

Fight the Australian Labor government's program of war and austerity!

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The following speech was given by Max Boddy, Socialist Equality Party (Australia) assistant national secretary, at the International May Day 2024 Online Rally, held Saturday, May 4.

In Australia as internationally, Israel's genocide in Gaza has produced major shock and opposition. Every week for the past six months, substantial protests have been held opposing the onslaught and the support it has received from the imperialist powers, including Australia.

This is the most sustained anti-war movement in the country's history, but it has reached an impasse—a roadblock.

The pseudo-left groups that lead the protests, as well as the Greens, insist that the task is to pressure the Labor government to change course.

But this perspective has been tried and has failed. The Labor administration is one of the most aggressive defenders of Israel. No matter what atrocity the Zionist state perpetrates—whether it is the destruction of hospitals, the bombing of civilian areas or cold-blooded executions, Labor declares Israel has a “right to defend itself.”

At the same time, it has overseen a major crackdown on the right to protest, as well as other civil liberties and has aided a Zionist witch-hunt against actors, artists, healthcare workers and others slandering opposition to genocide as “antisemitism.” This is based on a fraud, falsely identifying Jewish people with an imperialist-backed garrison state. It has been exposed in practice by the growing participation of Jewish people in the anti-genocide protests.

The pseudo-left and the Greens are trying to cover up what is revealed by this complicity. Labor's position on the genocide is not an accident or an aberration. Labor is a pro-war party of imperialism committed to

criminal US-led wars everywhere.

In 1948, the Australian Labor government was one of the first in the world to recognise Israel, established through the brutal dispossession of the Palestinians. Labor has supported every single action of the Zionist state since.

Labor's support for the genocide today is inseparable from its role as a key partner of American imperialism's global war drive. That includes providing more than a billion dollars to support the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. But even more significantly, Labor is completing Australia's transformation into a staging post for a US-led war against China in this region.

The other line of the middle class fake left and the protest leaders is that this movement against the genocide must orient to the union leaderships. But the unions have taken no action whatsoever and are a key ally of the Labor government.

To cover over their role in suppressing opposition, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), the peak union body, issued a statement last week calling for the government to halt arms shipments to Israel and impose sanctions. That such a statement was released expresses widespread sentiment amongst workers that action must be taken. But the ACTU is doing nothing more than issue feckless appeals to the government. In fact, it is the unions themselves that are facilitating shipments to Israel. That includes the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), held up as a “left” and “progressive” union. Every week, it ensures the orderly coming and going of cargo from the Israeli Zim shipping line, which, in October, dedicated its entire international fleet to the war effort. The MUA sometimes voices hollow statements of concern over the Palestinians. But in February, it invited Prime

Minister Anthony Albanese to give the keynote address at its national conference, even though he is a party to the genocide.

War abroad means a war against the working class. The old depictions of Australia as a “lucky country,” exempt from social hardship and tension, have given way to the reality of brutal capitalist austerity.

Military spending is more than \$50 billion a year as part of the war drive, especially against China. Last week, Labor announced another \$50 billion over the decade, which will take annual defence expenditures to over \$100 billion by 2034. Australia’s acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines, under the AUKUS deal, will cost at least \$368 billion.

There are limitless funds for militarism and war, but no money for the needs of ordinary people.

In 2022, Labor came to office, making phoney promises that it would deliver a better future. But in power, Labor has insisted that ordinary people must make “sacrifices.” Together with the unions, it has imposed the biggest real cuts to workers’ living conditions in decades.

Over the three years to December, wages have fallen by an average of 5.1 percent compared to inflation. Having a secure place to live is almost a luxury.

Average weekly mortgage repayments have increased by \$400 since May 2022, more than eight times the average increase in wages. As a result, the number of Australians “at risk” of mortgage stress has doubled in less than two years. Almost one-third of owner-occupied mortgage holders are now in this category, the highest level since 2008. Advertised apartment rents have soared to record highs across the country, increasing by an average of 12.7 percent in the past 12 months. Of 45,000 listed rental properties nationally, less than 300 are affordable to a full-time worker on minimum wage.

Public healthcare and education are in a state of complete breakdown, with understaffing, overcrowding and no ability to meet demand. But they are slated for even further cutbacks.

In addition to the military, this money is going to the ultra-wealthy. Since 2020, 42 new Australian billionaires have been minted, bringing the total to 159. The combined wealth of Australia’s 250 richest individuals has increased to \$591 billion, a 57 percent rise in four years.

There is mass opposition to Labor and the entire political establishment and a growing anti-capitalist sentiment. But to go forward, this developing movement must be based on an understanding that the source of all the problems we confront is the outmoded profit system.

Labor and its counterparts around the world have exposed themselves as the right-wing and rotten parties of big business. The issue is that the working class needs its own party, based on a socialist and internationalist program to end war, inequality and their source, the capitalist system. I appeal to you to join the SEP and the ICFI to fight for this perspective.



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