

ADELAIDE FESTIVAL OF IDEAS

17-20 October 2013

ANWAR IBRAHIM



IN CONVERSATION WITH
WALEED ALY



19 OCTOBER 2013

Dissent and Democracy: an audience with Anwar Ibrahim

This podcast is from [afoi 2013](#)

Anwar Ibrahim is an internationally recognised champion of democracy. He has spent years championing free and fair electoral processes in Malaysia at great personal and political cost. Imprisoned and vilified, lauded around the world and lambasted in his own country, what sustains his ideals in an environment that appears devoid of political transparency? Where does he see the value in maintaining a viable opposition in Malaysia and how does this contribute to the development of democratic institutions?

In the wake of the controversial May elections Anwar will discuss why he's stubbornly stayed in public life and to what end.

Introduced by Senator Nick Xenophon. In conversation with ABC Broadcaster Waleed Aly.

*Presented by Flinders University, The University of Adelaide and Optical Superstore.
The Adelaide Festival of Ideas is recorded by Radio Adelaide through the support of [The Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, University of South Australia](#)*

Library and Flinders University Library, so many more people can participate in this important exchange of ideas through radio broadcasts, podcasts and online library archives.

<https://radio.adelaide.edu.au/dissent-and-democracy-an-audience-with-anwar-ibrahim/>



The entrance to Bonython Hall, The University of Adelaide



Mr Peter Hartung, director Adelaide Institute, surveying the scene outside the venue



Dr Anwar Ibrahim arrives



Dr Ibrahim with protesting students outside the venue



Dr Ibrahim, centre, about to enter Bonython Hall with Senator Nick Xenophon, upper right



**Inside the hall –Walid Ali, left, and Dr Ibrahim,
and the only microphone available for question-time**

Some points of interest raised in the discussion between Walid Ali and Dr Anwar Ibrahim:

The Malaysian government has threatened students on scholarships studying at Australian universities that if they were to attend any function where Dr Anwar Ibrahim is guest speaker, then their scholarship will be withdrawn. Against such measures, says Dr Ibrahim, students and others must protest and challenge this kind of authoritarian behaviour. He praises Senator Nick Xenaphon supporting basic freedoms of human rights, and opposing such student intimidation. He does concede that sometimes bi-lateral trade and cross-border investments override such freedoms, which should not be compromised because our existence doesn't 'consist of statistics and numbers but people's wellbeing'. He talks about good governance and such other ideals because money and business 'should not be our raison d'être'.

He mentions the blindness or ambivalence/hypocrisy in diplomatic relations 'in Australian foreign policy that need to be corrected'. The Australian government sacrificed human rights in its response to the threat made against Malaysian students by not stating that Malaysian students 'studying in Australia should not be intimidated'. If it is maintained that Australia should not interfere, Anwar asks, 'then why talk about Aung San Suu Kyi? Why send troops to Iraq? Why deplore the work of the Taliban? Let it be! You take a position because we protect human dignity'.

It is obvious that Anwar Ibrahim is an idealist within whose mind concepts such as freedom, tolerance, justice, courage, hope and peace, for example, clash with authoritarianism, intolerance, hypocrisy and corruption. The discussion raises all current pressing political issues, and at the end of the conversation Anwar Ibrahim does mention how the UK and the USA derailed the Iranian democratic process in 1953 and installed a compliant Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi – all for the sake of satisfying the needs of a predatory oil industry, and 'Syria is a tragedy of our time'.

Question Time:

Fredrick Töben: *Dr Ibrahim, I think you should come to Australia and join Justice Lander and assist him with his corruption commission. What you've said is very interesting. Are you aware that in the western democracies everything is possible. You are allowed to deny the existence of God but you are not allowed to question the Holocaust – and I'll finish on this, and I spent time in London just as Senator Nick spent time in Malaysia, and I can't travel to Europe because there's an arrest warrant on me. Do you favour the curtailment of asking questions about historical events?*

Walid Ali: *Nice easy one to begin, would you –*

Anwar Ibrahim: *Of course I don't. I know, I know your clique, the late Roger Garaudy, the great French intellectual, had to suffer the same ordeal. I mean, he was just questioning and of course in France you can condemn God but you can't criticise the Holocaust, I mean, question the Holocaust. I mean, I think you talk about the liberal tradition, you must allow, not of course to abuse, to insult race or religion, but you must allow for a discourse, and I do not share that view at all, and you are right the fact that you use laws to forbid even a healthy discussion discourse. I, having said that, I must say that I believe that it did happen. I am clearly against Hitler and his atrocities – no question about it – against the Jews or minorities, but to deny the right to even engage in a discussion discourse, to me, is unacceptable.*

Walid Ali: *Can I just – a follow-up to that. You say, for example, there shouldn't be hate speech. The argument, particularly in Europe is that something like Holocaust denial in and of itself amounts to hate speech because it only exists in connection with a political agenda that legitimises what happened, and in some senses would like to see it happen again. I'm not suggesting that is necessarily the attitude of this particular questioner but that's very much the reasoning that prevails particularly in Europe given the historical memory of that episode. Is there any circumstance in which you would accept that that sort of curtailment needs to happen given the social circumstances that exist in a particular country?*

Anwar Ibrahim: *Walid, that's right, but the law must be clear and consistent with any attempt to preach hatred either to minorities or religion. But they should not deny the possibility of questions to be raised. In the specific case of Roger Garaudy, the great French intellectual, was some of the basic questions raised. I disagree with Ahmadinejad, for example, the Holocaust denier, and I think to me is quite absurd his contention-position which the new Iranian president tries to adjust. OK? But my point is should you use these laws specific to one case and then to deny any possibility of a discussion or discourse, and that is my position, and I don't believe you should deny the right to be able to engage in healthy, vibrant discourse.*

Download discussion at:

https://radio.adelaide.edu.au/wpcontent/uploads/2014/10/18_anwar.mp3