

Large marches in Australia voice hostility to Labor's role in Gaza genocide

Our correspondents
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An estimated quarter of a million people joined marches in every capital city and many towns throughout Australia yesterday against the intensifying Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Significantly, the protests were marked by deepening outrage and hostility not just toward the mass slaughter and starvation in Palestine but the active support for the US-backed onslaught by the Albanese Labor government, including through continuing exports of F-35 parts and other weapons to Israel.

Following on from the anti-genocide march by up to 300,000 people across the Sydney Harbour Bridge on August 3, these were among the largest pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Australia since the Zionist ethnic cleansing began in October 2023. In Brisbane, where up to 50,000 marched, it was the biggest anti-war protest since the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq.

The vast majority of those in attendance were ordinary workers, students and other young people, some joining the anti-genocide demonstrations for the first time, while others had been protesting week after week for nearly two years.

At least 100,000 rallied in Melbourne, 40,000 in Sydney, 15,000 in Perth, 10,000 each in Adelaide and Hobart, 5,000 in Newcastle, 2,000 in Canberra and hundreds in each of about 40 other locations, including Geelong, Cairns, Bathurst, Shepparton, Geraldton, Coffs Harbour, Katoomba and Tathra.

A protest was held outside the US-Australia Pine Gap satellite surveillance base near Alice Springs, which is almost certainly being used, with the Labor government's approval, to help the Israeli regime target the bombs that have so far killed at least 62,000 people, overwhelmingly civilians, in Gaza.

In some cases, the sheer size of the marches made it difficult to estimate the numbers. In Brisbane, where the organisers and police had said they expected 7,000

attendees, the turnout in Queens Gardens far exceeded that. The crowd spilled over to surrounding streets, forcing the police to shut down parts of the central business district. It took two hours for the final marchers to reach the end at Musgrave Park.

A factor in the Brisbane response was opposition to the anti-democratic ban imposed by the police and the courts on the originally planned march over the city's iconic Story Bridge. The police falsely cited safety concerns, whereas it was the police that had caused safety dangers on the Sydney Harbour Bridge march by ordering thousands of demonstrators to turn back mid-bridge.

Most strikingly, participants in yesterday's marches voiced fury at the ongoing active support for the genocide by the Labor government, despite the claims of the protest organisers and speakers that the massive Sydney Harbour Bridge march had forced the government to start to change course by saying it would recognise a Palestinian state, supposedly to be based in the rubble of Gaza and the West Bank.

Hand-written placards in Brisbane, for example, poured particular scorn on statements by Foreign Minister Penny Wong that the export of F-35 war plane parts to Israel, permitted by the government, were "non-lethal." Among the many such signs were: "There's nothing non-lethal about F35s," "Stop arming Israel" and "Stop selling weapons to Israel."

Other placards displayed or referred to the reality that the killings, starvation of children and unfolding famine were continuing despite the hypocritical, mild statements of objection being made by governments, including Australia's, that have backed the Israeli barbarism from the outset.

This widespread sentiment was in sharp contrast to the line being peddled by the organisers and most of the speakers, notably Greens leaders and trade union bureaucrats, that "the tide had turned" because of the

Albanese government's recent empty criticisms of the blatant starvation and other crimes against humanity being committed by the Netanyahu regime.

Speakers generally implored the participants to keep trying to pressure the Labor government to impose sanctions and weapons embargoes on Israel. They were effectively seeking to channel the growing anger back into the dead-end of continuing to appeal to the same government and ruling class political establishment that has enabled the genocide.

In Melbourne, Greens deputy leader Mehreen Faruqi promoted the government's promised recognition of Palestine as a victory for the protest movement. "This government would not have taken even this small step unless you had brought them kicking and screaming, dragged them, to the table, with all your actions," she stated. "They finally know that they cannot deny the depth and breadth of sentiment in the communities."

This could not be further from the truth. The Labor government remains totally committed to the US-backed Israeli offensive to reorganise the entire Middle East, and to Washington's underlying war drive against Russia and China to assert US global hegemony. This has not changed one inch despite 97 almost weekly anti-genocide rallies in Melbourne.

In Brisbane, where ex-Greens MP Max Chandler-Mather spoke, Greens leader Larissa Waters was particularly blatant in seeking to divert the mounting outrage back into the complicit hands of the parliamentary establishment, in which the Greens are a vital cog. Speaking on the side of the rally, Waters told the media:

"Australians are horrified that we are selling weapons components to the Israeli government; it's got to stop. I think after the Sydney march just a couple of weeks ago, which saw the government change position, I'm really hopeful that with the amazing turnout today across the country the government will feel the pressure."

Pseudo-left groups such as Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative consciously fed into this illusion. In both Melbourne and Sydney, Socialist Alternative leaders chaired or co-chaired the rallies, effusively introducing speakers from the Greens and the trade union apparatuses.

In Melbourne, for instance, rally co-chair Omar Hassan, from Socialist Alternative, responded to Faruqi's speech by thanking the Greens for being "staunch in this movement."

Hassan later introduced Luke Hilakari, secretary of Victorian Trades Hall Council, who among other union bureaucrats has ensured that not a single day of industrial

action has been taken to block supplies to Israel, keeping workers trapped in the straitjacket of the Labor government's anti-strike Fair Work legislation.

Hassan apologetically declared: "Some of us would like [union] action to be more militant in the current context, but it is important that we're building coalitions, so please make Luke welcome and let's hear what he has to say."

Hilakari proceeded to mouth a series of platitudes about Palestine and declare his support for sanctioning weapons exports, while committing the unions to do precisely nothing to block weapons or other supplies to Israel.

Likewise in Sydney, Socialist Alternative member Josh Lees introduced New South Wales Teachers Federation president Henry Rajendra, who gave a demagogic speech on behalf of Unions NSW. Rajendra condemned the killing of civilians and called on the Albanese government to impose sanctions on Israel, but did not raise that the unions would take any action to halt supplies.

Some trade unions and regional union federations officially endorsed the demonstrations, yet did nothing to mobilise their members, with only small union contingents visible.

Socialist Equality Party members and supporters campaigned at the rallies. They discussed the burning political issues with participants and circulated *World Socialist Web Site* articles and statements exposing the hypocrisy of the Albanese government's highly limited criticisms of Israel's starvation drive.

The SEP campaign teams called for a new strategy, based on the fight to mobilise the working class independently, including through strikes and industrial action, to cripple the imperialist-Israeli war machine, in a rebellion against the union apparatuses that have blocked such action around the world.

As one of the SEP leaflets, the August 22 WSWS Perspective, explained: "This struggle must be part of the broader fight to build an international anti-war movement of the working class, based on a socialist, revolutionary and internationalist perspective, directed against all of the governments and the capitalist system that is spewing up all of the horrors of the 1930s."



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