

Sham opposition on display at Brisbane G20 protests

Mike Head

17 November 2014

Various groups, all carefully vetted by the police, were given permission to stage publicity stunts, rallies or marches at last weekend's G20 meeting in the Australian city of Brisbane. It amounted to an officially-sanctioned display, designed to provide a show of democracy and "opposition," at a summit held under unprecedented police-state conditions.

All the 26 organisations that were authorised to hold media events or demonstrations within the G20 "designated area"—which covered the entire centre of Brisbane—collaborated closely with the authorities. Thousands of police and soldiers deployed to ensure that no protests came anywhere near the Brisbane Convention Centre, where the 4,000 official delegates, business leaders, trade union officials and NGO representatives assembled.

The G20 summit was a gathering of government leaders responsible for escalating geo-political rivalries that threaten to trigger another world war, deepen social inequality and continue the mounting attacks on basic democratic rights. Their central official platform consisted of ratcheting up the assault on the working class, under the banner of "economic growth." None of the groups allowed to conduct rallies opposed this agenda. Instead, in one form or another, they sought to appeal to, or win the favour of, the assembled leaders and the associated business and media contingents.

Some of the organisations were openly pro-imperialist outfits, ranging from those opposing the Chinese regime from the right, such as the Chinese Falun Gong sect and anti-Chinese Tibetan separatists, to Ukrainian groups protesting against the presence of Russian President Vladimir Putin. The Young Liberals—affiliated to the Abbott government's ruling Liberal Party—fronted a "free the markets" rally.

Other groups represented the phalanx of charities, aid

groups and other non-government organisations that seek greater government funding so that they can provide their limited band-aids internationally to try to contain the rising social and class tensions. Among their events was a mock riverside "beach party" conducted by Oxfam, urging the G20 leaders to address "the tide of inequality" around the world.

A third camp, consisting of indigenous groups and a coalition of environmental, refugee, religious, trade union and other formations, professed to represent the opposition to the G20 meeting. In reality, this grouping, known as BrisCAN, was also preoccupied with "having a voice" in the G20, and provided a platform for organisations, notably the Greens and the trade unions, that are part of the political establishment.

BrisCAN convened the main protest march on Saturday, which drew about 2,000 people, mostly members or supporters of the affiliated groups. While most of the speakers at the preceding rally professed to oppose the summit, their main pleas were for the G20 leaders—the very forces spearheading the turn to militarism, austerity and repression—to listen to their voices.

A sprinkling of hand-held signs gave voice to opposition to militarism, the growing gap between rich and poor, the inhuman treatment of refugees, proposed fees to see doctors and welfare cuts. Slogans included: "Welfare, not warfare," "The beginning of the war will be secret," "Yankee go home" and "Hands off healthcare."

One of the most striking features of the rally speeches, however, was the silence on the intensifying US-led war in Iraq and Syria, and Australia's involvement in it, let alone any reference to the escalation of geo-political tensions by Washington, particularly against Russia and China, and the danger of

another world war.

This was despite the fact that the G20 summit itself was overshadowed by prominent confrontations with Putin and by US President Barack Obama's speech targeting China and asserting American hegemony over the Asia-Pacific.

Apart from this whitewash of the drive to war, the most prevalent political theme of the rally speakers was a parochial one, geared to corralling discontent back behind support for the Labor Party and the Greens, both parties of the political establishment that will only intensify the program of war and austerity.

Speakers denounced Prime Minister Tony Abbott's government on a variety of fronts, particularly for ignoring indigenous history and keeping climate change off the G20 agenda. In general, these objections went no further than criticisms raised within the sections of the corporate establishment itself.

The BrisCAN organisers gave pride of place on their platform to Greens Senator Larissa Waters and a trade union bureaucrat, Andrew Dettmer. The Greens senator declared that she was embarrassed by Abbott and called on the prime minister to "listen to the need for compassion."

The Greens, while professing to oppose aspects of the policies of the two main ruling parties, Labor and Liberal-National, are a pillar of the parliamentary order. They formed a de facto coalition with the previous Labor government, which committed itself to back US militarism, slashed jobs and began the assault on social spending.

Dettmer is national president of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, which has systematically suppressed the opposition of workers to the devastation of jobs and conditions across the manufacturing sector. He faithfully regurgitated the line of the so-called L20, the gathering of global union officials that is an integral part of the G20. His primary complaint, echoing that of the L20 meeting, was that the Abbott government had not consulted sufficiently with the union chiefs in drawing up the G20 "action plan"—that is, the next round of attacks on the working class.

Several indigenous speakers gave vent to their divisive Black identity politics, blaming "whites"—including ordinary working people—not capitalism, for the ongoing oppression of Aboriginal people. Their

demands for legal recognition of indigenous "ownership" of land in Australia represent the interests of a thin layer of Aboriginal bureaucrats and businessmen that have already benefitted from the recognition of "land rights."

The pseudo-left groups provided a bogus "progressive" gloss for the protest. Speaking on behalf of BrisCAN, Adrian Skerritt, a longtime Socialist Alliance supporter, demagogically condemned austerity and inequality, but summed up the outlook of the protest coalition when he complained that "the G20 locks us out." In other words, the BrisCAN coalition reflected, above all, the interests of various middle class layers wanting, like the unions, Greens and NGOs, to play a part within the political establishment itself.

In a revealing tribute to the BrisCAN organisers, Queensland Deputy Police Commissioner Ross Barnett thanked them for helping ensure that the summit went ahead according to plan. "This outcome is no accident and reflects the good will and trust between both sides, which has been built up during negotiations over many, many months prior to G20," he told the media.

In other words, the sham display of opposition to the G20 had gone off without a hitch.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact