

Australian public sector workers take a stand against Gaza genocide

Oscar Grenfell
9 June 2024

An open letter issued late last month, condemning Israel's onslaught in Gaza and the Australian government's complicity, has now been signed by more than 2,300 public servants across the country. The document had 350 signatories when it was released, meaning that almost 2,000 public sector workers employed by Australia's federal, state and territory authorities have added their name in less than a fortnight.

Having pointed to the record of the ruling elite's dispossession of the country's own Indigenous population, the letter states: "As public servants whose work is to serve our communities, it is our obligation to voice our deep concern that you are leading Australia to be complicit in an additional genocide, an additional colonial project, staining this nation with more war crimes—even more than it lays claim to already..."

It declares: "Aside from the dishonour of assisting what the Commissioner General of UNRWA has termed "a war on children," Australia may now be violating international law and complicit in criminal warfare."

The letter notes that United Nations experts have previously called on Australia to halt all defence exports to Israel. Under conditions where the Labor government is simply lying, by telling the population that no such exports are occurring, the letter includes a brief but devastating outline of the real state of affairs.

The F-35 warplanes that are dropping Israeli bombs on the defenseless population of Gaza could not conduct their operations, without key components from the Australian defence industry.

The letter points out that "The Australian Government... boasts that over 70 Australian companies manufacture parts for the F-35, and that Australia plays a key role in the F-35 supply chain. Rosebank Engineering in Victoria is the only company in the world that makes the mechanism that allows the F-35 to drop bombs." A court in the Netherlands ordered a halt to all Dutch exports contributing to Israel's fleet of F-35's, but Labor has continued Australia's trade.

In addition, the Labor government last February awarded a

contract to Elbit Systems, totalling almost a billion dollars. Elbit is Israel's largest defence company, and has manufactured many of the weapons of war being used against Gaza. That includes drones which fired the fatal missiles that killed Australian aid worker Zomi Franklin earlier this year

And despite the denials, Australian export approvals to Israel have increased during the genocide, and total at least 350 since 2017.

The public servants demand an end to this trade, the cancellation of all contracts with Israeli weapons companies and the disclosure of Australia's full involvement. That includes releasing information about the role played by the joint US-Australian Pine Gap spy base, which has likely provided targeting information used by Israel to conduct its bombardment.

In appending their names to the letter, the public servants have taken a courageous stand. They have openly defied draconian employment conditions, set out in federal, state and territory codes of conduct, which generally prohibit public sector workers from speaking publicly on political matters.

Despite this, many of the workers have signed with their full names and have also indicated the specific department that they work in. Taken together, the signatories represent a significant cross-section of the working class.

Among them are dozens if not hundreds of education workers, health staff, including doctors and nurses, and community workers. Most states and territories appear to be represented. More than 500 of the signatories are employed by the federal government. That includes employees at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which is directly responsible for foreign policy.

The letter demonstrates the breadth of opposition to the genocide, which has also been manifested in weekly mass protests in major capital cities, in possibly the most sustained anti-war movement in Australian history.

The range of signatories underscores the basis for mobilising the working class against the genocide. If a call

were issued for industrial action against the onslaught and Australia's complicity, it would doubtless receive a similar response and, as the letter indicates, could encompass key layers of the working class, which are central to Australia's daily functioning.

The country's trade unions, however, have not called a single action opposing the slaughter. They rejected a desperate appeal from Palestinian trade unions last October for strikes and other union activities to disrupt and halt the genocide. Instead, they have maintained an alliance with the Labor administration as it supports the mass killing, in line with the broader role of the union bureaucracy as a police force of governments and corporations against the interests of workers.

The letter appears to have been initiated by a subset of the Trade Unionists for Palestine (TU4P) organisation. Established by the fake-left Solidarity group, it has worked throughout the genocide to cover-over the complicity of the union officialdom in the mass slaughter.

TU4P has collaborated very closely with the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), even as it enforces the daily loading and unloading at ports of goods from the Zim shipping line, which in October dedicated its entire fleet to the Israeli war effort. TU4P and Solidarity leaders sought to cover-up the fact that the MUA invited Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to be the featured speaker at its February national conference and then made excuses for the bureaucrats when his attendance was exposed by the WSWS.

Two elements of the letter reflect TU4P's bankrupt line. Firstly, it asserts that Labor's support for the genocide is an error, because the war crimes are not in Australia's interests. This is entirely false. Labor is backing the mass murder because Australia is fully-aligned with a broader US-led war drive, throughout the Middle East, in Europe targeting Russia and in the Indo-Pacific, China.

Australia is an imperialist state, with its own predatory interests, which it has always advanced under the umbrella of the dominant power of the day, first Britain and then the US.

Secondly, the letter is based upon appeals to the Labor government to change course. But such appeals, including every week at the mass protests, have not shifted the government one iota. They are a bankrupt dead-end, serving to demobilise workers and to line them up behind the government, as it continues its full support for Israel.

If anything, the more opposition has been expressed, the more the government has doubled down. That has been on display over the past week, including with Labor joining hands with the Liberal-National Coalition to brand peaceful protests opposing the genocide as dangerous exercises of

violence based upon "misinformation."

On Sunday, the Victorian Labor government carried out an aggressive police operation against a mass Gaza protest, with riot cops storming into the crowd and deploying capsicum spray as they purportedly searched for someone alleged to have set off a flare.

In New South Wales (NSW), the state Labor government directed the leadership of the public service to send a threatening letter to workers at the end of last month, warning them against signing the open letter and engaging in other political activities.

At a small rally on Friday evening outside the NSW Department of Education headquarters, teachers and high school students spoke about a regime of intimidation and censorship. Staff had been threatened with disciplinary measures for wearing pro-Palestinian pins and insignia, while being instructed that they could not mention the genocide in any way. Students had been hauled before principals and school executives for wearing Keffiyehs, Palestinian scarves.

Labor's ongoing alignment with the genocide and its clampdown on opposition underscores the bankruptcy of moral appeals and protest politics.

What is required is the mobilisation of the working class, to halt all defence related trade with Israel and to help end the genocide. That demands the formation of rank-and-file committees in all industries and workplaces, independent of the Labor-aligned and corporatised union bureaucracies. Such committees can provide a forum for democratic discussion to plan concrete actions, including strikes, against the genocide and in defence of those who are victimised.

Such a struggle must be linked to the fight to develop an international anti-war movement that unites the working class, not only against the Israeli war crimes, but the broader eruption of imperialist militarism of which they are a part, and the capitalist system which is responsible for the descent into barbarism.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact