

Ongoing Australian protests against Gaza genocide: “The capitalist ideology is really elitist and not empathetic at all”

Our reporters
22 February 2024

Thousands again took to the streets across Australia over the weekend, opposing Israel’s ongoing genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza. The protests took aim at the Israeli offensive on Rafah, in southern Gaza, which marks a new stage of the ethnic cleansing operation aimed at killing as many Palestinians as possible and driving the rest into the Sinai Desert of Egypt.

As many as 10,000 took part in Melbourne, together with several thousand in each of Sydney and Brisbane. Smaller events were held elsewhere.

In keeping with its complicity in the genocide, the Australian media again blacked out the mobilisations, as it largely has over the past four months.

Instead, significant coverage was given to a pro-Israel rally in Sydney on Sunday. Many in attendance there appeared to be from Evangelical Christian denominations.

The motley crowd, including these fanatical Christians and hard-line Zionists, were addressed by far-right speakers, including former Prime Minister Scott Morrison (associated with the charismatic Christian Hillsong church), who denounced the United Nations as antisemitic.

In contrast to the pro-Israel rally, the protests defending Gaza have been attended by broad layers of workers and young people.

One of the main speakers at the Gaza event in Melbourne was John Shipton, father of persecuted journalist and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who is in court in the UK this week for hearings which could see him imminently extradited to the US.

Assange, an Australian citizen, faces charges under the US Espionage Act with a potential 170-year sentence for exposing American war crimes and other human rights abuses—most infamously during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Assange is being used to set a precedent for all those who would dare to tell the truth about imperialist crimes.

Under conditions where US imperialism and its allies in the UK, Australia and others, are supporting and funding Israel’s genocide against Gaza and preparing even greater war crimes against the world’s population, Assange represents the exposure of and opposition to imperialist militarism.

Shipton noted the threat of his son’s extradition to the US. He condemned the 30 years of US-led wars in the Middle East and Central Asia, noting that they had laid waste to entire regions in a process that was continuing and deepening.

Rally participants engaged in chants of “Free Palestine!” alongside “Free Assange!” Some of the protesters held hand-made signs calling for Assange’s freedom.

Sech, who has just completed a teaching degree, attended the rally in Melbourne. She told SEP campaigners: “I’m here because I want

Palestine to be free and the people are suffering immensely. I see that their lives are not valued. It’s reflected in how governments act.”

“I’ve been coming to the rallies since they started. I come all the way from Geelong [50 kilometres southwest of Melbourne],” she said.

“Why this is happening has to do with money. For the people in Palestine, they don’t care, but the Middle East has a lot of resources and if the Palestinians are wiped out, they can get in there. As long as the rich remain at the pinnacle, they don’t care what happens to anyone else. It’s greed.”

Stephen, who is 75 years old and retired, also joined the protest in Melbourne.

“I’m here to support a ceasefire and to highlight there are so many people against the genocide in the public,” he said. “I’ve seen the persecution of the Palestinian people, the removal from their homes in the West Bank while this is going on in Gaza.”

He said the protests are “not against the Israeli people, it’s just against the government.”

Stephen condemned the continued support the imperialist governments, including in Australia, have given to the genocide and broader wars in the Middle East. “The government doesn’t care. The invasion of Iraq, millions and millions of people stood up to say that they didn’t want the invasion to happen. What did they do? Carried on. It’s the governments’ responsibility to listen to the people and what they want.”

He also raised the link between the drive to war and the attack on freedom of speech epitomised in the plight of Assange.

“That’s why I’m here: for Julian Assange as well as the protest for Palestinians,” he said. “I’ve been writing to [Labor members of parliament] Penny Wong and Albanese and Clare O’Neil for years now. You get a message back saying ‘Thank you very much for that’—an automatic message—and you don’t hear a thing.”

He denounced Labor’s complicity in Assange’s ongoing persecution, saying: “I mean the Labor party were always protesting when the Liberals were in, but now they’re saying: ‘Oh, we’re working behind the scenes.’”

In Brisbane, **Leyla**, a Year 11 student, said she had come to the rally “because I believe that everybody should have the equal right to live and other human rights like housing.”

Asked about the major governments supporting the genocide, Leyla said: “I just think that if you don’t support everybody’s right to live, it’s cruel and it’s shameful. I’ve always been inclined to think that everyone is entitled to equal rights. I am a Muslim and I have had my fair share of cruelty. I just want everyone to be happy with themselves, and not cause harm to other people.”

Leyla, whose mother came from Bosnia, said she agreed with socialism. “The capitalist ideology is really elitist and not empathetic at all to

everyone. It's racist as well."

Speaking about the mass killing of children in Gaza, she said: "I've seen quite a lot of videos of the children passing away in Gaza. I saw one of a young boy, aged around seven, getting his younger brother—I think he was about three—to recite a prayer before he died so he could go to heaven. It's horrible."

Mahraj, a kindergarten teacher, originally from Bangladesh, said she had joined the rally to support the Palestinians against "all the big countries" that were responsible for the genocide.

"This is not fair for the people of Gaza and, as well, it's not peaceful for the world, because when a fire is sparked in one place, it will spread. We need to stop this, not add more fuel.

"Israel is just a front. Who is putting the fuel there? It is the US, the UK and all the big old countries, for their own interests, including to sell their weapons. It is business, nothing else.

"I'm so upset and angry when big leaders are two-faced, like when Biden is crying about one country's children with a sad face, but not caring to see that other countries' kids are dying. Hypocrites and fake people are leading our world.

"We are people around the world. I am afraid for my generation's future. Am I going to live through a third world war?... We need to step up and raise our voice. We want peace and equal lives.

"The leaders are not listening to us like they are supposed to. We elect them to listen to us, but they listen to the money. None of them are real peoples' leaders."

In Sydney, **Alice**, a British born teacher, explained: "This is the first week we've come to the rally. That's partly the logistics of bringing a small child to the event. But I feel powerless and horrified by what we are seeing and hearing about. And anything we can do to try to show some solidarity is the least we can do.

"I don't think there's anything you can read on what has happened in Gaza in the past 19 weeks as an empathetic person and not see yourself and see your family and think how horrendous it is. The fact that health workers, hospitals, civilians have been targeted on such a huge scale and that safe places are now becoming targets is just horrifying. As a parent to see images of small children that have been murdered—I can't imagine the feelings of the parents. It's just horrifying, there's no other word."

Speaking of the British government's backing of Israel, she said, "I wasn't surprised that the conservative government was trying to weaponise peaceful democratic action as being a threat to the wider society. That is consistent with the way they have worked over the last years.

"Labour's backing of this is hugely disappointing. In the UK it is a two-party race so it is quite scary because Labour's stance is not going to help any change in the UK. I think a lot of the motivation of Starmer's comments and actions has been to try to move away from the reputation the party got as an antisemitic party, which was something that Corbyn got through his support for Palestine."

Discussing the slander that opposition to Israeli war crimes is tantamount to antisemitism, Alice stated, "I think that is absolutely untrue of course. You can be against the actions of a government and that isn't about the people. I'm certainly not in favour of the British government but I'm not against British people. I think there is a lot of conflation between being against the occupation and the actions of the Israeli government but that is not reflective of every Israeli person or all Jewish people."

Ethan, who is studying Engineering at UNSW, said: "I came to this rally because for the past 130-something days, there's been an active and blatant genocide that almost every Western government has turned a blind eye to. About three days ago the Canadian, New Zealand and Australian governments released a memo telling Israel, maybe don't do Rafah after, you know, over 30,000 people have died. It's far too little, far too late. A

lot of people have been drawing the comparison of Ukraine and Russia, and Israel and Palestine.

"It's not perfect because Palestine is far more vulnerable, far less able to defend itself and is receiving next to zero support from any other government in the world. With Russia there's been huge amounts of sanctions to the detriment of a lot of innocent civilians, but they were like, we're going to be harsh, try and dissuade them from the war. With Israel it's a finger wag and then another hundred billion in aid from Biden. It's genocide being carried out with Australian, American and other Western power's equipment.

"If you're still trying to work within the system, you are bound to kneel to the powers that be. When Albanese was in his twenties he was very happy to use progressive rhetoric to be popular in the marches and talk about Palestinian rights and economic rights. As he realizes it wasn't going to help his career anymore he shirked that pretty easily, which makes you think if he ever really believed in it.

"It's pretty clear that the quote unquote 'leftist' parties and right parties in basically any Western nation are two sides of the same coin. New organizations and systems need to be made in order to fight the genocide. It's deeply disappointing that unions, decades old institutions of workers rights, are pretty corrupted and people have to go build from the ground up."

Asked what he thought about a direct war by the US against Russia and China, Ethan said, "It's a really grim prospect. Most Western governments are kind of excited for it, especially the US with their military industrial complex. They don't want a war that they're personally involved in, but they want these proxy wars that they supply the funds to and make money from.

"The US wants to prolong the war in Gaza as long as possible. They are fighting against certain Israeli motives so the public eye doesn't get too negative but that's purely self interest. They want it to be another 'forever war.' Look at Afghanistan, it went for over 20 years and they knew it was completely unfeasible to win in 2008 and then it continued for another, what, 14 years. It's really disgusting.

"I don't see these imperial powers changing their tune anytime soon, but I do see the citizens developing a stronger resistance."

When asked what he thought about a socialist perspective to end capitalism, he said, "You'll find a lot of activists on a lot of very important issues who are not explicitly socialist or leftist and they'll be very passionate about climate change or social justice or institutionalised racism, and those are very important causes, but don't see that the hunger of capital fuels all those things. To be truly anti-colonial, to be truly pro-Palestine, to be truly for freedom for everyone, you have to be against the current world system of capitalism and exploitation.

"The fault of almost every serious problem in our society is capitalism."



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)