

Students at university encampments in Australia speak out against Gaza genocide, war

Our reporters
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Over the past two weeks, student encampments protesting against Israel's imperialist-backed genocide in Gaza have been established at a number of Australian universities.

The encampments emerged ten days ago at the University of Melbourne and University of Sydney. Since then, similar protests have been set-up at Monash University in Melbourne, Western Australia's Curtin University, the University of Queensland and the Australian National University in Canberra. Each is demanding that their university cut ties with Israel.

The protests are part of an international movement of students centred in the United States. There the peaceful student protests have been met with brutal state repression. More than 1,700 students have been violently arrested by police ordered by the administration of "Genocide Joe" Biden. Encampments have also come under attack by vigilante groups of far-right, pro-Zionist thugs in cities like Los Angeles.

Despite the small size of the Australian encampments, they have been met by hysterical denunciations from the corporate press, based on similar lies that have been used in the US. Despite the involvement of numbers of Jewish students and the explicitly anti-racist character of the encampments, assertions have been made, without a shred of evidence, that they are a threat to the safety of Jewish pupils.

Politically, the encampments are dominated by pseudo-left and other protest groups. For the past seven months, fake-left organisations like Socialist Alternative and Solidarity have sought to restrict opposition to the genocide to impotent appeals to the Labor government to end its support for Israel. Now, these tendencies are seeking to limit the opposition even more, by confining it to campus-based actions aimed at pressuring individual

university administrations.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) has intervened at the encampments, insisting that students must turn to the working class, as the only force that can end the genocide. This must be connected to a socialist perspective directed against the eruption of imperialist militarism, of which the genocide is a part, and its source the capitalist system.

IYSSE members have spoken to some of those in attendance.

Molly, a University of Melbourne student, said: "I am here because I'm against Israel's genocide in Gaza and I'm also against Australian universities' complicity in that genocide. Albanese's government is abhorrent. Not only is it not supporting Palestinians, it's actively supporting Israel by providing military means, as is Melbourne University."

She also denounced the mainstream media smearing students as antisemitic. "That rhetoric is being peddled by the media en masse. We've seen a lot of misinformation by the media and also by our government. We have Jewish students here who are in support of Gaza. We're not anti-Jewish, we're anti-terrorism."

Molly also spoke against the police crackdowns on the encampments in the US. "It's disgusting. This is a peaceful protest and we don't want the cops here. They're not welcome."

IYSSE members also highlighted the broader imperialist agenda. "There's no doubt about the state of the world right now. It's so terrifying," Molly said. "That's why we're all here, to show that we're anti-war."

Second-year University of Melbourne media student **Sarah** also denounced the police attacks on protests in the US.

"These have been peaceful protests. It's not fair for

them to be met with violence. Simply putting up a tent in a university location shouldn't warrant police brutality in any way."

"Going against what Israel is doing is not going against Jewish people. It's just standing against the genocide. They're two separate things. You can be Jewish and support the pro-Palestine movement," she said.

"It's not self-defence on Israel's part. It's the murder of civilians and children," the student added. "Such violence shouldn't be labelled as self-defence when it gets to the point of deliberately inflicting violence. They're the ones perpetrating crimes."

A University of Melbourne law student **Mark** told the IYSSE: "What's happening in Gaza is atrocious. For some students here, maybe it's easy to feel distant from it. But this encampment has made it visible to every student. The students camping here have made it clear why they are doing what they're doing. I honestly don't understand how that can be interpreted as antisemitic."

"It's very disappointing to see the Labor government supporting Israel's actions against Gaza," Mark added.

At the University of Sydney, **Aleyna**, a part-time student who also works full-time in sales, said: "The Labor government is supporting Israel and the genocide because of economic interest and for natural resources, the global powers have a vested interest. We've seen it with the war in Iraq and after 9/11 they labelled it a war on terror. To me the reasons for those wars was to infiltrate and take over those areas of the Middle East. It's colonialism, it's imperialism, they want control, and it is brutal.

"Israel has long since lost public opinion. To be honest with you, all this mobilisation and support from the public is amazing, but I don't know how much of an impact it will have. We want to be on the right side of history. We don't want to support a genocide. But in terms of the right way forward, I think the entire political system, the media, all of that, it's all corrupt. I don't know a specific way to dismantle it, but it needs to be dismantled entirely.

"We can scream at politicians as much as we want, and the people in power, but it's very easy for them to turn a blind eye and just disregard it. Whereas I think if we increase the masses and just get the vast majority involved, that might be a better starting point or a better approach."

Asked what she thought about socialism, Aleyna said, "I've only recently studied Marx and his critique of capitalism. I fully agree. I think the capitalist system is where a lot of our problems stem from and the entire

system needs to be dismantled. I think we need more socialists."

At the University of Queensland, the IYSSE spoke to physiotherapy student **James** who was not part of the encampment on campus, but spoke with IYSSE campaigners at the camp.

"I really feel for the people in Gaza. All war is wrong, but this seems especially terrible when it's innocent people. I think it should stop immediately," James said.

"I guess all these western countries have a common strategy, but whatever their reasons there's no acceptable reason to support the bombing of civilians, of children," he added.

He agreed with the IYSSE's warnings that protest alone will not change the minds of capitalist governments.

"While it's important to protest, I don't think it's going to do all that much by itself. I mean you come and protest here, but who is going to listen to you?"

James responded strongly to the IYSSE's call to turn students to the working class.

"I agree with you when you say that students have to talk to the workers. I mean if everyone is involved, not just students, then I think these protests can go somewhere, have a real effect. I also think that it's wrong that students are getting attacked. They have a right to do what they are doing."

James added: "I also agree with your point that if everyone went on strike, they couldn't get weapons to Israel. I'm not sure how you would achieve that, it's so many people, but it's certainly the direction things need to go."

"I don't know much about capitalism and socialism. I agree though that things have got to change, and that bombing of Gaza has got to stop," the student added.

"I would say that what you are doing is right. I agree that everyone [students and workers] have got to come together to stop what's happening in Gaza. I think there's so many people who know it's wrong, but aren't sure what to do about it."



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