

## Victoria Australia's Proposed Anti-protest Law a Fundamental Attack on Civil Liberties

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*Victorian **Premier [Jacinta Allan's](#)** announcement on December 17 of “strong action” supposedly needed “to fight hate” is a declaration of war against all supporters of free speech and the right to protest.*

It is the latest in Victorian Labor's attempt to repress the Pro-Palestine movement. In September, it authorised police to use excessive force against protesters during the anti-war protests at the [Land Forces weapons' conference](#).

[Allan claims](#) Victoria needs new laws to protect “social cohesion”. She said “strong action to confront “antisemitism, deal with dangerous and extreme demonstrations protect religious worship and [and] restore social cohesion” were needed.

In asserting this, Allen is conflating the [reprehensible firebombing of the Adass Israel Synagogue](#) with the weekly peaceful pro-Palestine protests.

Labor's proposed laws follow remarks by [antisemitism envoy \*\*Jillian Segal\*\*](#) who described the weekly pro-Palestine rallies as “intimidatory” and [called for restrictions](#) on where they can take place.

Rights organisations and pro-Palestine movement organisers have condemned the government's move to hand police more powers, including to be able to make arrests if someone does not remove their face mask at a protest.

**David Mejia-Canales**, from [Human Rights Law Centre](#), said the wide-ranging discretionary powers for the police could be used against other protest movements.

[Liberty Victoria](#) said the proposed new laws “may result in the introduction of a permit system by stealth” and are unworkable.

As Victorian Trades Hall secretary [Luke Hilakari said](#), protests “hold the powerful to account in a physical, visible way, fostering solidarity”.

Most people do not have access to the halls of power, but “we all have access to the streets”, he said. Inconvenience is a “small price to pay for everyone to have a voice”.

Other draconian measures include the display of “prohibited” flags and possessing glue, ropes or locks. This is aimed at those wanting to undertake disruptive protests — which to

date have mostly been related to the climate emergency.

Glue, ropes and locks are commonplace items, meaning that a ban on possessing them at a protest would potentially criminalise people who have done nothing wrong.

The government also wants to restrict protests around places of religious worship, such as churches, temples, mosques and synagogues. This comes after Prime Minister Anthony Albanese urged the states to enact such restrictions.

Survivors of clergy abuse and supporters of abortion rights are just some of those who have held protests against the [institutional cover-up of sexual abuse](#) and the church's hypocrisy over the sanctity of life.

It would mean that protests in Ballarat and on Gadigal Country in Sydney where people tied ribbons on the front of the church calling for justice would be outlawed.

These restrictions also open the door to abuse by authorities who may arbitrarily decide to restrict a protest because it has marched past a religious place of worship, of which there are many.

What about if the main protest square happens to be next to a place of worship, such as the Sydney Town Hall square?

And what about the protests in front of Flinders Street train station in Naarm/Melbourne? Would that be banned because it is diagonally opposite Saint Paul's Cathedral?

There is a lot missing from the mainstream commentary about the rise of antisemitism.

Antisemitism had largely disappeared from Australia until the far right and neo-Nazis started mobilising to promote racial hatred, including antisemitism.

These far-right and neo-Nazi groups were actively promoted by right-wing and reactionary MPs in the Liberal and National Parties and in the Pauline Hanson One Nation Party. Labor politicians tended to turn a blind eye to it.

It is this mainstream support for the far right that has given new life to racist and prejudicial views about Jewish people or Judaism as a religion.

Israel's bloodthirsty genocide in Gaza has also generated antisemitism, unfortunately.

The pro-Palestine movement has worked to prevent its spread by consciously opposing it and educating people about the difference between Zionism and Judaism.

Anti-Zionist Jews, including Jews who practice their faith, are an important part of the pro-Palestine movement.

The idea that authorities can make decisions on where and when protests are allowed to take place is a fundamental attack on the democratic right to protest.

The very act of protesting is the only public way of expressing dissatisfaction and disagreement with the powers-that-be. It is a fundamental right in a democracy.

Labor's refusal to impose sanctions and cut weapons ties with Israel, after more than a year

of genocide in Gaza, is only going to prompt more people to join the protests.

This is likely what most governments fear. It is the reason we have to continue to protest for Palestine and oppose the authorities' clamp-down on our civil rights.

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*Featured image: Supporters for a free Palestine march in the weekly protest on December 15 in Naarm/Melbourne. Photo: Conor MacCleod*

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