

Workers and youth in Australia denounce genocide in Gaza

Our reporters

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Tens of thousands of people joined protests around Australia last weekend to oppose the Israeli onslaught on the people of Gaza. Rallies or marches were held in the main cities, including Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Canberra, defying threats by Labor state governments and police commanders to ban or shut down demonstrations.

In addition to our initial coverage yesterday, WSWs correspondents interviewed further participants.

At the 10,000-strong Melbourne rally, Moe, who works in the construction industry, said: “I came today to support the good cause of freeing the people of Palestine from being locked away in their own homes and treated like prisoners, and to march to give my support to those who are falling victim to Israeli forces.”

Moe condemned the Australian Labor government’s expenditure of \$368 billion on nuclear submarines, as part of the militarist AUKUS alliance. “The government is spending unnecessary funds, rather than spending it here in Australia and educating the Australian people from all different backgrounds to know how to move forward, rather than causing conflicts in other backyards... But the people here at this demonstration have brains and they know the difference between right and wrong.”

Abdul, a civil engineering student, explained: “The reason I’m here is that we know the situation in Palestine is getting harder and harder every day. So we’re here to support them. We are against what is happening there. We’re against young children and women being killed.

“The Israelis cut the water to Gaza, the electricity. Even before that, there were a lot of restrictions on the Palestinians. They were not allowed to bring in anything from other countries... Among the people, as we know, most of them are young kids and women. I am from Afghanistan. I know about war. My family moved from Afghanistan to Pakistan and I know how war is, how difficult it is, especially for young children.”

Abdul spoke in support of an international anti-war movement. “When in one place war finishes, then in another place war starts, and I do not think that this is just a coincidence,” he said. “There are some people behind that, planning that—finishing the Afghan war and they’re now starting the Palestine war. And before there was the Iraq war, there is always war.

“But the people don’t want war, we want peace. You ask any civilian, any normal person of any country—nobody wants war, everyone wants peace. In Australia, you stop any normal person, they will say ‘I don’t want war.’ The powerful people are the

ones who don’t want peace.”

Mahdi commented: “The mainstream media like to portray Israel as the actual victim of Palestine, but I would like to ask the question—where else have you seen a victim having control over their oppressors’ border, food, electricity and actually being able to control that and turn it off?

“So we have seen for more than 70 years of oppression against the Palestinian people and the whole world is actually supporting their oppressors, not the people being oppressed, which is very sad to see. It is unprecedented that we have the whole world media, and the whole world superpowers going for their own agenda, and not supporting the oppressed ones.”

Mahdi denounced suggestions that pro-Palestine statements and actions were anti-Semitic. “I think that is disgusting,” he said. “We have a lot of orthodox Jewish rabbis who are against the state of Israel. Are you going to say they are anti-Semitic or supporters of Hamas? Supporting Palestine means that you are just a supporter of human rights, you want to be the voice of people who have no voice to speak out. That doesn’t mean we’re anti-Semitic.”

Suzie, originally from Lebanon, said: “I’m here because I am against the war, innocent children are dying, women are dying, and they’re targeting civilians. So the Israeli military are not really targeting Hamas as they say, or military groups. The comments from government ministers about Palestinians being ‘animals’ are disgusting. You can’t look down on people like that and call them animals. For us, we’re not against actual Jews but rather against the Zionists. We were living together at one stage. But now the aim of the Zionists is to take all of Palestine.”

Jaydon explained that his girlfriend has a Palestinian family background. “Her connecting to her roots, having conversations like that has really helped me understand the severity of the issue with the Palestine conflict, the Israeli occupation, and the colonialist expansion of Israel,” he said.

“Essentially there was a break-out of Gaza, the open-air prison that essentially Gazans have been stuck in for almost 75-100 years. A place where they just get randomly bombed and they have very poor water quality. A lot of people have been focused on Hamas and their violent actions and everything, but the real conversation needs to be around Israel and its occupation and how it has created this environment.”

Jaydon spoke of the Albanese Labor government’s complicity: “There is obviously a massive propaganda campaign out there, and

it's really disappointing to see that from our prime minister. I have come a long way from trying to separate myself from that propaganda and it's really hard. You are brought up in an environment where people are just telling you false things, and that make it seem like it's normal, that's the most dangerous thing. The last three-four years of my life, I have been trying to find credible sources and doing credible research."

On police suppression of protest actions in Australia and internationally, he replied: "It's getting ridiculous, and another excuse for them to ramp up their police powers against protestors. And this is to quell any resistance, whether for the Palestinian struggle or the indigenous struggles, climate change... They are increasing their police presence and powers."

At a previous demonstration in Melbourne last week, Julian, a 19-year-old preparing to begin university next year, explained: "Well I'm Jewish, living here in Melbourne, and all the mainstream media sites have put out articles saying, 'Jewish leaders support Israel against Palestine.' It's very misleading, I think. A lot of people aren't very informed about what's actually happening. They see the headlines about '300 killed' or whatever, but they don't know that in retaliation to this, and for the last 20 years, Gaza's been a sort of open-air concentration camp.

"Israel controls the flow of supplies in and out. So in retaliation to this attack by a fringe group, they've cut off water, food supply, power supply to over two million people, 44 percent of whom are under the age of 15. This is directly in violation of basically every tenet of international law. It's a war crime. The United Nations General Assembly resolution 37/43 legalises violent reaction to an occupying force. So collective punishment, retaliation to civilians in response to this, is just unacceptable."

Asked about support for Israel within Jewish communities in Australia, Julian said: "A lot of people grew up in the Zionist organisations and with that sort of mentality. So there's this sort of cognitive dissonance between what they think of the situation, which is a group of terrorists harassing Israel and being anti-Semitic, versus the reality, which is an occupying force systematically ethnically cleansing a minority. The reality that many people don't know, is that the Israeli government wiped out any secular liberation groups in favour of Hamas, so they'd have more of an excuse in the global sphere, to continue their campaign of ethnic cleansing.

"No atrocities that Israel commits on a daily basis—the pogroms in the West Bank, the continued settler colonialism, the shrinking of Palestinian living areas, the lack of freedom of movement—none of that is actually spoken about in the media. You only hear, 'Hamas this, Hamas that,' and it's just an extreme misrepresentation by the mainstream media."

Asked about a socialist and internationalist perspective, uniting Jewish and Palestinian workers and working class people globally, he replied: "Yes. I agree with that—no war but class war."

At Saturday's 8,000-strong Sydney rally, Lilly, a young woman, said: "I have Palestinian heritage but even without that it's about having empathy for the people who are being oppressed, who have had their land stolen. I'm here to show support for the people who need it and that goes for both the Palestinians who are being slaughtered and for the Israelis who are also going to be killed in

the midst of everything. I am here to make sure I am on the right side of history."

Asked what she thought of the attitude of the Albanese government, she replied: "I have never actually thought that governments actually care about the people anyway. It's all about greed and land. Zionism and Judaism are not the same thing. They are using religion to try to have some reason to claim land."

Lilly thought what Hamas had done was atrocious, but the source of the situation lay with Israel. "Israel has been doing this, with or without Hamas. Since 1948 they were doing the atrocities that they are still committing today. For a lot of people history started a week ago, they don't have the knowledge and context needed to understand that Israel is the root cause of everything."

At the 5,000-strong march in Brisbane, Mark, a social sciences student, said: "Israel should know better not to persecute people, especially considering their own history. We have to oppose the apartheid in Israel, where they are making ghettos for Palestinians, which is really ironic given what was happening to Jewish people not too long ago.

"It is really repulsive... I am not saying that all Jewish people are responsible, but the Netanyahu regime. A lot of the Jewish workers are not standing for Netanyahu or his actions against Palestine. A Jewish ethno-state is particularly repugnant to any democratic conception."

After some discussion about the Fourth International's opposition to the creation of the Israeli state in 1948 and its perspective of fighting for a unified socialist state of Arab and Jewish workers, Mark commented:

"It's going to be sad how many Jewish people are going to die too as a result of Netanyahu's policies. Military service there is compulsory so all those Israelis who were fighting against apartheid will now be forcibly made to fight for apartheid."

Asked about the connection between the Albanese government's backing for Israel's violence and its Voice referendum proposal, Mark said: "They are fine with the persecution of Palestinians, but they are very silent on what is happening with Aboriginal deaths in custody and high incarceration rates."



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