

Australian high school students ferociously attacked for protesting Gaza genocide

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On Thursday and Friday, more than 1,500 high school students across Australia walked out of class to protest Israel's onslaught against the Palestinians and the Australian Labor government's full support for the genocide. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) unequivocally supports and defends the strikes.

Strikes were held in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Wollongong. In Melbourne, around 1,000 participated, while in Sydney, roughly 400 took part. The events point to a highly significant political radicalisation that is developing among young people.

In interviews with the WSWWS, strikers made comments condemning Israel's bombardment and the decades-long occupation of the Palestinians. Their remarks were far more perceptive and insightful than almost anything published in the corporate press over the past six weeks. The students are well informed through social media and through their independent endeavours to seek out the truth. They have informed themselves in order to fight oppression.

The venomous response of the establishment to the protests was as significant as the events themselves. There is no recent parallel to relatively small political events of young people being attacked as stridently and aggressively as over the past few days. It is an extraordinary condemnation of official society and its institutions that youth had to fight for their right to protest the mass murder of infants and children in Gaza, more than 5,500 of whom have been slaughtered over the past six weeks.

The state Labor governments in Victoria and New South Wales were at the forefront of the attacks. In both states, the Labor premiers and education ministers condemned the planned walkouts, told students to remain in school and instructed education authorities that action could be taken against students who were absent from class. At least some schools in Sydney and Melbourne sent emails to parents relaying this instruction.

The arguments of the state Labor governments against the strikes were ludicrous and incoherent. Having slashed funding to the point where public schools suffer their worst

crisis of student overcrowding and teacher shortages in decades, the Labor ministers proclaimed that children's education would be harmed by participating in the strikes.

The Murdoch-owned Sydney *Daily Telegraph* took that line to its absurd endpoint. It cited an individual described as a qualified child psychologist, who instructed parents to tell their children: "Turn up to school, don't rob yourself of the opportunity to get a great quality education." The strikes were of roughly two hours in duration.

The other line of the Labor administrations was that the strikes could increase "tensions" associated with the "conflict" in the Middle East. Some students could be upset by the walkouts. This was essentially a repetition of the claims of various pro-Israeli groups, which asserted, without any evidence or rationale, that Jewish students would be harmed by school pupils protesting the mass killing of civilians in Gaza.

In comments uncritically quoted in the press, Zionist leaders pushed this argument, while simultaneously directing foul vitriol against students planning to participate in the strikes.

Speaking to the right-wing Sky News, Dvir Abramovich of the Anti-Defamation Commission declared: "Free Palestine, the group that is organising this hate-fest and recruitment drive has taken a leaf out of the Hamas playbook in using kids as human shields and sacrificing them in their war in propaganda and disinformation." The activists had "torn up the rulebook" and "crossed every red line," meaning that "all bets are off."

Abramovich, while he is invariably introduced in the press as a "Jewish community leader," unerringly advances the positions of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and intelligence agencies. Under conditions where the IDF is massacring civilians in Gaza, his comments, framed in military rhetoric, have the most disturbing implications.

It is difficult to imagine many other individuals making such statements about children without any repercussions. If a prominent Islamic or Arabic leader said such things about pro-Israeli children, there is little doubt they would be

visited by counter-terrorism police.

Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies president Jason Steinberg reacted hysterically to a suggestion by Brisbane strike organisers that the march be led by students wearing their school uniforms. He responded: “This is abhorrent, and just like Hitler Youth of the 1930s, it looks like Queensland schoolchildren are now being infected with the world’s oldest form of hatred, antisemitism.” The Hitler Youth wore uniforms; schoolchildren in modern Australia wear uniforms, ergo they are one and the same.

This sort of unhinged rhetoric has always been the province of the far-right, including fascistic forces. Misrepresentation, hysterical accusations without evidence and frenzied attacks on children because of their political views have never been associated with a struggle against antisemitism, racism or for any progressive cause.

Despite the dire warnings, the strikes occurred largely without incident. The one exception was when an adult male carrying an Israeli flag sought to accost and confront striking children in Sydney, before being led away by police.

At the protests, the children made very clear that their motivation was to fight the mass murder of Palestinians. Many poignantly held homemade placards, stating simply: “Stop killing kids!” Some held signs declaring “Nazis not welcome,” to underscore that their action had nothing to do with hostility to Jewish people.

Students denounced the attempt to equate their protest with antisemitism. Some commented that the false identification of Jewish people with the war crimes of the Israeli state was itself antisemitic. The cynical line peddled by Zionist groups and echoed by governments, that all opposition to Israeli policy is antisemitic, serves to downplay the dangers of genuine antisemitism and to relativise the horrors of the Holocaust.

The media has nevertheless sought to concoct provocations. The *Australian* published an interview with a participant in Melbourne, claiming that she expressed support for Hamas. Based on the *Australian*’s own audio, it is entirely unclear that is what she stated. The replies from other strikers published by the *Australian* indicated that its reporters were asking the students whether they supported Hamas and accepted Israel’s “right to exist.”

The image of professional journalists skulking around a student protest and trying to trip children into expressing support for Hamas, a proscribed terrorist organisation in Australia, is not a pretty one.

It was not only the Murdoch press. The *Sydney Morning Herald* published an “analysis” of social media posts promoting the event in that city before it occurred. They came to the extraordinary conclusion that university students, as well as high school students, were supporting

the strike. This was linked to assertions that the Socialist Alternative organisation was involved in planning the walkout. That story, from a publication that has continuously promoted IDF talking points, was simply McCarthyism in support of an unfolding genocide.

Two other developments have highlighted the far-right character of the campaign against the strikes, and the bogus assertions used to attack them.

The Sydney rally was addressed by a Jewish boy. He reportedly stated: “I stand here today as the grandson of a Holocaust survivor to say that I stand against all genocides, and I will not let the state of Israel speak for all Jews.”

When those remarks were posted to X/Twitter, Zionist commentators denounced the boy or accused “activists” of “exploiting” him. Some described him as being “of Jewish descent,” rather than simply “Jewish,” his heritage seemingly having been diminished because he criticised the Israeli government and military. The concern that these same individuals had professed over the “mental health” and “feelings” of Jewish students evidently did not extend to Jewish kids who are anti-Zionist.

More broadly, many X/Twitter posts about the strike have been swarmed by right-wing trolls. That includes vile comments attacking the students, calling for their deportation and slandering them in terms that cannot be published. A brief perusal of the accounts shows that many have previously attacked Aboriginal people, refugees and generally aligned themselves with other fascistic causes.

The student strikes have come under such attack because the ruling elite is terrified that a mass movement of students and youth will erupt against the genocide in Gaza and link up with the developing struggles of the working class against militarism and the profit system, which offers the younger generation no way forward. It was very striking that many of the students participating expressed anti-capitalist sentiment and sympathy for socialism.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality calls for this movement to be deepened and developed. Above all, that means a turn to the working class, the revolutionary force in society, and the adoption of an international socialist perspective directed against the whole social order responsible for the slaughter in Gaza and all of imperialism’s other crimes.



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