

Australia: IYSSE at Western Sydney University presents a socialist perspective to fight Gaza genocide

Our reporters
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On August 21, a Special General Meeting (SGM) was held at Western Sydney University (WSU) Rydalmere campus. The event was part of a “National Student Referendum on Palestine” taking place across Australian universities between August 20 and 28. It was called by the WSU4Palestine group and overseen by the Student Representative Council (SRC).

The meetings are being held amid an upsurge of opposition among workers and students internationally to Israel’s escalating imperialist-backed genocide in Gaza. In Australia, this has been most sharply reflected in the up to 300,000-strong march across the Sydney Harbour Bridge on August 3 and last weekend’s mass rallies in dozens of cities and towns across the country.

The SGM was well-attended by a diverse range of students, including those hailing from the Middle East, Asia and Africa, and the required quorum of 100 was met. The students who were allowed to speak did so with passion, in some cases referring to the horrific death toll of their own families and friends in Gaza. The attendance reflects broad hostility to the genocide among the university’s largely working-class student population.

What emerged centrally in the meeting was the question of how to take forward these sentiments and stop Israel’s barbaric ethnic-cleaning operation.

The perspective put forward by the meeting organisers was one of plaintive appeals to the complicit Labor government and university management to change their ways.

The first demand in their four-point motion was that “The Albanese government impose full sanctions on Israel, a full military embargo including weapons parts, and end its political cover for Israel.” The following demands were all addressed to WSU management, to lift the suspensions of student protesters, halt job cuts and end the university’s research partnership with Syqe Medical, a supplier of medical marijuana to the IDF.

Even in the course of moving this motion, Jordan Pardoel, president of the pseudo-left Solidarity club at WSU, inadvertently hinted at its bankruptcy. She noted that the genocide and war crimes would not be possible without the support from “Western governments and Western institutions

like our university,” and that WSU management had called police to campus in October to intimidate and arrest protesting students. Despite this, she promoted the motion appealing to these very governments and management as a solution.

Zach Diotte, president of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at WSU, explained: “SGMs, petitions and other pressure tactics using this perspective have been tried for the past two years and failed. It’s time that we draw some conclusions. Labor supports the genocide because it is a party of imperialist war. That is not going to change with yet another polite request, this is a dead end.

“The pledge to recognise a Palestinian state does not change that in any way—it is a promise to recognise a Palestine of rubble, while continuing to export weapons to Israel. Meanwhile, Labor and the university managements’ response to mass opposition is repression, more weapons to Israel and police-state attacks.

“WSU Vice Chancellor George Williams and the rest of WSU management cannot be appealed to either. To do so, like with Labor, is to chain the development of a real anti-war movement to the forces directly responsible for genocide—the point is to break it.

“We say the working class can and must stop the genocide, not by appealing to the Labor government or uni managements, but by fighting against them. Workers can cripple the Zionist war machine through strikes and industrial action, but that means opposing the pro-Labor union leaderships which have blocked such a struggle for two years, refusing to call a single strike.”

On behalf of the IYSSE, Diotte moved an amendment to the WSU4Palestine resolution, which read:

1. This meeting condemns the Labor government’s complicity in the Gaza genocide. Through its support for the atrocities against the Palestinians, Labor has again revealed itself to be a blood-soaked party of imperialist war. The experiences of the past two years

have demonstrated that the task is not to appeal to this government, but to organise the most determined political fight against it.

2. Urgent action must be taken to halt the genocide, including through the blocking of all weapons shipments and trade with Israel to cripple the Zionist war machine. That will come from below, not above.

3. Students should initiate a campaign in the working class for industrial action, including strikes, at the ports, the logistics hubs, the universities and more broadly, to make that a reality. Given that the unions have blocked such action and have not held up so much as one shipment to Israel, students must join with workers to establish rank-and-file committees against the corporatised, Labor-aligned and pro-war union bureaucracies.

Diotte's speech and the IYSSE motion were met with enthusiastic applause from many attendees, and a desperate scramble from the organisers to block the motion and shut down any further discussion.

Pardoel claimed to support "the majority of that motion" but not the third point dealing with the unions. On the face of it, this was a cynical fraud—the two points she claimed to agree with explicitly oppose the perspective of appeals to government and management espoused in the resolution and in her own contribution just a few minutes earlier.

Pardoel proceeded with a crass defence of the trade union bureaucracy, starting from the premise, two years into the genocide, that "we're not going to free Palestine tomorrow," but that "this needs to be the beginning of a long campaign of building up student confidence, of building up our organisation."

That statement was as cynical as it was absurd. In leaping to the defence of the bureaucracy, Pardoel essentially argued that nothing could be done to halt the mass murder, under conditions where Israel is moving to complete the ethnic-cleansing of Palestine, not in the distant future but imminently.

Pardoel declared "It's not true that all of the unions have completely abandoned Palestine. There are rank-and-file workers across this country that have been organising for Palestine." That was simply an attempt to muddy the waters. The IYSSE motion was obviously not directed against rank-and-file workers. It was directed against the union bureaucracy.

The record of that bureaucracy throughout the genocide is completely damning. Not a single strike has been organised anywhere in the country to block the supply of weapons or other goods to Israel, despite a desperate appeal from Palestinian unions for such action almost two years ago. Moreover, not one union has broken its affiliation or financial ties to the Labor Party, which remains a full-throated backer of the genocide.

In the face of this objective reality, and desperate to shut down criticism of the bureaucracy at WSU, Pardoel was compelled to deploy even more falsehoods. She hailed the leadership of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) as one which had opposed the genocide, citing its limited involvement in several "community protests" at the docks.

The last of those protests was more than a year ago. And much more importantly, the MUA has enforced the orderly loading and unloading of cargo from the Israeli Zim line, which supports the genocide, and has rejected any industrial action to defend Gaza.

In other words, the mobilisation of workers to halt the genocide directly depends on precisely the rank-and-file rebellion the IYSSE was calling for, against a union leadership that Pardoel and Solidarity collaborate with closely.

Diotte was not allowed to speak again to address the confusion created by Pardoel, and the alternative motion was quickly voted down. The impact of the IYSSE's intervention into the meeting was palpable, however, and the organisers could not tolerate any further discussion. Although there was still a line of students waiting to speak and the meeting had been running for less than half an hour, the main motion was immediately put to a vote and passed.

As soon as the result was announced, organisers armed with megaphones began chanting and led the attendees out of the room on a comically brief march through part of the largely deserted campus.

The organisers' rush to shut down the meeting—within just six minutes of the conclusion of Diotte's speech—underscores the real political role of organisations such as Solidarity. Their occasional references to socialism are a fraud, and their claims to defend the Palestinians are worthless. Speaking for a privileged layer of the upper middle-class, pseudo-left groups such as Solidarity function as the agents and defenders of the Labor-aligned union bureaucracy that is facilitating a modern-day Holocaust.

The perspective advanced by the IYSSE is the only realistic one for stopping the genocide, as part of the broader struggle to build a socialist anti-war movement of the working class globally. We urge students to not only consider it, but to fight for it.



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