

Sydney hospital workers face up to 20 years' imprisonment after being baited by Israeli provocateur

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On Tuesday night, clearly acting on behalf of Zionist groups and the state and federal Labor governments, New South Wales (NSW) police arrested and laid extremely serious federal charges against one of the Bankstown Hospital workers, who was recently goaded into making politically reactionary comments online by an Israeli operative about killing Israeli patients, which were obviously not to be taken literally.

Sarah Abu Lebdeh, a nurse, has been charged with three offences, which NSW Police Commissioner Karen Webb boasted were “very, very serious” charges issued after consultation with the Commonwealth Director of Prosecutions.

These charges, which can mean up to 20 years in prison, are designed to intimidate anyone making comments on social media criticising Israel, as the US-backed Netanyahu government escalates its genocide and ethnic cleansing in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. Such remarks are being demonised as “antisemitic” and increasingly being made illegal, punishable by prosecution and possible jail terms.

The first charge, under section 80.2BA of the Criminal Code Act, of “threatening violence” against a group based on race or religion, or anyone associated with such a group, carries a sentence of up to seven years imprisonment if the threat, if carried out, would “threaten the peace, order and good government of the Commonwealth.”

Under recent “hate speech” amendments to the Criminal Code, jointly rammed through federal parliament by the Albanese Labor government and the Liberal-National Coalition on February 6, it is enough for the prosecution to show that any “reasonable” member of a group—in effect a Zionist organisation—feared that any of these threats would be carried out.

The second charge, “Using a Carriage Service to Make a Death Threat,” is a crime under section 474.15(1) of the Criminal Code Act that carries a penalty of up to 10 years in prison.

The third charge of “Using a Carriage Service to Menace/Harass/Offend” is a crime under section 474.17, with punishment of up to three years in jail. That last offence only requires the person to communicate online “in a way (whether by the method of use or the content of a communication, or both) that reasonable persons would regard as being, in all circumstances, menacing, harassing or offensive.”

Police chief Webb said charges would also be laid against the other hospital worker, Ahmad Rashad Nadir, who was entrapped by Max Veifer, a so-called Israeli social media influencer, into making similar comments to him.

Nadir is reportedly still undergoing medical treatment related to the trauma produced by the all-out corporate media and government witch hunt against the pair facing dismissal, who were summarily stood down by the state Labor government’s NSW Health.

For now, Abu Lebdeh has been granted conditional bail to appear in court on March 19, with restrictive and anti-democratic conditions that include being banned from using any social media and surrendering her passport.

In a media statement announcing the charges, Commissioner Webb congratulated the recently launched police “antisemitism” taskforce. “Strike Force Pearl detectives must be commended for acting swiftly under enormous pressure and public expectation,” she said.

“These charges have been laid following a lot of hard work and legal advice, received yesterday from the Commonwealth DPP. Detectives have overcome obstacles and jurisdictional challenges to get where we are today.”

This indicates decisions taken at the highest levels of the state and federal legal authorities, both led by Labor governments, acting under “enormous pressure,” to prosecute the hospital workers on the most serious federal charges possible, despite the alleged incriminating comments being made to an individual who was not in Australia but operating out of Israel.

The source of this “enormous pressure” originates from the Israeli government and state and federal Labor governments in this country, which have not only joined the drumbeat for prosecution but led it. It coincides with the daily ramping up of the Israeli atrocities in Palestine with the full backing of the fascistic Trump administration in the United States, as part of a plan to forcibly remove hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Palestinians from the devastated Gaza Strip and West Bank refugee camps.

Israeli news website *Ynet* reported that Israel’s ambassador to Australia, Amir Maimon, had personally spoken to NSW Labor Premier Chris Minns and called for Nadir and Abu Lebdeh to be fired. *Ynet* also reported that Israel’s deputy foreign minister Sharren Haskel had said antisemitism was a “disease spreading in Australia.” Haskel had insisted: “This behaviour must be dealt with to the fullest extent of the law and at the very least, they should be fired.”

An obvious double standard is on display. The historic scale of the US-Israeli crimes is covered up by the media and the Labor governments, which instead present Zionist groups and their supporters as the victims of rampant antisemitism.

All the evidence emerging about this social media event shows that the two workers were entrapped by a Zionist operative. Veifer boasted of killing Palestinians as an ex-member of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), provoking them into making overblown statements on a chat site.

Veifer quickly declared “mission accomplished” as part of his campaign to dox people worldwide who express allegedly antisemitic views. He told Sky News on February 12: “I talk with different people from all over the world... I had a mission to accomplish. I had to expose them... The mission has [been] accomplished—we got them.”

Veifer said he created content on Omegle and Chatruletka, online video chat platforms, where “I expose people.” Far from being genuinely offended, let alone menaced, Veifer conducted a premeditated provocation against the hospital workers, as he boasted of doing internationally.

As Commissioner Webb admitted on Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Radio Sydney on Wednesday, the police had found no evidence that anyone at Bankstown Hospital, in Western Sydney, had been harmed.

Nevertheless, the lives of the two health workers have been wrecked. Well before she was charged, Abu Lebdeh’s family had said the nurse was “sorry” and had suffered an “extreme panic attack.” Nadir was taken to Liverpool Hospital following a welfare concern on February 13, the day before Strike Force Pearl detectives raided his Bankstown home.

As soon as Veifer’s edited version of their comments was

promoted throughout the media, Minns and Health Minister Ryan Park vowed they would never work in the public health system again.

Likewise, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese described the comments by the hospital workers as “vile,” saying, “the footage is sickening and it is shameful.” He declared: “These antisemitic comments, driven by hate, have no place in our health system and no place anywhere in Australia.”

Without any due process or procedural fairness, both workers have had their registrations immediately suspended by the Nursing and Midwifery Council of NSW. Neither can work in the health sector anywhere in Australia, after also being suspended by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).

This is a warning of the vicious methods that are and will be used throughout the working class in the escalating Zionist-media-government campaign against “antisemitism,” which has already targeted such prominent individuals as journalist Mary Kostakidis, Macquarie University academic Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah and Jewish Council of Australia executive director Sarah Schwartz.

The persecution and charging of the Bankstown Hospital workers with serious criminal offences marks an escalation of a protracted campaign to falsely brand all opposition to the Israeli genocide as antisemitism.

Workers need to come to the defence of Abu Lebdeh and Nadir, as part of the struggle against the mass slaughter of the Palestinians and to defend their social and democratic rights. The persecution of the hospital workers shows that in opposing the genocide, anger is not enough.

As Socialist Equality Party (SEP) national secretary Cheryl Crisp told a Macquarie University Rank-and-File Committee public meeting last week to defend Abdel-Fattah, free speech and academic freedom, this offensive can be answered only on the basis of a clear political perspective to fight the turn to fascism and war, not just by the ruling elites in Israel and the US, but globally.

“Take the tragic experience of the Bankstown nurses,” she said. “They were entrapped, goaded and baited into making comments... What is needed is a socialist perspective. That’s what those two nurses in Bankstown lacked. And they are paying a terrible price for it.”



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