

Australian students denounce attacks on Gaza and hypocrisy of Labor's Voice campaign

Our reporters

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Students and young people in Australia have denounced the fraud of the Labor government's claim to be giving a "Voice" to oppressed Aboriginal people while simultaneously declaring its support for the Netanyahu government's genocidal onslaught against Palestinians.

As part of their campaign for an active boycott of the Voice referendum tomorrow, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth wing of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), spoke to university students in Sydney and Newcastle this week.

IYSSE members explained that the Voice, an indigenous advisory body to parliament, has nothing to do with improving the dreadful social conditions faced by the majority of Aboriginal people. Both the Yes and No camps have declared their intention to slash spending on indigenous programs including health and education.

The phoney character of Labor's professed support for the interests of indigenous Australians is starkly exposed by its denunciation this week of the struggle of Palestinians in Gaza against 75 years of Zionist oppression.

As the SEP has insisted, "the struggle to end the oppression of Aborigines, and the struggle for the social rights of the working class, are one and the same." In the same way, the fight for the democratic rights of the Israeli working class is inseparable from the struggle of Palestinians against Zionist oppression.

In each case, what is required is a unified movement of the working class, regardless of race, religion, nationality, gender or sexuality, against the capitalist profit system itself.

Mariam, a nursing student at Western Sydney University, said, "What is happening in Palestine is the

result of 75 years of occupation. The killing of Palestinian people has been happening for 75 years. No one talks about it. The media completely ignores it. When the Palestinians finally try to resist in response to what they've been through, then they are terrorists. They are not!

"The Australian media is also completely ignoring what is happening. Netanyahu said he's going to cut electricity, water, food supplies, everything. The Palestinians have every right to resist. Australia supposedly supports democracy. Where is the democracy?"

"In the referendum campaign for the Voice, the government and the media are saying we need to acknowledge Indigenous rights, but when something happens in Palestine, they ignore the rights of the Palestinians. This is hypocrisy.

"The Australian government claims to support human rights. If that is so, then they should act on it. They have said for years they are going to improve the lives of the Aboriginal people, but nothing is changing. Now they are banning Palestinian protest rallies, banning the right to protest."

At the University of Newcastle, the IYSSE spoke to **Wasan**, who said she had been attacked online for opposing the criminal assault on Palestine.

"People have rallied in Sydney and the government declared people are celebrating death. It's not about that! No one wants to see other people dying, but the Palestinian people have been oppressed for so many years and now they're being called the terrorists. The Prime Minister [Anthony Albanese] says Israel has a right to defend itself—how? They've taken the homes and land of Palestinian people. The media doesn't show this."

Wasan referred to a video she saw online in which a

Palestinian lady was crying outside her home after it was destroyed: “Women and children and the elderly have been killed, hospitals and schools have been bombed—is that okay because they’re Palestinian? They say they don’t want to support terrorism and death, then why are they supporting Israel? Ethics and morals have got nothing to do with it. The truth is very clear.”

She said she didn’t know much about the Voice but was shocked when she heard it was promoted as a way of saving money: “They’ve oppressed Aboriginal people for years and now they want to save more money. They should build hospitals and schools, but we also need jobs. The government is making the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

“I feel like it’s similar for Aboriginal people and Palestinian people. Aboriginal people were originally here, many years back, it was just them and they have been oppressed.”

Originally from Sydney, Wasan said she was shocked at the limited medical access available in Newcastle: “If you want to go see a doctor, good luck calling every medical centre in the area, they’re all booked. They don’t do bulk-billing, so if someone has Medicare they can’t use it, they must pay for it. You can only imagine what it’s like for people who live further away.

“I feel like nowadays, no matter how much people are voicing their concerns it’s going nowhere. The government knows what’s happening, they just don’t care. They have the power to make massive changes. All the money they spend on war, imagine what that could be used for.

“We need something more. If everyone were to go on strike all at once, that could have an impact. But I heard about nurses recently who went on strike, and they were fined, so it needs to be done together.

“If no one says anything now and nothing changes, things are only going to get worse.”

Mithun, also at the University of Newcastle, is studying software engineering. He said, “The conflict feels like it has reached a boiling point. The Palestinians have suffered years of oppression within Israel, it has been very one-sided if you look at the death toll. Whilst I don’t condone innocent people getting caught in between, I think that Israel is responsible.

“A lot of people who aren’t aware of the history of the conflict have just been siding with the US who are

calling it a terrorist attack. This is the first time it has really hit the news in a while and everything the Palestinians have gone through is completely ignored.”

Asked what he thought of the Labor government supporting Israel whilst promoting the Voice to parliament, Mithun replied, “It is a contradiction, they are claiming to be giving the Aboriginal people some measure to be heard about their issues, and the Palestinians are being completely ignored. Right now, they are trying to suppress any pro-Palestine positions. They are trying to say that if you support the Palestinians, you support terrorists.”

Note: Under conditions of compulsory voting, which makes it a crime to urge a boycott of the vote itself, the SEP calls on workers and youth to register their opposition by casting informal ballots and join our active boycott campaign in the lead-up to October 14, that goes well beyond the individual act of voting.

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