

Pseudo-left Socialist Alternative supports nationalist, pro-business indigenous Voice to Australian parliament

Oscar Grenfell
21 June 2023

The pseudo-left Socialist Alternative organisation is openly supporting the creation of an indigenous Voice to the federal parliament, one of the signature policies of the big-business Labor government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

An article in its *Red Flag* publication last week was the most explicit yet on the need for workers and young people to ensure a “yes” vote on the referendum that must be held to constitutionally enshrine the new body. It would function as an advisory body to the federal government and parliament, which would also determine its composition and personnel.

Socialist Alternative’s support for the initiative again underscores the fact that it has nothing to do with socialism. Rather, it is a pseudo-left organisation based on affluent sections of the upper-middle class, mired in identity politics fashionable among this social layer and tied by a thousand threads to the political establishment.

The article, “Voice to parliament losing ground,” warns in worried tones that the Labor government’s policy is not winning substantial popular support. It cites recent polling indicating that less than 50 percent of the electorate would support the creation of a Voice if a referendum were held now.

Red Flag speaks nervously of the dangers of “a humiliating defeat for the Yes campaign.” This, it asserts, “would be a significant victory for the conservative right and its racist campaign against the Voice.”

In its clearest enunciation of Socialist Alternative’s line on the referendum, the article states: “While a small minority of left-wing activists are critical of the Voice, their voices have been drowned out by the right-wing racists who dominate the No campaign and the debates around it in mainstream discussions. A win for the No campaign in this context would strengthen the right and undermine the existing widespread support for Indigenous rights.” From this, it concludes that “the left” has no choice but to support the Labor government’s Voice.

This assertion is all the more striking, given the characterisations of the new body in the *Red Flag* article itself.

The Voice, it states, “is not an organic demand arising out of the struggles of an oppressed people.” Instead, it is “the

construct of a small number of Indigenous and non-indigenous lawyers, academics and NGO leaders.”

The Voice, Socialist Alternative acknowledges, will do nothing to address the profound social crisis afflicting the vast mass of Aboriginal people. Instead, “it will be used by the Albanese government to whitewash institutional racism and to attempt to diffuse anti-racist sentiment.” And yet the only conclusion Socialist Alternative offers is that workers and young people must line up behind this reactionary campaign!

The peculiar manner in which the article is framed, simultaneously criticising the Voice and insisting that there is no alternative but to support it, is bound up with Socialist Alternative’s support for the Labor government whose policy is already substantially discredited.

Broad layers of working people, who are horrified at the plight of Aboriginal people, nevertheless recognise that this new institution will resolve nothing. The deep-going skepticism extends to many indigenous people. They have been through innumerable experiences with land councils, government advisory panels and other bodies, which have covered up the failure of governments to address their social crisis while enriching a tiny Aboriginal elite.

To obscure the fact that it is promoting an unpopular policy, which it acknowledges is essentially reactionary, Socialist Alternative is compelled to put forward certain limited and mealy-mouthed criticisms. This is the political equivalent of window dressing.

Socialist Alternative claims it is necessary to support the Voice to prevent a victory of the far-right, which is similar to the position it and the rest of the pseudo-left put in elections and on all significant political developments. They are cynical peddlers of lesser-evilism, the assertion that workers and youth must support Labor, the Greens and other official parties, to prevent the coming to office of the Liberal-National Coalition.

The function of the claim that Labor and the Greens are the lesser evil is to chain workers and youth to these parties of big business and to block an independent political movement of the working class against the entire political establishment and the capitalist system that it defends.

The assertion that the far-right can be defeated by aligning with sections of the political establishment is a fraud. It is a crude recapitulation of the Popular Front policy of Stalinism in the 1930s that promoted an alliance with supposedly “progressive” sections of the bourgeoisie to purportedly block fascism. The results of that policy, which assisted the rise of fascism, are starkly demonstrated by the subsequent horrors that befall the working class.

The same is the case, on a very different scale, in relation to the Voice. To the extent that the Coalition and the right-wing populist organisations are able to gain any traction, it is a result of the reactionary, pro-business character of the Voice itself. While Liberal leader Peter Dutton is dog-whistling to a small far-right constituency, he is also denouncing the Voice as a product of the elite “Canberra bubble” that will resolve nothing for ordinary people.

The right-wing elements campaigning against the Voice can point to the fact that it is backed by some of the most powerful layers of the Australian corporate elite, including most of the country’s major companies and business lobbies, the very forces that Socialist Alternative is now in a de facto alliance with over the issue.

More generally, while criticising aspects of the Voice, Socialist Alternative backs the entire racialist perspective that underpins it. The Labor government, the Greens and the pseudo-left all present the plight of Aboriginal people in essentially racial terms. The poverty, inequality and hardships afflicting indigenous people, Socialist Alternative asserts, are the product of “structural racism.”

This is a fraud. In reality, the oppression of Aboriginal people is a crime of capitalism. The original dispossession of the Aboriginal people, justified by racism, was a product of the drive to establish capitalist property relations, particularly private ownership of the land, in opposition to the primitive communism that prevailed among indigenous tribes.

With the establishment of a modern capitalist nation-state, Aboriginal people became the most oppressed section of the working class. Attacks on their social rights have inevitably served as a prelude to an assault on the wider working class.

To say racism, not capitalism, is responsible is an apology for the profit system. It has also served as the mechanism for the enrichment of a narrow and privileged layer of the Aboriginal population, as is again occurring with the proposal for a Voice. Above all, the racialist line serves to drive a wedge between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers, preventing a unified struggle for their common class interests while burying the primacy of class more broadly.

Socialist Alternative’s position reflects definite material interests. It speaks for a layer of the upper-middle class in academia, the top echelons of the public sector and the trade union bureaucracy. This social milieu uses the politics of race, gender and sexuality to advance its own striving for privileges, within the framework of capitalism, while staving off any threat

to the social order posed by a unified movement of the working class.

The related aspect of Socialist Alternative’s promotion of the Voice is that it says nothing in its commentary on the referendum about the broader agenda of the Labor government. In fact, it is a government of reaction all down the line. Labor is presiding over the worst social crisis in decades facing workers, regardless of race, culture, language, gender or any other “identity,” while instituting policies, such as the Stage Three tax cuts, that benefit the ultra-wealthy.

At the same time, Labor is fully committed to the advanced US-led preparations for war against China. It has allocated vast sums to the military, including \$368 billion for nuclear-powered submarines, and is functioning as a diplomatic attack dog of Washington throughout the region.

The Voice is a cover for this right-wing pro-business agenda. It also serves longstanding attempts by the ruling elite to cultivate a new, supposedly more “inclusive” nationalism aimed at suppressing class tensions and promoting a “national unity” that is essential to the drive for war.

The bottom line is the cost of such war measures will be borne by the working class, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, in the form of the immense gutting of social spending, increased exploitation and the attacks on democratic rights that are always a by-product of war.

The Socialist Equality Party alone has exposed this essential class character of the Voice and opposed it from the standpoint of a genuine socialist, revolutionary and internationalist perspective. In opposition to the Labor government and its pseudo-left supporters, it is necessary to unite the entire working class in a common struggle for socialism, as the only means of ending the social crisis and averting the threat of a catastrophic war.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact