

School students strike in Melbourne against the Gaza genocide

Our reporters

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High school students across the city of Melbourne went on strike Thursday against Israel's genocide in Gaza. A crowd of students, estimated at over 1,000, gathered outside Flinders Street Station in the city centre. This marked the first of a series of planned school strikes around Australia this week, including today in Sydney, Adelaide and Wollongong.

Students on strike included those from schools in the inner suburbs of Melbourne, such as Brunswick, Northcote, Preston, Caulfield and Pascoe Vale. Students told WSWs reporters that most had come from schools in the outer northern and western suburbs. One student said that the entire student body at Tarneit Senior College, in Melbourne's working-class west, walked out at lunchtime.

The school strike is part of a global wave of mass protests, against the genocidal war on Palestinians by the Israeli state. Similar school walkouts have been seen in the US, Canada and Britain.

The Melbourne strike was particularly significant given the widespread denunciations of students opposing genocide by the mainstream media and the entire political establishment, from the Labor Party state and federal governments to the extreme right. These forces attempted to intimidate schoolchildren from participating, ordering them to "stay in school" and slandering them as "antisemitic" for opposing the Israeli bombardment.

After rallying at Flinders Street to hear speeches, the crowd marched up Swanston Street and staged a sit-in inside Melbourne Central Station. The students' chants denounced the complicity of the Australian government in Israel's genocide and targeted Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, US President Joe Biden, as well as Victoria state Labor premier Jacinta Allan, who insisted in the lead-up that students not attend the strike.

Since the strike, politicians and the media have gone into overdrive, venomously attacking the children who protested. They have been defamed as "ignorant" and having been "manipulated," but in the comments below to the WSWs, striking students make very clear why they participated.

Daniel, 14 years old, said, "I'm not surprised about Australia's support for Israel. The colonial state of Israel has always been propped up by the Western powers, who have carried out colonialism in the past too, for example in Rhodesia and South Africa."

Lachie, who is the same age, added, "Albanese has gone back on everything he said in his past. The genocide in Palestine takes a back seat to his political career."

Both agreed that Labor was a party of imperialist war and of the Australian ruling class. "Labor and the Liberals are completely united in their foreign policy and support for war," said Daniel. "They are both capitalist parties. They're basically the same party, but a different colour."

Lachie spoke on the "appalling situation" in Gaza. "This has been going on since 1948, and even before with the Zionist militias that helped establish the modern state of Israel. The fact that it's continued this long without change is absurd. Students here today are the same age as children being murdered in occupied Palestine."

Daniel spoke on the government figures pressuring students to stay at school: "It's very hypocritical for them to condemn us. The Australian government says we can protest over climate change, but not over Gaza, not over the brutal mass murder of people every single day."

On learning about protests and workers' actions targeting weapons shipments to Israel, they exclaimed,

“That’s great! That’s a powerful move.” Lachie raised, “When workers come out in support of the Palestinians, that really scares the government and the people in power. And I think, especially when the younger generation shows that it’s enthusiastic about this, that also scares them.”

Anna, 14, and her friends were familiar with the *World Socialist Web Site*.

She said, “I think it’s important that people, especially students, gather to protest against the actions of the Israeli government... Jewish people in no way equate to their government... I know for a fact that students are not here to oppose Jewish people or Israeli citizens, but rather to oppose the actions of the Israeli government.”

Answering the government officials discouraging students from “missing school,” Anna said, “It’s two periods, we’re not missing several weeks! There are kids in Gaza who are missing school, who are dying!”

Anna agreed that workers had to be mobilised to stop genocide and war. “It’s good for workers of the world to unite, for workers from different countries and different political beliefs to band together against the ruling class and war.”

Joskun, 17, had been following events in Gaza on social media. “I’ve been seeing lots of posts on Instagram, that there were donations for people in Palestine. Even though it’s struggle street for lots of us, they were still donating money to this which is great.

“I also saw how big companies like Macdonalds and Starbucks were giving free food to the Israeli military. It’s not great, but it says a lot about the forces supporting them.”

Billy, 18, had just completed his final exams but “wanted to show support for Palestinians and put a light on what’s happening so that the world knows.” He said that the media and government are “scared” about opposition from young people. “They’re scared that many people will come and the world’s going to see it.”

Many students expressed anger at the dishonest claim that opponents of Zionism were fuelling antisemitism. **Sarah** said: “That’s wrong! It’s not about being antisemitic, it’s anti-genocide. They’re killing kids, and they think it’s about being antisemitic?”

The Israeli government was presenting itself as the victim, she noted, but “They’re killing women, men,

they’re bombing hospitals, refugee camps, and they think that they’re the victim.”

She went on, “It’s not about Muslim rights, it’s human rights... Everyone’s here: non-Muslims, kids, adults. But politicians who sit behind their big desks are not here.”

“School is not as important as saving kids’ lives. We’re able to sit in a classroom, to go to school safely, no bombs are dropping on us. But they get bombed in their beds... We need to fight for them.”



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