

Mass protest against Israeli war criminal Herzog in Melbourne

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About 50,000 workers, students and youth demonstrated in Melbourne's central business district (CBD) on Thursday as part of a series of protests across Australia over the visit of Israeli President Isaac Herzog, a war criminal, who was welcomed to the country by the federal Labor government.

Thursday's turnout, more than double the size of the previous demonstration in the Victorian state capital the previous Monday, was in large part a response to the brutal police rampage orchestrated by the New South Wales (NSW) state Labor government in Sydney just days earlier. The scenes of state violence in Sydney—where peaceful protesters were pepper-sprayed, bashed and charged at by hundreds of riot police—have sent a shockwave of horror and opposition across the country.

In Sydney, the Labor government of Premier Chris Minns, acting in lockstep with the federal Albanese government, had invoked “major event” legislation to erect a virtual police state, banning marches and granting police draconian powers to control the CBD. The resulting violence was a calculated provocation. Footage showed a grandmother's back being broken after she was pushed by police and a group of Muslim men being attacked while they were in the middle of prayer.

However, as the scale of the movement grows, so too do the efforts of the Greens and their pseudo-left satellites to politically neuter it.

The February 12 rally in Melbourne served as a platform for these forces to attempt to contain the working-class anger and channel it back into the dead-end of the parliamentary system and appeals to the very Labor Party responsible for the crimes being denounced.

The most politically revealing and dangerous contribution came from Gabrielle de Vietri, the Greens' state member for Richmond. De Vietri's speech was a textbook example of how the Greens seek to act as a “safety valve” for the capitalist state.

De Vietri sought to sow illusions in the efficacy of “pressure” within the existing political setup. She claimed that “the power on the street, the power in the parliament, the power in court” had already combined to achieve “incredible things.” She listed as “wins” the end of the Victorian government's partnership with the Israeli arms manufacturer Elbit Systems and the removal of the Land Forces arms expo from the state. These

claims were presented as proof that the Labor Party and the capitalist state can be compelled, by moral pressure and electoral manoeuvres, to halt their support for genocide.

This is a deliberate falsification of reality.

While these localised “victories” are touted, the genocide has only intensified, and the Labor government has responded by expanding police powers and signing multi-billion-dollar contracts with Zionist-linked surveillance firms like Palantir.

The Elbit “partnership” and IMOD MoU were always commercial, time-limited arrangements, quietly allowed to lapse or be rebranded while the state expanded broader military and security ties, including with other Israeli arms companies based in Melbourne and integrated into Australian defence projects. Israeli arms multinationals Elbit Systems, Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries all maintain operations in Melbourne, anchored in Victorian-backed initiatives such as Elbit's “Centre of Excellence” and defence-industry partnerships geared to major Australian “arming programs.”

At the same time, the Allan Labor government is ramming through draconian protest laws: extended CBD-wide “designated areas” for warrantless searches (including of children), new bans and penalties targeting demonstrators, and a “social cohesion” crackdown that explicitly links pro-Palestine rallies with “extreme, dangerous and radical protest” and antisemitism in order to criminalise opposition to genocide.

In other words, the “pressure” de Vietri advocates has not shifted Labor to the left, but has seen it move dramatically to the right, toward the implementation of police-state measures to suppress dissent. Her narrative turns the deepening onslaught on democratic rights into an opportunity for Green electoral horse-trading.

De Vietri's ultimate goal was to capture the movement for the Greens' electoral project. “We must take every opportunity and an election year is a better opportunity than any other,” she declared to the crowd.

She urged the protesters to “translate this people power... into electoral power,” arguing that by voting for the Greens, they could “threaten” Labor's power where it “hurts the most.”

In a cynical piece of political theatre, de Vietri conducted a “poll” of the tens of thousands present, asking those who had

voted Labor in the past to raise their hands and then shout “Never again!” She concluded by inviting these voters to join the Greens, claiming they would “replace them and... change the future of politics.”

This perspective is a political trap. The capitalist Greens are not seeking a break with the imperialist source of war and genocide. They are desperate to prove their utility to the ruling class as “responsible” minority partners in a future Labor-Greens coalition government. Their entire role is to dissipate anger over genocide and war into the safe channels of parliamentary manoeuvres.

The protest organisers, including representatives from Free Palestine Melbourne (FPM), further disoriented the crowd by downplaying Labor’s active participation in the slaughter. FPM speakers repeatedly claimed that Labor’s crime was its “silence” or “complacency.” This narrative serves to obscure the material reality that the Albanese government is a full partner in the imperialist eruption in Gaza and more broadly.

Labor provides diplomatic cover for the Zionist regime, maintains critical military and intelligence ties, and exports weapons components that are essential for the ongoing carpet-bombing of Gaza. By welcoming Herzog and coordinating with his visit, the government sends a message that ethnic cleansing and genocide are acceptable instruments of policy, and that it is prepared to align itself openly with such crimes.

Yet, the political leadership of the protest continues to direct the movement toward impotent moral appeals, asking protesters to “send the government a message” through the ballot box. The underlying premise is that the same parties and institutions orchestrating genocide abroad and repression at home can somehow be pressured into a humane course.

The role of the pseudo-left organisations, such as Socialist Alternative (SAlt), is to provide a “radical” cover for this parliamentary orientation.

Jasmine Duff, a leading member of SAlt, delivered a speech that was devoid of any socialist or anti-capitalist analysis. She failed to even mention the words “capitalism” or “imperialism,” instead offering a bankrupt perspective of endless, repetitive protest: “The same thing needs to happen week after week, year after year.”

This is not a strategy to stop genocide and war, but a recipe for exhaustion and demoralisation.

By advocating for more of the same, SAlt and its ilk ensure that the movement remains politically neutered and under the thumb of the Labor-aligned union bureaucracies.

Throughout the genocide, these unions—including the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), whose Sydney secretary Paul Keating was paraded as a “supporter” at the Sydney rally—have blocked any industrial action by the working class to stop the shipment of weapons or trade with Israel.

Duff and SAlt run cover for these bureaucrats, refusing to call for a break from the union leadership that maintains a lockstep alliance with the pro-genocide Labor government.

The Greens and pseudo-left play this role because, as middle-class formations rooted in the existing parliamentary and trade-union apparatus, their material interests are bound up with preserving capitalism and the state, so they seek to divert mass anger into safe, electoral channels rather than toward a revolutionary break with Labor and the entire profit system.

The alternative to their electoral trap is the independent political mobilisation of the working class. This requires a complete and total break with the Labor Party, which has demonstrated yet again through its invitation to Herzog and its police-state rampage in Sydney that it is a party of war and repression.

The massive turnout in Melbourne confirms that there is a deep and growing hostility to war and the turn toward authoritarianism. But unless this anger is armed with a clear political perspective, it will be dissipated and betrayed. The capitalist class is responding to its global crisis by tearing up democratic norms and turning toward world war, with the Herzog visit and his red-carpet reception by Labor signalling that there are no red lines when it comes to imperialist interests.

The struggle against genocide cannot be separated from the fight against the capitalist system that produces it. The necessary perspective is the unification of the international working class on a revolutionary socialist program to abolish capitalism, the source of imperialist war, dictatorship and social devastation, and to establish workers’ governments that place the vast resources of society under democratic control.

The protests in Australia show the objective potential for such a movement. It will be realised only to the extent that workers and youth consciously reject all attempts to chain their struggle to the parliamentary establishment and instead join the Socialist Equality Party to build a new, revolutionary leadership in the working class.



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