

Australian government postures over ceasefire, but backs Israeli war machine

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The Australian Labor government was among those that shifted its previous position, joining 152 other states to call for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza on Tuesday.

The vote at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly testified to the blatant criminality of the onslaught against Gaza. The US and Israel were joined by only eight other countries in voting against, all of them client states of Washington, most with miniscule populations. Another twenty-three, including the United Kingdom, abstained.

The motion was overwhelmingly passed under conditions where mass opposition, expressed in enormous global protests over the past two months, has triggered a political crisis in many countries.

The motion, however, is entirely toothless. It is non-binding, does not commit a single government to do anything, and will not obstruct the Zionist regime's bombardment or the American administration's financing of it.

The essentially mealy-mouthed and hypocritical character of the resolution was underscored by the Labor government's support for it. Since the carpet bombing began in early October, Labor has aggressively asserted Israel's "right to defend itself." As in other imperialist centres, this has extended to the vilification of those opposing the mass murder and threats against demonstrations protesting it.

Labor abstained on an almost identical resolution six weeks ago and publicly denounced it for insufficient condemnation of Hamas. While the death toll has grown massively, the fundamental realities of the situation have not changed between the two votes.

When Labor refused to back the ceasefire motion in late October, Israel was already indiscriminately targeting hospitals and other protected facilities, thousands of children had been murdered, and spokespeople for the Zionist regime were openly proclaiming their intention to ethnically cleanse Gaza.

Even in voting for Tuesday's motion, the Australian government sought to undermine and neuter an already tepid statement. It voted for an unsuccessful US amendment that aimed to introduce bellicose condemnations of Hamas.

When he addressed the assembly, Australia's ambassador to the UN James Larson essentially argued against any immediate, permanent ceasefire. He had not a word of criticism for Israel, instead describing the mass killing of Gazans as a "humanitarian tragedy."

Larson presented as a model the week-long truce or pause that concluded December 1 with Israel's resumption of hostilities. As the WSWS had correctly warned, the pause was largely aimed at allowing the Israeli military to restock, while dampening down global anger. It has been followed by an even more intense onslaught.

Australia, Larson said, was joining the world in "urging these pauses be resumed." He added: "We see such pauses as critical steps on a path to a sustainable and permanent ceasefire." The meaning is clear enough. By referencing "pauses," plural, Larson was outlining a scenario where Israel's campaign against Gaza continues indefinitely, punctured only by short breaks aimed at putting a "humanitarian" veneer on the mass murder.

Larson again declared that Israel was "defending" itself, but it had to mind the civilian toll. He launched into a denunciation of Hamas as a "terrorist group," which had to be "defeated and dismantled." That is an explicit endorsement of the lying pretext Israel is using to cleanse Gaza of Palestinians. It is an open-ended commitment to support Israel's continuing onslaught.

A similar line was put forward in a joint statement by Australia, Canada and New Zealand, released just prior to the meeting of the General Assembly.

It also referenced the late November truce and said: "We want to see this pause resumed and support urgent

international efforts towards a sustainable ceasefire.” Unlike the UN resolution, the statement declared: “This cannot be one-sided. Hamas must release all hostages, stop using Palestinian civilians as human shields, and lay down its arms.”

Stripped of its cynical humanitarian rhetoric, that is not a call for a ceasefire but for a continuation of the war. A ceasefire is an agreement between two parties in conflict, not a demand that one of those parties completely surrender or commit mass suicide.

Again, the statement covers over the fact that what is occurring is not a war but a genocide against Palestinian civilians. Under conditions where senior Israeli government ministers have declared that there are no civilians in Gaza, its entire population being designated as Hamas members or supporters, the Australia-Canada-New Zealand statement justifies the ethnic cleansing that is underway.

This morning, it was revealed in the Australian press that the Labor government had contacted the US and Israel prior to the UN vote, informing them that it would back the resolution. It is hard to believe that Labor, which has marched in absolute lockstep with the US, would have voted as it did, had it been instructed otherwise by Washington.

Under conditions where the US knew that the General Assembly would overwhelmingly approve the ceasefire resolution, it seems likely that Australia was instructed to stake out a middle ground, of nominal support for the motion, but full endorsement of Israel and its claimed war aims. The statements of Larson and Labor government representatives were, if anything, weaker than previous expressions of “concern” from the White House over the massive civilian deaths in Gaza.

Australia is not a bystander to the genocide. As reported in October by *Declassified Australia*, it is almost certain that at least some Israeli airstrikes are based on targeting information supplied from the joint US-Australian Pine Gap spy base and military facility in central Australia.

Australian governments have approved more than 350 defence exports to Israel since 2017. That includes 52 this year alone under the Labor government. When she has been asked about those exports, Labor’s Foreign Minister Penny Wong has repeatedly become apoplectic. The Labor government is doing everything it can to keep their contents secret, including by contesting court action initiated by Palestinian human rights groups to reveal what is being sent.

The real position of the government is summed up by a

current bipartisan visit to Israel. Wong’s assistant minister Tim Watts and several other Labor MPs, including Josh Burns, are touring the country, together with Liberal-National shadow foreign minister Simon Birmingham. Yesterday, pictures of the group were posted to social media, showing them grinning like cheshire cats, arm in arm with Israel Defence Forces personnel.

Australia’s involvement in the war will deepen, not lessen. Today it was also revealed that the US navy has asked Australia to dispatch a warship to the Red Sea, where Yemeni forces are disrupting Israeli military shipping lines. Given the Red Sea is a warzone, that would make Australia an active party in what could become a wider war in the Middle East.

To signal its commitment to US militarism everywhere, Labor also announced this week a \$186 million expansion of an existing program where Australian military personnel train Ukrainian forces in the United Kingdom. That takes Australia’s commitment to the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine to well over a billion dollars.

Inevitably, Zionist leaders and hawkish media commentators have bemoaned Labor’s vote at the General Assembly, and have warned against “disunity” or capitulation to the mass popular opposition to the genocide. Such forces will not be satisfied with anything less than the complete annihilation of the Palestinians.

But workers and young people should not be taken in by Labor’s maneuvering. It remains what it has been for the past two months: a blood-drenched and criminal administration, that is party to the worst war crime of the 21st century. The fight against the genocide requires a political struggle against Labor, as part of the development of a socialist and international anti-war movement.



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