

Australian pseudo-left slanders workers, defends unions' complicity in Gaza genocide

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Amid mass working-class opposition to Israel's genocide, backed by imperialist governments globally, including Labor, Australia's unions stand exposed for their complicity in the barbaric assault.

In addition to weekly mass protests around the country, sections of workers, most prominently in the health sector, have staged vigils and other demonstrations opposing Israel's campaign to exterminate the Palestinian population. Thousands more have signed petitions or used their public platforms to call for an end to the genocide.

In the face of this mass opposition, the corporatised trade unions have done everything they can to block any struggle by the working class against these historic war crimes. This is a stark expression of the role of the union apparatus as a key component of the Labor government and a last line of defence for the capitalist system itself.

Health workers, including doctors, nurses and paramedics have been targeted by Zionist supporters of Israel's bombardment, who have demanded that they be disciplined, silenced and, in some cases, removed from their employment. The unions have done nothing to defend the victimised workers, creating the conditions for the witch hunts to continue and expand. Journalists, artists and actors have confronted similar attacks.

With the unions' support for genocide obvious and undeniable to growing numbers of workers, the pseudo-left is desperately seeking to bolster illusions in the bureaucracy. Socialist Alliance and its publication *Green Left* are playing a leading role in the attempt to preserve the credibility of the unions and head off any move by workers to oppose the leadership.

The latest example is an interview featured last week with Tim Gooden, a former union official and a prominent member of Socialist Alliance, entitled "Unions need to lead on support for Palestine."

The title is a cynical cover for the real purpose of the interview, which is to excuse the inaction and complicity of the union bureaucracy, lay the blame on supposedly ignorant, backward workers and divert the growing opposition to Israel's onslaught behind toothless appeals to a Labor government that is totally committed to genocide and imperialist war.

Gooden initially paints a picture of "good trade unionists" fighting to win workers over to the Palestinian cause. He claims, "My union, the CFMEU [Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union], has been going out to jobs and trying to get the Palestinian flag flown."

This "is not easy," Gooden says, because "the majority of the working class, our members included have grown up with the Murdoch media." As a result, Gooden claims, "the first reaction is, ' Hamas brought this upon themselves... it's got nothing to do with us, fuck 'em.'"

Gooden later returns to this theme, claiming mobilising workers will "be hard, because for years our membership have been told, 'these rag-heads, these terrorists, they're nothing but trouble.'"

This is more vicious slander against the working class aimed at covering up the bureaucracy's refusal to act. His accusation flies in the face of the contemporary reality of the Australian working class, and the construction industry in particular, with more than half the workforce born overseas,

including many from a Middle Eastern background.

There is ample evidence to refute Gooden's lies. For almost four months, workers and young people from all ethnic and religious backgrounds have been turning out in mass protests against Israel's genocide. Workers in numerous industries have demanded the right to march with union flags and hold workplace demonstrations, only to be harshly rebuked by the bureaucracy.

Well aware of this, Gooden is obliged to contradict himself, acknowledging: "We've got members that are turning up with their community and with their churches, etc. But they're not turning up in union colours. They're not turning up and following a union banner or a union flag, because they're not there."

The conception pushed by Gooden, that the union bureaucracy is simply not doing enough to radicalise its supposedly recalcitrant and backward membership, is a complete fraud. Far from seeking to mobilise the growing number of workers expressing opposition to genocide and imperialist war, the unions have actively sought to block its development.

In violation of the call issued by Palestinian trade unions on October 16 for unions and workers' organisations worldwide to take urgent action, not one Australian union has called for workers to strike, either to directly block Israel's profits and supply lines, or in an attempt to pressure the Labor government to end its support for the genocide.

The unions' refusal to allow workers to take even the most limited industrial action in defence of Palestinian lives has emerged most sharply on the waterfront.

Hundreds of workers and young people have taken part in protests at major ports in Sydney, Melbourne and Fremantle, braving police violence and arrests in attempts to block the operations of Zim, an Israeli shipping line that has pledged its full resources to the Zionist regime.

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) leadership has largely postured as supporting these actions. As long as they were occasional, brief and mostly ineffectual, workers have been allowed not to cross so-called "community pickets."

But the union's primary role has been to ensure that, apart from these short sporadic stoppages, MUA members have been kept on the job, loading and unloading Zim ships day in and day out, keeping profits and supplies flowing as Israel's assault has continued and deepened.

Gooden hails this as a model for the rest of Australia's unions, declaring, "The MUA has been doing their bit from an early day." This underscores that what he is calling for is not for unions to call for industrial action—the word "strike" was not uttered once in the almost 18-minute interview—but for the bureaucrats that lead them to give more lip service to the Palestinian cause, to avoid alienating workers opposed to genocide.

As another example of the "good trade unionists," Gooden pointed to his former Socialist Alliance comrade Christy Cain, national secretary of the CFMEU. The MUA is a division of the CFMEU, meaning Cain is ultimately responsible for the union lining up behind Zim and Israel.

At several pro-Palestine rallies, Cain has delivered blustering denunciations of the inaction of the ACTU executive, of which he is a member. As one of the very few bureaucrats to even attend the mass protests, let alone speak, his comments have been heavily promoted by the pseudo-left.

Cain's contributions amount to nothing more than a call for other union leaders to join him on stage at the mass rallies out of concern that the failure to do so will further discredit the bureaucracy and undermine its capacity to keep workers in check.

Gooden echoes this fear, urging union secretaries to "put out an email and say, 'I'm gonna be there [at the rallies], come and stand with me'," because he recognises the danger of a mass movement developing completely outside the unions' control.

Conscious that Labor and the union bureaucracy sit atop a powder keg of mounting hostility in the working class, Gooden warns, "It's not good enough that we assign a union organiser to deal with the most progressive elements of our membership and take the pressure off the steam vessel."

The comment is a remarkably candid acknowledgment of the role of the unions. Their aim, Gooden notes matter-of-factly, is not to mobilise workers in a struggle against genocide, war or for their conditions. Instead it is to suppress opposition from below. Gooden's only criticism is that this task cannot be left to lower-level bureaucrats, but must be urgently acted upon by senior union executives to prevent the development of a movement outside the control of the unions.

To fulfil this task, Gooden insists that opposition must be channelled back behind appeals to the very Labor government that has defended and participated in the genocide. Speaking of that government, Gooden stated: "What we want them to say now to the Israeli government is, 'hey, pull your head in, you're doing the wrong thing. Back off, stop slaughtering people.'"

Gooden knows full well that the government will do no such thing. Labor is totally committed to the war plans of US imperialism, which include backing Israel to the hilt. No amount of polite demands and flag-waving will change that.

The truth is that this whole framework is a sham. The union bureaucracy is not separate from the government, but a component of it. Figures such as Cain head some of the most influential and powerful union affiliates of the Labor Party. The union bureaucrats function as factional warlords and even kingmakers in this corrupt and fetid environment, with their sway having been sufficient in the past to remove state premiers and even prime ministers. Of course, this power is never exercised to advance the interests of workers, but to shore-up the Labor apparatus, of which the union bureaucracy is a part.

Gooden is not just speaking for himself, but expressing the right-wing political line of Socialist Alliance as a whole. From the beginning of Israel's current onslaught, the organisation has urged protesters to orient to Labor and promoted illusions that the government can be pressured to oppose the genocide.

This is in line with the pro-imperialist record of Socialist Alliance over decades. When protests broke out in Australia as part of a global wave of opposition to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, Socialist Alliance strangled the movement and sought to divert it behind Labor and sow illusions in the United Nations.

More recently, Socialist Alliance has given full-throated support to the far-right Ukrainian regime in the US-NATO proxy war against Russia, including through calls for increased arms shipments from the major powers.

These positions are not an accident. Socialist Alliance, like all the pseudo-left groups—including, in Australia, Socialist Alternative and Solidarity—is a pro-capitalist party of the upper middle class whose function is to block the revolutionary strivings of workers and young people by tying them to Labor and the unions.

In fact, there is a direct line of connection running from the pseudo-left, through the unions, to the pro-genocidal Labor government itself.

This is exemplified by Socialist Alliance's promotion of Gooden as a spokesman. His own record as a union official includes a stint as secretary of the Geelong Trades Hall Council (GTHC), where he played a leading role in overseeing the "orderly closure" of the Victorian car industry.

In 2013, when Ford announced it would shut down production in Geelong and Broadmeadows, Gooden was appointed head of a \$20 million "taskforce" aimed at suppressing opposition from workers to the permanent destruction of thousands of jobs by promoting illusions in bogus "transition" and "retraining" schemes. By 2020, just 53 percent of workers previously employed at Australia's major car makers were in full-time employment.

Gooden presided over this assault on working-class jobs not only as a representative of the union bureaucracy, but as a leading member of Socialist Alliance. Then, as now, Socialist Alliance boasted of Gooden's membership in their party, as he collaborated behind closed doors with some of the most powerful corporations and governments to inflict a historic assault on the working class.

Cain was also a national executive member of the Socialist Alliance, when his ascent to the upper echelons of the MUA and CFMEU bureaucracy was already well underway.

At some point, Cain appears to have left Socialist Alliance and began campaigning for the Labor Party. Socialist Alliance did not announce his departure, comment on it or criticise its former leading member for participating in openly capitalist politics. Instead, Socialist Alliance continues to promote Cain as a "militant," knowing full well that he is a careerist hack.

The record of Gooden and Cain underscores that Socialist Alliance's pretences of promoting a more "left-wing" or "militant" segment of the trade union officialdom are a sham. They simply view occasional left-wing and even "socialist" rhetoric as a necessary cover for their right-wing, pro-business and pro-government activities.

Foreign policy is always an extension of domestic policy. The tacit support of the unions for the genocide and for the broader eruption of imperialist militarism complements their enforcement of the dictates of the banks and the corporations against the workers they falsely claim to represent through the imposition of cuts to jobs, wages and conditions, and the suppression of any industrial or political action. That connection is demonstrated in Gooden's own biography. A member of the pro-imperialist pseudo-left, he has also functioned as an agent of the conglomerates and governments in their job destruction.

The fight against genocide and war requires a political offensive against both the union bureaucracy and the pseudo-left.

In the first instance, workers must be mobilised to carry out strikes and other industrial action to halt the supply of goods to Israel and attack the regime financially.

This will require the fight to build new organisations of struggle, rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves, not the Labor-aligned bureaucrats.

The position of the union leadership on Palestine is not an accident or aberration. They support genocide because they support capitalism and will defend it to the end, as it toboggans towards a catastrophic third world war.

The alternative is the urgent fight to build an international working-class anti-war movement of the working class, based on a revolutionary socialist perspective. The genocide now being carried out against Palestinians is the real face of capitalism and imperialism, part of escalating US-led plans for global conflict, and a stark warning of the barbarism that is to come. The mass protests have demonstrated the potential for a fight against this, but the developing global movement requires a genuine, socialist program and leadership. That is advanced by

the Socialist Equality Party alone.



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