

Australia's pseudo-left organisation complicit in US war for regime change in Syria

Will Morrow
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The launching of the latest US-led war in Syria and Iraq, aimed ultimately at overthrowing the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, is a devastating exposure of the pro-imperialist politics of the Australian pseudo-left organisation Socialist Alternative (SAIt).

Since the Obama administration signalled at the end of August that it would expand its war from Iraq into Syria, under the pretext of combating the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), SAIt has maintained a stony silence on events in Syria.

Over this period, it has published two articles of its own, in its online newspaper *Redflag*, dealing with the war, which have been entirely focussed on Iraq. The first, "So many lies, so much hypocrisy on Iraq," by Tom Bramble, was published on September 3, and was followed on September 22 by "The Iraq crucible," by *Redflag*'s editor Corey Oakley. Without opposing the war outright, the articles make various criticisms of the US intervention—replete with references to the 2003 lies about weapons of mass destruction—and of the Australian government of Prime Minister Tony Abbott for committing military forces.

The glaring omission is Syria. No mention is made of the fact that the real target of the war is not ISIS, but the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. What was supposedly begun as a limited campaign to defend the persecuted Yazidi minority in Iraq has, in the space of three months, morphed into a full-blown war in Iraq and Syria. The Obama administration has renewed its plans for regime change, which were temporarily shelved last September just as it was on the brink of bombing Syria.

SAIt has yet to write a single article even acknowledging that US bombs have begun to rain down on Syria. As the old maxim states, silence is consent. SAIt has said nothing because it agrees with the US-led war to oust Assad. Like its international counterparts, including the International Socialist Organisation in the US and the Socialist Workers Party in Britain, SAIt has spent the past three years promoting the so-called "Syrian Revolution" and the US-backed anti-Assad forces.

Speaking for privileged upper-middle class layers who increasingly identify their interests with US global hegemony, and thus with its war drive to dominate the Middle East and the entire Eurasian landmass, SAIt's Oakley notoriously declared in August 2012 that it was time to put an end to "knee-jerk anti-imperialism."

In September 2013, as the US was poised to bomb Syria, SAIt published a statement titled, "Syria: support the revolution, oppose US bombing," which, while nominally opposing US bombing in

Syria, supported the imperialist proxy forces as "revolutionaries," and called for them to be armed by the imperialist powers.

Bramble's September 3 article takes up the same theme. Its sole mention of Syria is a criticism of the Obama administration for insufficiently arming the Syrian opposition forces. "[W]hen Syrian revolutionaries were begging for anti-aircraft missiles to help them defend liberated territory from president Assad in 2012," Bramble declares, "they were offered nothing."

In reality, for more than two and a half years, the US proxy forces that SAIt promotes as "revolutionaries" have received huge quantities of arms, as well as finance and training, through the CIA's covert gun-running operations, and from the despotic regimes in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The anti-Assad forces that have benefitted include reactionary Islamist militias such as ISIS and the Al Qaeda-linked Al Nusra Front.

Moreover, within days of Bramble's call for more US support, his wish was granted. The US Congress voted to authorise the White House to provide \$500 million to fund, arm and train the so-called "moderate" opposition in Syria.

The only article that has appeared on *Redflag* that mentions the war in Syria is a belated October 6 repost of a September 24 article from *Socialist Worker*, the website of SAIt's American co-thinkers in the International Socialist Organisation, written by its editor Alan Maass. This article confirms SAIt's role as a cheerleader for imperialist regime-change in Syria.

Maass' main criticism of the US-led war is that it is not directly and explicitly targeted at Assad. He complains that "the murderous Syrian regime of dictator Bashar al-Assad will use the opportunity of Washington attacking a common enemy to tighten its grip."

Maass admonishes the US for the inefficiency of its arming and training of the anti-Assad forces. "Obama claims that part of his strategy for attacking ISIS in Syria is to train rebel fighters from the so-called 'moderate' opposition," he writes, "but it will take the better part of a year for the first units to be ready. In the meanwhile, the Syrian regime can shore up its position in the east without a fight—while continuing its murderous assaults against rebel fighters elsewhere."

Maass is simply echoing the criticisms of the Sunni-based opposition militias inside Syria and their backers such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, whose objection to Assad is not that he is a dictator, but that he belongs to the Alawite Shiite sect and is backed by the Shiite fundamentalist regime in Iran.

Having spent more than two years promoting the Sunni Islamist

forces inside Syria as progressive, SAlt continued to support them as they crossed from Syria to Iraq and, in June this year, took control of several Iraqi cities. An article in *Redflag* on July 1 by Oakley, while nominally opposing the “reactionary” politics of ISIS, hailed what he claimed was a “broader” Sunni “rebellion,” which, he declared, was threatening to break down the colonial borders imposed in the carve-up of the region after World War I. He breathlessly wrote: “The stunning speed with which the revolt has swept across Iraq has shaken the entire region to its core.”

SAlt is now clearly concerned that its support for these extreme right-wing forces has left it politically exposed, and is desperately seeking to cover its tracks. Forgetting, and hoping everyone else will forget, his previous panegyrics to the so-called progressive rebellion heralded by ISIS, Oakley declares, in his September 22 article, that ISIS is a “grotesque and reactionary organisation.” Yet, he makes no condemnations of the Sunni fundamentalist “rebels” in Syria who for the past two years, committed recurring sectarian atrocities.

Moreover, while Oakley writes that ISIS “is the child of the 2003 Iraq war,” he assiduously avoids any mention of the fact that it was only established in April 2013, after gaining significant strength among the anti-Assad forces in Syria and splitting with the Al Nusra Front.

More fundamentally, Oakley’s article is an attempt to blind workers and young people to the dangers posed by the new war in Iraq and Syria. “Today, Obama’s Iraq policy is not about some grand new plan for US domination,” he writes, “but is a desperate rear-guard effort to salvage what remains of US power and influence in the Middle East.”

SAlt’s efforts to paint the US as an imperialist power in retreat fly in the face of reality. The United States is now in a state of permanent and unending war. Under conditions of deepening economic crisis and sharp social tensions, the American ruling class is consciously using its overwhelming military might in an attempt to overcome its long-term economic decline and prevent the emergence of any rivals. The war in Iraq and Syria is the means for ensuring US domination over the entire Middle East, as it prepares for conflict with Syria’s allies, Iran and Russia. This year, the Obama administration has provoked a confrontation with Russia in Ukraine, while pursuing a steady military and diplomatic build-up against China.

This reckless agenda contains within it the seeds for war not only across the Middle East, but for World War III. Oakley’s dismissal of a “grand new plan for US domination” is aimed at politically disarming working people and youth and preventing them from drawing the necessary conclusions. Moreover, by downplaying American aggression and portraying the US as a weakened power on the defensive, SAlt lines up with US propaganda by insisting that Iran and Russia are the main threats to regional stability.

SAlt is positioning itself to derail anti-war opposition by channelling it behind Labor and the Greens. In contrast to its strident but limited condemnations of the lies and hypocrisy of Abbott and his government, it barely mentions the lies and hypocrisy of the Labor Party. Yet, the Labor opposition has given its full and unconditional support to Australian participation in the war, with opposition leader Bill Shorten declaring that national

security is “above politics.” Bramble feels compelled to note, briefly, that Labor is marching in lockstep with the government, before he quickly moves on.

As for the Greens, SAlt has nothing to say about their lies and hypocrisy either. Their “anti-war” posturing amounts to nothing more than a series of questions about whether the US-led war will be effective. They oppose Australian military involvement, but not the war as such, or Washington’s neo-colonial ambitions in the Middle East. In fact, the Greens support the ousting of Assad and the installation of a US puppet regime in Syria—as long as it has the blessing of the UN. Their concern is to maintain a “left” face as anti-war sentiment grows, all the better to control and contain it within the official political establishment. Bramble’s sole mention of the Greens is a positive reference to their call for a parliamentary debate.

The signs are unmistakable. SAlt is once again preparing to dupe workers and young people into believing that the Greens and even the openly pro-war Labor Party represent some kind of opposition to the Abbott government. For the past five months, along with other pseudo-lefts, it has worked might and main to channel the groundswell of popular opposition to the May budget into support for Labor and the Greens. While SAlt promoted the illusion that the two parties would block the budget, Labor and the Greens both voted for budget appropriation bills that contained deep spending cutbacks.

The drive to war cannot be stopped through parliamentary manoeuvres, but only through the development of an independent and unified movement of the Australian and international working class against the source of war—the global capitalist system. This requires the development of a new revolutionary leadership within the working class, based on a socialist program, and a complete political break from all the parties of the corporate and financial elite, and their pseudo-left backers such as Socialist Alternative. That is the perspective of the Socialist Equality Party and its sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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