

# Australia's pseudo-left Socialist Alternative holds fraudulent "anti-war" meeting

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Socialist Alternative, an Australian pseudo-left organisation, held a forum in Melbourne on June 3 under the banner "Stop the drive to war." Nominally called by its electoral front, the Victorian Socialists, the event was a political fraud aimed at obscuring the key issues in the fight against war and diverting workers and young people behind reactionary Australian nationalism.

The starkest aspect of the meeting was that at an event ostensibly opposing war, not a word was said about the war that is underway in Ukraine.

This was hardly because the conflict in Eastern Europe is petering out or deescalating. On the contrary, its character as a US-NATO proxy war against Russia is now indisputable. So is the danger that this will erupt into a far broader conflagration that threatens world war.

The meeting was held as the US and its allies were preparing to send fighter jets to Ukraine, a move they previously acknowledged could lead to World War III. It occurred just before a NATO-directed Ukrainian counter-offensive that is greatly widening the scope of the conflict.

The basic reason for the silence is that Socialist Alternative supports the US-NATO war. Their publication, *Red Flag*, has functioned as a propaganda outlet for the war effort, using "left" phraseology to promote a line indistinguishable in its essentials from that of the establishment media.

To cite only one example, last July *Red Flag* proclaimed that Russia's "invasion cannot be defeated by pacifist methods. Western military supplies went some way to preventing a rapid Russian military victory and the imposition of a puppet government in the early stages of the war."

In fact, the supplies have nothing to do with "defending Ukraine," as Socialist Alternative asserts. Instead their purpose was to deepen and widen a war against Russia that the imperialist powers are determined to conduct to the last Ukrainian.

Socialist Alternative has never resiled from this position, which is in complete alignment with American imperialism, and the actions of its partner, the Australian Labor government, which is now developing advanced plans to send Australian fighter jets, and even possibly pilots, to Ukraine.

The main speaker at the meeting, *Red Flag* editor Corey Oakley, personifies Socialist Alternative's support for US imperialism. In 2012, he proclaimed the need for an end to "knee-jerk anti-imperialism." This was the opening shot of a years-long campaign by Socialist Alternative promoting the CIA regime-change operation in Syria as a "revolution" to be supported.

The contents of Oakley's remarks, and those of other speakers, made plain that Socialist Alternative's recent discovery of the "danger of war" does not mark a deviation in any way from this pro-imperialist record.

Instead, while continuing to support US imperialist-led operations, Socialist Alternative is joining hands with various figures in Labor, the trade unions and Greens to develop a nationalist trap for rising opposition to Australia's frontline role in the preparations for war against China.

It is impossible to speak seriously about the prospects of war with China, let alone to oppose them, while remaining silent on the conflict in Ukraine. The strategists of American imperialism have made clear that the war underway is aimed at inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia to clear the path for conflict with China, its chief economic rival.

In any event, Oakley did not even pretend to oppose the threatened war against China. Instead he simply called for Australia not to participate in it.

He declared that the Australian Labor government of Anthony Albanese "could easily avoid Australian involvement in this war" by "scrapping the US-Australian military alliance." He said that Victorian Socialists' policy position is to pressure the government "to end the US alliance, kick the bases out of Australia and end the AUKUS deal."

AUKUS is a military alliance between Australia, the US and the UK against China. As part of AUKUS, in March Albanese announced a ten-year, \$368-billion deal to purchase nuclear-powered submarines from the US and Britain.

By simply calling for the end of the alliance with the US, Oakley is not presenting an anti-war position. Instead, he is echoing the line of a minority wing of the Australian ruling class, fearful of the social, political and economic implications of full-scale war with the country's largest trading partner.

This tendency in the Australian political establishment is not remotely anti-war or anti-imperialist. It includes leading political figures, themselves responsible for Australian involvement in criminal US-led wars, such as former Foreign Minister Bob Carr and former Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating.

Oakley gave uncritical support to comments made by the right-wing Keating, condemning AUKUS while outlining an alternative strategy for Australia to advance its own predatory imperialist interests, especially in the South Pacific.

If anything, Oakley and Socialist Alternative have taken the reactionary, nationalist positions of these anti-AUKUS layers to their logical conclusion. Socialist Alternative does not even feign concern over the consequences for the international working class of a major war between the US and China, much less express the slightest interest in preventing it.

Its claim that Australia can sit out such a conflict is a reactionary utopia. In the first instance, such a war would almost inevitably involve the use of nuclear weapons. No corner of the globe would be spared the ensuing nuclear winter, which would likely end human civilisation.

Australia's alignment with the US war drive, moreover, is not the result of the proclivities of individual politicians. It expresses the fact that as a middle imperialist power, the Australian ruling elite has always sought to prosecute its own predatory interests in alliance with the dominant power of the day, first Britain, and then midway through World War II, the US.

That is why the Labor government and the dominant sections of the ruling elite have so enthusiastically taken up the war drive. Albanese and Labor are not simply being dragged along by the US, they are at the

forefront of its diplomatic, economic and military campaign in preparation for conflict with China.

Australia is already so integrated into the US-led war machine that, if a war were to break out, its participation would be automatic and immediate.

Oakley's assertion that "this is a war of choice for the ruling class," has a broader significance, raising a critical theoretical issue.

For Marxists, a major imperialist war, however it begins, is not simply the outcome of the immediate actions of capitalist politicians and governments. Instead, the eruption of conflict is grounded in the intractable contradictions of the capitalist system, above all between an integrated world economy and the division of the globe into rival nation-states.

In periods of capitalist crisis, the ruling class seeks a way out of its impasse through the path of war.

Socialist Alternative said virtually nothing about the context in which war is looming. Capitalism is in its deepest crisis since 80 years ago, with the worst pandemic in a century, a deep-going malaise of the real economy threatening international recession and a resurgence of the social struggles of the working-class.

The ruling elites, presiding over a system in breakdown and fearing major social upheavals, feel that they are looking into the abyss and are responding with a reckless drive for a new, frenzied imperialist redivision of the world.

Significantly, Oakley's assertion that war is merely a "policy," recapitulates the line of various opportunist tendencies against whom Lenin and Trotsky polemicalised during World War I. Lenin and Trotsky emphasised that the conflagration could not be understood in terms of "who fired the first shot," or on the basis of other secondary characteristics, but only as an existential breakdown of the global capitalist system.

Those disputes had far-reaching political implications. Those who claimed war was merely a "policy," invariably oriented to their own national-capitalist political establishment, seeking at most to compel it to adopt a new policy. In contrast, Lenin and Trotsky insisted that the only progressive response to the war would be the fight for socialist revolution on an international scale.

The relevance of these issues was underscored by the remarks of the final speaker at the meeting, longstanding Socialist Alternative leader, Diane Fieldes. Her presentation was introduced as one that dealt with the lessons of history in the struggle against war. In fact, almost everything she said was a gross falsification of history in the service of Socialist Alternative's reactionary nationalist line.

Referring to World War I, Fieldes asserted that it was ended by protests and strikes. She left one thing out: the October 1917 Russian Revolution. Led by the Bolsheviks, the Russian Revolution brought the working class to power and initiated a wave of revolutionary struggles across Europe which would eventually compel the imperialist powers to end the war.

Fieldes was silent on this monumental historical experience because, its socialist phrase mongering notwithstanding, Socialist Alternative is bitterly hostile to the revolutionary perspective embodied in 1917, of the fight for the political independence of the working class from all capitalist parties and its unification on an international scale.

In her potted history, Fieldes also drew attention to the millions-strong international protests against the illegal US-led imperialist war in Iraq in 2003. This, she indicated, was the way forward. But the speaker glossed over the obvious issue with that assertion: the protests failed to stop the war.

While the demonstrations expressed immense anti-war sentiment among workers and young people the world over, they were saddled with a bankrupt political perspective, promoted at the time by pseudo-left groups such as Socialist Alternative, together with the Greens, the trade unions

and other pro-capitalist outfits.

All of these forces joined hands to insist that pressuring the United Nations, together with the Democratic Party in the US and formations such as the Labor Party in Australia, would halt the invasion. That perspective effectively demobilised the anti-war movement, channelling it behind the very political establishment that was prosecuting the war.

Fieldes' history lesson demonstrates that Socialist Alternative is seeking to create precisely such a trap for the widespread opposition that has erupted to AUKUS and the increasingly visible preparations for war with China. Socialist Alternative is perpetrating this political fraud, even as it continues to openly back imperialist war, as in Ukraine.

Both political positions—a phoney, nationalist opposition to AUKUS and open support for the war in Ukraine—are directed against the only means of stopping war: the construction of a unified, international anti-war movement of the working class, aimed at the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of socialism.

The objective basis for such a movement exists in the developing struggles of the working class around the world. As was the case one hundred years ago, the same processes that lead to imperialist war propel the working class onto the path of socialist revolution. Already, in an early stage of the war, the massive growth of inflation and the ever-greater diversion of state resources to the war machine is provoking major struggles, building on anger over social inequality that has been increasing over the past 40 years.

The essential preparation for the Russian Revolution was the ruthless struggle, led by Lenin, against all national-opportunist tendencies that sought, in one way or another, to chain the working class to the capitalist nation-state and to thereby block the revolutionary struggle that was required. Lenin disclosed the material roots of these national-opportunist tendencies in a labour and trade union aristocracy that had been cultivated by imperialism and which identified its own privileged interests with it.

A hundred years on, the pseudo-left represents an even more rotten and corrupted social layer. It speaks for sections of the affluent upper middle-class, ensconced in the top echelons of the public sector, the union bureaucracy and academia whose interests are ultimately bound up with the continued economic and strategic dominance of US imperialism. As Socialist Alternative's openly pro-imperialist policies over the past decade have demonstrated, the fight against war can only go forward through a political fight against the pseudo-left.



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