

Free Palestine protests in Australia: “We need a complete system change, globally”

Our reporters

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Thousands continue to participate in weekly protests across Australia, opposing the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, which have now spanned more than three months.

Despite sweltering heat, a Sunday demonstration in Sydney was attended by more than 4,000, another in Brisbane by over 2,000 and an event in Melbourne by 10,000 or so.

The protests occurred the week after Labor’s Foreign Minister Penny Wong travelled to Israel, solidarising her government again with the homicidal onslaught against Gaza. Australia is also actively assisting US and British strikes against Yemen, which underscore the American imperialist-led attempts to transform the genocide into a regionwide conflagration targeting Iran.

WSWS reporters spoke to some of the participants over the weekend.

In Brisbane, a Palestinian woman from Gaza spoke anonymously, concerned that her remarks would place her under surveillance by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), the domestic political spy agency. She said she had written to Wong every time some of her relatives had been killed by Israeli forces in Gaza, but had received no replies.

“Every time a cousin or family member is killed in Gaza I have written to Penny Wong and not received a response ever, since October 10, when my first cousin was killed. I have written three times, over 14 family members.

“It’s quite telling that she’s met with the families of Israeli hostages, who are not Australian citizens, but will not respond to anything about Australian citizens whose families have been killed. What can I say? It shows where her allegiances are.

“I won’t vote Labor ever again. I’ll exercise my democratic right to vote but I will be voting for more left-leaning governments and parties. I’ll never vote for Labor again.”

She noted that, as reported by *Al Jazeera*, the Israeli forces are conducting “mass executions” of Palestinian men. She said the Biden administration and other governments, including Australia’s, could stop the genocide but “they don’t want to stop it, and I honestly don’t know why.”

Ali, a young man hoping to become a support worker, said he joined the protest because “I have actively studied history. I studied the Holocaust for a good while and World War II and it mattered a lot to me.

“I started seeing the way it was playing into the genocide in Palestine and the way that history is being rewritten and twisted to make it OK again. It bothers me a lot, so I decided I had to do something and the least I could do was to come here.

“It’s the most documented genocide in history because we have

phones now. So, it’s disturbing that even if everyone is fully aware, unlike maybe the Holocaust, most of the world does nothing.

“I know that’s not what the people want. When you study history, this is not shocking, but it’s disheartening. It’s depressing, but not surprising.

“I think we should do whatever we can to stop the genocide. I know that looks different for most people. It differs from person to person, but a lot of people are doing what they can. Not everyone can afford to take the most drastic measures, but people can at least come here.

“I’m aware that governments never change and that we will have to fight back. I know that’s a reality. This is a step toward that.”

Asked about Labor’s long support for Zionism, personified by former Australian Council of Trade Unions president and Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke, Ali replied: “I am aware a little bit about Labor’s record of supporting Zionism. I haven’t done that much looking into Australia’s history with this issue, just Israel’s. I’m studying history just as a hobby.”

Ali concluded: “Free Palestine!”

In Sydney, **Indi**, a student said, “I’m against the genocide that’s being committed against Palestinians by Israel. My stance has been developed by research in the last couple months because I wasn’t aware of the history before October 2023. I now follow Palestinians on social media, but I’ve also tried to understand the Israeli perspective.

“I didn’t know the difference between the Jewish people and Zionists, but in my reading, I noticed a distinction in beliefs. That shifted my perspective towards understanding that this isn’t an attack from Jewish people on Palestinians, but of Zionists and Israel against Palestinians.”

Explaining why she felt compelled to do her own research Indi said, “I have a strong sense of justice and it’s something that has always driven me in my decision-making. A lot of people can relate to not feeling informed enough to take a stand for something. I knew that this was polarizing, but I still wanted to take a stand. I see first hand the misinformation that’s spread and how people get very aggressive in their stance without educating themselves and how our world leaders benefit from that.

“I recognise that in Australia settlers came in and took over from Aboriginal people, that happened with Native Americans in the US and a lot of people refer to Palestinians as the indigenous population in Palestine. The US and Western society’s role in the Middle East, which should be none, is trying to assert dominance or power or control over people that don’t need that.

“I used to believe that our leaders were representative of the people and I guess through life and learning more I’m realising that is 100

percent not the case. We, as the people, are taught not to educate ourselves and are thrown different distractions and fear to create division.”

In Melbourne, **Amanda**, a disability support worker and social work student, said: “I think it’s pretty horrific what is happening. Things that I learn in social work, it’s kind of a bit of a slap in the face—you learn about the UN Human Rights Charter, and how that is the basis of social work practice—and then you find out that they don’t actually do anything. It feels like a big sham, all these big organisations aren’t doing anything about Gaza and Yemen. Money is still at the top, and human rights fall behind money, but it shouldn’t be like that.”

She added: “I think we are kind of in a difficult position where the systems around us actually keep us in a position where we are so overworked, that people say ‘I am so tired, I can’t join the fight.’ It’s hard to get the fight started when people are like ‘I’m just trying to pay the rent, I’m about to get kicked out of my home.’

“But I think people are waking up at the moment. I’m seeing a lot of change with people, attitudes shifting a bit. My parents were kind of not aware of all this before, but now they are like, ‘it’s hard to live in the world, it’s hard to live in the capitalist system, it’s hard.’ We need a complete system change, which needs to happen globally.”

Dave said: “Israel is founded on the idea that they are going to have the whole area, and so they need to wipe out the Palestinians essentially, cease the West Bank, cease Gaza. I don’t think the Israeli state would be able to exist without the US. I think America likes to have control over the whole world, they need a friendly state within the Arab nations to defend their interests.

“In the Middle East, all of Africa, the number of times the US overthrew left-leaning governments to install other governments... Even the establishment of ISIS—the majority of its founders came from American internment camps in the Iraq war, that’s where they were radicalised. So a lot of what we are seeing, the turn to the right and extremists in the Arab states, are from acts of the US military, purposely stoked.”

On the protest movement, he said: “I think it’s a big turning point in the world, and hopefully we are not too late. What they have seized from the workers in the 20th century, and especially the 21st century—we have lost so much, and with COVID we lost so much, everything is being eroded away, all the socialistic aspects of government that were there, they are being eroded away. We are not as bad as America here but that’s what they want.”

Huda, a health sciences student originally from Singapore, said: “I’m very passionate about what’s happening currently in Gaza, but after the information you have given us, throughout the Middle East as well. To put it simply, it’s like the USA is the mean girl in this world, bullying other people for resources, with the Middle East for their oil.”

She added: “Israel feels like they are above the UN, above the law, above war crimes, like ‘it’s not really a war crime if we do it.’ It’s really scary, because if the UN can’t stop them, if other countries step in and express that what they are doing is literally a genocide... But nothing is happening, so what is the next step? What will actually make them listen and make them stop this horrendous crime?”

Yvonne, a University of Melbourne student from Sri Lanka, told the WSWs that she had been to every weekly demonstration since the beginning of the assault on Gaza.

“I am against Israel’s genocide on Palestinians,” she explained. “I see that they’re trying to justify it in a way as self-defence, but I don’t see it that way. It’s something that has been going on for a long time.

In my opinion it is an ethnic cleansing, I just think it is wrong. I feel like the protest movement should keep going, not just for Palestine but for fighting against imperialism and colonialism and the effects of that. Keep protesting for those causes as well as for Palestine. I’d like this to be a regular thing and to keep fighting for it.”

On the situation in Sri Lanka, she said: “It’s so f—d. The Sri Lankan government is so annoying to me. Whenever I go and visit, I see the people, like my family, struggling from it. My friends in Sri Lanka are struggling because of the corruption that the Rajapakses have caused and everything, that it has seeped into in the government. I’m very much against them. I don’t think [current president] Wickremasinghe is any different. I don’t think there’s much change.”

Fiorella, a retired teacher, said: “This is the beginning of a movement worldwide for people to question everything that happens and be able to have a voice. We are powerful, we are the majority in the world, we can do something if we stick to our convictions. I don’t know how exactly we enact change but by being here.

“We can go on strike, we can hold things back supporting people that we know are pro-Zionist. We can do things like that, because we have the power, because we have the numbers. It’s a matter of being part of something. I’ve been a teacher, I’ve been on strike with the union for better conditions, so we can do all things like that, make it painful for the top.”

Fiorella continued: “This has to be the beginning of the end of that style of capitalism. It cannot continue. It’s unjust, it doesn’t serve the public, the average person, it’s wrong. I’m hopeful that it is a change for the future.

“We all have phones, we see first hand everything that is happening in the world, it cannot be denied. No matter what these Israelis say, Netanyahu is a madman, you can’t deny it anymore. They’re clutching at straws. That is what is good about social media. We’ve got it straight away, in an instant. How can you watch this stuff and not be in pain for these people? How can you watch children traumatised and losing limbs in thousands and thousands? It’s beyond humanity. It’s just beyond belief that this goes on.”



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