X/Twitter account referencing Gaza. The sacking was done in a hurry. Lalor was in Sri Lanka as a freelance commentator commissioned by SEN to cover the ongoing Australia-Sri Lanka Test cricket series when he was dismissed.

Lalor had commentated the first test in Galle without incident, and was scheduled to cover the second. Why then the sudden rush by SEN to sever all ties with a leading cricket expert? For anyone familiar with the witch-hunts of the past 16 months that have accompanied the Israeli war crimes, inevitably “upset” and “offended” Zionists were in the picture.

As per Lalor’s account, “I was asked by station boss Craig Hutchison, who was civil, if I didn’t care that my retweeting of events in Gaza made Jewish people in Melbourne feel unsafe. I said I didn’t want anyone to feel unsafe.” Predictably, Hutchison reportedly related

accusations that Lalor may be an antisemite, which has been the go-to line for shutting down opposition to the assault on Gaza.

Lalor went on: “The following day Hutchison told me that because the ‘sound of my voice made people feel unsafe’ and that people are ‘triggered by my voice,’ I could not cover the cricket for them anymore.”

If Zionists were telling SEN management that Lalor’s measured commentary of a Test cricket match was making them feel “unsafe,” the appropriate response would have been to dismiss the remarks as absurd.

More to the point, SEN should have noted that the complainants were making a cynical bid to have someone sacked for disagreeing with them politically. They should have told the witch-hunters to stop harassing their employee.

But, as has so often been the case with the Zionist witch-hunts, SEN management rolled over.

After Lalor’s sacking, Hutchison issued a nauseating statement. “SEN Cricket is a celebration of differences and nationalities,” it proclaimed, although those “differences” evidently did not extend to opposing the unfolding genocide or referencing the mass killing of Palestinians. To justify its censorship, the statement went on to describe the station as a “a place where our SEN audience can escape what is an increasingly complex and sometimes triggering world.”

Like the saga of Khawaja’s shoes, the most striking aspect of this incident is the complete mismatch between Lalor’s “offence” and the response. Lalor is not accused of ever having mentioned Gaza during a broadcast, so the references to the sound of his voice are presumably because it reminds the Zionists of his X/Twitter feed.

Moreover, the posts on his feed are simply not of a highly controversial character. In any objective

assessment, Lalor comes across as a humane and democratically minded man, disturbed by the mass killing of Palestinians and wishing for an end to war.

Most of his posts were retweets from other accounts. As per Lalor's account, Hutchison indicated that SEN was hit with complaints over Lalor during the first Test match, played from January 29 to February 1. It is difficult to determine when something was retweeted, as against when it was posted by the original account.

But some of Lalor's X content around that time included retweeting a post reporting that "Palestine Red Crescent teams have recovered another 14 decomposed Palestinian bodies from several areas on the Rashid Coastal Road in Gaza."

Another was a statement by a Palestinian Christian leader, condemning the invitation by US President Donald Trump for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to visit Washington. The pastor wrote, "The man who has an arrest warrant for him from the ICC [International Criminal Court] is invited to the White House as a guest of honor. This is the world we live in. Faith leaders must make their voices heard in times like this." Other retweets by Lalor have highlighted the plight of Palestinian children and prisoners.

People instigating a witch-hunt over such content, which has nothing whatsoever to do with antisemitism, are simply supporters of war crimes.

Media and cricket figures have spoken out in defence of Lalor.

Khawaja declared on Instagram: "Standing up for the people of Gaza is not antisemitic nor does it have anything to do with my Jewish brothers and sisters in Australia, but everything to do with the Israeli government and their deplorable actions. It has everything to do with justice and human rights." He concluded: "Pete is a good guy with a good heart. He deserves better."

As per Lalor's account of the sacking, "I was told in one call there were serious organisations making complaints; in another, I was told that this was not the case."

Throughout the genocide, right-wing Zionist lobby groups that collaborate closely with the Israeli state and support its every crime against the Palestinians have fraudulently been depicted by governments and the media as representative Jewish organisations. Their every pronouncement has been reported uncritically

and they have had access to the corridors of power.

These groups have repeatedly instigated witch-hunts targeting critics of Israel. Journalist Antoinette Lattouf is currently in the Federal Court, having brought a case against the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) for unlawful termination. Lattouf was sacked halfway through a week-long fill-in position, after a concerted campaign by Zionist lawyers who barraged the ABC with vexatious complaints.

Lattouf's sacking, ostensibly because she shared a post to her personal social media from Human Rights Watch condemning Israel's use of starvation as a weapon of war, occurred in December 2023. The dismissal of Lalor, more than a year later, in such similar circumstances, underscores the normalisation of witch-hunting and politically motivated sackings by the Australian political, media and corporate establishment.

Such repressive measures set a precedent for broader attacks on working people as they enter into struggle against the broader eruption of militarism, including Australia's transformation into a frontline state for a US-led war against China, completed by the same federal Labor government that has consistently backed Israel's war crimes in Gaza.



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