

Australian university rank-and-file committee members oppose Zionist witch hunt against Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah

Our correspondents
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Members of the Western Sydney University Rank-and-File Committee have issued statements in defence of Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah, a pro-Palestinian academic at Sydney’s Macquarie University, against a mounting Zionist-led media and government witch hunt.

This is in response to the statement by the Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee on January 21 calling on academics, university workers and students at Macquarie and more broadly to come to the defence of Abdel-Fattah. She has been falsely accused of antisemitism, along with many others in Australia and internationally, for opposing the continuing US-backed Israeli genocide in Palestine.

Last week, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s Labor Party government openly joined the attack, which includes demands for Abdel-Fattah’s sacking by the Macquarie University management. Education Minister Jason Clare wrote to the Australian Research Council (ARC) asking it to urgently investigate Abdel-Fattah’s current ARC \$870,000 research grant, based on phony allegations that she breached the grant rules.

Michael Head, a law educator and rank-and-file committee member, wrote: “The fact that the Labor government is blatantly assisting the mounting Zionist-led media demonisation of Randa Abdel-Fattah, demonstrates how much is at stake in her defence.

“Free speech and academic freedom are under direct attack, along with the broader basic democratic right of political dissent. Abdel-Fattah, a sociology academic and award-winning children’s book author, has been targeted because she is a prominent pro-Palestinian voice.

“The aim of this witch hunt is to silence opposition to the US-Israeli mass killings—some of the worst war

crimes since the Holocaust—which the Albanese government has fully supported.

“Any educator who challenges this agenda, now spearheaded by Donald Trump’s call for the ethnic cleansing of Gaza, whether in their research, teaching, at academic conferences or even in individual social media posts, faces the threat of dismissal.

“An editorial in the Murdoch media’s *Australian* insisted that Education Minister Clare or the ARC must apply the ARC’s ‘national interest’ test to Abdel-Fattah’s Future Fellowship study of ‘Arab/Muslim Australian Social Movements since the 1970s: a hidden history.’ That sends a threat to any university research which is deemed not to be in the interests of the political establishment.

“This will not stop at criticism of the Gaza genocide. Unless defeated, this witch hunt will extend to any voice of dissent against the underlying plunge into militarism, anti-immigrant poison and the gutting of social programs, including public education.

“The National Tertiary Education Union has not issued a single statement in defence of any of the growing list of victimised anti-genocide academics. That is why the rank-and-file committee at Macquarie has launched this campaign to defend Abdel-Fattah and all the other victims of this offensive.”

Gabriela Zabala, an academic teacher at Western Sydney University (WSU) The College, said: “I stand unreservedly against the right-wing witch hunt against Macquarie University academic Randa Abdel-Fattah by the Australian Labor government and the Zionist-led media’s demonisation of her.

“At WSU, the rank-and-file committee is fighting the ‘spill and fill’ destruction of jobs and conditions at the

College and warning that it is a precedent for wider job cuts and pro-business restructuring across the university sector, which makes it all the more critical to defend the right to free speech and dissent.

“Abdel-Fattah has expressed her opposition, as have millions around the world, and hundreds of thousands in Australia, to the genocide in Gaza, currently being carried out by Israel with the support of its imperialist allies including the US and Australia.

“The conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism by the media and governments, and increasingly adopted by university managements, serves only to demonise and criminalise political dissent and opposition to the genocide. At stake are also freedom of speech and political expression, denied to those who are critical of the Israeli regime, including anti-Zionist Jews.

“All workers, including university workers and students, should defend Abdel-Fattah from these attacks as these constitute part of the government’s authoritarian measures to suppress opposition to policies of militarism, war and austerity, as expressed in the shutdown of the protest encampments at Sydney University and other universities.”

A **postgraduate student** wrote: “As a member of the Western Sydney University Rank-and-File Committee, I condemn the allegations raised by Federal Minister for Education Jason Clare and the mainstream media against Macquarie University academic and advocate for the liberation of Palestine from the Zionist state of Israel, Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah.

“The ministers’ actions demonstrate once again the rotteness and corruption of the global capitalist system and its use of the law to serve the interests of the ruling class. In particular, the minister is using legal means, the investigation of how Dr Abdel-Fatah has used her current ARC research grant and is operating on the basis of false allegations. These allegations stem from the vocal opposition of Dr Abdel-Fatah to the genocide in Gaza and are aimed at transforming her into a scapegoat in the public eye, enforcing the dominant rhetoric of Australia’s support for Israel and the framing of all supporters of Palestinian liberation as terrorists.

“Of course, this is not the first time Australian authorities have implemented reactionary measures and targeted the academic community for the stand of many of its members in support of the Palestinian struggle. In

early October 2024, at WSU, an academic institution consisting, in its majority, of students who come from a working-class and/or a Muslim background, police officers entered campus grounds and arrested students who had protested against the genocide.

“This incident, as well as the current persecution of Dr Abdel-Fattah, are instances of a greater witch hunt that Australia, as every other capitalist state, is conducting for the purpose of suppressing any voice of resistance. It demonstrates the close alliance of the Albanese federal government with the butchers and warmongers of NATO and of US-led imperialism.”

“Free speech is not a privilege through which oligarchs and media moguls can spread capitalism’s rhetoric of hate. On the contrary, it is a right manifested through the protests of the working class and aiding in its liberation. Bearing this in mind, we must defend the right of academics to voice their opposition to genocide and war and organise in order to achieve a better world.”

To defend Abdel-Fattah and all other witch-hunted educators, please send statements of support to the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file educators network.

Contact the CFPE:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

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