

Australia: Once again on Socialist Alternative's pro-imperialist politics

Patrick O'Connor
19 September 2013

Having campaigned for more than a year for a stepped-up US-Saudi regime-change operation in Syria, including openly supporting CIA gun-running operations, the Australian pseudo-left organisation Socialist Alternative last week finally broke its silence on the Obama administration's preparations for war.

The article, "Syria: support the revolution, oppose US bombing" by Vashti Kenway, marks a desperate attempt by Socialist Alternative to avoid being too closely associated with another criminal US war in the Middle East, while at the same time maintaining its unqualified support for Washington's proxy forces in Syria. As a result, the comment is littered with contradictions and outright lies.

"It is vital that the left in the West reject dictator apologists, support democratic uprisings *and* oppose all imperialist meddling," Kenway writes.

This opened the article with two falsehoods—that US imperialist "meddling" in Syria is a future threat, as opposed to a current reality, and that there is a "democratic" uprising underway in Syria, distinct from such "meddling." In reality, Washington has mounted a protracted effort to oust the Assad regime, allying with Al Qaeda-dominated militia forces, as part of a wider strategy of maintaining its domination over the oil-rich Middle East and North African regions.

Kenway insists that because of the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, "all the major imperial forces have been left scrambling to regain a foothold." In fact, two years after the downfall of the Mubarak dictatorship in Egypt, US imperialism is not scrambling to develop a response. Across the region, it mounted a rapid counter-offensive against the revolutionary threat. In both Egypt and Tunisia, Washington has manoeuvred with different elements of the ruling elite. In Cairo, the Obama administration has variously promoted the military and the Muslim Brotherhood as the best means for

suppressing the working class. At every step, the pseudo-left has tailed the State Department line, with the Revolutionary Socialists, Socialist Alternative's Egyptian co-thinkers, first hailing the installation of the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Mursi as president in June 2012 and then his removal in the US-backed military coup a year later.

In Libya, just five weeks after Mubarak was removed from office in Egypt, the US launched a regime-change operation to defend its strategic interests in the region. Anti-Gaddafi protests were co-opted by the Obama administration and used to launch a US-NATO bombing campaign on bogus "humanitarian" grounds.

The war in Libya became the blueprint for US-backed operations in Syria, which Socialist Alternative fully supported. In August last year, Socialist Alternative's Corey Oakley denounced "knee jerk anti-imperialism," insisting that any emphasis on the "imperialist threat" against Syria was "profoundly mistaken"—because imperialism "is not the main threat facing the masses of Syria, or of the Arab world as a whole." He claimed: "The Arab revolution has transformed everything. We now live not in a 'post-9/11 world' but in a 'post-Tahrir world'."

Now, as Syria faces threatened US bombing campaign—which the recent US-Russia chemical weapons agreement has postponed, not averted—Kenway similarly declares: "Some commentators are resurrecting the ghost of Iraq and the weapons of mass destruction scandal. But Syria 2013 is not Iraq 2003. The US has to contend with a much more volatile situation in the Middle East. The Arab Spring has changed the game."

The American ruling elite has a thoroughly worked out strategy: to utilise its pre-eminent military capability to maintain its domination over the crucial Middle East and Eurasian region, offsetting its decline within the world economy and gaining an advantage over rival powers

including Russia and China. This strategy has not altered since 2003. What has changed in the last decade is Socialist Alternative, which has dropped its previous oppositional posturing to predatory US military operations, such as the Iraq invasion, and openly joined the camp of imperialism. It shares responsibility for the mayhem and violence being inflicted upon Syrian society by the Obama administration.

Neither Corey Oakley nor Vashti Kenway, in their lengthy articles on Syria, once mention Libya. The omission is not accidental. The removal and brutal murder of Gaddafi and the installation of a client government in the oil-rich state remains the model for the “Syrian revolution.”

Socialist Alternative’s silence on Libya is also aimed at covering up their support for the so-called revolution against Gaddafi. In 2011, the organisation nominally opposed a US military attack while simultaneously hailing the “rebel” forces working with Washington as revolutionaries. It is now silent on the situation in Libya, where the “revolution” has culminated in a devastated society headed by a US client government and dominated by rival militia forces, including Al Qaeda-aligned fundamentalists and criminal gangs.

Kenway effusively hails the Syrian “rebels.” She insinuates that anyone not supportive of the opposition forces is an apologist for the Assad regime. In fact, to oppose the Washington’s regime-change operation and the US proxy forces in Syria does not imply any support for the bourgeois government in Damascus, any more than opposition to the 2003 invasion of Iraq meant support for Saddam Hussein.

Kenway insists that to describe the opposition forces as “puppets of Western imperialism” is a “slander,” adding: “To make such a claim is to deny the very real democratic struggles being waged by revolutionary forces.”

Socialist Alternative remains silent on the fate of those subjected to the rule of the Al Qaeda-affiliated Al Nusra militia, including the tens of thousands of religious minorities expelled from their towns and villages, and on the numerous other documented atrocities carried out by these forces. Kenway admits that “reactionary Islamist forces such as Jabhat al Nusra and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant are being funded by Gulf countries.”

She also acknowledges: “It is true that some sections of the movement are calling for US intervention. It is also clear that some forces are getting weapons via Western gun runners. Neither factor indicates universal capitulation on the part of the rebels.”

This is another falsification—it is not “sections of the movement” demanding intervention, it is the entire leadership, with the Syrian National Coalition and the Free Syria Army not only demanding a bombing campaign but basing their strategy for coming to power in Damascus on such an attack.

Kenway’s reference to “some forces” working with “Western gun runners” is another attempt to downplay and cover over the imperialist operation that is underway. It involves the US stationing 1,000 troops in Jordan, including special operations commandos, to train “rebel” fighters. As well, the CIA runs a command-and-control centre in Adana, Turkey, 95 kilometres from Syria’s northern border, to coordinate the influx of arms, foreign fighters, money and supplies to the anti-Assad forces.

Socialist Alternative insists that all this is entirely legitimate and worthy of support. Kenway declared that “many movements have received their arms through one imperial source or another,” raising Germany’s supply of guns to Irish anti-colonial fighters in the early twentieth century and the USSR’s support for the armed wing of the South African ANC. This is to simultaneously falsify history and slander the Irish national liberation and South African anti-apartheid struggles, which, for all their political weaknesses and problems, were genuine mass movements and not imperialist plots like the CIA-US military operation in Syria.

Socialist Alternative’s pro-imperialist stance on Syria is another expression of the lurch to the right of the pseudo-left internationally. The crisis of the capitalist system has intensified geopolitical tensions around the world, while at the same time generating unprecedented social inequality within the advanced capitalist countries. These parallel developments have created a constituency for imperialism within the upper-middle class milieu that the pseudo-left organisations have long represented. The material interests of this affluent social layer are bound up with continued US global dominance, particularly in crucial oil-rich regions of the world. As a result, pseudo-left organisations like Socialist Alternative have rushed to junk their previous nominal opposition to militarism and war as they establish their credentials as a “left” tendency within bourgeois imperialist politics.



To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact