

Australian workers and youth oppose the Voice, denounce Labor's support for genocide in Gaza

Our reporters
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On October 14, a referendum held in Australia to enshrine an indigenous Voice to Parliament was resoundingly defeated. Socialist Equality Party (SEP) members and supporters campaigned at polling booths in Sydney, Melbourne, Newcastle and Brisbane calling for an active boycott of the Voice.

In advancing an active boycott the SEP warned that the promotion of the Voice by the Labor Party was to cloak its support for US-led wars and continued assault on the living conditions of workers behind a progressive façade.

The SEP warned that the Voice would only deepen the already dire conditions confronting indigenous communities as part of a broader offensive against the working class. If implemented the Voice would have primarily benefited the affluent Aboriginal elite.

The No camp, headed by the Liberal-National Coalition, is based on a defence of the status quo and thinly veiled racist dog-whistling. Both the Yes and No camps are united in their support for the anti-democratic 1901 Constitution, which does not guarantee a single democratic right. Both declare they will cut federal social spending.

The SEP's call for an active boycott was aimed to unite workers against the escalating assault on their social conditions and the ongoing wars raging in Gaza and Ukraine, which threaten to spiral into a Third World War.

The underlying unity in the Voice campaign was starkly revealed just prior to referendum day, when Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, fully backed by the Coalition, gave his full-throated support for the genocidal assault on Gaza carried out by the Israeli regime. He joined the chorus of other governments worldwide which are fully backing the onslaught.

Workers and youth reacted in shock and disgust to this announcement, with many telling SEP campaigners that this caused them to change their vote from Yes to No. They pointed to the hypocrisy of Albanese claiming to oppose the oppression of Aboriginal people, while supporting the bombing of Palestinians.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is featuring comments from workers and young people from the working-class suburb of Bankstown in Sydney, which has a substantial Middle Eastern

population, and the Melbourne suburb of Meadow Heights which has a large immigrant and refugee community.

Timi, a university student, who was spoken to in Bankstown said, "I support Palestine because it's the right thing. The media don't show the whole situation. They only show the Israeli side. They are also pushing fake news about what the Palestinians are doing.

"It is to try to make people believe that the Palestinians are terrorists, but they are just trying to defend themselves against 75 years of ethnic cleansing. They are the victims here. They fight back for one day and there are all these lies and slander."

On the Voice, "The Aboriginal people here should have more rights. The same things that are happening to the Palestinians happened to them—colonisation, ethnic cleansing, trying to kick away the original inhabitants.

"The government is talking about giving Aboriginal people their rights back, but when the Palestinian people demand their rights, they are denounced as terrorists," he said.

Tarik, from Gaza, said, "This has been happening for the last 75 years. It's a genocide and apartheid. We live in a world of double standards. When the Palestinians try to get their minimum rights to live, they are attacked. This is the world's largest open-air prison. Israel controls the travel, the water, the food, and people are dying. I lived there for 14 years. The only thing the Palestinian people have is education.

"There are all these claims about Hamas slaughtering children and raping women. This is fake news. In a few days, Israel dropped nearly as many bombs on Gaza as the US did in Afghanistan in a whole year. 6,000 tons of bombs, but nobody blinked an eye," he said.

A **Palestinian accountant** explained, "My father and mother fled when Israel was established in 1948. They are stateless. The occupation is a shame on the international community. It accepts this attack on our rights and allows it to occur. When there are no rights, that's what leads people towards violence and fighting. If they have nothing to survive, the only way to resist is through military attacks on Israel. Let them travel, go to schools, work and there will no violence.

“Netanyahu is corrupt, he is changing the court system, he is unpopular. This war is his escape route. He is trying to increase the violence to stay in power. Who is paying for this? It’s the civilians. Palestinian casualties will be at least 10,000 with this war, we have to stop it” he said.

Asked about the bipartisan program of austerity cuts to social spending, the worker said, “We should be spending more on healthcare, education and pensioners rather than supporting these politicians who are just increasing tensions and wasting all on the money on weapons.”

On the Voice, he said, “I don’t think we need a referendum to get advice from the Aboriginal people. That should be a default as a courtesy. Why do they need to change the Constitution to do this? We have spent more than \$400 million on this referendum, when we have pensioners who don’t have enough money and are living day to day. Why don’t we give this money to the pensioners and the Aboriginal people?”

Dani, 28, a public sector employee, said, “The majority of people and media are forgetting the occupation that’s going on in Palestine and that it’s not just a random attack. Even though I don’t agree at all with Hamas’s actions, Israel is not an innocent party in all of this”.

On the referendum, Dani said, “The Voice is not what Anthony Albanese is trying to make it out to be. Even in the polls Aboriginal voters are voting no. They fundamentally know that it’s not going to do anything for them and they want real change. In the Northern Territory they’re living in inhumane circumstances, this is Australia and we’ve got people living that way” he said.

“The \$300 million plus spent on this referendum could have been spent on Aboriginal homes, places where they live. The Voice is just for those Aboriginals that are privileged or in positions of power in government or society and not the Aboriginals that really need it.

“A good solid No vote is a big wake up call for them [the Labor government] and it’s to say that we’re not going to be pressured by your fake promises. We didn’t get sucked into your identity politics and your attempt to play on our emotions, and Aboriginals didn’t either.”

Saide, a schoolteacher in Melbourne from a Turkish background, explained that she was initially leaning towards voting in favour of the Voice but was voting No in protest over the Albanese government’s support for the Israeli military. “What’s happening in Palestine at the moment changed my view—they [the federal government] are just behind Israel’s occupation,” she said. “I’m upset about what’s happening in Gaza at the moment, and that’s the reason I’m voting No.”

She continued: “The government sees Muslim people as terrorists. Israel has no right here—they can’t do that to innocent people. The Gazan people are living in an open-air prison and everyone’s closing their eyes on that. Albanese is upset about the protests in support of Palestine—why? We have the right to protest, they can’t stop that.”

Saide spoke about the Voice referendum, “I don’t think a Voice is going to change anything. Give Aboriginal people their rights, give them housing, give them education, but a Voice is not going to deliver these things”.

She continued, “Albanese is not changing anything. The cost of living has risen. I’m living alone, getting a good wage, but I’m struggling. The rates have doubled, and my wage hasn’t doubled. Food prices have doubled, more than double maybe, the petrol prices are high, it’s really hard living on a normal wage. I’m not a big spender—if I’m struggling, I think the rest of Australia is struggling.”

Ahmad, a 56-year-old gardener originally from Eritrea, explained, “I have lived all my life as a refugee until I came to Australia. I can’t support someone occupying someone else’s country. My country was occupied by the Ethiopian government, my people fought for 30 years, and still, we are fighting for human rights. I can’t support someone occupying another country, wherever it is.

“It is like, if someone occupies your house, you can’t defend yourself? In Gaza, yes, this is genocide, for Israel to bomb like that. Forcing Palestinians to leave their homes, that’s not fair, that’s oppression of two million people who are living under siege for decades. Now America brings a warship, it’s not fair. How are the Palestinians going to get their rights? By asking permission from Israel?”

Zeynep, a schoolteacher, said that she had voted No to the Voice, “The government hasn’t given us enough information. I am all for Aboriginal rights—I’m a primary school teacher so I advocate that in the classroom, but this is very hazy to me.”

Zeynep was eager to discuss the crisis in the Middle East. “It’s a war crime, absolutely,” she said. “The Palestinian people can’t get water, they can’t get food, Gaza is an absolute prison. It’s been going on for years and years. It’s not stopping and our leaders are turning a blind eye. I have seen that they have also used white phosphorous. It’s absolutely disgusting.”

She continued, “The Australian government says Israel has a right to defend itself, but does it say the Palestinians have a right to defend themselves? Their land is occupied illegally, but as soon as they retaliate, they become the terrorist. It doesn’t make sense. It’s like someone coming into your home and saying, this is mine now, get out.”



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