

Australian protesters prevent Israeli ship from docking at Melbourne port

Our reporters**9 November 2023**

A pro-Palestine protest yesterday afternoon by around 300 people forced Israeli shipping line ZIM to reschedule the arrival of a cargo ship into the Port of Melbourne.

For almost 12 hours, demonstrators occupied the road leading to the Victorian International Container Terminal (VICT), preventing trucks, some carrying ZIM containers, from accessing the port.

ZIM, Israel's largest shipping company, has a long history of supplying the military, and last month reaffirmed its commitment to serving the "national needs of Israel," offering the Netanyahu regime all of its ships and infrastructure for the country's onslaught against Gaza.

Those participating in the protest included members of the Palestinian community, as well as students, young people and activists. The rally garnered a wide audience online, with at least one video receiving more than 145,000 views on Twitter/X.

Yesterday's action is part of an international wave of protests, with expanding mass rallies in cities throughout the globe, including a 40,000-strong event in Melbourne on Sunday. It reflects a strong sentiment of opposition among broad sections of the Australian population to the genocide being carried out by the Zionist state of Israel, with the full support of imperialist governments worldwide, including the Albanese Labor government in Australia.

In Australia and globally, there is a developing sense among workers and young people that the atrocities taking place in the Middle East must not just be condemned, but actively fought against. The unanimous complicity of world leaders is making clear to growing layers that the road of appeals to parliamentarians will only lead to a dead end. The question of action targeting workplaces and industry is increasingly in the air.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to some of those who took part in the demonstration

yesterday.

A driver whose truck was blocked by the action spoke out in support of the protest. He said of the attacks against Gaza, "It's a disgrace. I've seen a lot of videos of people getting bombed, kids getting burned. Over here, people are trying to support them, putting their voice up. Albanese should look after the Australian people first rather than sending money to kill people overseas."

Mona, an accountant, said, "For the last month I've been unable to do my job, to be honest. I'm unable to concentrate. I'm physically there but I'm mentally not there.

"I'm really appreciative of the protest today, because it says that there are people who do not accept the grave injustice that is happening to the people in Gaza."

Mona has friends in Gaza, and spoke about the isolation they are experiencing with internet access now cut off: "They're very disconnected from each other, they don't know what is happening to other parts of Gaza."

Mona denounced the Australian government's support for the Israeli regime: "They are literally using tax from my wages to go and slaughter people, to commit genocide. They need to be held to account and we need to raise our voices. We need to make sure that we don't stop until this stops and Palestinians are given justice. Sadly I voted the Labor government in."

Mohammud, an engineer, said, "I believe the Labor government isn't representing the people as it should be. You can just look at the rallies, they show how much support there is [for Palestinians] from different types of people, different cultures and backgrounds."

Osama, who runs a car yard and attended the protest with his family, said, "Anybody that has a sense of humanity should come today. You see kids are dying, women are dying."

The Melbourne action is in line with protests that have occurred in several locations around the world in recent

days, in which ordinary people have sought to directly cut across the military and commercial interests of the Israeli regime.

On the West Coast of the US, a military supply ship ultimately bound for Israel was stalled for several hours by hundreds of protesting residents, first in Oakland, California, and then in Tacoma, Washington.

In Søborg, Denmark, protesters surrounded a factory owned by Terma, an arms company that produces components for Israeli Defence Force fighter jets. British protesters blockaded the road to the Bristol headquarters of Elbit Systems, a major Israeli weapons manufacturer. In Spain, 1,200 dockworkers in Barcelona announced Monday that they will refuse to service ships carrying war materiel to Israel.

These actions reflect the striving of the working class to take on the genocidal Israeli regime and its warmongering imperialist government backers. They are in line with a call from Palestinian unions for the support of workers internationally to block the supply of weapons and other supplies to Israel.

Workers around the world who seek to take action to support their Palestinian counterparts are coming into conflict with the union bureaucracies that claim to represent them.

One of the groups responsible for organising the demonstration, Trade Unionists for Palestine, stated on Facebook this morning that ZIM's forced schedule change was a "solid initial achievement for our campaign." A similar event, planned to take place at Port Botany in Sydney on Saturday when the same ship was originally expected to arrive, will proceed, although "it is almost certain there will not be any ZIM ship in Sydney."

A cursory look at shipping schedules reveals that ZIM vessels are regular visitors to Australian ports. The fact that the "Block the Boat" actions have focused solely on a single ship underscores the limited character of the action and the role of the official unions.

Despite the "Trade Unionists for Palestine" moniker, yesterday's protest was notable for the almost complete lack of an organised union presence. The reality is that this group, closely connected to the pseudo-left Solidarity, exists to cover over the refusal of Australia's unions to call strikes or in any way organise workers to oppose Israel's genocide in Gaza.

The presence of Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) Victorian Deputy Branch Secretary Dave Ball at the demonstration, and his speech, only served to underline the union's role in ensuring that there is minimal

disruption at the nation's ports, including the loading and unloading of Israeli ships.

Ball declared, "Your community will need to act independently on how we work out how we can stop those ships coming in here, but you will have the support of the MUA."

In other words, the MUA, whose members and officials are intimately connected to every aspect of shipping schedules and port operations, will not even offer advice on how ZIM vessels can be blocked. Instead, the union will continue to ensure its members are forced to load and unload these ships, while its officials offer mealy-mouthed words of "support" to protesters on shore.

In an attempt to justify the MUA's effective complicity in the genocide, Ball alluded to the possibility of fines against the union, if industrial action was taken to block port operations. The reality is that Australia's harsh anti-strike laws, implemented by successive Labor governments, have been enforced by the union bureaucracy since their creation.

The union leaderships are doing nothing because they are aligned with a Labor government that is as aggressive in its support for Israel's bombardment as any. The bureaucracy, moreover, is hostile to action by workers on any issue, from war, to the assault on jobs, wages and conditions. It is a parasitic and corporatist entity that collaborates daily with big business and capitalist governments.

The horrific situation in Palestine, and the US-led escalation of military preparations throughout the Middle East and more broadly, poses the burning need for workers to take immediate and concrete action, in opposition to Israel's genocide, and to prevent the onset of broader conflict.

The union bureaucrats have made clear they are hostile to such a struggle and are seeking to block it. That means workers must take matters into their own hands. Independent rank-and-file committees must be established, across the docks, the airports and in all essential industries, to prepare the industrial and political action required to block the genocide as part of a global movement of the working class.



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