

Sydney protest points to striving for working-class action to stop the genocide, but maritime union collaborates with Israel

Our reporters
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More than 500 workers and young people protested at Port Botany in Sydney on Saturday, opposing the presence of Israeli shipping line ZIM at Australian ports. The company is closely aligned with the Zionist state and has committed to serving the “national interests of Israel,” making all of its ships and infrastructure available for use in the Netanyahu regime’s assault on Palestine.

In addition to those attending on foot, around a dozen protesters rode jet skis flying Palestinian flags.

The event followed a protest in Melbourne last Wednesday, in which hundreds of demonstrators occupied the road into the port for around 12 hours, preventing trucks from entering to drop off cargo bound for ZIM ships. Similar actions have been held at US ports.

Rabi, a retired building worker, told *World Socialist Web Site* reporters, “I’m here to show my support for my brothers and sisters in Palestine. Even though they are on the other side of the world, we are trying to stop these organisations from delivering military weapons to Gaza.

“Hopefully, if we stand here, some of the people working at the docks and the unions will hear us, and they can get together to stop loading up these vessels and sending weapons and killing children.

“I understand that workers need to work, and this ship has probably got nothing to do with it, but there should be a stand against the companies backing countries that kill mothers and children and elderly people indiscriminately.

Elle, a student, said, “The most important protests are the ones that actually disrupt. Stopping a ship coming in and docking is very powerful.”

She came to the demonstration to “show my support for ending the illegal occupation of Gaza and Palestine” after experiencing firsthand the dead-end of appeals to parliamentarians.

She explained: “I am quite ashamed of [federal Labor

Foreign Minister] Penny Wong. She has not been doing anything. I’ve been emailing MPs, and most of the replies say, ‘we feel for both of them. We should look after citizens in Israel and in Gaza.’ They completely ignore that this has been going on for 75 years. This is not a war. This is genocide.

“We see time and time again governments around the world testing us, saying ‘how often can we get away with this?’, until it leads to a world war. We see it in Ukraine, Iran, Palestine, Congo, Syria.

“We can’t let this go. We need to make something for the world’s citizens, not just the world’s governments.”

These healthy sentiments, however, were provided with no way forward by the organisers.

The protest went ahead as scheduled, after organisers admitted on Thursday that no ZIM ship would be present, the company having changed its schedule in response to the Sydney and Melbourne actions being called. This was hailed by speakers at the rally as a “victory.”

But what organisers kept quiet as long as possible was that the ship supposedly targeted by the protests, the *Contship Dax*, was in fact docked at Port Botany for much of last week. Only on Friday, after the *World Socialist Web Site* had reported the regular presence of ZIM ships at Australian ports, and after questions were raised on social media, did Trade Unionists for Palestine organiser Paddy Gibson admit that this was indeed the case.

Trade Unionists for Palestine serves as a cover for the collaboration of the trade union bureaucracy with the Labor government and, ultimately, with Israel and its genocide. Just as its pseudo-left progenitor, Solidarity, provides an endless series of excuses and apologies for sell-out union wage agreements, Trade Unionists for Palestine is now seeking to provide a “safe” channel for workers’ opposition to the refusal of the bureaucracy to

call industrial action against Israel's horrific war crimes.

This is most starkly expressed in the duplicitous role of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA). The union's position was laid bare at a Trade Unionists for Palestine meeting it hosted on November 3. Socialist Equality Party assistant national secretary Max Boddy asked whether the MUA would heed the plea of Palestinian trade unions and call strikes to block all military supplies to Israel.

Refusing to address the question, MUA Sydney Branch secretary Paul Keating and former official Joe Deakin denounced Boddy and other SEP members while aggressively hustling them out of the building.

MUA officials were as conspicuously absent from the speaker's list on Saturday as the *Contship Dax* was from Port Botany. The only speaker from the union was Erima Dall, a longstanding Solidarity member and MUA delegate at the port.

Dall's role was to excuse the MUA's collaboration with Israel. She claimed, "We have heeded the call of the Palestinian trade unions for a boycott movement. But in Australia, we face anti-strike laws that mean it is illegal for us to walk off the job to support causes such as the Palestinian cause.

"Now, there are anti-protest laws that target people for blockading port infrastructure. But we need to build a movement that can break these laws because what has the law ever done for the Palestinian people."

In other words, the MUA, which is part of the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union, one of the largest unions in the country, is not prepared to risk a fine to oppose war crimes, and is instead leaving it up to individuals, many of them students or recent migrants with precarious employment or visa status, to do just that.

Turning this reality on its head, Dall declared, "We as trade unionists, and we as a movement, stand with every worker anywhere who stands up to the Israeli apartheid state."

In reality, the MUA is maintaining complete industrial peace for ZIM, overseeing the loading and unloading of the company's ships at ports around the country, and facilitating the outfit's moves to avoid disruption from the very protests the union claims to support.

The MUA, with the eager help of Solidarity and Trade Unionists for Palestine, is hiding behind Australia's harsh anti-strike laws, just as all of the country's unions do whenever there is a call for mass action by workers over attacks on jobs, wages and conditions.

But the truth is that this draconian legislation was

implemented by the union-backed Rudd-Gillard Labor government in 2009, building upon foundations laid by the Hawke and Keating administrations between 1983 and 1996, again with the full support and cooperation of the union bureaucracy. This collaboration is ongoing, including with industrial relations legislation introduced late last year to strengthen the industrial courts and prevent strikes.

The union apparatus consistently supports and enforces this legislation, because it provides a legal backstop for their role as an industrial police force, to protect the profit interests of big business and governments against the struggles of the working class.

The MUA, along with every Australian union, is continuing to play this role in the face of mass opposition to Israel, its genocidal onslaught against Palestine, and the backing of the Labor government for these war crimes.

The "Block the Boat" protests on Saturday and last Wednesday, as well as the growing protests, week after week, in cities across the country, make clear that there is mass support among workers and young people for concrete action to defend the rights and lives of Palestinians, and reverse the broader drive towards global conflict.

But what is equally clear is that such action cannot be taken without a rebellion against the trade union bureaucracy, in opposition to its pseudo-left apologists. This poses the urgent need for workers to form new organisations, rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves, in order to take up the necessary industrial and political fight against genocide and war.



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