The Australian pseudo-left and the drive to war against China

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In recent weeks, there have been numerous media reports, government statements and other indications, including military deployments, that the United States, fully backed by Australia, is preparing to stage a provocation against China's territorial claims in the South China Sea—a course of action that could trigger conflict between nuclear-armed powers. These developments have included US claims that long-range B1 bombers will "move" to Australia and newspaper reports that Australian surveillance aircraft will be used to violate Chinese-controlled territory.

The pseudo-left organisations in Australia that falsely label themselves as "socialist" have responded with total silence. Not a word has been written or spoken by Socialist Alternative in its *RedFlag*; Socialist Alliance in *Green Left Weekly*; the Socialist Party, which publishes the *Socialist*; and the grouping Solidarity, which produces a printed and online journal of the same name.

The maxim—silence implies consent—applies. Having given tacit support to US-backed intrigues and regime-change operations in Libya, Syria and Ukraine, the pseudo-left groups are preparing to line up with US and Australian imperialism against China and are collaborating with the political establishment to conceal the immense dangers of war from the working class.

A no less deliberate decision was taken by the same organisations to remain silent on the flagrant attempts by Sydney's Burwood Council and the University of Sydney to prevent the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) from holding a public anti-war meeting on April 26. Venue bookings were cancelled or denied because the SEP openly condemned the multi-million dollar official glorification of the Anzac landing in Turkey on April 25, 1915 and exposed the commemorations as an ideological campaign to promote patriotism and condition public opinion for new wars.

While workers, students and academics around Australia and the world condemned the censorship of the SEP, the self-styled "left" of Australian politics, along with the rest of the political and media establishment, blocked any discussion on this attack on democratic rights and its relationship to the drive to war.

The silence of the pseudo-left groupings on the assault on democratic rights and the war dangers is not the result of ignorance or complacency. It reflects the material interests and class prejudices of the privileged sections of the middle class they represent.

While organisations such as Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance protest against particular excesses of capitalism, they instinctively fear the development of a political movement in the working class against war. Such a movement will, out of necessity, directly challenge the US-Australia alliance and all its political defenders, including the Labor Party and the trade unions, with which the pseudo-lefts are closely aligned. This movement will only be able to go forward on the basis of a political struggle to end the source of war—the capitalist profit system itself.

In the final analysis, the social position and wealth of the upper middle class is wholly dependent on the vast web of financial and corporate relations between the American and Australian capitalist class and, therefore, the maintenance of US global hegemony against the perceived threat posed by China's economic and strategic rise.

The pseudo-left organisations have a track record when it comes to the turn by US imperialism toward confrontation with China. The installation of the Obama administration in 2009, which was hailed by fake lefts around the world, was followed by a definite shift of focus from the Middle East toward a concerted diplomatic, economic and military effort to undermine Chinese interests—a policy that was later dubbed the "pivot to Asia."

The political consequences in Australia took the form of the June 23-24, 2010 factional coup within the Labor Party government, which ousted Kevin Rudd and installed Julia Gillard as prime minister. From the outset, the SEP stressed the "undoubted" involvement of Washington. US diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks in December 2010 revealed the intimate relations of the main coup plotters with the US embassy and Washington's antagonism toward Rudd's calls for an American compromise with China.

The pseudo-left organisations, however, joined with the establishment media to insist that nothing more was involved in the Gillard coup than a cosmetic change from one leader to another. Not one word was written at the time by any of them on the mounting evidence of US involvement and its

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relationship to Washington's anti-China foreign policy.

The implications became obvious when President Barack Obama announced the "pivot to Asia" in the Australian parliament on November 17, 2011. The Greens-backed minority Labor government headed by Gillard agreed to the permanent "rotation" of US Marines through Darwin and the increased use of Australian ports, airfields and military infrastructure by American armed forces.

Ever since, aircraft carriers, nuclear-powered and armed submarines and B-52 bombers have made regular visits. The communications bases on Australian soil have been expanded and are essential to the operations of the US military in the Indo-Pacific, including the targeting of nuclear weapons, missile defence systems and anti-satellite technology.

Again, the response of the pseudo-left groups was to conceal or minimise the central role being played by Australia in facilitating Washington's aggressive and reckless "pivot" against China.

In the main, they have written and said nothing. Socialist Alternative, however, in a comment in 2013, defined the position that is broadly shared throughout the pseudo-left: that the actions of the US and its allies are largely a defensive response to China's emergence as an aggressive "imperialist" rival, one which is trying to "muscle in" and supplant the US as the dominant power in Asia.

Socialist Alternative explicitly denied there was any danger of war, however, on the grounds that the existence of nuclear weapons and the economic interdependence of the two countries would pull the US and China back from the "brink." The sole purpose of such statements is to assist in chloroforming the working class as to the mounting dangers of world war.

A recent document, published this year in the Socialist Alternative's journal *Marxist Left Review*, attempted to substantiate its ahistorical characterisation of China as "imperialist" by referring to Beijing's assertion of its territorial claims in the South China Sea—the same pretext now being used by Washington and Canberra to paint China as an expansionist power and justify a reckless military confrontation.

In reality, the US, Australia and their other allies are the aggressors. The highly unstable Chinese Communist Party regime, which serves the venal Chinese capitalist class that developed since the restoration of capitalism and China's integration into the world market from the late 1970s, is desperately attempting to stave off the imperialist intrigues and cling to power. Its efforts to build military facilities in the South China Sea are a response to the Pentagon's plans and preparations to impose a naval blockade of Chinese maritime trade and strangle its economy in the event of conflict.

Socialist Alternative has repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to ideologically align with US imperialism. In 2012, it declared its full support for the US-backed "rebels" in Syria fighting to overthrow the Russian-backed regime of President Bashar al-Assad, denouncing any criticism as "knee-jerk anti-imperialism." It proclaimed: "Imperialism, in the sense of Western neo-colonialism, is not the main threat facing the masses of Syria, or of the Arab world as a whole."

Since those words were written, the US has sponsored the Israeli assault on Gaza and redeployed forces into Iraq and Syria on the pretext of degrading Islamic State—one of the "rebel" organisations fighting Assad. Washington's intrigues have instigated a renewed civil war in Yemen and provoked acute tensions between Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies on one side and Iran on the other. As a result, the entire Middle East is wracked with sectarian rivalries and tens of millions of people confront a social disaster.

In 2014, Socialist Alternative extended its glorification of Washington's intrigues to Ukraine, hailing the US-backed, fascist-dominated coup in Kiev as a "genuine uprising from below" against "Russian imperial domination." It persists in labelling Russia as "imperialist," thus aligning with the ever-mounting build-up of US and European economic and military pressure. The unstated aim of the destabilisation and threats against the Putin regime in Moscow has been to weaken a potential ally of Beijing and clear the way for the looming military confrontation with China.

The false designation of both Russia and China as "imperialist" serves definite purposes. It opens the door for the pseudo-left to directly support the Australian ruling class, on the pretext that the US and Australia represent a "democratic" lesser evil to the "totalitarian" or even "fascist" imperialism in Beijing and Moscow. This was precisely the justification that the liberal and "left" milieu used to line up behind the ruling classes of the "democratic" powers during World War II.

Workers and youth cannot allow themselves to be dragooned into another war on the basis of such lies. The threat of a third world war can be prevented only by the unification of the working class internationally, including in China, Russia, the US and Australia, in a common revolutionary struggle for socialism. An essential component of that struggle is the political exposure of all the various pseudo-left groupings that seek to tie the working class to one or other faction of the bourgeoisie.

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