

Australia's Socialist Alliance lines up behind imperialist war drive against Russia

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The Russian invasion of the Ukraine and the resulting war that is rapidly transforming into a conflict between nuclear-armed powers—NATO and Russia—has resulted in widespread shock, revulsion at the humanitarian consequences for the Ukrainian people, and considerable suspicion about the motives of the US and NATO.

Workers and youth are being bombarded with a deluge of anti-Russian propaganda in the establishment media aimed at overwhelming the critical faculties of ordinary people. A more insidious role is played by the various pseudo-left groups, such as Socialist Alliance in Australia, which falsely claim to be socialist but, despite token criticisms of the US, align themselves with the NATO war drive against Russia.

Typical is an updated comment by Socialist Alliance co-convenor Sam Wainwright, initially published on February 24, that condemns the Russian invasion as “a terrible act of war” and declares that “we must stand with Ukraine against the war being waged on it by Russia.”

While denouncing the Kremlin, Wainwright concedes the obvious that “the conflict cannot be understood outside the relentless drive by the United States to expand NATO up to Russia’s border and to encircle it militarily.” He points out that “the Biden administration has used the current tensions as a pretext to push its own strategic objectives.”

However, at no point does Socialist Alliance explicitly condemn US imperialism and NATO for their provocations against Russia, which were clearly aimed at inciting the very war that has erupted. Instead, it merely makes a gesture toward the concerns of working people about the predatory aims of the US in the Ukraine crisis, in order to cover its tracks.

The strategic objectives of US imperialism are never explained by Socialist Alliance. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 by the Stalinist bureaucracy, the US has sought nothing less than the break-up and subjugation of Russia, as well as China, so as to dominate the Eurasian landmass and exploit its enormous resources.

To that end, the Ukraine has been transformed into a garrison-state on Russia’s border by the US and NATO in its preparations for war with Russia. The US, Germany and NATO allies, including Australia, have sent and are sending hundreds of millions of dollars of “lethal aid” to the Ukrainian military that will be used directly against Russian forces.

And what does Wainwright’s call to “stand with the Ukraine” signify? It can only mean support for the current pro-EU and pro-NATO Ukrainian government which has willingly transformed the country into a launching pad for war against Russia. Its origins lie in the right-wing regime that was installed in 2014 in a US-backed coup

in Kiev that ousted the elected pro-Russian government of President Viktor Yanukovich.

The WWS and International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) have condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine not on the basis of moral outrage, but because it can only serve to drive a wedge between Russian and Ukrainian workers and undermine the fight for the broader unity of the working class. We do not “stand with the Ukraine,” but with Ukrainian and Russian workers who share common class interests in a struggle against war and capitalist oppression.

The ICFI’s statements place the chief responsibility for the war squarely on US imperialism and its NATO allies. Washington has deliberately stoked tensions with Russia, threatened to incorporate Ukraine into its NATO military alliance and recklessly goaded it into a war in pursuit of its broader aims of destabilising Russia, and ultimately China as well.

Socialist Alliance’s support of the current Ukrainian government is of a piece with its attitude toward the so-called Maidan protests in 2014 that were the vehicle for the ousting of President Yanukovich and in which extreme right-wing and openly fascist groups dominated.

In his comment, Wainwright declares that the 2014 protests had to be supported, despite their pro-imperialist and fascistic character. “It’s a mistake,” he writes, “to dismiss the 2013–14 Euromaidan protest movement that ousted former President Viktor Yanukovich as nothing more than a US-backed coup carried out by ultra-nationalist fascists, although they certainly provided the street-fighting muscle and the US was very active behind the scenes.”

The reason? Wainwright writes: “The movement had a mass base in the west of the country.” In other words, it would be wrong, according to Socialist Alliance, to characterise the ousting of the elected pro-Russian president as a US-backed coup, even though it admits “the US was very active behind the scenes” and Ukrainian fascist militias were its political and physical spearhead, because it had a “mass base.” However, if “mass support” is the political benchmark, then anything goes. After all, Hitler and the Nazis had a mass base among sections of the disoriented and desperate middle classes in Germany in the 1930s.

In reality, the Ukrainian fascist groups do not have mass support. The protests in which they played a dominant role enjoyed the backing of sections of the Ukrainian ruling class and of US imperialism and its allies in Europe. Like the “colour revolutions” whipped up and inflated by Washington in other former Soviet republics, the Maidan leaders exploited anti-Russian chauvinism and the political disorientation generated by the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In supporting the current Ukrainian government, Socialist Alliance and the pseudo-left more generally are lining up with the profoundly reactionary forces. The far-right and fascist militias that played the central role in the ouster of Yanukovich, such as the Azov Battalion, have been integrated into the Ukrainian state. They have fought as a division of the Ukrainian National Guard in an eight-year war against pro-Russian separatists in the Donbass.

Bankrupt pacifist appeals

What lies behind the Biden administration's utterly reckless war drive against Russia? For decades, the US has been engaged in a desperate bid to offset its historic decline through the use of its overwhelming military force. In the wake of criminal wars and military interventions in the energy-rich Middle East and Central Asia that have turned into debacles, Washington has raised the stakes and turned its sights on what it regards as the principal threats to its global domination—Russia and China—despite the risks of nuclear conflagration. NATO's encroachment into Eastern Europe is paralleled in Asia by the encirclement and military build-up of China over the past decade.

These geo-political aims have now intersected with a profound social, economic and political crisis at home, greatly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only is the death toll approaching a staggering one million in the United States, but the pandemic has produced a dramatic increase in social inequality, a deepening assault on the working class and an intensification of the class struggle. Washington's turn to war with Russia and the deluge of anti-Russian propaganda is a desperate attempt to project these social tensions outward against an external enemy.

The relentless American drive to war underscores the reckless and reactionary character of Putin's invasion of the Ukraine in an attempt to extract concessions from Washington through military means and nuclear brinkmanship. The invasion has only played into US hands.

The objective forces propelling the US to war also expose the utter futility of Socialist Alliance's pacifist proposals for "world peace." Wainwright declares: "Russia needs to stop its attacks and to get out of Ukraine. The US and its allies need to pull their missiles away from the Russian border and dissolve NATO."

The world is closer to a nuclear war than at any point since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. The US and NATO are funnelling arms and military "volunteers" into the Ukraine at an ever-increasing pace. A discussion is underway in Washington and European capitals about a NATO-imposed no-fly zone in Ukraine that would bring warplanes from nuclear-armed powers into open conflict and dramatically increase the danger of a nuclear conflagration.

Despite this, Socialist Alliance makes empty appeals to US imperialism to pull out of Eastern Europe and disband NATO. The Biden administration, which refused to give Moscow a guarantee that the Ukraine would not be allowed to enter NATO, is not about to disband the military alliance on which it relies to drag its European allies headlong into a war with Russia.

Socialist Alliance never takes the position adopted by all genuine socialists since World War I, that, where they live in imperialist countries conducting a war, they must inscribe on their banner "the main enemy is at home" and direct their political activity on that line.

Socialist Alliance's stance has a very definite class orientation. The most striking aspect of Wainwright's comment is the absence of any, even nominal, reference to the working class. Socialist Alliance traces its roots to the opportunist tendency within the Fourth International led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel that broke from Trotskyism in

1953. In the aftermath of the split, the ICFI was established to fight for the fundamental principles on which Leon Trotsky formed the Fourth International in 1938.

The predecessor of Socialist Alliance, the Socialist Workers League, was founded in Australia in 1972 as a section of the Pabloite United Secretariat, and renamed in 1974 as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Central to Pabloite opportunism was the rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class and the fight for its political independence from either the Stalinist Communist Parties or the pro-capitalist political organisations dominant in the "workers' movement"—in Australia, the Labor Party and the trade unions.

The degeneration of the SWP is a case study in the transformation of such middle-class radical parties into the pseudo-left—namely organisations that are oriented to affluent layers of the upper middle class preoccupied with identity politics. They have become a new constituency for imperialist war and abandoned their pretenses of fighting for socialist revolution.

In 1989, the SWP's response to the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and the orgy of triumphalism in ruling circles about the "end of socialism" was to sever all international ties and transform itself into the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), oriented to the Greens. In 2001, the DSP dissolved itself into the grouping known as Socialist Alliance, oriented to Labor, the Greens and the trade unions—all of which fully support the US-NATO war drive.

Only one social force is capable of halting the plunge toward World War III and that is the working class. The ICFI, established in the fight to defend the principles of Trotskyism, is the only party conducting the political struggle to build a unified anti-war movement of the international working class based on a socialist perspective to put an end to capitalism and its bankrupt system of rival nation-states that is the root cause of war.

The rapidly evolving war in the Ukraine adds to the urgency of this task. Contact the International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections—the Socialist Equality Parties—and join this fight to halt the drive to war.



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