

# Melbourne protesters denounce Israeli war criminal's visit to Australia, Labor's police-state measures

Our reporters  
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A demonstration of around 50,000 workers, students and youth took place in central Melbourne on February 12, the largest of a series of nationwide protests against the Albanese Labor government's invitation to Israeli President Isaac Herzog, a war criminal who has openly incited the Gaza genocide.

The rally took place just days after the New South Wales Labor government used "major event" laws to impose police-state conditions in Sydney, where peaceful protesters were kettled, pepper-sprayed and assaulted under sweeping new powers aimed at deterring any opposition to Herzog's visit and to Australia's complicity in the US-backed onslaught on Gaza.

Read the *World Socialist Web Site's* coverage of the Melbourne rally here.

In Melbourne, WSWS reporters spoke to a cross-section of demonstrators about why they opposed Herzog's tour, how they viewed Labor's role in the genocide and the broader assault on democratic rights.

**Laura**, a legal assistant, said it was her first time attending a rally against the Gaza genocide.

"I've come tonight because I believe in the freedom of Palestinian people and I'm here to support that. Australia shouldn't agree with war crimes and shouldn't give any incitement to anyone that has anything to do with war crimes. So the invitation of Herzog is absolutely awful.

"Labor has supported the genocide for the past couple of years now. I like to think I try to see the best in people. But I'm not seeing it at the moment in this government."

In response to the claim by Labor that the protests are antisemitic, Laura said: "That's ridiculous. People have

a right to freedom of speech, including when it's speaking out against the oppression of a people. That's not antisemitic. They're completely different things and no one should say otherwise."

On the police rampage in Sydney the previous Monday, she said: "That was police brutality, and I was shocked to see that happening here. It's the sort of thing we associate with videos of countries overseas, including the US with what ICE is doing to civilians. I'm ashamed for my overseas friends to see that that's happening in Australia."

**Rob** is a truck driver who attended the protest with his family.

"The United Nations and most nations around earth acknowledge that he's a war criminal," he said. "We shouldn't be acknowledging and welcoming this criminal here. Selling weapons to people that kill children shouldn't be the case."

Asked about the attack on protesters in Sydney by police, Rob said, "It's never illegal to have freedom of speech."

**Lily**, a high school student, travelled from regional town Ballarat by train to attend the protest. She said: "I just don't think that a man who promotes genocide the way he does, just doesn't promote what Australia is. I don't want to support a man who supports genocide. I'm here today to just make my voice heard."

Referring to the attack on protesters in Sydney, Lily said, "I think it's in some part definitely inspired by what's happening over in the US with ICE. Governments are feeling freer to use more fascist sort of politics. It goes against our rights."

**Ben** and **Fiona** both work in retail.

Ben explained he attended the protest "partly because

of the footage that came out of Sydney on Monday. I think it's a disgrace and I think people need to be held accountable and secondly, I think it's pertinent to show numbers when Herzog's in town. The gloves are off. The police are nothing but state bullies and they are enforcing protection for war criminals and private property.

"I see disturbing parallels to not necessarily where America is now, but where it was a few years ago and how people let that slide and I see that as the future for Australia. They are telling us, 'don't believe what you know to be true, believe what we tell you to believe.' That's what a lot of Western politics is coming down to."

"They're saying it was justified and that the police were acting under such pressure," Fiona added. "They are lying to people's faces and expecting them to believe.... But we could see the footage. We saw that they wanted a fight. They were attacking people because they wanted to. It was disgusting."

Retiree **John** told the WSWs correspondents: "The New South Wales and Victorian state governments, all Labor are basically a bunch of fascists. I've always been Labor. I don't think they represent the spirit of Labor. They have aligned themselves with America who are supplying the weaponry that kills Palestinian civilians.

"In Britain, [Labour prime minister Keir] Starmer is no better than the Tories. Starmer represents basically the English labour movement, but do they look like a labour party to you?"

"Not far from here there was the arms expo under the auspices of the Victorian Labor government. This is not [extreme right party] One Nation who's putting this on. We have no alternative anymore in Australia as to who we vote for because you've either got Albanese who's on the right or you've got a dysfunctional opposition. We've become a one-party state effectively, because we don't have any alternative and the same goes in the United States.

"I know a lot of people dislike Trump, but can you give me an alternative? America under Biden just supplied weapons to bomb the hell out of Palestinian civilians. Of course, they all will say, like [Foreign Minister] Penny Wong, they oppose violence against civilians. These are just words. Ultimately, you have to apply sanctions against Israel.

"If you saw the Open Letter in ~~Am~~ Monday's by prominent Jewish people, they were saying that Herzog does not represent them as Jews. So a lot of the opposition is coming from Jewish people themselves."

John was asked about the fact that the speech platforms at the protests promoted officials from the Maritime Union of Australia which has blocked any industrial action by dock workers to prevent arms shipments to Israel.

"The degree of complicity is actually extraordinary," he said. "You can add all those Arab countries as well like Saudi Arabia, Egypt who have actually by their silence and lack of action facilitated the whole process. The labour movement apart from in Italy where they pulled a number of general strikes in the major ports, has done nothing. Where is the labour movement? They're not holding Albanese to account. It's a complete betrayal. The Palestinian people have been betrayed on a wide scale."



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