

Australian students denounce Labor foreign minister for complicity in Gaza genocide

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18 October 2024

Dozens of students and other protesters demonstrated against Australian Labor government Foreign Minister Penny Wong as she delivered a speech at the University of Tasmania Tuesday night, condemning her role as part of a government which has supported Israel's ongoing onslaught against the people of Palestine and Lebanon.

Over the past year, the public activities of Wong and other senior members of the government have been carefully curated, to shield them from hostility to the genocide. The event in Tasmania showed why that is, providing a vivid display of the enormous gulf that exists between the government, the political establishment as a whole and broad layers of young people and workers.

Wong was to give a speech at the university on international relations and policy. Her speech was interrupted by protesters on about a dozen occasions.

Demonstrators interjected to denounce the Australian government's refusal to sanction Israel and abstention in a vote on a resolution tabled at the UN in September calling for an immediate end to the bombardment.

One demonstrator called out, "Israel is burning people alive," while another told Wong, "You should be ashamed."

Wong was forced to restart her speech multiple times, taking 45 minutes to deliver the 25-minute presentation. Her response to the protesters was filled with contempt and frustration as she addressed none of the substantive issues in her replies.

To do so would be to reveal the real role of the Labor government—along with the governments of all the imperialist powers—in politically, militarily and logistically aiding and backing the Zionist state's campaign of ethnic cleansing as it threatens a region-wide war in the Middle East.

Protesters were forcibly removed from the venue by university security, but continued their demonstration outside. They waited outside for Wong to emerge after the event.

After more than an hour of hoping the protesters would leave, Wong finally left the building, surrounded by security,

bodyguards and police. Protesters continued to chant and denounce Wong and some were physically moved away by police.

The Labor government under Anthony Albanese has been among the most vociferous proponents of the fraudulent justification for Israel's ethnic cleansing campaign—that it "has a right to defend itself."

Wong echoed this in her speech on Tuesday, condemning Hamas and saying that the events of October 7 recall "humanity's darkest moments." At the same time she made mealy-mouthed statements calling for "de-escalation" and "peace," but on the basis of "Israel's security."

Wong declared support for a Palestinian state, knowing full well that the "two-state solution" is a fantasy, as evidenced by the utter destruction wrought on Gaza over the past year.

The genocidal assault has destroyed every university, school and hospital in the strip, and seen the killing of about 200,000 Palestinians in Gaza according to the *Lancet* medical journal.

The world knows that Israel's assault has nothing to do with defence. The Zionist state could not continue the bombardment one more week without the continued support of the imperialist powers, including Australia.

Wong presented Australia as a minor player in the Middle East, but one that had promoted "peace."

In reality, Australian imperialism has been actively engaged in the genocidal campaign of the Zionist state. The Pine Gap spy base in central Australia has likely provided intelligence used by the Israeli Defense Forces to target their strikes on Gaza. Meanwhile, shipments from Australia carrying vital military hardware continues to be sent with the full backing of the government.

In the days after her speech, that key involvement was highlighted by the revelation that US bombers had received unspecified assistance in Australia before bombing Houthi rebel forces in Yemen.

Feigning concern over the killing of aid workers in Gaza and other parts of the Middle East, Wong attempted to use

her speech to tout a “Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel.” But such declarations are less than worthless in the face of Israel’s imperialist-backed, wholesale slaughter.

Indeed, the Labor government’s true attitude to the cold-blooded murder of aid workers was revealed in April, when Australian Zomi Frankcom was killed along with other World Central Kitchen staff by Israel. Wong failed to even name Israel as the perpetrator of the war crime in a statement on X/Twitter on the day.

While Wong lambasts the protesters for “not listening,” the Labor government has spent the last 12 months attacking and intimidating anti-genocide protesters, who have been fraudulently labelled “antisemitic” by the corporate media and political establishment.

These anti-democratic attacks reached a new level last week with the arrest of three Western Sydney University students who were engaged in a peaceful protest against the complicity of the Australian government and universities in Israel’s war crimes.

University students across the country have been engaged in demonstrations and other forms of protest for more than a year in response to the horrors in Gaza, joining a mass anti-war movement involving millions of students and workers globally.

This has included the establishment of encampments on the university campuses including at the University of Tasmania (UTas) which has more than 30,000 enrolled students. The campus is in the Tasmanian state capital of Hobart—a city with a population of about 250,000.

Wong’s disdainful response to the protesters at UTas is that of a representative of the ruling class which has adopted a policy of war and austerity. It underscores the bankruptcy of the perspective that the genocide in Gaza, and imperialist war more broadly, can be ended by making plaintive appeals to governments, individual politicians and university managements.

This dead-end perspective was promoted by the predominantly pseudo-left organisers of the student encampments at UTas and elsewhere.

Like the encampments at the other universities, the UTas encampment was packed up. One of the first in the country to be set up in May, the UTas encampment lasted about three months.

It, like several others, was disbanded by its organisers based on fraudulent claims of “victory” because they had done backroom deals with university managements who made paltry statements agreeing to disclose some of their ties to military companies.

Organisers at UTas published a statement nearly two months after they packed up the encampment. In it, they say

they “decided the encampment strategy was not the most effect [sic] way we can push for UTas to meet the demands and end their complicity in the Palestinian genocide.”

But the experiences of the past 12 months show that the fight to end the genocide is not a question of which particular set of protest tactics is most effective.

The key question is that of what fundamental political perspective students and youth take up in the struggle against the genocide.

The only realistic program was laid out at a Special General Meeting (SGM) of students initiated by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at Western Sydney University (WSU) earlier this month.

That meeting stressed that the only way forward against the bombardment of Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon was for students to understand the root causes of the slaughter.

IYSSE members outlined that Israel’s war crimes are not some isolated event, but intimately bound up with the broader geostrategy of the imperialist powers led by the US, which threatens a nuclear third world war. Imperialist militarism is a result, not of bad leaders, but the fundamental economic contradictions of the global decline of capitalism.

Already, US imperialism and its allies are engaged in a war against Russia in Ukraine and they are preparing for open conflict with China in this region—a conflict in which Labor is deepening preparations for Australia to play the role of Washington’s key attack dog.

For youth and students to take forward the struggle against genocide, war and anti-democratic attacks against protesters, they cannot place their hopes in the leaders of capitalist governments to “see reason” or have a “change of heart” based on moral appeals.

They need to turn to the only social force in society that can end the capitalist system which is their cause: the world working class armed with a socialist, revolutionary perspective.



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