

# Australian workers and youth speak out against Herzog visit and anti-protest laws

Our reporters

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On Monday evening, tens of thousands of workers, students and youth rallied across Australia, denouncing the red?carpet welcome extended by the federal Labor government to Israeli President Isaac Herzog.

Protesters recognised Herzog's tour as a stark and provocative affirmation of Australia's complicity in the Zionist regime's mass slaughter of the Palestinian people.

They rejected the use of the Bondi terror attack in December as a pretext for a sweeping assault on democratic rights. In Sydney, a massive police operation culminated in the violent suppression of demonstrators, exposing the anti?democratic character of the anti?protest laws imposed by the state Labor government.

Below are comments given to *World Socialist Web Site* reporters by some of those who took part in the rallies in Sydney and Melbourne.

**James**, a young worker from Queensland, was visiting Melbourne and happened to stumble upon the rally. He told WSWS reporters: "I think it's horrible that we're allowing someone to come in who openly advocates for the genocide of a people. It's disgusting, he shouldn't be allowed in. You wouldn't allow someone who identified as a Nazi and hated Jewish people. But someone who says there are no innocent people in Gaza is welcomed by the government.

"There's the Zionist elite in Israel and their allies, including here, who are trying to blow over that they're literally committing a genocide. The government welcomes people like this, but I think most people in Australia can agree that Israel shouldn't be killing innocent children, blocking off supplies to Gaza so that people starve to death, people being oppressed in ways that are unimaginable."

He spoke on the anti-protest laws passed by Labor in the wake of Bondi: "This could be used to stifle any protests, not just about Palestine. There were heaps of protests here before COVID over climate change and mining, all this

opposition to the government, which has grown ever since. We don't have freedom of speech in Australia. This is a deliberate attack on our freedom to protest."

When asked why he thought Labor had backed the genocide, James said: "It's all to do with money. It's obvious to me that America wants to take over Palestine and the Middle East in general. This genocide is a furtherment of that, and Australia is complicit in that fight as well. It might not be directly the ones committing the killings, but it may as well be."

James agreed that Gaza was one component of a globally expanding war, led by US imperialism, including the criminal invasion of Venezuela: "This has been ongoing. They destabilised Venezuela back around 2017, which caused them to go into hyperinflation. The economy completely collapsed. And now Trump has gone in and taken over.

"The whole capitalist system is collapsing," he went on. "Gold prices are going through the roof. Last week it hit AU\$8,000 per ounce. There's a clear war going on by the US against China. It's all to do with capitalism."

**Maria**, a retired lawyer, condemned the Gaza genocide. "This has gone from something awful to something absolutely appalling. And now Australia has invited the president here! It's unbelievable." Asked why she thought Labor had invited Herzog, she said, "I think Labor is trying to satisfy the US and Israel, and the Zionist lobby groups here. But this is a step too far, to be inviting such a man here."

Of the moves by New South Wales Labor to lock down Sydney to suppress the protest, Maria said: "That is outrageous. The fact they are joining anti-Zionism and antisemitism, especially now after Bondi, is just awful. And that's why I'm out here. It's been 50 years since I last went to a demonstration, and here I am now. Because this is unacceptable."

**Ash**, a university student and retail worker, said:

“Everyone has a duty to adhere to international law. But the state and federal governments here are not doing that. The Queensland government has criminalised the statements, ‘globalise the intifada’ and ‘from the river to the sea.’ I think these are steps towards banning freedom of speech. For now it’s on Palestine, soon it’ll be banning other things that make the government uncomfortable. The government has this idea that the people must do as they’re told.

“Ever since World War II,” he continued, “the western governments have been in an alliance to create a sort of higher class where they dominate the world. Take the United Nations. There are countries like the US that have veto powers. We are seeing colonial-style wars all around the world today, which Australia has an interest in. Myself being of Afghan origin, there were Australian forces that committed atrocities for nefarious purposes, as part of a plan to take over the country’s natural resources.”

Ash had been following the fascistic conspiracy in the US to overturn the constitution: “Now with Trump, the US is moving towards stripping their citizens of all rights and privileges. But it would be wrong to say that isn’t an Australian position as well. For decades, Australia has vehemently opposed refugees coming into the country, in addition to asylum centres we have in offshore countries. It just speaks to the fact that Australia isn’t willing to address the United States’ policy on immigrants and its breaches of human rights, because Australia has breaches of its own on this issue. That’s a conversation neither the Labor Party nor the Liberal Party are interested in having.”

A **retired barrister** at the Sydney rally said she was “not surprised” by Albanese inviting Herzog, noting that, last year, “Netanyahu made a very frank threat to Australia, saying that if we didn’t get hold of ‘antisemitism’ by Rosh Hashana, we’d be sorry. They’re my words, but I think that was a threat.”

Asked about the Labor government’s support for the Israeli genocide, she said: “I think none of the world leaders are innocent. They’re either party to it, or they’re compromised. Obviously it’s a strategic thing. But I’d say there’s a combination of greed and self-interest and compromise and threat.

“I think people are aware of it now. They weren’t before.”

About the Bondi terror attack, she said, “There were people that were killed, so you can’t minimise the loss of life. But I’m a bit cynical about it. Immediately, the anti-

semitism laws, or hate speech laws, or whatever they were called [were passed].

“They’ve been trying to bring in [anti-protest laws] since, probably, the war in Iraq. Definitely, they’ve been talking it up for at least the last year. The war in Iraq was about regime change, strategic and moneyed interests. There was a whole confluence of greed and political opportunism, and Paul Wolfowitz was into regime changes, the Project for the New American Century and all that.”

She agreed that, despite years of mass protests against the genocide, Australian Labor governments were moving to the right and “clamping down” on opposition. She said: “I don’t bother appealing [to the government]. You see it in the UK, you see it in the US. It doesn’t matter what party we vote for. They’re all the same. They’re not going to listen.”

**Sarah**, a counsellor, said: “I’m here because Australia’s complicit in genocide and it needs to stop—we need to break the system.”

She said she was “not surprised at all” by Labor’s welcoming of Herzog: “They’re only interested in profit and the weapons manufacturing industry.”

Asked why governments support Israel, Sarah said it was rooted in “US imperialism, as well as the capitalist profit system.”

She noted that brutal US-led imperialist interventions go back decades, referring specifically to Vietnam and Afghanistan, saying, “we have a US president now that says the quiet part out loud, but every US president has done the same thing.”

“It’s colonialism. The US has had its eye on Iran, and Iran’s been a thorn in its side, for a very long time. No matter what you think of their leaders, the Iranian people should dictate and decide their future.”

“This is part of a plan, the US understands it’s losing its power, its global hegemony. This is end-stage capitalism and this is the part where we’re going to see them do whatever they want to do, as a last-ditch effort to save their empire. But all empires fall. I think people will get to a point where they are that disenfranchised and I have hope that the people will rise up.”



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