

Students at Australian universities form encampments to protest Gaza genocide

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Students at Australia's University of Melbourne and University of Sydney have begun campus occupations to protest against Israel's ongoing genocide against Gaza.

The encampments in Australia have been organised in solidarity with similar demonstrations at university campuses in the US. The Australian protests have denounced the police-state crackdown on US students, which is being coordinated nationally by the Biden administration and has as its aim the outlawing of opposition to the genocide, and war more broadly.

Such protests at two of Australia's most prestigious universities, in the two largest cities in the country, underscore the ongoing and deepening opposition of students and youth to the mass murder in Gaza, which is being aided and abetted by all the imperialist governments, including the Labor administration in Australia.

A central demand of the students is the cessation of the universities' collaboration with arms manufacturers which have been directly supplying weaponry and other military supplies to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and used in the genocide.

About 100 students and others joined the encampment on the University of Melbourne campus which began on April 25.

That date marks the yearly pro-militarist celebration known as "ANZAC Day" which is used by the political and media establishment to glorify Australia's involvement in past wars, especially World War I, and promote the military as Australia deepens its involvement in the ongoing assault in the Middle East, the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and US-led provocations against China.

Young people protesting against war on ANZAC Day has sparked outrage from right-wing commentators. Spokesperson for veterans' affairs for the opposition Liberal-National Coalition Barnaby Joyce denounced "anti-ANZAC sentiment" as disrespectful.

Meanwhile, the universities have issued threats against the protests.

An email by University of Melbourne Vice Chancellor

Duncan Maskell in response to the peaceful protest paid lip service to students' right to exercise "their right to protest." But the email quickly warns against any action which is deemed to undermine "safety and wellbeing" of others on campus.

Maskell's email says the university "will not tolerate" behaviours including "vilifying an individual on their own or as part of a group" and denounces "all forms of racism, including antisemitism and Islamophobia."

The university is attempting to set up the conditions where, like in the US, the students engaged in peaceful protests against the Gaza genocide can be accused of antisemitism and of jeopardising campus safety.

Maskell's threats against the protests include the warning: "in order to observe and maintain public order, Victoria Police may themselves choose independently of the University to attend campus at any time."

University of Sydney acting Vice Chancellor Annamarie Jagose issued a similar statement on Wednesday, 24 April.

In it, she also states: "we have zero tolerance for any form of racism, threats to safety, hate speech, intimidation, threatening speech, bullying or unlawful harassment, including antisemitic or anti-Muslim language or behaviour."

New South Wales state police conducted an operation at the University of Sydney yesterday according to campus newspaper *Honi Soit*. It is unclear if the police presence had anything to do with the ongoing encampment.

A University of Sydney spokesperson who gave *Honi Soit* a statement refused to comment on the nature of the supposed threat to which the police were responding. Several buildings were evacuated.

As in the US, a nationally-coordinated attack on the demonstrations is being developed. The Murdoch-owned *Australian* has published several frothing denunciations of the small encampments, in the few days since they were established.

In an article today, the *Australian* featured a letter from the Australian Academic Alliance Against Antisemitism to

university leaderships across the country. The missive, from the rabidly Zionist and pro-Israeli organisation, includes hysterical accusations that the situation is “rapidly spiralling out of control,” with a wave of purported antisemitism on campuses across the country.

This is a lie, conflating opposition to Israeli war crimes with anti-Jewish racism. It is a slander against the many Jewish youth in Australia, as internationally who have protested against Israel’s mass murder. It is also antisemitic, falsely identifying the Jewish people en bloc with a widely-despised garrison state of imperialism as it perpetrates atrocities.

The national Chancellors Council has immediately acceded to the letter, pledging to table it and discuss it at a meeting in Queensland this Thursday. This body, which brings together university leaderships across the country, includes senior figures from the military apparatus, such as former Chief of the Defence Force Angus Houston.

The frothing response underscores the bankruptcy of the perspective advanced at the encampments by pseudo-left organisations such as Socialist Alternative, Socialist Alliance and Solidarity. All of them are seeking to limit the actions to pressuring the corporatised university leaderships to break ties with Israel. This is part of their broader program of subordinating anti-genocide protests to feckless appeals to the federal Labor government, as it continues to aid Israel’s mass murder.

As the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and the Socialist Equality Party have insisted, students and youth must turn to the working class, to fight the genocide and the developing attacks on democratic rights. The aim must be to develop a unified movement of workers around the world, against the mass murder, the broader program of imperialist militarism and their source, the capitalist system itself.

IYSSE campaigners spoke with students at the encampments.

In Melbourne, **Safiyya**, a psychology student, said: “I am here because I believe strongly that Gaza should be free from killing and oppression. We’re here to show that students around the world support the Palestinians and we won’t back down.”

The student opposed the Australian government’s role in Israel’s onslaught. “The Labor Party’s support for genocide is terrible. They are totally ignoring the rights of Palestinians.”

Safiyya also noted the US-led spread of the conflict throughout the Middle East targeting Iran, which threatens to spiral into a global conflict. “It’s a really scary thought, the possibility of a world war. I just hope the genocide stops soon.”

Siena also spoke with IYSSSydney members. studies law at the University of New England, but travelled to the University of Sydney to join the protest.

“It’s just horrific. It’s blatant genocide and it’s been going on for over six months now, not to mention the 75 years prior. The government is not only apathetic, they are actively supporting the genocide, sending weapons and doing weapons deals with Israel despite no one supporting it! People straight up see through it, it’s not like you can cover up a genocide, especially nowadays with everyone on social media seeing the horrific events that are happening.”

When asked what she thought about Labor’s support for the genocide she said: “We’ve all seen clips of Albo [Prime Minister Albanese] out being pro-Palestine decades ago, and now they’re [Labor] truly spearheading the deals with Israel. I saw a photo today of [Foreign Minister] Penny Wong putting flowers on the grave of someone that was murdered from the genocide. It is truly ghoulish and completely unconscionable to be putting on this façade of empathy towards the victims of this genocide when you are the ones providing them [Israel] with the resources to continue it.”

Referring to ANZAC Day, Siena said: “It’s just completely absurd. Australia has their priorities in all the wrong places. They’re continuing to invest in weapons manufacturing and make people feel like that is a fundamental part of our economy when that’s just so not true. Instead, they should be investing in actual essential services like teaching, nursing and other healthcare professions.

“It’s unsustainable because people are going to get more angry and they won’t continue to support a government that is actively supporting genocide overseas while violently oppressing minorities and the working class in our own country.”



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