

Oppose Zionist harassment of Gaza genocide opponents at the University of Melbourne!

Our reporters
20 March 2024

Over the past two weeks, campaigners for the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) club at the University of Melbourne in Australia were harassed on two occasions by pro-Zionist students. The IYSSE members were distributing leaflets to students on campus opposing the Israeli state's genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and the support it has been given by all the imperialist governments, including the Albanese Labor administration.

On March 6, IYSSE members campaigning outside the Baillieu Library were approached by a group of three students, appearing to come from a nearby event organised by the Melbourne University Jewish Students Society (MUJSS), an affiliated club on campus. They began by asking the IYSSE a series of questions, including: "Do you condemn the October 7 terrorist attacks?" "So you support Hamas?" "What about the women who were raped by Hamas?" "Why aren't you calling for the hostages to be released?"

The students identified themselves as Jewish and claimed to be offended by the IYSSE's opposition to the Gaza genocide, accusing it of spreading false information. They disputed that it was a genocide, instead describing it as a legitimate war between Israel and Hamas terrorists.

The IYSSE members responded by saying that Israel is bombing innocent civilians, hospitals, and refugee camps, to which the Zionists replied that this was "unfortunate" but justified. They regurgitated the Israeli government narrative that Hamas had constructed underground tunnel networks and converted hospitals into military outposts, making attacks on the civilian infrastructure necessary to "defeat Hamas forever and prevent future October 7s." They said the "Arabs" had brought this upon themselves, and that "we have tried to offer them a

state several times and they refused."

They went on to vehemently object to the IYSSE's answer to these lies and the statement that the Zionist state does not represent the interests of all Jewish people. They argued that Jews who oppose Israel are a "tiny fringe minority" and that Zionism and Judaism are the same thing.

One IYSSE member told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "They didn't allow us to answer their questions fully but constantly talked over us. I told them they could read our leaflet if they wanted to understand our perspective but that I was not interested in pursuing any further discussion with them. I said we were socialists and internationalists. We fight for the unity of Jewish and Arab workers and youth against nationalism. However, they kept trying to bait us and refused to leave, saying that they just wanted to 'have a debate.'"

It was clear that they did not want a political discussion about the situation in Gaza but were intent on preventing the IYSSE campaign team from being able to speak to students on campus. Despite being told repeatedly to leave, the three students continued to provocatively harass the campaigners for around 15 minutes. At one point, they raised their voices while one turned to students passing by and shouted loudly, "F*** Hamas!"

The group eventually began to move away, saying as they left that they were sorry to learn the IYSSE was a club on campus.

The following week, on March 13, two of the same students harassed IYSSE members who were handing out leaflets at the same location. A concerned passerby asked what was occurring and suggested that security be called.

The Zionist students, both male, approached a young female member of the IYSSE. According to the IYSSE

members, they demanded to know “what she would think if New Zealand invaded Australia and began raping and killing women.” She responded that this was “an absurd hypothesis, that Palestinians were resisting a 75-year long military occupation, and that it was Zionists who invaded Palestine and expelled people from their homes, and killed people.”

MUJSS is an affiliated student club. As such, they have the formal right and the means to conduct political activities on campus.

They do not have the right, however, to harass and intimidate the IYSSE or anyone else campaigning on campus against Israel’s historic war crimes. The IYSSE demands that the MUJSS and its members desist from such conduct, which is clearly aimed at suppressing political discussion on campus in an intimidatory attack on basic democratic rights. We call on all defenders of civil liberties to support that demand, and for the relevant bodies of the University of Melbourne Student Union to take action if the harassment continues.

The MUJSS is the University of Melbourne chapter of the Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS). While professing to represent Jewish students, AUJS, in fact, operates as an aggressive Zionist lobby group on campus.

Its chapters have repeatedly engaged in offensive campaigns vilifying and attempting to silence students and academics who speak out against Israel’s criminality. AUJS, like the major Zionist groups that it collaborates with, specialises in the fraudulent conflation of any opposition to the Israeli state with antisemitism. This line, falsely identifying the Jewish people as a whole with a right-wing militarist outpost of imperialism, is itself antisemitic and denies the reality that a growing number of Jewish people are deeply opposed to the Gaza genocide and the broader oppression of Palestinians.

The incidents at the University of Melbourne are politically revealing.

Throughout the genocide, the corporate media, together with the Labor government and the entire political establishment, has presented an inverted picture of reality. What is presented is that the most ardent Zionists among the Jewish community are living in fear, under siege from rampant antisemitism, which is identified with any opposition to Israel.

A typical AUJS article posted in February, summed up the official line. “Jewish university students across the country are ‘uneasy’ about returning to campus and fear confrontations with well-organised pro-Palestinian student groups could increase this year,” it darkly warned.

But, the reality is very different. As the encounters of the IYSSE demonstrate, the most aggressive Zionist students operate as a law unto themselves, harassing, intimidating and seeking to provoke “confrontations” with students opposed to the Israeli war crimes. Far from hiding in fear, they proudly and obnoxiously announce their support for the Israeli military as it massacres tens of thousands of Palestinians and ethnically cleanses the Gaza Strip.

The reason that there is such a glaring contradiction between the official narrative and reality is not a mystery. The statements of the government, the media, official institutions and their Zionist allies are cynical lies aimed at delegitimising opposition to an unfolding genocide.

The official line has undoubtedly emboldened Zionists, such as the MUJSS activists who harassed the IYSSE. These layers can conduct themselves in the most provocative and outrageous manner, confident that the major publications and even the government will continue to present them as embattled victims.

But there is mass opposition to the Israeli onslaught. That has been registered in the mass protests internationally, in the further collapse in support for Labor and all political parties supporting these historic crimes and in the sentiments of the vast mass of students and young people. Undoubtedly, this ongoing and deepening hostility to the genocide accounts for the rather desperate conduct of the MUJSS members.

The IYSSE will not be intimidated. It will continue its fight against the Gaza genocide, explaining to students that this is a crime of capitalism and imperialism, which can only be fought through a turn to the working class and a fight to build an international anti-war movement based on a socialist program.



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