




Speech By  
**Michael Berkman**

**MEMBER FOR MAIWAR**

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### **FIGHTING ANTISEMITISM AND KEEPING GUNS OUT OF THE HANDS OF TERRORISTS AND CRIMINALS AMENDMENT BILL 2026**

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (5.46 pm): I rise to speak on the so-called Fighting Antisemitism and Keeping Guns out of the Hands of Terrorists and Criminals Amendment Bill. Because of the way the government has presented this bill and in the context of the horrific anti-Semitic Bondi shootings last year, I want to put on record my sympathies for the families and communities of those killed, for everyone who witnessed or was touched by this act of terrorism and for anyone who still carries fear within them as a result of those men's actions.

I genuinely wish I was standing here to debate a bill that actually addressed discrimination and prejudice and that actually updated our firearms laws to limit the potential for gun violence as far as possible, but that is simply not the case. This bill is a crude facade and the title of it is misleading in the extreme. It does not fight anti-Semitism; it does not keep guns out of the hands of terrorists and criminals. It is an Orwellian attempt by a dangerously authoritarian government to silence free speech and intimidate Queenslanders into muting their opposition to the state of Israel and its genocide in Gaza. It is an extreme dog whistle.

The government has done its best to dodge scrutiny of this bill at every point, as it tries to rush through what is an incredibly blunt political instrument. We had a single week for submissions but still received over 500 submissions, the majority of which have serious concerns about the so-called hate speech provisions where they were addressed. We had just over two weeks for the committee inquiry, and the Palestinian community—the community that is most directly impacted by the proposed bans on the phrases 'from the river to the sea' and 'globalise the intifada'—were excluded from the hearings. The Jewish submitters and groups who disagree with this legislation and who do not accept that those phrases are anti-Semitic—who participate in the Palestinian liberation movement—were not offered an opportunity to participate in the committee hearings.

**Mr HUNT:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The member is commenting on the committee's deliberations in the formulation of the program for the hearings. I think he is straying into disclosing to the parliament the committee's deliberations.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Lister): Member for Maiwar, I was distracted at the time and I did not hear what you said. If it is the case that you are referring to confidential deliberations of the committee, I caution you about reflecting on those in public.

**Mr BERKMAN:** The program and the witness lists are a matter of public record, so I will leave it at that. Despite the short title of this bill, the actual amendments do not specifically target or even mention anti-Semitism. The word does not appear in the bill beyond the short title. The only proposal that has been explicitly linked to 'fighting anti-Semitism' is the government's pro-Palestinian expressions. These are expressions used in response to the actions of the State of Israel but not Jewish

or Israeli people as a protected group. They are certainly not a call, as some members have brazenly claimed, to abolish the State of Israel. Jews for Justice in their submission made a really important point. They stated—

By conflating Judaism and Zionism, the Bill dangerously positions Israel as a representative of Jews. This risks linking the political and military actions of Israel with those of Jewish faith. Israel is accused of war crimes and genocide, of which the Australian public are outraged, as evidenced by consistent and large public protests. By conflating Judaism and Zionism, the Queensland government risks feeding a false narrative that Jewish people in Australia are responsible for Israel's actions.

That was from Jews for Justice's submission. We did not hear from them at the public hearing.

Turning to the banned phrases, these are incredibly harsh penalties. Two years imprisonment for using a word in a way that might offend is extraordinary. There is no requirement to actually cause offence. The mere expectation of offence is enough. Bear in mind that just last sitting week we removed voting rights for people who have been in prison for longer than a year, so we are also potentially stripping voting rights away from people.

I will go to the phrases themselves, firstly 'from the river to the sea'. If we had heard from Justice for Palestine, they could have gone into more detail. They said in their submission the term is used—

... to advocate for the equality of all people living in the geographical area of the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. It is a call for freedom from apartheid, freedom from occupation and freedom from oppression.

I want to make the point as well that the original platform for the Likud party, the current ruling party in the State of Israel, has in its first paragraph these words 'between the sea and the Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty'. One reference to the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea is hate speech and another one is not. Why is that? The answer is simple. It is because of what follows in the regularly used chant that the government takes issue with: 'Palestine will be free'. We can hear it out the front now. That is the sentiment that this bill targets, a refusal to engage with the fight for Palestinian liberation.

'Globalise the intifada' is not a chant that I have even heard at any of the pro-Palestine rallies I have been to. Again, the Jewish Council of Australia offered a more nuanced perspective on this expression in its submission. It states—

Much like English translation 'uprising' or 'revolution', the term 'intifada' has been associated with violent and non-violent actions depending on the context, meaning that the violent association is merely one interpretation and not the word's inherent or exclusive meaning.

Again, the point made by our esteemed chair in the committee was that phrases mean different things to different people.

In terms of the laws in practice, the explanatory notes make clear that they will be used to ban certain phrases and it is intended that they be applied to the use of chants or placards at a protest. This bill is about cracking down on protests. Yes, there is a defence that the conduct is for the purpose of a genuine political or other genuine public dispute or issue carried on in the public interest, but the onus is on the defendant. You can still be arrested for simply showing up, irrespective of your meaning or your intent. How will they work in practice? They are clearly targeted towards pro-Palestine demonstrations, attempting to silence literally tens of thousands of Queenslanders who have taken to the streets to call for an end to the Israeli state's genocide in Gaza. This is a genocide that has been acknowledged; it has been recognised by the UN Human Rights Council.

Police suggested at the briefing that they will not be conducting mass arrests. Instead, they would choose their mark and choose their moment. That is a concerning discretion that is left in the hands of police to target protesters. Will they simply identify the organisers who represent most of the threat and those are the marks they will identify? Again, it seems the main objective here is to put fear into the hearts of protesters and to drag us back to the bad old days of police crackdowns on protests. I say to the tens of thousands of Queenslanders who have taken to the streets: you have a right to peacefully protest and express your political views. Your conduct at the protests calling for a free Palestine cannot reasonably be expected to make someone feel menaced or harassed or offended—and some people are offended by the very existence of the practice of protest. Our right to public assembly and protest is fundamental in a democracy here and anywhere in the world.

I think a lot of people might have missed this detail, but I turn to the banned symbols changes in the bill. An explicit list of banned symbols exists at the moment, but this bill now proposes to fundamentally change that so that symbols that are used by a proscribed organisation or a member of a proscribed organisation to identify that organisation will now be punishable by two years imprisonment. We do not even know what the symbols are. There is no list of banned symbols; we are just supposed to know. We are presumed to know. There is nothing stopping a terrorist group from coopting symbols, as we heard from Mr Trad from the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils. Others

have spoken about the way ISIS has hijacked the Shahada, which is one of the five pillars of Islam. It appears on the ISIS flag. Are people simply supposed to know that that is the case if a similar symbol is coopted? I am going to table a document prepared by the Combat Antisemitism Movement following a summit held on the Gold Coast last year which purports to list a variety of anti-Semitic symbols and phrases.

*Tabled paper:* Report of the Antisemitism Research Center by Combat Antisemitism Movement, titled 'Antisemitic Symbols Since October 7', dated February 2025 [257](#).

It includes the timeout hand symbol, keffiyeh scarves, the words 'free Palestine'—to simply say 'free Palestine' is somehow anti-Semitic—and the watermelon. Images of a watermelon are claimed to be anti-Semitic. Maybe honourable members have never said the words 'from the river to the sea', but just pause and think: where does it go next? What is next?

There is not enough time for me to go through the provisions relating to the guns changes, though I might like to. To sum up, this is a bill from politicians who want to look like they are doing something. However, banning words does not make anyone safer. It is just straight-up authoritarianism. You cannot legislate away hatred or discrimination. You certainly do not fight anti-Semitism by conflating the genocidal Israeli state with Jewish people. Please, I beg of Labor members: do not support this. We will not support a bill that purports to tell us what these words mean. They are a call for peace, equality and freedom from oppression and violence.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Lister): The member for Maiwar's time—

**Mr BERKMAN:** From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Maiwar, your time has expired. Take your seat.