

Call for industrial action to halt Gaza genocide stifled at Australian university union meeting

Our correspondents

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A motion calling for action by workers to halt all work connected to military exports to, or collaboration with, the Israeli state, was opposed and maligned by National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) branch committee members at the University of Sydney last week.

Socialist Equality Party supporter Zac Hambides moved the resolution as an amendment to a branch committee resolution that proposed no such action but instead asked the university's management itself to cut ties to Israel.

This was after seven months of an escalating genocide, in which Israeli forces have killed more than 35,000 people—during which no trade union in Australia has called a single stoppage to oppose the slaughter—and amid the launching of more mass killing in Rafah and across Gaza.

The amendment called for a black ban and cessation of work on all university research, education or other projects linked to the Israeli military or otherwise assisting the genocide in Gaza. It urged all workers, including at other universities, to take similar decisive action.

When Hambides moved the motion on behalf of the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), the rank-and-file educators' network, NTEU branch president Nick Riemer arbitrarily declared that he would have only two minutes to speak, despite the NTEU standing rules providing for three minutes.

Hambides told the meeting: "I am moving this amendment because the union resolution proposes workers do nothing except make appeals to management to divest. This will not stop the genocide!"

"The only social force that can end the genocide is the working class, taking decisive action as the Palestinian unions have called for. Rafah is now being invaded and tens of thousands more Palestinians will die.

"This barbarism is part of a wider agenda. The same governments that are backing and arming Israel in the genocide in Gaza are waging war against Russia in Ukraine and preparing to go to war against China. All these wars are

linked. While genocide Joe [Biden] helps Israel kill over 30,000 in Gaza, he says the threat of nuclear weapons won't prevent him from escalating the war in Ukraine.

"Millions all over the world have protested against the genocide. These are the largest anti-war protests since the 2003 war in Iraq. Yet the slaughter has only intensified.

That is because the protests have been limited to the dead-end perspective of appealing to the very same governments, including the Albanese government, that are more fully committed to Israel and US militarism.

"In the face of this, the union leaders have refused to call a single strike. So we have to decide today to take action ourselves and call for other workers worldwide to do the same."

Riemer even blocked Hambides from reading out the full amendment, which began by citing the call issued last October by the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions. That call was for "unions in relevant industries" all over the world to "refuse to build weapons destined for Israel... refuse to transport weapons to Israel... [to] take action against complicit companies involved in implementing Israel's brutal and illegal siege."

The amendment denounced the Labor government for "supporting and facilitating the genocidal assault on the Palestinians," and condemned "the refusal of any union in Australia to take industrial or other action in line with the call by the Palestinian unions."

The amendment also called for industrial action to defend the anti-genocide student encampments at Sydney and other Australian universities, "if they come under attack by university managements, police or Zionist provocations."

Speaking against the amendment, branch committee member Jason Todd falsely claimed that it let management "off the hook completely." In fact, the amendment called for action against the management's refusal to cut its lucrative ties with genocide-linked projects.

Todd declared it was "really counterproductive" to

denounce the role of the unions and the Labor government. Counterproductive for whom? Todd did not, indeed could not, deny the reality: Neither the NTEU, nor any other union, has called a single strike to block supplies to Israel or prevent the Labor government from continuing to support the Netanyahu regime's genocide in Gaza.

The purpose of Todd's statement was to provide a further green light for the very forces that have systematically suppressed any industrial action against the genocide for seven months. That includes the Maritime Union of Australia, which has opposed any stoppages to block ships belonging to Israeli shipping line ZIM, which has offered up all of its resources to support the onslaught against Gaza.

Riemer imposed an immediate vote after Todd spoke, although the amendment had not been read out to the meeting, denying attendees the right to discuss it. To create an atmosphere of confusion, Riemer did not accurately report the number of votes. At least 15–20 percent of the approximately 350 in-person and online participants either abstained or voted in favour of the amendment.

After the CFPE amendment was defeated, Zambides spoke against the branch committee resolution, "from the left," because "it leaves all initiatives and all actions in the hands of university management and the government." He pointed out that "genocide is now a policy of every imperialist government in the world, including in Australia. They know the genocide is taking place and wilfully continue to support Israel...

"This is why protests and appeals to the government go nowhere. Just like appeals to management also go nowhere."

Riemer and a majority of the branch committee represent two pseudo-left groups, Solidarity and Socialist Alternative. They pushed through a resolution that called on the university management to cut ties with organisations that enable "the current Gaza violence" and with the "weapons industry."

This resolution did not commit to any action if the management continues to reject such calls, nor did it propose any action if the student encampment at the university came under attack.

The resolution noted "the NTEU National Council resolution of October 2023, committing the union to active solidarity with Palestine." That is a fraud. The October NTEU resolution proposed no action by workers against the genocide either.

The events at the meeting demonstrated the role of the pseudo-left groups in heading off opposition to the refusal of the trade union bureaucracies to call any industrial action against the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza.

After Hambides exposed the fact that the branch committee resolution made no commitment to defend the

anti-genocide student encampments, an impromptu motion was proposed to express solidarity with the encampment at the university and to "defend it if attacked." The motion passed with 196 for, 5 against and 5 abstaining.

The CFPE last week backed the call issued by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) for workers everywhere to take action to force an end to the genocide and the violent police-state crackdown on university protests. The IWA-RFC said the issues raised by the courageous stand taken by students "cannot be resolved on the campuses, but rather in the factories, warehouses, railroads and docks."

In supporting this call, the CFPE stated: "Workers can and must organise independently of the trade union bureaucracies to stop weapons deliveries and arms production." It specifically urged the development of action along the lines called for by the IWA-RFC statement: "Demonstrations, mass meetings and delegations of workers to campus protests must be organised, culminating in a nationwide and international strike to force an end to the assault on the basic right to free speech."

We encourage all educators to contact the CFPE and join the global campaign against the Israeli genocide:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/commforpubliceducation
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/opposeaeusellout>

Twitter: @CFPE_Australia



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact