Australian protests continue against Gaza genocide: “The system is so full of harm”

Our reporters
27 December 2023

Over the weekend thousands of protesters turned out across Australia, opposing the genocide being inflicted on Gaza by the Israeli regime, backed by all the imperialist powers.

In Sydney around 5,000 participated and more than 10,000 in Melbourne. There was also a sit-in in Brisbane’s post office square. That was notable, given the events were held in the midst of the holiday season, just days before Christmas.

This marked the eleventh consecutive weekend of protest in the country since the onslaught began. Attendees continued to denounce the Albanese Labor government for its support of the genocide, demanding an immediate and permanent ceasefire, and an end to the occupation.

Below are interviews with attendees at the Sydney and Melbourne rallies.

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In Sydney, **Adam**, a high-school teacher, said, “Unfortunately, the Albanese government, while voting for the ‘humanitarian ceasefire’ in the United Nations, continues to support Israel’s occupation of Gaza.

“They do this by allowing companies like Zim Shipping to operate. They allow exports into the terror state, for continuing the bombardment of the Palestinian people in Gaza.

“The only country so far blocking Zim Shipping is Malaysia. I hope that will set a precedent for its neighbour, Indonesia, and other countries in the Asia-Pacific region to follow.

“I don’t see a Labor or Liberal government stopping that because they’ve got a financial interest in exports continuing. The power is in the people. The protests against Zim have somewhat slowed down the movement of ships, and with more action it becomes more difficult for them.”

Adam agreed that industrial action by workers, including at the ports, was needed to shut down Zim’s operations, “but sometimes unions block these strikes because it’s not in their best interest. The Maritime Union is not the only one.”

He was shocked by Health Services Union (HSU) boss Gerard Hayes’ public denunciation of health workers after their polite request to bring union flags to the mass rallies. “They don’t really back the health workers. How many doctors and paramedics and health staff have died in Gaza? But the Health Services Union doesn’t seem to back the workers of the health care industry. That’s concerning.”

A first-generation **migrant from Pakistan** who wanted to remain anonymous said, “The 8-year-old kid who was killed in the West Bank two days ago looks just like my son, who is 7. To me they look the same. What if it was my kid?

“I have been trying to process these rallies. Sloganeering, chanting, then they walk… they have been going on for three months. These were my first protests ever. What has it led up to? I don’t think that Albanese, who I voted for, has any heart.

“An Israeli minister said that they should nuke the Palestinians, and nothing happens. If we said it of the Israelis, we would be called antisemites. I was hoping to introduce my kids to the Jews for Palestine here today. I want to teach them that this conflict is not about Judaism or Islam.

“When the Saudis were bombing Yemen, I was against the Saudis. I don’t care about the Kaaba, the Mecca, they were doing the wrong thing. You must not be biased on any discrimination, religion, caste, colour, creed, sexual orientation, language, anything! Wherever there is an oppressor and an oppressed, there is a problem. Whether they look like me or talk like me or not, I don’t care. I ask: who is the oppressor?”

In Melbourne, **Mandy**, an IT worker, said, “I’m disgusted in the Labor Party. I used to respect [foreign minister] Penny Wong, but I have to say, I don’t know how she sleeps at night. I just don’t. She’s in a position to effect real change, and what we get is ‘it’s complicated.’ It’s not complicated, it’s a genocide. Do they think we are not educated enough to see that?

Mandy’s friend **Teena**, originally from Iran, added, “This is the least I can do, after seeing everything. When I see the

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kids in Gaza, it reminds me of my niece and nephew."

Mandy continued, "Politicians only respond about whether they're going to be voted in or out. A ground movement can effect change in that regard. If everyone unites, that's how you get a revolution, that's how we've effected change as humans. It hasn't been grand gestures from politicians, it's been grassroots people saying, 'this is not right and we're not going to stand for it.' So, there's power, we have that power."

Yoey, who is studying youth work, said, "I'm here because what is happening in Palestine is unacceptable and the Israeli Defence Forces need to be held accountable for the genocide that it is enacting. The Australian government needs to do more to stand up for the people of Palestine.

"The US government has a vested interest in having an ally in the Middle East because of the oil reserves, and the Australian government will just agree to whatever the US tells them to do. In situations like this there is really no excuse to not stand up and to say what's happening is not OK. We can't be preferencing the economy and oil over peoples' lives."

She added, "Anyone that is involved in sending weapons to Israel is complicit in the genocide that is occurring in Gaza."

Julian, a secondary school teacher, explained that he attended the rally after a colleague encouraged him to come. He said: "Since October 7, I've done a lot of reading to understand what the Israeli regime's point of view is. I've found that it doesn't really matter what the starting point is, there's no way that anyone's reasoning can justify the amount of violence that has taken place in Gaza. I'm very happy to put my face and my name and my thoughts to the movement."

Julian opposed any conflation of the Israeli government with the Jewish people, "Again, doing research, I found that Netanyahu and his political party are very happy to make compromises with people who are even more extreme than them.

"His whole government sees that they need violence to continue to exist, which to me sounds like a lot of the hallmarks of how fascists or extreme right-wing people look at the world. They need some sort of scapegoat, they don't have a purpose in and of themselves if there's no one to fight. The Jewish people are culturally and religiously very diverse, and there is a clear difference between that and the Israeli government."

He spoke briefly on the Victorian Labor government's intimidation campaign against teachers and school workers who speak out against the Israeli genocide. "There is the general sense of censorship that teachers are facing. It creates anxiety and fear, and I've seen at my school how it takes a mental toll on those people who are trying to do the right thing. The new education minister [Ben Carroll, also deputy premier], I believe it is his first major portfolio, he is looking for prestige, to show and prove himself, however he is not taking the time to consider what actually is the right side."

Magady, who works with homeless young people, said, "This is a very ironic date, it's Christmas Eve, where we are celebrating a holiday that focuses on a baby, whilst many babies, many children, many pregnant women right now, in the place where this story occurred, are being killed, are being hurt.

"The work I do is often with refugees, so I get stories from people from Ethiopia, people from South Sudan. I've done work in Uganda. Around the world there are slaughters that don't even get reported on in the western media.

"There is a ridiculous double standard of the people who matter and the people that don't. Everybody should be able to go to sleep in a safe bed with a full stomach, knowing they are not going to be bombed, or murdered, or raped, or in any way harmed while they sleep. But this is not what is happening for the people in Palestine right now and this breaks my heart, and that's why I am here today."

Magady expressed her agreement with developing an international anti-capitalist movement, "The system is so full of harm at so many levels. I battle the system daily with my work. I long for what you said, about there being an uprising amongst the people who feel powerless towards power, to say that everyone is worthwhile, everyone is valuable, and we want peace and wellbeing and a roof over our heads and safety from war and safety from harm and abuse, because every human being matters and is valuable and worthwhile. And there is so much power there—people who are loading boats, loading weapons onto boats set for Palestine can refuse to do that. We need hope right now, thank you for everything you are doing, that is amazing."

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