Australian fake left promote Greens, trade unions and Labor at anti-fascist protest

Our reporters
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Following last week's neo-Nazi rally at St Kilda beach in Melbourne that involved right-wing independent Senator Fraser Anning, the pseudo-left organisations in Australia are attempting to channel anti-racist sentiment among workers and youth into the election of a federal Labor government.

At a rally at Melbourne's State Library on Saturday, Socialist Alternative facilitated the promotion of the Greens, the trade union bureaucracy and, implicitly, the Labor Party.

Only about 400 people attended the event, with neither the Greens nor the trade unions making any effort beforehand to mobilise their supporters. Rally organisers in the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, a front for Socialist Alternative, nevertheless enthusiastically promoted these organisations.

Victorian Greens leader Samantha Ratnam was among the main speakers. She hailed the result of the Victorian state election last November, which was a political debacle for the Greens, but saw the incumbent Labor government returned with an increased parliamentary majority.

Ratnam declared: "At the last state election, the Liberal Party right here in Victoria tried the same tactics of using a law-and-order agenda to confect fear, scapegoat communities and pit people against each other. And you know what Victoria did in response—you voted against them and nearly wiped them out. And here we go again with an election around the corner. We have this cycle on repeat. We find [racism] being whipped up by these right-wing racists egged on shamefully by these politicians who do not represent us, who do not represent Australia."

Ratnam's reference to the upcoming federal election made clear the message underlying the entire rally—vote for the Labor Party and the Greens.

Her assertions amounted to a flagrant cover up of Labor's responsibility for the racist "African gangs" hysteria in Melbourne. The state government created the environment for such racism to emerge by presiding over a "law-and-order" campaign. This included spending unprecedented amounts for additional police and prisons, rather than on programs to alleviate youth unemployment or provide social facilities for young people.

It was only under these conditions that the Murdoch-owned tabloid media and the federal Coalition government—followed in turn by extreme right-wing groups and individuals—began to focus on the skin colour and ethnic origins of alleged youth offenders.

Carina Garland, Victorian Trades Hall assistant secretary, followed Ratnam in promoting Labor at Saturday's rally. She spoke solely about the Liberal Party's responsibility for promoting racism and xenophobia, without once mentioning the Labor Party.

Garland emotionally recounted how her Italian great-grandfather was killed by fascists and how her grandparents had fled Italy. "I think it is sickening, ridiculous actually, that all these years later their granddaughter is standing here with all of you fighting against Nazis. This should not be happening now." She concluded: "It's all a bit bleak but I think there's lots to be hopeful about."

Garland's implicit "hope" was only the return of a Labor government at the national level. The unions are spending tens of millions of dollars to assist Labor win the federal election that will be held later this year.

Jerome Small, Socialist Alternative member and Victorian Socialists' candidate in the state election last November, was the final speaker at Saturday's rally. Making no attempt to differentiate from Ratnam or Garland, Small also presented the development of far-right groups as the outcome solely of the policies of the Liberal and National Coalition parties.

"We also have to realise for the last 20 years some of the most powerful forces in our society have worked very hard to create a far-right movement in this country," he declared. "And I'm talking about the Liberal Party and their dance with Pauline Hanson back in the '90s and more recently. I'm talking about Rupert Murdoch and the *Herald Sun* and Channel 7 advertising these people as patriots, rather than the Nazis that they are."

Small's only criticism of the Labor Party was that it was "failing to challenge the racism [and] agreeing to a bi-

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partisan regime of torture directed against refugees."

Small's claim that Labor has "failed" to challenge racism is a flagrant lie. Historically, Labor was the author of the racist "White Australia" immigration policy that prevailed in the country, from its establishment in 1901 until the 1960s. The Keating Labor government introduced mandatory detention of refugees in 1992 and initiated a campaign of police raids against "illegal" workers to scapegoat them for mass unemployment.

Moreover, it was the Gillard and Rudd Labor governments from 2010 to 2013 that resumed the illegal detention of refugees on remote Pacific island prison camps. The Labor government imposed the brutal ban on asylum seekers seeking to reach Australia by boat from ever receiving entry, even if they were recognised as "genuine" refugees.

Socialist Alternative raised none of these facts. Small's speech also featured a direct cover-up for the role of the trade unions in creating conditions for the development of ultra-nationalist tendencies. He declared: "The great thing about today is to see the unions represented here," and then naming seven separate unions he claimed had representatives at the rally. This appeared to be based on some individuals holding union flags in the small crowd.

In reality, the unions have been at the forefront of blaming overseas workers and students for taking "Aussie jobs" and demanding harsh restrictions on their ability to work in the country. The anti-immigrant rhetoric of the unions has been directly adopted by the most extreme neo-fascist movements.

Small continued: "We need a new sort of politics, a politics of solidarity to counter the politics of hatred and fear… Victorian Socialists is proud to contribute to this politics as is every single person at this rally."

The "new sort of politics" advocated by the pseudo-left is not a socialist perspective. The term "socialism" was not mentioned throughout the event. The misnamed Socialist Alternative and their state-based electoral front, the Victorian Socialists, instead explicitly promote the Greens and Labor—both capitalist parties—as "progressive" and apologise for the corporatist trade union bureaucracy.

Small concluded his speech: "Of course they [the fascists] have got a lot going for them—they've got the media going for them, they've got some of the most powerful politicians in our society going for them… All we have is ourselves, so let's take it to the streets."

Socialist Alternative works to prevent any understanding of the real political and social roots of the re-emergence of fascistic tendencies internationally. Instead, it advocates support for alleged "progressive" and "democratic" elements within the parliamentary apparatus, combined with a dash of protest politics.

Small's reference to the Victorian Socialists "contributing" to a "new" politics hinted at a potential coming together of the pseudo-left, the Greens, the union bureaucracy, and sections of the Labor Party, under the false banner that they are "fighting" fascism.

In Europe, the counterparts of Socialist Alternative already openly work to subordinate the working class to right-wing capitalist parties like Labor on the fraudulent grounds it is necessary to defend democracy against the extreme right.

Fascism, however, is a political excrescence that is the product of the intensifying crisis of the profit system. It cannot be defeated by tying the working class to the very parties and organisations that defend capitalism and have presided over the destruction of jobs, working conditions and living standards.

The Labor Party and the unions are representatives of finance capital and big business. They have proven to be ruthless instruments of the ruling class, especially in periods of crisis. Steeped in nationalist and racialist politics, Labor and the unions are no less responsible than the Liberal Party in cultivating the political climate within which openly fascistic forces now operate.

The claim that the Labor Party and the unions can serve as bulwark against racist and fascist forces is a dangerous echo of the Popular Front policies of the Stalinist Parties in the 1930s that facilitated the growth of the extreme right. The Popular Front defended the profit system, not democratic rights, and was directed above all at paralysing the revolutionary movement of the working class, resulting in catastrophes in Spain and France in particular.

The only way to defeat fascism and ultra-right parties is through the building of a unified movement of the working class, independent of Labor and the unions, on the basis of socialist internationalism to overthrow capitalism.

All those concerned by the re-emergence of fascistic tendencies need to draw on the lessons of history. We urge all workers and youth opposed to nationalism and racism to read the January 3, 2019 perspective of the *World Socialist Web Site*, "The Strategy of International Class Struggle and the Political Fight Against Capitalist Reaction."

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