

Australian pseudo-left seeking to divert anger over Gaza genocide behind Labor, unions

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As the Israeli genocide of Palestinians continues in Gaza, the phony and temporary “truce” notwithstanding, millions of ordinary people are being confronted with the fact that the major governments of the world have adopted as their policy ethnic cleansing and the mass murder of civilians.

Despite enormous global anti-war protests, governments in the US, Canada, throughout Europe and Australia, insist on the impermissibility of a “ceasefire” and proclaim Israel’s “right to defend itself.” The worse the war crimes, the more belligerent the governments become in support of the Zionist regime.

The situation poses fundamental questions of political perspective and program: how can the genocide be fought? What is the way forward in the struggle to end it?

Under those conditions, there is a concerted attempt to divert opposition to the genocide back behind sections of the establishment, and to prevent workers and young people from developing any understanding of the broader implications of the unfolding war crimes. In Australia, the chief role in this campaign of misdirection is played by the country’s pseudo-left organisations, Socialist Alternative, Solidarity and Socialist Alliance.

There are two key characteristics of the activities and interventions of these groups in the movement against the genocide.

Firstly, despite falsely describing themselves as socialist, they never raise the necessity for a socialist perspective. This is a continuation and deepening of the position these organisations have taken over decades, since they broke from the Trotskyist movement in the 1950s and oriented to Social Democracy, Stalinism and various forms of middle-class identity politics.

As the Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International and its Socialist Equality Parties, have insisted, the assault on Gaza is the true face of capitalism and imperialism. The Israeli genocide, moreover, is one component of a broader eruption of imperialist militarism, including US-led preparations for war with Iran, Russia and China.

That objectively raises the necessity for a struggle by the international working class for world socialism, against a capitalist system that is in crisis and whose ruling elites are tobogganing to the abyss. Outside of this broader context, the onslaught on Gaza is falsely presented as a primarily Middle Eastern development, with little immediate connection to what else is occurring in the world.

The pseudo-left’s general silence on what Gaza reveals about the whole capitalist system is bound up with the other aspect of their line: an attempt to subordinate the developing movement to pro-capitalist and pro-genocide political forces, above all Labor and the trade union bureaucracy.

Every week at the mass rallies, members of the pseudo-left ask participants to sign a petition calling for the federal Labor government to advocate a ceasefire. That this perspective is futile and a dead-end is obvious.

The Labor government is hardly a bystander, as such petitions imply. It is an active participant in the genocide, through its bellicose defence of all of Israel’s war crimes, and through its integration into US-led military networks that are coordinating the genocide. At least some of the Israeli air strikes are being targeted out of the joint US-Australian operated Pine Gap spy base in Central Australia, and successive governments have approved 350 defence export permits to Israel since 2017. That includes 52 this year under Labor.

Pseudo-left speakers at the rallies have played a key role in setting the tone of the events, which insofar as the speeches are concerned, generally hew to the line of appealing to and placing pressure on the Labor government to change course.

At one of the first rallies in Melbourne, on October 15, Socialist Alternative leader Jerome Small made passing references to “imperialism” and the “ruling class.” But the thrust of his speech was to bemoan the fact that Labor was not opposing the genocide. Small depicted a Labor government that was “lost for words,” when in fact it was already aggressively backing Israel’s actions.

Small stated: “[Foreign Minister] Penny Wong and the Australian government seem stuck for words. So let’s give them some words. Words like ‘obscene.’ Words like ‘horrific.’” This was not only a lament that the right-wing, imperialist Labor government was backing the genocide. It was a suggestion that Labor could be convinced to change its tune, and bordered on public relations advice to the government itself.

Small concluded with a perspective of endless protest, appealing to governments, even if that would not halt the genocide. He told attendees it was necessary for everyone to continue “coming back time after time after time after time while the destruction continues in Gaza and far beyond.”

Socialist Alternative’s publication *Red Flag* has similarly insisted that the task is to “shame the Labor Party for its egregious alliance with the US in supporting Israel’s genocidal attacks on the Palestinian people. We should flood Labor MPs phone lines and inboxes with questions about what they are doing to condemn Israel’s attempted genocide of the Palestinian people.”

The analogy that comes to mind is petitioning the Nazi regime to end the Holocaust. Whenever significant protests and movements develop, the pseudo-left always seeks to channel them back behind Labor, the Greens and the political establishment. But this attempt is even more nakedly bankrupt, not only given Labor’s full-throated

support for Israel, but also its threats to ban and outlaw protests in support of the Palestinians.

The real task is not to appeal to Labor, but to mobilise the working class against it in a political struggle. The pseudo-left, however, represents an affluent layer of the upper middle-class, tied to the political establishment, including Labor, above all through the trade union bureaucracy. A fight against Labor would cut across a web of opportunist political relations that the pseudo-left is involved in.

That is underscored by the pseudo-left's defence of the union bureaucracy, which has tacitly supported the genocide. The major unions have either remained silent or have issued mealy-mouthed resolutions, most of them condemning "both sides," i.e., the Palestinians and the Israeli regime seeking their extermination. Above all, the unions have taken no action to obstruct the genocide or the Labor government's support for it.

In practice, the unions have rejected an appeal from the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions for industrial action to starve the Israeli war machine and block its supplies.

The line-up extends across the board, but is particularly stark in the case of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA). Some of its leaders, especially in Sydney, have feigned support for the Palestinians, but every single week, they are ensuring the loading and unloading of Israeli ships of the Zim line, which last month dedicated its entire fleet to assisting the genocide.

There is widespread support among ordinary people for the kind of action called for by the Palestinian unions. There is also a growing consternation over the refusal of the Australian unions to take any action.

To fill the breach, Solidarity has initiated a Trade Unionists for Palestine group. While presented as a "rank-and-file" organisation, its entire purpose is to suppress opposition to the union bureaucracy and to run cover for it. The group has organised limited "community protests," including at the ports, but the purpose of such events is, above all, to obscure the inaction of the union leadership.

One of Solidarity's prominent members, Erima Dall, is herself an MUA delegate, closely associated with its Sydney leadership. Dall collaborates with and justifies the actions of the MUA leaders, who are themselves collaborating with Zim.

The character of Trade Unionists for Palestine was spelt out in an interview Dall gave to Perth Indymedia on Tuesday, about a current "week of action" that the group has organised.

The "actions" are miserable and pathetic. Dall stated: "[W]e're asking people to do anything they can at work, really. That might be just simply taking the petition to your workplace and getting a few workmates to sign it, or it could be wearing the kaffiyeh and taking a group photo during your lunch break..."

These "little actions" could "build into something much, much more powerful." As evidence, Dall cited the fact that the national leaderships of the construction union and her own MUA had issued statements condemning the genocide, well over a month after it began. Such statements are weasel-words that commit the leadership to nothing. Dall also hailed the fact that some national union leaderships were allowing their members to bring union flags to pro-Palestinian protests. This showed that Unionists for Palestine were "really having a tangible impact," she asserted.

Finally, Dall stated: "And that's all going to put pressure on the Labor Government, because as we know, our unions are affiliated with the Labor Party. They have delegates at Labor conference. So, those debates will ripple through in really, really critical ways."

These positions, not only have nothing to do with a fight for socialism, they are not even vaguely left-wing. Dall presents as a positive the fact that "our unions" are affiliated to the pro-imperialist and anti-working class Labor Party, as it is supporting a 21st century Holocaust. The comment exposes the fact that the pseudo-left is an adjunct of Labor, and represents a corrupt middle-class layer that couldn't care less about the Palestinians.

Dall's last comment also underscores the fraud of the line used by Unionists for Palestine to justify the inaction of the union bureaucracy. Together with the union leaders themselves, Solidarity points to anti-strike laws, which make most industrial action illegal. But that legislation, the Fair Work Act, was drawn up by the previous Labor government and the unions themselves. The unions, moreover, are affiliated to the Labor Party, whose explicit position is the maintenance of the anti-strike laws.

Just as they use Fair Work to suppress workers' opposition to the genocide, so the bureaucracy and its pseudo-left cheerleaders invoke the laws to suppress all strike action and to force through sell-out agreements slashing jobs, wages and conditions. The bureaucracy is a police force for governments and the corporations.

The Unionists for Palestine group was established to prevent a genuine rank-and-file rebellion. As the Socialist Equality Party insists, what is required are independent rank-and-file committees, opposed to the bureaucracy, to conduct the industrial and political action required to actually block weapons and all military supplies to Israel, develop political strikes against the Labor government within Australia and seek to end the genocide.

Finally, it should be noted that the positions of the pseudo-left on Palestine are not an aberration. In keeping with its class character and ever-greater shift to the right, the pseudo-left has ever more openly embraced imperialist war. In the case of Socialist Alternative, this has included explicit and aggressive support for the US-CIA-led regime-change operation in Syria, which was also backed by the Zionist regime. More recently, all of the pseudo-left groups have lined up behind the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.

These organisations are a last line of defence of the political establishment and imperialism itself.

The real alternative, as fought for by the SEP, is the development of a political movement of the working class, in Australia and internationally, directed against the entire establishment, the capitalist system and all of its defenders. The genocide in Gaza, the global breakdown of capitalism and the eruption of militarism pose as an urgent task the development of a political leadership in the working class, based on the perspective of world socialist revolution. To get involved in that decisive struggle, contact the SEP.



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