

Australian students strike again to protest Israel's genocide in Gaza

Eric Ludlow
15 March 2024

Over the past few weeks, hundreds of students in Australia have again gone on strike to voice their opposition to the ongoing Israeli bombardment of Gaza.

More than five months since it began, Israel's imperialist-backed onslaught has killed at least 31,000 Palestinians—most of them women and children. The Zionist campaign is a genocide in every sense of the word.

Hundreds of students took part in strikes from high schools and universities across the country on February 29, including about 300 in Melbourne and 600 in Sydney. Walk outs also took place in Adelaide and Canberra, as well as on March 1 in Perth.

In Melbourne, another strike took place on March 14 involving about 600 youth.

These strikes followed significant protests by high school students in November and December. More than 1,500 students went on strike nationally despite widespread denunciations of youth opposing genocide by the mainstream media and political establishment, spearheaded by the Labor Party state and federal governments, but also involving the extreme right.

Anger at the genocide and the complicity of the governments in Australia and elsewhere is intersecting with broad social discontent. Young people are among the hardest hit by the financial crisis, skyrocketing cost of living, soaring house prices, and are increasingly hostile to government inaction over human induced climate change.

Students and youth join in a sustained mass movement of workers and youth globally against Israel's genocide of Palestinians which is being perpetrated with the support and complicity of the major imperialist powers including the US, UK and Australia.

It does not detract from the political importance of the student strikes to note that they have become smaller. Responsibility for this lies not with ordinary students and youth who are overwhelmingly hostile to Israel's onslaught and the support of the major capitalist powers for it.

Blame for the decrease in attendance lies with the pseudo-left organisations—like Socialist Alternative, Socialist Alliance and Solidarity—who, at present, form the leadership of these protests.

The perspective they promote—that endless protest will pressure governments to back down from their support for the genocide—has been proven to be futile. Youth and students looking for a way forward are met with the dead end of protest politics.

It has become painfully obvious to millions of people that this orientation has failed.

This is a process underway more broadly. For 22 weeks in a row, workers, youth and layers of the middle class in Australia have protested the genocide. Numbers at the weekly rallies have dropped substantially in recent weeks.

This does not represent any decrease in opposition to the onslaught. The opposite process is underway. It reflects growing frustration with the bankrupt political perspective repeated by the speakers week after week that all that can be done is to appeal to the same governments who are supporting the genocide.

Such a perspective is intended to wear down and suffocate the mass movement and prevent ordinary youth from encountering a genuine socialist perspective to end the capitalist system which is the cause of the genocide.

This was on display at the February 29 rally in Melbourne where Socialist Alternative member Jerome Small was the first speaker.

While referring to the genocide as “one of the great crimes of capitalism,” all Small could muster in response to this was: “So, yeah, join in the rage and denunciation of that.”

Small presents “rage” against and “denunciation” in place of a fight against the capitalist system. No attempt is made to mobilise students to the great social force of the world working class, including in Australia. All Small and the other speakers offered was “keep protesting” and “help us organise more protests.” The purpose of this line is to subordinate young people to the Labor government, even as it continues to support the genocide.

Despite their occasional rhetoric, pseudo-left organisations like Socialist Alternative have nothing to do with socialism or the interests of the working class. They represent a privileged layer of the upper middle class who have gained wealth under capitalism and fear, above all, a movement of workers against the profit system.

This is why they seek to pull the wool over the eyes of youth who are grasping for a way forward. Discussion is kept by the pseudo-left organisers to the lowest level in a bid to limit the understanding and perspective of students and youth to dead-end appeals directed to the powers-that-be. The speakers rinse and repeat the same bankrupt positions at every event.

The only political tendency at the student strikes providing a way forward for youth was the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).

IYSSE members distributed hundreds of copies of its beginning-of-year statement, “Capitalism leads to genocide and war—youth and students must fight for world socialism!” and won a warm response from students for its genuine socialist, revolutionary perspective to end the genocide.

In Sydney, 19-year-old **Amanda** told IYSSE members: “I think what is going on in Gaza is an absolute travesty, where genocide is allowed to happen because of a world-wide government complacency towards it. That’s why you have rallies like today, students are coming out.”

“I don’t think there’s any point in pressuring the Albanese government,” the student added. “Albanese knows what’s going on. He knows the public’s reaction. It’s clear that he’s not going to budge from

his current position which is supporting the genocide.”

Amanda was supportive of the IYSSE’s perspective of developing a socialist movement of the international working class against the capitalist system.

“There is definitely the movement towards your perspective of a worldwide movement against capitalism, but I think there would need something to galvanise the workers of the world. If workers understood that what is behind this attack on Gaza is the US war drive, there would be more workers on the streets.”

A Year 12 high school student, also in Sydney, said: “There has been little discussion in my school about the genocide.”

“I came here today because I wanted to support Palestine and I wanted to see what other people thought about how we should have a ceasefire and how we should stop the genocide. I think it’s important to get workers and young people together. The government hasn’t been doing much. We need to continue the protests, especially young people.”

An international student originally from Indonesia, said: “I think it is important for me to understand the solidarity among the students here.”

“There has been support for Palestine in Indonesia is obviously for a long time,” the student said. “It is not only about the Muslim communities but because we care about humanity in general in Indonesia.”

“As we have seen in many parts of the world, the capitalist interests are coming to many sectors especially in funding war. It is a capitalist budget happening around the world today,” the student added. “It is not only a direct consequence of the war, but I think it will be a burden on the working people. For working people it is becoming more fragile and insecure. Inequality is very obvious which we are struggling with.”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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