

Stalinist “May 1 Movement” defends union thuggery at Sydney’s General Mills strike

Mike Head
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A group calling itself the May 1 Movement has appeared on the “community protest” outside the General Mills plant in Sydney, posturing as champions of the workers who launched an indefinite strike there on June 4 for better wages and conditions.

This group is working closely with the United Workers Union (UWU), especially in seeking to bar socialists—Socialist Equality Party (SEP) supporters—from discussing with the striking workers the political issues they and other workers confront.

UWU officials have aggressively grabbed *World Socialist Web Site* leaflets from the hands of SEP campaigners, physically blocked WSWs reporters from speaking to workers, and threatened to organise violence to “push you off.”

In carrying out this thuggish operation, the UWU has called on the assistance of the so-called May 1 Movement. It convened a “community rally” at the factory, from which SEP supporters were also physically barred.

What exactly is the May 1 Movement, and what is its relationship to the UWU and other trade unions?

It was established by the Stalinist Communist Party of Australia (CPA) in February 2020, above all, for the purpose of seeking to prevent workers from breaking out of the grip of the increasingly discredited trade unions.

By posing as a “militant” outfit, it is trying to channel the growing discontent of workers back into the arms of the same apparatuses that have systematically suppressed workers’ struggles for the past 40 years, especially since the corporatist Accords between the unions and the Hawke and Keating Labor governments of 1983–96.

At the May 1 Movement’s launch, Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) delegate Dennis McNamara urged the audience of about 60 people to try to revive the unions. “If your union leadership is weak, you must organise to make them strong,” he implored them.

The event was held at the Sydney office of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and the main speaker was a leading member of the CPA, then MUA Sydney branch secretary Paul McAleer. He blamed workers themselves for the onslaught conducted against them since the unions and the Labor Party used the Accords to bust up workplace committees and impose a vast pro-market restructuring of the economy and working conditions.

McAleer claimed that “divisions” within the working class and among “activists” had facilitated the imposition of neo-liberalism. He cynically criticised the “criminal” Fair Work Act, which

outlaws all strikes except during union-controlled “enterprise bargaining” negotiations, without mentioning that it was drafted by the unions themselves in collaboration with the Rudd-Gillard Labor government of 2007 to 2013.

Significantly, the May 1 Movement launch received a glowing write-up by a pseudo-left group, Socialist Alliance, in its publication *Green Left Weekly*. The article promoted McAleer’s declaration: “This is not just about May 1; it is about building a movement to defend workers’ rights, the rights of the oppressed and to demand real action on climate change.”

A Stalinist history

In reality, the May 1 Movement is another front for the CPA, which is the rump party left after decades of betrayal by the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union and its affiliated parties internationally, of the 1917 Russian Revolution.

Today’s CPA has nothing whatsoever in common with the revolutionary party established under that name one hundred years ago.

The CPA was founded in 1920 as part of the enthusiastic worldwide response of millions of workers to the October 1917 Revolution. That massive uprising demonstrated the capacity of the working class, with a genuine revolutionary and internationalist leadership, to overthrow the capitalist ruling classes and take forward the fight for world socialism.

However, the isolation of the first workers’ state following the failure of revolutions in Germany and other advanced countries by 1923 saw the emergence of a bureaucracy under Stalin that abandoned the Marxist perspective of global socialist revolution and adopted the nationalist program of “socialism in one country.”

By 1927, following further defeats of the working class in China and Britain, this regime was able to prevail over the Left Opposition formed by Leon Trotsky, the co-leader of the 1917 Revolution with Vladimir Lenin. The Left Opposition had been established in 1923 to defend Marxism and maintain the essential struggle for international socialism.

The CPA, like other communist parties around the world, became transformed into an appendage of the Stalinist bureaucracy, faithfully pursuing the foreign policy needs of that regime for coexistence with global capitalism.

To this day, the CPA continues to defend the Stalinist atrocities of 1936 to 1939—the Moscow show trials, the execution of all the leaders of the 1917 Russian Revolution, the mass killings of entire generations of Marxists and the betrayal of countless revolutionary

struggles around the world.

Stalin's regime conducted this political genocide in order to secure the survival of its rule in the Soviet Union, fearing that the looming World War II would create the conditions for revolutionary working class struggles, just as World War I had helped trigger the 1917 Revolution.

That counter-revolutionary violence culminated in the assassination of Trotsky and other leaders of the Fourth International that he had founded in 1938 to fight the betrayals of Stalinism and renew the struggle for international socialism.

The CPA regurgitated the Stalinist regime's slanderous identification of the Left Opposition with Nazism, as documented in *Betrayal: a history of the Communist Party of Australia*, published by the Socialist Labour League (the forerunner to the SEP) in 1981.

On September 5, 1936, for example, Richard Dixon, a central CPA leader, instructed a meeting of party officials: "Trotskyism is identified as fascism, and as we would deal with fascists, so let us deal with Trotskyists."

Today's CPA derives from the Moscow-line Socialist Party of Australia (SPA). The SPA split from the CPA, because it could not tolerate the latter's mealy-mouthed criticisms of the Soviet Stalinist invasion of Czechoslovakia. The SPA was founded on the principle of open support for the brutal suppression of the 1968 "Prague Spring" uprising of workers and youth. After the Stalinist bureaucrats ultimately dissolved the Soviet Union in 1991, transforming themselves into capitalist oligarchs, the old CPA likewise shut itself down, and the SPA renamed itself the CPA in 1996.

In the meantime, leading CPA and SPA figures, such as Laurie Carmichael, Pat Clancy and Stan Sharkey, integrated themselves into the trade union leaderships, in full agreement with their nationalist outlook, and were instrumental in drafting and enforcing the union-government Accords under Hawke and Keating.

The last line of defence of the unions

Today, the political situation is very different from the 1930s, when the Stalinists and their allies could prevail. The May 1 Movement and its partners in the middle-class pseudo-left organisations form the last line of defence for the trade unions.

These are "unions" only in name. They have long ceased to be workers' organisations. While once they endeavoured to gain limited concessions for their members—always within the framework of the wage labour system of capitalism—they have been transformed by the globalisation of production over the past four decades into pro-corporate industrial police forces.

Sitting on huge assets and superannuation funds, and staffed by well-paid bureaucrats, they have ruthlessly enforced the endless cost-cutting demands of the employers for "global competitiveness" for Australian capitalism, at the expense of the wages and conditions of workers in Australia and internationally.

The thuggish operation at General Mills marks an extension of such conduct, from Stalinist-led unions like the MUA to others, like the UWU, which have portrayed themselves as new amalgamated "super unions."

In a Facebook post last week, Alex Suhle, a UWU organiser who

has been involved in the campaign against the SEP, bragged: "I am just applying the MUA model to dealing with the SEP. it's very effective comrade." The comment referred to the methods employed by the MUA, led by the CPA's McAleer, during the 2015 strike at Hutchison Ports in Sydney, triggered by the company's sacking of 97 waterfront workers by text message.

On August 14 that year, just as the MUA prepared to shut down the strike, falsely claiming a victory after a week of backroom talks with management, McAleer and about 20 CFMEU representatives surrounded three SEP campaigners, whom they jostled and threatened to murder. Over the following days, MUA and CFMEU officials repeatedly threatened SEP members.

Three months later, the MUA revealed that its agreement with Hutchison provided for the destruction of at least 65 jobs, an extension of working hours, cuts to overtime payments and an expansion of the use of casuals. In other words, the attack on the SEP was a crucial preparation in shutting down the strike and imposing the company's demands.

Fear of a working-class breakout

The resort by the UWU to Stalinist-style thuggery also parallels similar attacks by mining union officials in the United States, and Twitter statements and memes by leading members of the Democratic Socialists of America, a faction of the big business Democratic Party, celebrating the assassination of Trotsky and threatening to employ such methods again.

What animates these reactions is fear that the intensifying discontent of workers, expressed in the eruption of strikes internationally in response to the global COVID-19 disaster, decades of ever-greater social inequality, and relentless assaults on the working class, will take a conscious and organised form on a global scale.

In particular, the union bureaucracies and their allies are alarmed by the global campaign by the SEPs for the development of rank-and-file committees—genuine independent working class organisations, outside the control of the pro-corporate unions, through which the workers can unite and coordinate an industrial and political struggle for their interests against the capitalist ruling class.

It is no accident that violent threats have erupted since the call issued by the world Trotskyist party, the International Committee of Fourth International, for the establishment of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), to strive to unify workers in a common worldwide fight, in support of the struggles that are erupting, including the General Mills strike and the Volvo Truckstrike in Virginia, against the union-enforced corporate offensive.

We call on all who uphold democratic rights, above all, the right of workers to openly and freely discuss the political issues they confront, to denounce the Stalinist and union thuggery, and join the fight to develop the IWA-RFC.



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