

Australia: Committee For Public Education holds forum opposing the Gaza genocide and educators' victimisation

Our reporters
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The Committee For Public Education (CFPE) hosted an online forum last week, attended by teachers, academics and students, which opposed the six-month genocide in Gaza and the victimisation of educators.

In the opening report, CFPE national convenor and Socialist Equality Party National Committee member Sue Phillips condemned the barbaric war crimes being carried out against the Palestinian people on a daily basis.

She explained: “The death toll currently stands at more than 35,000. Once the missing civilians are counted—buried under tonnes of rubble—the true death toll is likely over 44,000. In addition, a further 75,815 people have been wounded. In just six months, 5.45 percent of Gaza’s population has been killed, wounded, or is missing.

“More than 13,000 children have been killed—the most defenceless, innocent and vulnerable sections of society—with many thousands tragically made orphans. If the children, the younger generation of Gaza survive, they face permanent life-changing physical disabilities, including carrying with them the psychological scars and horrors of trauma into the next generations. The comments by the head of UNICEF last November—that Gaza has become a ‘graveyard of children’—has now been vindicated more than a thousand times over and continues every single day.”

Emphasising the complicity of Labor government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Phillips cited a recent statement by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Michael Fakhr. He noted: “We have never seen a civilian population made to go hungry so completely and so quickly [...] in modern history. The Australian government has provided military support to the Israeli offensive. The time will come where the Australian government will be held accountable for aiding and abetting a genocide and starvation.”

In line with this global agenda, governments internationally are transforming and militarising their economies for war. Schools and universities are being integrated into the war drive through curriculum programs and research from weapons manufacturers.

Phillips noted the ruling elite’s response to growing unrest

featured: “Intensifying censorship and legislation to illegalise demonstrations, falsely promoting the lie that to be opposed to the genocide, to be pro-Palestinian, equates to antisemitism. Every effort is being made to criminalise and silence workers and youth.

“Witch hunts, doxing campaigns, and sackings have hit multiple professions—medical professionals, journalism, the arts, as well as education. In the US, Zionist groups have mounted electronic billboards outside schools, provocatively accusing teachers of antisemitism after they spoke out against the atrocities in Gaza. On campuses university student protests against genocide are being met with suppression of free speech, arrests and expulsions from education institutions.”

In Australia, the Gaza protests have continued for more than 26 weeks. Last year, school student strikes were subjected to hysterical right-wing media denunciations fully backed by the federal Labor government and state Labor governments. In the schools, educators that engaged in Palestine solidarity work were slandered as antisemites, terrorist supporters, and threatened with disciplinary action.

In Victoria, the right-wing campaign within the school system was led by the Zionist lobby and endorsed by Victoria’s Labor deputy premier and education minister Ben Carroll, who denounced teachers as “divisive and inflammatory” for taking initiatives such as wearing keffiyehs and Palestinian flag pins.

Phillips explained the case of Jason Wong, a young secondary teacher, who spoke at an after-school rally in Melbourne in support of the Palestinians. Channel 9 News reported one sentence from his speech, completely out of context. This led to an orchestrated campaign against Wong aimed at having him sacked.

Wong’s speech, in fact, directly opposed antisemitism. The one sentence reported was, “ Hamas was doing exactly what they had to do.” A document circulated by Wong’s supporters has explained that he was not supporting Hamas or terrorism, adding: “Jason made the point that many others, including the Secretary General of the UN, have made—that there is a context for Hamas’ violence on October 7th, and without this context the history of the oppression of Palestinian people remains

untold.”

One right-wing outfit called the “Unsilent Majority,” planned to stage a provocative demonstration on the first day of the school year outside the secondary school where Wong teaches. The group, claiming victory, called off the action after learning that Wong was being investigated by the Department of Education.

Phillips warned that Wong’s defence cannot be “straitjacketed within the framework of trade unionism, of appeals to the Australian Education Union (AEU) bureaucracy. The union bureaucracy has a history of collaborating with government and department victimisations.” Like other unions, the AEU has refused to characterise the Israeli military operation as genocide, and has made a false equivalence between the violence of the occupying Zionist forces with that committed by the oppressed Palestinian people.

After the discussion on the forum’s opening report, the following resolution was passed unanimously:

This meeting of the Committee For Public Education condemns the genocide being perpetrated against the Palestinian people by the Zionist state of Israel and its imperialist backers.

Six months of the US-backed Israeli onslaught has resulted in the killing of more than 35,000 people, at least one-third of these children, and the destruction of virtually the entire physical infrastructure of Gaza—houses and apartments, universities and schools, mosques, hospitals and healthcare facilities, as well as basic water and sewerage facilities. The Netanyahu regime is using mass hunger as an instrument of its genocidal war, with a deliberately engineered famine now threatening the lives of tens of thousands more internal refugees. More than a million people remain in the besieged enclave of Rafah, with Tel Aviv pledging to soon extend its offensive into the city.

The CFPE condemns the complicity of the Australian Labor Party—the federal Labor government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and its state counterparts. None of the Australian government’s formal suggestions of a ceasefire—nor occasional hand-wringing over specific Israeli operations such as the murder of aid worker Zomi Francom and her colleagues—has altered Canberra’s lockstep alignment with the Zionist state. The Labor government continues to facilitate the transfer of Gaza bombing targets via the Pine Gap spy base in central Australia, and export of critical Australian-made weapons components to Israel.

The CFPE demands an immediate end to the bombardment. The siege on Gaza must be ended, and food, water, electricity, medical care, and all other necessities must be made available immediately.

The CFPE extends its solidarity with the world-wide antiwar movement, including demonstrations, strikes, blockades and other actions. We condemn the coordinated Zionist campaign against those speaking out against Israeli war crimes, and reject

with contempt the effort to portray support for the rights of the Palestinian people with antisemitism.

We oppose all victimisations, including doxing campaigns. The CFPE especially defends the right of all educators to speak out against the genocide in Gaza. We condemn anti-democratic directives that have threatened public school workers with disciplinary action if they are deemed to have violated various codes of conduct.

The CFPE condemns the victimisation of secondary school teacher Jason Wong, for speaking at a demonstration opposing the Israeli onslaught in Gaza. Wong is reportedly under investigation by the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), a statutory body that has sweeping powers, including the authority to deregister individual teachers. Deregistration effectively ends a teacher’s career by barring any school from employing them in any capacity. The CFPE calls for the broadest defence campaign in defence of Wong, including through the moving of resolutions in every school throughout Australia.

We warn that the Australian Education Union (AEU) will do nothing to defend teachers’ and school workers’ democratic rights.

The bureaucracy has a decades-long history of collaborating with government and education department victimisations—in Wong’s case it issued no public statement in his defence, and at two union regional meetings, officials spoke and voted against resolutions expressing support for him. This is consistent with the complicity of the AEU and all the trade unions in the Gaza genocide, as they have done nothing in response to a call of the Palestinian trade unions for global solidarity, halting the arms trade with Israel as well as funding and military research.

The CFPE calls on all educators to discuss the war at their workplaces, organise resolutions, and demonstrations, and form independent rank-and-file committees, turning to other sections of the working class to develop a unified movement against genocide and war.

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