

## Why Does Australia's Labor Fear Dissent on AUKUS and Palestine?

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*Desperate to present a united front at the upcoming Labor conference in Meanjin/Brisbane, on two crucial issues, dissent is feared. The Anthony Albanese government looks likely to prevent delegates voting on the merits of the AUKUS alliance and to recognise Palestine as a state.*

An opportunity for informed debate on each issue will be lost. Toeing a party line is the priority, not Australia's identity as an independent, human rights respecting country.

The controversy over AUKUS involves the lives of future generations and their understanding of security, via Australia's alliance with the United States military.

On Palestine, Labor delegates need the chance to oppose decades of collusion with successive Israeli governments' cruelties, including its practice of ignoring Israeli settlers' violence towards Palestinians.

The reasons for challenging any prospective steamrolling of debates should be known, and not just by Labor delegates.

Respect for a common humanity demands we pay attention to the human rights of Palestinians.

A common humanity, not just Australia's, is also at risk in the carefully promoted assumptions that China is our "enemy". The AUKUS-engineered purchase of obscenely expensive nuclear-powered submarines is designed to protect US economic interests by patrolling Chinese coasts.

Forces which influence and frighten Labor managers have been around for years but why do they influence the agenda of a national conference in 2023?

Debates at NSW Labor meetings have registered members' reject the AUKUS agreement. Labor Party HQ has perceived such rejection as a "threat to unity" and an unwelcome snub to powerful allies.

A regional NSW Labor conference on July 30 disallowed a vote on the anti-AUKUS motions and returned the matter to constituencies, asking the architects of those motions to think again.

The management's plan is clear: to prepare for a "non-controversial" national conference, the least delegates know the better.

An understanding of the implications of AUKUS means motions should be encouraged and debates held rather than trust advice from retired US admirals and from inaccessible Canberra-based, alleged expert think tanks.

For Labor's managers, however, the paradoxical route to truth is to remain ignorant and fear dissent.

AUKUS became policy when Labor in opposition was booby-trapped by the Scott Morrison government, which engineered the US-British-Australia alliance by deceiving the French.

There was no scrutiny or debate, neither in parliament nor at any level of the Labor Party. But why should a practice of concealment and secrecy continue at a national conference?

Labor's reported avoidance on recognising a Palestinian state derives from the same reluctance — to avoid offending powerful allies as occurred in establishment deliberations about AUKUS.

Cowardice over Palestine is obnoxious, but odd. Almost 140 nations, including the Vatican, have recognised Palestine as a state. Nasser Mashni, Chair of the Australian Palestine Advocacy Network, reminded the government that Australia recognised Israel 75 years ago so what smidgeon of courage does it take to recognise Palestine now?

An answer to that question lies in the conduct of a Zionist/Jewish lobby which still thinks it has a taken-for-granted entitlement to influence Australia's policies towards Palestinians.

The Israeli Ambassador to Australia argues that Palestine should not be recognised as a state until a final peace agreement has been reached. This is a monumental red herring, given that a decades-long peace process has been a farce.

Eager to promote the same arguments, the biased Colin Rubinstein, who is Director of the Australian/Israel Jewish Affairs Council, cannot resist advising the Labor conference that any motion to recognise Palestine as a state would be a setback to the peace process.

Given this man's hypocrisy, it is astounding that any Labor member should still take notice of such a predictable lobbyist.

Labor members should also recall Israeli **Finance Minister Bezael Smotrich** claiming that Palestinians do not exist; they have no history and that Minister for National Security,

**Itamar Ben-Gavir**, supported settler violence with his own national guard.

If those events do not prompt support for a Palestinian state, the Labor conference could at least heed Israeli journalist Gideon Levy's warning that, in face of slaughter by Israeli forces and pogroms by rampaging settlers, Palestinians are not even allowed to defend themselves.

Awareness of events in Israel/Palestine must raise questions about conference tactics to quell reminders about previous Labor undertakings to recognise Palestine.

Labor's recognition of Palestine as a state would boost the morale of a people under siege by the most violent, right-wing government in Israeli history.

Fear of dissent seems likely to drive attempts to stifle debate about an AUKUS foreign policy which cannot be afforded, seem likely to be scuttled by the US Congress and has nothing to say about dialogues for peace as ways to enhance the chances of life on Earth.

Discussion of such serious problems should not be stifled by determination to stage an impression of political unity at Labor's national conference.

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*Featured image: Protesting the Talisman Sabre war rehearsals in Meanjin/Brisbane. Photo: Alex Bainbridge*

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