



## STATEMENT

23 NOVEMBER 2023

### MARITIME UNION OF AUSTRALIA SYDNEY BRANCH MAKES NO APOLOGY FOR DEFENDING THE DEFENCELESS

The Maritime Union of Australia Sydney Branch is aware of the wilful complicity of the corporate mass media and conservative politicians – both within the Coalition and the ALP – in attacking the motives and actions of peaceful demonstrators who have been campaigning for justice, peace and a ceasefire in Israel and Palestine over many weeks.

For more than a month now this has taken the form of suggesting through thinly veiled subtext that anyone supporting the plight of murdered, injured and displaced Palestinians is somehow deserving of condemnation.

This week, that thinly veiled subtext has evolved into unthinking support of police violence against children, parents, grandparents and other peaceful protesters who gathered at Port Botany to peacefully protest the Israeli military's attacks on innocent citizens in Gaza and the West Bank.

We are now through the looking glass where the actions of Australian peace and justice campaigners are viewed more gravely than the global atrocities they are protesting. While there have now been more than 5,500 Palestinian children murdered by the Israeli military, Australian journalists' and politicians' greatest condemnation is reserved for Australians opposed to these atrocities.

The MUA Sydney Branch supports the community's right to protest illegal occupation, apartheid, genocide, communal mass punishment, ethnic cleansing and other war crimes being committed against people.

One of the speakers at this week's rally has lost 28 family members to recent bombings of residential areas in Gaza, but this human tragedy has been lost amidst an inane, reductive and disingenuous public debate about the role of the MUA in supporting the right to protest even when it includes a relatively short police induced blockade of a minor road.

#### Police Escalation

Hundreds of rally participants were illogically directed by police to disperse through a narrow bush track, causing a crowd crush that imperilled the safety of all in attendance, including infants and the elderly. Photos of a pram held above the crowd to protect the young child within from being crushed illustrate the recklessness of police decision making.

Rally organisers, as well as MUA Sydney Branch officials who were cautioning police to manage the crowd more safely, attempted to negotiate a finish to the rally after speeches were finalised,

however, police were determined to escalate conflict between themselves and the crowd by pushing people through an impossible choke point in the bush along Foreshore Road.

The police used well known paramilitary tactics to corral people into an open pen only to squash the crowd of protestors into smaller and smaller, unsafe spaces where it was impossible to escape unless through a narrowly funnelled bush track.

Instead of working with the rally organisers to minimise the risk of injury or conflict, police aggravated tensions at Botany and began plucking out unlucky attendees who couldn't escape the crowd crush to arrest them.

In doing so, they are empowered by the undemocratic anti-protest laws that exist in NSW. The fact that these laws have been allowed to continue and used in a weaponised manner against peaceful protest is a sad indictment on the NSW Government and undermines their claims to stand with the trade union movement in collective action or for social justice.

The pushing, shoving and violent behaviour by the police was never matched by the protestors who were overwhelmingly ordinary members of the Australian Palestinian and Arab communities and their comrades from civil society and the trade union movement.

Any attempt to label the protesters sitting on a road, peacefully and in opposition to the atrocities and genocide, as inciting violence is gravely irresponsible and undermines truth in journalism.

### **A History Lesson for Australian Journalists**

The MUA has a long and proud history of supporting the colonised, the oppressed and the victims of unjust wars, exploitation and discrimination. We have often rallied, protested, demonstrated and taken industrial action in defence of these principles, and this has more often than not been described as "illegal" by the government and the police of the day, only for the positions we have fought for to be celebrated and vindicated in the fullness of time.

Recently the MUA celebrated the contribution of maritime workers boycotting 600 vessels used to maintain Dutch colonisation of Indonesia in the aftermath of the Second World War. In supporting striking Indonesia seafarers we were roundly condemned by the Australian media for our efforts including journalists of the day calling for Indonesian seafarers to be rounded up by police and thrown in internment camps; the very same seafarers who had fought or served alongside Australian seafaring comrades in the fight against fascist Japan.

We will not be lectured by conservative journalists or politicians or the police who would have condemned protests against the Vietnam War or would have put forward specious and immoral legal, economic and social defences of South African Apartheid during the 70s, 80s and early 90s only to support Mandela, the man they labelled a terrorist during his fight to destroy the inherently racist Apartheid system.

The MUA Sydney Branch will continue supporting efforts around Australia and throughout the world to deliver justice for Palestinians. This includes an immediate ceasefire, an end to the occupation of Gaza and a long-term solution for peace in accordance with United Nations Resolutions and until such time as the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions determines justice has prevailed.

We will continue to join with other maritime, transport workers and trade unionists who are prepared to defend the adage 'Peace is union business'.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Keating', with a small dot at the end of the signature.

Paul Keating  
Sydney Branch Secretary  
Maritime Union of Australia