

Australia: Socialist Alliance holds bogus “defend Geelong jobs” rally

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Socialist Alliance member Tim Gooden this week organised a “Jobs for Geelong” rally. The event, a fraud from start to finish, was aimed at covering up the role of the trade unions and pseudo-left organisations such as Socialist Alliance, in enforcing the shutdown of the car industry and the broader pro-business restructuring of the entire manufacturing sector. All three car makers—Ford, GMH and Toyota—have announced their intention to end auto production in Australia by 2016–17.

Gooden is the secretary of the Geelong Trades Hall Council, the unions’ umbrella organisation in Geelong, Victoria’s largest regional city, 75 kilometres south-west of Melbourne. He is playing a key role within the trade union bureaucracy in helping destroy hundreds of jobs at the Ford plant in the city. Gooden was appointed head of a government taskforce overseeing a \$20 million fund for the “retraining” and “transition” of the Ford workers. These funds are a well-worn tactic of governments and corporate Australia, assisted by the unions, to block struggles by workers in defence of jobs by pushing them into dead-end training schemes.

Gooden’s services are well recognised within local establishment circles. He has a regular column in Murdoch’s *Geelong Advertiser*, and recently used it to demand that the state and federal governments double the amount of money his taskforce controls, because of the hundreds of sackings recently announced at Alcoa’s aluminium plant. In other words, this leading Socialist Alliance member is keen to deliver other “orderly closures,” in addition to the one underway at Ford.

The Trades Hall Council demonstration, held on Monday afternoon, involved around 300 people, mostly union officials and their supporters. Construction, electrical, manufacturing, education, services and other

unions participated. Federal Labor parliamentarian and shadow immigration and border protection minister Richard Marles attended, as did several state Labor politicians.

Gooden, who chaired the rally, made clear the pro-Labor orientation of the rally when he warmly introduced one state Labor parliamentarian, James Merlino, as “the next deputy premier.”

Merlino’s speech was a mixture of demagoguery and parochialism. He denounced the Liberal state government as being “no friend of Victorian workers” and criticised its massive cuts to the education system. But the previous state Labor government, in which Merlino was a cabinet minister, as well as the former federal Labor government, carried out the same pro-business agenda of slashing social spending while presiding over huge job losses.

Merlino also announced that the Labor Party would build a regional port at Geelong, “not down at Hastings,” if elected at the next state election in November. Hastings, a smaller regional city, has experienced nearly 1,600 job losses over the last few years with the downsizing of the BlueScope steel plant. At the time, workers were told that plans were afoot for a major development of the port, which would provide new job opportunities. Merlino and the unions are now seeking to pitch workers in Geelong and Hastings against one another over the location of the new port infrastructure.

The union bureaucrats who addressed the “Jobs for Geelong” rally all insisted that state and federal governments were “doing nothing” while thousands of jobs are shed. Acting state secretary of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Craig Kelly, declared: “We have to put pressure on those politicians that are doing nothing.”

In reality, successive Labor and Liberal governments—with the close collaboration of the unions—have actively orchestrated ruthless restructuring measures against the working class. The Australian economy is being geared increasingly to the profits of the major mining companies and the banks, devastating working-class areas like Geelong that have relied on manufacturing employment.

The northern suburbs of Geelong already have an official unemployment rate of nearly 10 percent, with the real level of joblessness far higher. The city is facing the shutdown of Ford, numerous car component closures, continued Qantas sackings at the nearby Avalon airport maintenance plant, and the closure of Target’s retail headquarters. Hundreds more job losses are imminent as 500 Alcoa aluminium smelter workers face being laid off in June.

The unions’ orientation was inadvertently highlighted at the bogus jobs rally by state secretary of the Electrical Trade Union, Troy Gray, who endorsed the Chinese government’s “strategic vision.” He declared: “We went over to China... and it doesn’t matter what industry you go to in China, they have planning. An example of that is the solar panel industry. Ten years ago the government showed the planning and commitment. They put money into it and had a vision. Ten years down the track, China is now the largest manufacturer of solar panels in the world. That is what we need.”

The Chinese government’s “vision” is based on the super-exploitation of hundreds of millions of low-wage industrial workers, regimented by a police-state apparatus. Gray’s remarks underline the entire agenda of the trade unions: corporatist collaboration with governments and big business to boost “international competitiveness” through a relentless onslaught on jobs, wages and working conditions.

The working class cannot defend jobs and living standards within the framework of the trade unions. Workers in Geelong need to develop their own independent forms of organisation, including rank-and-file committees, and turn out to other sections of the working class in Australia and internationally, facing similar attacks. Against the Labor Party, the unions and the pseudo-lefts, a political struggle has to be waged for a workers’ government and socialist policies. That is the political perspective for which the Socialist

Equality Party fights.



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