

Australian pseudo-left group Solidarity defends maritime union's promotion of pro-genocide Prime Minister Albanese

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More than five months into Israel's mass murder of Palestinians in Gaza, the question of how to end the genocide is posed more sharply than ever.

The program that has dominated rallies internationally, of endless protests appealing to and placing pressure on Western governments, has manifestly failed. The corporatised unions have, in practice, rejected a desperate appeal from Palestinian unions for strikes and industrial action to paralyse the Israeli war machine, instead ensuring industrial peace.

As the Socialist Equality Party has insisted, the starting point of a fight to end the genocide must be an understanding that it is a crime of capitalism. The imperialist governments are supporting the mass murder because it is part of their broader program of militarism, particularly targeting Iran, Russia and China. As in the 1930s, capitalism offers a future of barbarism. The alternative is a political struggle by the working class against the governments and the profit system that is responsible for war.

The key role in suppressing any understanding of these issues is played by pseudo-left groups which, while occasionally claiming to be socialist, represent a privileged layer of the upper middle-class tied to the existing political set-up. The more protest politics and the union bureaucracy are discredited, the more desperately the pseudo-left seek to defend both.

A case study is provided by the Solidarity group in Australia. It has, throughout the Israeli onslaught insisted that the trade unions are the key basis for a struggle against the genocide.

The difficulty for Solidarity is that Australia's unions are aligned with the Labor government which has fully backed the Israeli bombardment. The unions have not only done nothing, most of them have scarcely even mentioned the war crimes.

To obscure this reality, Solidarity has promoted supposedly "left" unions, above all the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), which has occasionally condemned the Zionist regime. Solidarity also played the key role in establishing Trade Unionists for Palestine (TU4P). Supposedly a rank-and-file grouping campaigning against the genocide within the unions, TU4P is based on a rejection of the most fundamental feature of such a struggle, a fight against the pro-war union bureaucracy.

The real character of Solidarity's activities, essentially to cover for Labor and the union bureaucracy, was graphically exposed late last month. The purportedly militant and pro-Palestinian union invited Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to give the keynote address to its annual conference. Albanese hailed the MUA, and the bureaucrats gave a rousing ovation to the Labor leader whose government has actively supported the Holocaust of Palestinians.

The initial response of the pseudo-left to this damning exposure of its perspective was to pretend that the conference did not occur. Solidarity's publication still has not reported it, nor has Socialist Alternative's *Red*

Flag or Socialist Alliance's *Green Left*.

Erima Dall, a central figure in Solidarity and TU4P, attended the conference as a delegate, but said nothing about it, including at a March 8 meeting of TU4P held at the MUA's Sydney headquarters. Following this meeting, the TU4P promoted the appearance of MUA officials in a press conference at Port Botany where they issued phoney professions of "solidarity with the people of Palestine."

The sordid conspiracy of silence, recalling nothing so much as the corrupt cover-ups and lies of capitalist politicians, was only broken by a *World Socialist Web Site* report on the MUA conference last week. It provoked immediate consternation in a TU4P WhatsApp group, with people who had joined the group thinking that it was genuinely committed to a fight in defence of Gaza expressing shock and anger.

One condemned the "very shameful action by MUA. It shows they're just talk and working to placate us." Another declared, "Quite a lot of people, including myself, are quite disappointed and disillusioned with union leadership."

One commenter asked "Why should ANY Labor figure, let alone the PM be allowed to get up and posture as a friend of the workers at union meetings?" and called into question the TU4P's perspective of pressuring the union bureaucracies.

Having kept TU4P members in the dark about Albanese's appearance at the conference for the best part of a fortnight, the Solidarity leaders immediately sprang into action in the WhatsApp group to defend the MUA when the angry comments were posted.

Dall insisted that neither the MUA's invitation to the prime minister to speak, nor the fact that he was "applauded enthusiastically," "prove that the MUA does not support the Palestine movement."

Her arguments consisted of desperate lies and evasions.

Dall claimed that many of those present at the conference "genuinely did not think Albanese is complicit in genocide, even in a union that has a very radical history and a high political awareness compared to other unions."

Who does Dall think she is kidding? Hundreds of thousands or even millions of people are intensely hostile to Labor's support for the genocide. Ordinary people, including those who were not particularly political before October last year, have bitterly declared that Albanese is complicit in mass murder and has blood on his hands. "I will never vote for Labor again" has become a common refrain.

But TU4P members are supposed to believe that the well-heeled bureaucrats, their hangers-on and carefully-selected delegates, simply missed the events of the past five months. Like the wise monkeys, they had seen and heard no evil when it came to Albanese, and would have been shocked that he was supporting a genocide.

In fact the upper echelons of the MUA are effectively part of the pro-

genocide government themselves. MUA Assistant National Secretary Mich-Elle Myers is also the national Labor Party's Vice President. MUA National Secretary Paddy Crumlin is on the federal government's Maritime Strategic Fleet Taskforce and was hailed by Albanese as his "good and loyal friend."

Dall, aware that she was on rather thin ice herself, suddenly recalled that she had campaigned at the MUA conference in defence of the Palestinians, something she had not informed the TU4P membership of for the previous two weeks. Dall and others had distributed a fact sheet pointing out Labor's support for Israel. The conference had even passed a motion somehow relating to the Palestinians. No one outside the conference knows exactly what the motion was about because it has not been published anywhere.

Nevertheless, it will surely be of great comfort to those being massacred in Gaza that the MUA, having hailed Albanese, a key supporter of the genocide, passed a motion noting the existence of the Palestinians.

Dall was attempting to claim that there was some sort of ferment, even struggle within the MUA conference, something of which there is no evidence whatsoever.

At the conference, Dall participated in a social media video of the "women of the MUA," standing behind Myers as a head-nodder. Crumlin himself came out of the MUA's Sydney branch with which Solidarity has the closest of ties.

The actions of Crumlin and the MUA executive, moreover, were entirely in line with the perspective that Solidarity itself has argued for, of collaboration with the Labor leadership.

In a November interview with *Perth Indymedia*, Dall presented the MUA's formal affiliation with the Labor Party as a positive, declaring, "They have delegates at Labor conferences, so these debates will ripple through in really, really critical ways." If one supports affiliation to the pro-war, big business Labor Party, why not give its leader a platform?

And that is precisely what Solidarity has advocated for, not only at union conferences but even at rallies in defence of the Palestinians. A January article by Solidarity demanded that "dissident" Labor MPs be featured speakers at the protests, even though they represent a party that supports the decimation of Gaza. There are no such dissident MPs. Not a single senior Labor figure has condemned Albanese or the government for backing Israel's onslaught.

Dall gave a justification for the MUA's collaboration with Albanese, declaring its leadership was anxious "to get a strategic shipping fleet out of the Labor government." That comment underscored the pro-imperialist character of Solidarity and the pseudo-left.

Under Labor's Maritime Strategic Fleet plans, vast sums will be handed over to multinational shipping lines to protect the profits of supply-chain dependent corporations, while further integrating seafarers into the military apparatus of Australian and US imperialism.

Labor has explicitly connected this policy to its military build-up directed against China and its broader support for US-led military operations, including against Iran.

The strategic fleet is being sold by Labor and the MUA under the pretext of "concern for jobs," a lie that Dall repeated without criticism. In reality, with this fleet to be under private ownership, workers will continue to be subjected to the same attacks on jobs, wages and conditions that have been enforced by Labor and the MUA for decades.

The whole conception of the strategic fleet, moreover, is the subordination of all aspects of shipping to the war drive. The corollary is the forceful suppression of all opposition from workers. Any struggle by stevedores would be branded as an attack on the "national interest" and an impermissible disruption of the militarist program.

Essentially, that is what the MUA is already doing. It has rejected all calls for industrial action targeting the Israeli company Zim, which dedicated its entire fleet to the genocide in October. Every week, the

MUA ensures that Zim cargo is loaded and unloaded at Australian ports without disruption.

Some union branches, including in Sydney, have cited the Fair Work industrial laws as justification, however, the anti-strike legislation was drafted by Labor and the unions themselves and is enforced by Albanese, whom the MUA leaders rapturously applauded.

Certain lessons need to be drawn. The purpose of TU4P is not to pressure the union bureaucracy to the left, but to shield it from opposition over its support for genocide.

That was clear at an early TU4P meeting in November. When a Socialist Equality Party leader asked the Sydney MUA officials if they would heed the call of the Palestinian unions for action against Zim, he was shouted down by Solidarity members. At the conclusion of the meeting the MUA officials, including Sydney branch secretary Paul Keating, accosted the SEP members in an aggressive and threatening manner.

In the WhatsApp discussion about Albanese's presence at the MUA conference, Solidarity members derided the SEP and the WSWs as sectarian. What they mean by that term is any struggle for the political independence of the working class in opposition to the corporatist and pro-war union bureaucracy, and the Labor government with which it is aligned.

But that is precisely the struggle that is required. Against the phoney rank-and-fileism of TU4P, there needs to be a struggle for genuine workers' rank-and-file committees, including at the ports, to block Zim ships and to prepare a broader industrial and political struggle against the government. The sine qua non of such a movement is implacable hostility to the bureaucracy and a rebellion against it.

Solidarity's defence of the MUA and of Albanese is not an accident or an aberration. It epitomises the fact that the pseudo-left has nothing to do with the fight for socialism and the interests of the working class, but is an opponent of both.

Solidarity traces its origins to a pro-imperialist split from the Trotskyist movement in 1939-40, which rejected the revolutionary role of the working class and oriented towards a social-democratic, trade unionist perspective.

In the decades since, the pseudo-left has hurtled miles to the right. Its membership represents an affluent section of the upper middle-class tied in to the union bureaucracy, the upper echelons of the public sector and academia which advances its own privileges within the capitalist system through identity politics based on race, gender and sexual orientation. As the MUA-Albanese episode reveals very graphically, the pseudo-left is a pro-imperialist tendency that functions as the last line of defence of capitalism, including in this instance its political executive in Australia, the Albanese Labor administration.

A political struggle against the pro-genocide government, mobilising the working class in the fight to build an international and socialist anti-war movement, can only take place in direct opposition to the pseudo-left.



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