

Australian unions complicit in Gaza genocide

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As millions of workers respond to the Israeli bombardment with shock and horror, the Zionist regime is only able to proceed with its genocide in Gaza due to a chain of political support extending from the world's imperialist governments and their satellites.

In Australia, the Labor administration, one of Washington's chief allies, has been as aggressive as any in its insistence of Israel's supposed "right to defend itself," through the mass murder of Palestinian civilians. The central backer of the Labor government on this question, and on all attacks on social and democratic rights, is the trade union bureaucracy.

For more than a week after the Netanyahu regime declared war on the Palestinian people, Australia's union leadership said nothing at all, signalling their support for the onslaught.

Diametrically opposed to the unions' stance, a groundswell of working-class opposition to the genocide has emerged, including worker-organised protests by doctors, nurses, university staff and students, as well as mass rallies around the country.

There is a growing recognition at these demonstrations of the Australian government's role, with protesters chanting "shame, shame, Albanese" and carrying placards declaring that the prime minister "has blood on his hands."

Only in reaction to this did the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) come out with a statement, designed to cover its filthy role and head off a broader eruption of opposition to Israel and the complicit Labor government.

In the October 19 statement, the ACTU makes its adherence to the government line clear, drawing a false equivalency between the explosive anger of the oppressed Palestinian people and the Israeli state, which is backed by the full might of US and global imperialism.

Workers, Palestinian, Israeli, Australian or otherwise do not rate a mention in the statement, which "calls on the Australian Government to exercise all avenues of diplomacy to stop the bombing and the ground assault by Israel into Gaza and call for an immediate ceasefire."

The hollow character of this plea is emphasised by the fact that the statement does not contain a single word of criticism of any Australian government, whether for their continuing support of the Netanyahu regime, or their efforts to criminalise pro-Palestine rallies at home.

In other words, Australia's leading union bureaucrats are

declaring that workers must stand aside and wait for a "diplomatic solution" to emerge from the same forces of world imperialism that have unfailingly backed 75 years of brutal occupation, and presided over decades of devastating attacks throughout the Middle East.

The ACTU's attempt to conceal the unions' total support for the Labor government with a mealy-mouthed statement of "concern" is exposed as a fraud by the actions of other unions, which have threatened and cracked down on rank-and-file workers who have opposed Israel's war crimes.

Perhaps the most striking demonstration of the unions' hostility to the cause of oppressed Palestinians was an attempt last week by the United Services Union (USU) to distance itself from a petition signed by more than a thousand workers.

The petition, drafted by members of the New South Wales (NSW) branch of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), called for "an immediate suspension of all hostilities and an immediate end to the blockade of Gaza... an end to the illegal occupation of Palestinian land and an end to apartheid and ethnic cleansing."

The statement was not by any means a call to arms directed towards workers, but a plea to the state and federal Labor governments, declaring, "We support the demonstrations around Australia for Palestine, and call on governments and police authorities to facilitate them."

Even this was completely unacceptable to the USU bureaucracy, which responded by sending members a communiqué declaring, "All members are advised the United Services Union was not consulted about the circulation of this petition nor was the union a party to its distribution. Members who choose to sign this petition do so independently of the Union."

In utterly cynical fashion, the message concluded with the union's customary slogan, "By your side." The USU leadership has made clear whose side it stands by—not workers calling for "an end to apartheid and ethnic cleansing," but Zionist oppressors and the Australian governments that support them.

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) also issued a statement disavowing the petition, declaring, "While it is the democratic right of all people to hold their own views on complex matters such as this conflict, the NSWNMA remains steadfast in opposing all war, and like many others, we

call for a peaceful outcome.”

The position of the NSWNMA is clearly expressed in the fact that the union said nothing until after both a snap protest by health workers at Liverpool Hospital in Sydney and the circulation of the petition.

Even then, the NSWNMA bureaucracy could not bring itself to condemn, or even mention, Israel’s targeted bombing of the Al Ahli Hospital. An organisation that says nothing about the mass murder of doctors and nurses, in Palestine or anywhere else, has branded itself as an enemy of health workers everywhere.

According to the *Daily Telegraph*, the Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) also issued a statement declaring that the petition “does not represent the views of the RTBU.”

The USU response was reported on Twitter/X by Fahad Ali, a University of Sydney academic, NTEU member and co-organiser of recent pro-Palestinian rallies in Sydney. In a subsequent post, Ali wrote: “A very angry @USUNSW official called me to claim that the union has had to spend \$7000 on a mass SMS campaign because we “don’t care about death on both sides” and misrepresented our petition as an official USU initiative.”

Firstly, the USU claim is false on both counts. The petition calls for “peace, equality and justice for Palestinians, Israelis, and everyone in the Middle East.” Far from any misrepresentation, the USU is not mentioned at all.

But what is of far more significance to members of the USU is what the bureaucracy’s response reveals: The union leadership is so closely aligned with the Labor government’s support for the genocidal Netanyahu regime that it will readily spend thousands of dollars (of members’ dues) to try to discredit any opposing political view.

That the union bureaucracy is tacitly, and in some instances, actively supporting the worst war crimes of this century, exposes its class character. The bureaucracy is anti-working class, instead representing the interests of an affluent and parasitic layer, tied by a thousand strings to the Labor government, the major corporations and imperialism.

It should be noted that historically, and no doubt today, Australia’s union leaders have had the closest ties, not only to big business Labor politicians, but also to the US embassy, out of which American imperialism’s intelligence agencies operate.

The rotten foreign policy of the unions is entirely bound up with their reactionary domestic role. For forty years, the union bureaucracies have been the chief force suppressing the class struggle and imposing one assault after another on workers’ jobs, wages and conditions.

The unions’ alignment with the Israeli war is a signal that they will step up this onslaught, in the face of growing rank-and-file opposition. As the WSWs has explained, the bombardment of Gaza is one front in a developing global war spearheaded by the US, against Iran, Russia and China.

The Australian Labor government is playing a frontline role in this new imperialist redivision of the world, particularly functioning as an attack dog in Washington’s plans for a devastating conflict with Beijing. The associated military build-up requires the diversion of vast social resources to the war machine, an accompanying assault on workers’ living standards and a crackdown on widespread anti-war opposition.

With their line on Gaza, the unions are signalling that they will act as the police force for this agenda. Organisations that do nothing amid crimes that recall nothing so much as the horrors of the Nazi regime are making plain that there is no line that they will not cross, including supporting a militarist agenda that threatens world war.

The position of the Australian unions is a direct rejection of an urgent plea issued by Palestinian unions and professional associations. In an October 16 statement, “An Urgent Call from Palestinian Trade Unions: End All Complicity, Stop Arming Israel,” they called on unions and workers’ organisations worldwide to take urgent action, including:

- To refuse to build weapons destined for Israel.
- To refuse to transport weapons to Israel.
- To pass motions in their trade union to this effect.
- To take action against complicit companies involved in implementing Israel’s brutal and illegal siege, especially if they have contracts with your institution.
- Pressure governments to stop all military trade with Israel, and in the case of the US, funding to it.

The Australian unions are doing the direct opposite, ensuring that there is no disruption whatsoever to the major corporations, including in the ports and arms sectors, as the genocide proceeds.

That demonstrates that a response to the Palestinian call must come from workers themselves, in a rebellion against the pro-imperialist union bureaucracies. Independent factory and workplace committees should be established everywhere, to rally opposition to the onslaught on Gaza, and to plan concrete measures to end the genocide, including strikes and other industrial action.

The Socialist Equality Party urges all workers seeking to participate in this struggle to contact us and discuss establishing a rank-and-file committee today.



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