

# Australian university and high school students strike against the Gaza genocide

Our reporters

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Students from universities and high schools around Australia struck earlier this month in opposition to the Israeli genocide in Gaza and the complicity of the Australian Labor government of Anthony Albanese.

While the strikes, held on August 7, were not as numerous as the first ones held in November 2023, hundreds of students walked out of class in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane and Wollongong. The largest demonstration was in Melbourne, where around 500 students rallied outside the State Library and marched through the city.

The student strikes, which drew many young people to protest against the Gaza genocide for their first time, demonstrate the ongoing mass opposition among workers and youth internationally to the horrific crimes of imperialism. They took place in the wake of a large march across the Sydney Harbour Bridge, which organisers estimated at attracting over 300,000 people.

The strikes were organised by the pseudo-left group Socialist Alternative. As at other pro-Palestine rallies, they presented the bankrupt perspective that the Labor government, which is directly complicit in the mass murder in Gaza, can be pressured to oppose the genocide.

At the Melbourne strike, speakers including Nasser Mashni, president of the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network, and Robert Martin, a member of the Freedom Flotilla, promoted the fraud that protest is "working" and needs to be continued.

In reality, the Albanese Labor administration, a pro-war government of Australian imperialism, has responded to the mass protests of the past nearly two years by slandering protesters as "antisemitic," expanding state suppression and assaulting basic democratic rights.

Labor's pledge to vote in favour of "recognising" a Palestinian state was an utterly cynical attempt to distance itself from the genocide, in which it continues to be actively involved. In practice, it would mean recognising a pile of rubble and corpses, while supporting Israel as it completes the ethnic-cleansing of Palestine.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) went to the strikes to advance a revolutionary socialist perspective. We warned that appealing to governments responsible for the genocide to change course was a dead-end that would only facilitate the completion of the genocide.

We raised the need to campaign within the working class for industrial actions, including strikes, that would cripple the Israeli war machine, in opposition to the corporatised union leaderships that have blocked such a struggle. And we insisted that this must be part of the fight to build an international and socialist anti-war movement.

IYSSE campaigners spoke with the following students at the Melbourne rally.

**Leo** and **Elle** were both attending a school strike for Gaza for the first time. They participated in some of the school strikes for climate in 2019 when they were in primary school.

Leo said: "I have been closely following the genocide in Palestine for the past year or so, although I've been aware since the beginning. It's appalling what's happening. Probably hundreds of thousands are dead or starving. And nothing is really being done about it. Australia is actively giving parts of jets to Israel."

Elle added: "Staying silent is a kind of condonement of the current siege and occupation of Gaza. And the Australian government is clearly engaged in arms trade with Israel. That's why we came today."

Leo spoke on how the genocide is being backed and enabled by all the imperialist powers, from the US and Europe to Australia. "All these Western governments are supporting ethnic cleansing. It's horrific for Israel to be doing this, because this is a sort of holocaust against Gaza."

"They are essentially weaponising the tragedies suffered during World War II," said Elle, "and using them against the Palestinians and those who support them. They are doing a very similar thing in Gaza."

On the ongoing protests against these blatant war crimes, Leo said, "Maybe a part of me is pessimistic, because I'm

not sure how much progress is made just out of these protests. In a way, peaceful protests are standing up for what you believe in, rather than expecting anything to come of it. At this point, I think that if protests like this one can be ignored by the Australian government, they will be.”

High school students **Sophie, Sophia, Aud** and **Ayla** joined the rally together from the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School.

Sophia said: “It’s a really important cause and it’s impossible to ignore now as well. I think that when you weigh up your priorities, missing a class versus supporting something of this importance is like, of course.”

“It’s really easy to feel helpless when we’re in a whole different country and you can’t really do anything when you’re so young,” Aud added. “So this is kind of the way of trying to make even the smallest of a difference.”

Ayla said: “I think it’s been going on for so long and it’s been ignored by governments, but also I think reminding school institutions as well that it’s going on by missing classes is really important.”

On Israel’s deepening of the genocide, Sophie said: “I just think it’s completely inhumane and horrible, especially with the current food shortages and starvation. It’s an ultimate form of cruelty that I think it really does need to stop.”

“It’s sickening the fact that they’re targeting civilians,” Sophia added.

IYSSE campaigners asked the students what they thought about Prime Minister Albanese’s mealy-mouthed denunciations of the starvation of Palestinians while the Labor government continues to support Israel’s genocide.

“If he actually cared, there would have been some sort of interference by now. I think that it’s very much just trying to appear supportive,” Aud said.

Sophia agreed, raising, “It’s one thing to say that you recognise that something’s wrong and it’s another thing to, when you’re in a position of power, use that position and actually do something with it.”

Ayla added: “I think that him talking about it was just performative and to quiet people.”

IYSSE members linked the Gaza genocide to the broader eruption of militarism, including the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and the preparations for war against China in the Asia-Pacific, which threatens nuclear catastrophe.

“Me, Sophia and Sophie are all history of revolutions students, so it’s terrible what’s happening, but it’s so interesting because it’s just a repeat of stuff that’s happened in the past and to learn about it and then go out and watch it happen in real time, it’s really concerning,” said Ayla.

Sophia added: “It’s quite scary. We see the impact that it has globally on regular people economically and socially,

emotionally, and I think it just makes you scared about your own future. It might not be affecting us right now but what about in 10 years? Who knows. So right now, there’s a chance to push it back and support each other.”

The IYSSE campaigner referred to the attempts by governments to suppress pro-Palestinian protests, including the Labor state government in New South Wales attempting to block the Sydney Harbour Bridge protest.

“I definitely think it’s horrible and it’s completely against the human right to protest and human right of free speech,” said Aud. “It’s just so un-empathetic of what’s happening.”

“I also think it’s unsurprising that they’re trying to stop protests,” added Sophia. “Anytime that the public speaks out, their immediate reaction isn’t to actually listen to us, but it’s to shut us down. So continuing and fighting even more aggressively against it is the right course of action.”

Finally, the interviewer explained the IYSSE’s analysis that protest to government alone will not end the genocide. What youth and students must do is fight to mobilise the working class, the social force which is capable of ending the capitalist system which is the source of war. The IYSSE’s perspective is that young people call on workers to go on strike in key industries to prevent the manufacture and shipment of arms to Israel. The response from the students to this program was enthusiastic.

Sophia said: “I’m in complete support of that, and honestly, it’s one thing to strike from one class—that doesn’t change or impact anything. I think a complete shutdown is the only real action that can be taken.”

“In order for it to work, everyone has to do their part,” Ayla added. “So, like you said, dock workers need to stop, students need to stop, everyone needs to stop.”



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