

Hundreds of Sydney school students strike against the genocide in Gaza

Our reporters

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Around 400 high school students from across Sydney walked out of class yesterday to strike against the Israeli regime's genocidal war in Gaza and the support it has received from the Australian Labor government. About 100 also gathered in the working-class steel city of Wollongong, south of Sydney.

The stoppages followed strikes in Melbourne and Adelaide on Thursday involving more than 1000 pupils. The strikes are part of a broader wave of mass protest internationally with similar walkouts seen in the US, Canada and Britain.

In Sydney there were a significant number of students from schools in the working-class southwest region of the city, including Canterbury, Greenacre, Bankstown and Lakemba. There were also students from the inner west including Burwood and others from the eastern suburbs of Randwick and Surry Hills.

The students that attended did so in defiance of a ferocious campaign led by the state Labor government and involving all the corporate media outlets. NSW Labor Premier Chris Minns told students not to attend the protest but to stay in school to "get educated." The protesters have been denounced as propagating antisemitism, solely for opposing the onslaught on Gaza.

Students reported that many of their classmates and parents were worried about being targeted or disciplined for attending. Principals at some schools sent letters to parents telling them that students had to stay in class or would be marked absent in line with behaviour and attendance policies.

Talia, whose family is from Jordan, said: "Since I was young my family have been boycotting products from Israel and I've been talking about it to my friends before anybody knew what was happening."

Talia said: "I have seen a shift. I remember around 2015, no one would talk about Palestine." Now, however, "people are going out and researching to find out the real side of the story. Social media has had an impact. There is a lot more information on Instagram and social media in general. People post real stories, the raw images.

Talia was asked what she thought of Labor Premier Minns' hostility to the strike. "I think it's racist. It's not looking at both sides. Look at all the community we have here. The Arab community, the Palestinian community, Muslim, Christian, everyone's here.

"This protest is not antisemitic. We are not condoning the Holocaust or what happened in the past. It was a horrible event and should never have happened. However, something is happening right now, and we need help.

"I have seen a lot of Jewish people oppose the oppression of Palestine, and I think it's really good. More Jewish people, and people in general, should educate themselves on what is happening, rather than listen to the government. We are taught to trust the government, but it's not always right, especially when there's a lack of equality.

"Higher class people, those in government, people in power, they are listened to. People like us, we aren't listened to because we are considered automatically wrong for not agreeing. We should form our own opinions and not be dependent on agreeing with the government."

She spoke of the pressure at school not to attend. "It's not okay for them to tell us not to come out. Clearly there is a war occurring, people are dying, and we have to do something. We can't just stand back. Schools should support all students for what they believe in, and think it is right.

“There needs to be a permanent ceasefire. There needs to be restoration efforts, this is a humanitarian crisis. For both sides, we need to start society again, like how it used to be. There is no kicking out one side specifically, but we need to all live and coexist peacefully.”

Dorina, an adult originally from Romania, who attended to lend support to students, said, “I am outraged at what is going on with the Palestinians, the massacre that we see right in front of us. Our government is complicit in this through their lack of support for the Palestinians and their support for Israel.

“Students have every right to join these demonstrations. It is one day off school, who cares? This is their protest against the atrocities and to be on the right side of history. I wish I had their strength when I was their age. The state of the world is probably worse now than then. We relied on the mainstream media for coverage of the news. Now social media is bringing the truth to us, so I probably wasn’t aware of what was going on.

“The absolute hypocrisy of the government supporting Ukraine, where you had 11,000 people killed in 21 months. 14,000 Palestinians have been killed in 40 days and they don’t get that kind of support or military assistance. You need to support the right people, not the oppressors who have been colonising and illegally occupying Palestine.

“I remember Albanese claiming to support the Palestinians in 2015, giving a passionate speech about his support for the plight of the Palestinians. Now, where is that? Where are those morals? That’s the person I voted in. Now there’s none of that.”

Atef, originally from Lebanon, attended with his 13-year-old daughter. He said, “I think NSW Premier Chris Minns is a disgrace. I would never, ever vote Labor again. This has been going on for a long time but I’m starting to see a change. People are starting to wake up, people are not going to accept what is going on.

Pointing to the conditions facing the Palestinians, Atef said it was clear why many wanted to fight their oppression. Referencing the occupation in the West Bank, he said: “Imagine, you can’t cross the street, can’t go to the shop. Every night I spend my time on social media, looking at dead children. I cannot believe government leaders are supporting this.”

Roukaya, a student said, “I am out here because you can’t just leave it alone. People say protest will do nothing, but each week the numbers go up drastically. We need to use our voices.

On the official condemnations of the strike, she said: “The hypocrisy is crazy. If you go back a bit, when we voted for Labor, we didn’t know they would be supporting genocide. I was really surprised. Even Albanese a few years back supported the Palestinians and spoke up for them. Now he is just a hypocrite.”

On the growing protest movement, Roukaya said, “Millions are coming out now because it is the truth. We are here with the truth.” Simea, also a student, added, “these protests are so much bigger because of social media. It has spread awareness. We didn’t have social media before.” Roukaya concluded: “The system needs to change, because the system itself is corrupt.”



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