

Australian Greens: No way forward to fight genocide, war

Oscar Grenfell**13 June 2024**

Over the past week, the federal Labor government and the Liberal-National Coalition have launched frenzied attacks on the Greens. They have accused its MPs of stoking “division” and even “violence,” solely because the minor party has condemned Israel’s genocide in Gaza and Australia’s complicity in it.

The campaign is reactionary and sinister and undoubtedly driven in part by electoral motivations. With a federal election due to be held next year at the latest, Labor’s support remains at historically low levels. Neither major party is projected to be able to form a majority government.

More fundamentally, the frenzied denunciations of the Greens are intended to intimidate and even ban opposition to the Israeli genocide and to war in general. A wartime atmosphere is being whipped up, in which opposition to the militarist policies of the government is depicted as an unacceptable attack on “social cohesion.”

Under conditions of widespread hostility to Israel’s barbaric war in Gaza, there is substantial anger and opposition to the attacks on the Greens.

It would be a grave mistake, however, to conclude from the vilification of the Greens that the environmentalist party advances a principled and consistent opposition to war.

The Greens are a pro-capitalist party, with a base of support primarily in the most affluent sections of the middle class. Its criticisms of the genocide are tactical and largely serve the political purpose of diverting opposition back within the parliamentary set-up. That is underscored by the increasingly open support for imperialist war by the Greens over the last 15 years.

The Greens’ response to the bipartisan denunciations of the past week has been tepid. In one parliamentary exchange last week, for instance, as Labor’s Foreign Minister Penny Wong launched a diatribe against the Greens over Gaza, its foreign affairs spokesperson Jordon Steele-John repeatedly uttered, “this is beneath you, foreign minister.”

Even in a party statement responding to the bipartisan onslaught and declaring that the Greens would not be lectured by parties supporting war crimes, a plaintive note was struck. The Greens complained of “Labor’s refusal to do anything meaningful to put pressure on Benjamin Netanyahu to stop the slaughter.”

The Greens have repeated this essential line throughout the eight-month genocide: moral appeals to Labor to change course and to “do the right thing.” The Greens have the same message week after week at mass protests opposing the war crimes, where they have called on attendees to increase “pressure” on Labor.

This political perspective is a bankrupt dead-end. Despite the mass opposition, Labor has not deviated one iota in its support for Israel.

Even in their promotion of protest politics, the Greens have only gone so far. At no stage have they threatened to vote against all Labor legislation until the government ends its support for the atrocities. Nor have the Greens ruled out entering into a power-sharing arrangement or even a coalition with Labor after the next election. That has always been at the

very centre of the Greens’ perspective.

While rhetorically condemning the government, the Greens have continued to signal their willingness to collaborate with it. On May 30, for instance, the Greens issued a statement hailing Labor and its Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. The reason was meagre. All Albanese had done was deny reports of a backroom commitment to major companies that future environmental legislation related to coal and logging approvals would take no notice of climate change implications.

If one looks at the Greens’ statements and “latest news” items spanning the Israeli onslaught, a similar pattern is evident. Gaza is occasionally raised, but so are many other things, numbers of them congratulatory of the right-wing, pro-business Labor government.

The entire line of the Greens is aimed at promoting the fraud that Labor’s support for the genocide is a mistaken or immoral policy that can be corrected, with no intrinsic connection to the government’s broader program or its class character.

However, as the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party have explained, the genocide is one component of an eruption of imperialist militarism globally, which is why Labor and all of the world’s imperialist governments support the mass murder. To fight for an end to the ethnic cleansing in Gaza thus means a fight against imperialist war, the governments and the capitalist system itself.

The Greens are intensely hostile to this socialist perspective, because they defend the profit system and support other key fronts in the war program.

The Greens back the US-NATO proxy war against Russia

Along with overseeing the genocide in Gaza, as part of its drive to war throughout the Middle East targeting Iran, Washington is engaged in a proxy war with Russia in Ukraine. Last month, the US approved the use of its missiles by Ukraine on Russian territory, in a massive escalation highlighting the danger of a world war.

The Greens support the proxy war, repeating all of the lies that it is a conflict for “freedom” and “democracy” against Russian expansionism.

In March 2022, a month after the Russian invasion, the Greens joined with Labor and the Coalition to pass a Senate motion hailing the Ukrainian war effort.

In his remarks, foreign affairs spokesman Steele-John did not differentiate from the major parties even slightly. He uttered not a word of criticism of NATO or the US, which deliberately provoked the conflict to pursue their aim of weakening and subordinating Russia. This has included the relentless eastwards expansion of NATO since 1991, a US-sponsored coup ousting a democratically-elected Ukrainian government in 2014, and the subsequent cultivation of a militarist, extreme right-wing

US-puppet government in Kiev.

Instead, Steele-John proclaimed that it was necessary to act “as a global community in unison to ensure that Vladimir Putin and his dictatorial regime are held to account and that the people of Ukraine are provided with the support that they need.” Steele-John called for major sanctions on Russia, which he denounced as a “petro-state.” He uttered the phrase “Slava Ukraini,” coined by the Ukrainian fascists who fought alongside the Nazis in World War II.

As the war has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and NATO has intervened more and more directly, the Greens have not altered their pro-imperialist line one iota. In March 2023, the Greens again voted with the government and the Coalition for a motion backing the Ukrainian war effort.

Steele-John, who occasionally describes himself as a “pacifist” and a “peace activist,” spoke like a typical war hawk. “Right now, as we sit here, the Ukrainian army is engaged in a great battle with Russian forces over the city of Bakhmut,” he proclaimed.

Most significantly, Steele-John warned against any turn away from the war by the NATO powers. He declared: “There is a profound moment of danger for the people of Ukraine in that moment if, in the aftermath of victory on the field, the international community declares ‘mission accomplished’ and moves on. We cannot let that happen.”

In their backing of the two resolutions, the Greens signalled their support for the funneling of Australian military aid to the Ukrainian regime, which now amounts to over a billion dollars, much of it in lethal weaponry.

The Greens have repeated the standard imperialist line that this is a war for “democracy” and “freedom.” They have thus covered up the reactionary character of the Ukrainian regime, which is dominated by fascists and wholly dependent on the US and NATO. The Greens have said nothing about the Zelensky regime’s banning of most opposition parties, its imposition of martial law or its roundups of men to be used as cannon fodder in a war for US strategic interests.

No Greens MP has said a word about the arrest of Bogdan Syrotiuk. A leader of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, Syrotiuk has been charged with “high treason,” for opposing the war from the standpoint of uniting Ukrainian and Russian workers against all the governments involved and the capitalist system. Syrotiuk faces life in prison for advancing that socialist and internationalist perspective on the pages of this website.

A broader pro-imperialist record

The Greens’ full-blown support for the war in Ukraine is not an aberration, but is part of a broader alignment with imperialist war.

The Greens have made certain tactical criticisms of the AUKUS pact with the US and Britain, which is directed against China. But they are themselves responsible for Australia’s alignment with the US-led preparations for war with China, which is viewed as the chief economic threat to American imperialism.

The Greens entered into a formal alliance to prop up the minority Labor government of Julia Gillard in 2010. In 2011, Gillard, in a de facto coalition with the Greens, signed up to the US pivot to Asia, a vast military build-up in the region directed against China. When US President Barack Obama announced this war drive on the floor of the Australian parliament, among the first people lined up to shake his hand were then Greens leader Bob Brown and his successor and current leader Adam Bandt.

The Greens had form, with Brown in particular criticising Australian involvement in the US-led wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan, but from the standpoint that the Australian military should focus on this region. Brown advanced all the propaganda points used by the US to justify its build-up, including the promotion of Tibetan and other minority separatism within China.

Support for the pivot was part of a turn to open militarism by the Greens. In 2011, Bandt, having replaced Brown, demanded the imposition of a “no-fly zone” over Libya. Referring to the CIA-sponsored Islamist forces fighting the Gaddafi regime, he declared: “The Libyan rebels are calling for it, the Arab League supports it, and the international community needs to get on with it.”

That “no-fly zone” was eventually forthcoming. It meant the US and NATO bombing Libyan cities to smithereens, in a regime-change operation aimed at securing control of the country’s oil and resources and removing Gaddafi, who had been an irritant to the major powers over decades. The consequence was the transformation of Libya into a “failed state,” with armed militia fighting to assert control and the reemergence of open-air slave markets.

In 2012, the Greens took the same position on the US-led regime-change operation in Syria. Again, they criticised the government from the right. In May of that year, Bandt and the Greens demanded the imposition of additional sanctions on Syria. The civil war, provoked by the US, is now acknowledged to have been among the largest CIA operations in history. In addition to displacing and killing hundreds of thousands, the Islamist groups sponsored by the US spawned ISIS.

The Greens have never repudiated this record or given an accounting for it. It should be stated bluntly that a party that supported war against the Libyan and Syrian masses will just as readily turn on the Palestinians.

That has already been foreshadowed in Germany where the Greens hold the foreign ministry. Like their Australian counterparts, they rabidly support the US-NATO war in Ukraine. But they also openly back Israel and have played a leading role in seeking to outlaw all political opposition to its genocide in Gaza.

This is a class phenomenon, rooted in the character of the Greens movement as one representing layers of the upper middle class, whose interests are rooted in the capitalist system itself. The Greens are hostile to the only way that war can really be fought—the independent mobilisation of the working class internationally on a socialist program against all the governments and the capitalist system itself.



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