

Australian Greens, Socialist Alliance display pro-Labor, bankrupt protest politics at election forum

Our reporters
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An election forum focussed on the Gaza genocide, held in the Melbourne electorate of Wills Tuesday evening, demonstrated the dead-end political perspective of the Greens and Socialist Alliance. Candidates for both organisations insisted that the struggle to defend the Palestinian people meant continuing efforts to “pressure” the Labor government to act, through demonstrations and the ballot box.

The forum, attended by about 60 people, was organised by two organisations, Free Palestine Melbourne and Muslim Votes Matter.

The former has organised the near-weekly demonstrations held since the beginning of the Israeli onslaught on Gaza. These have been dominated by the Greens and pseudo-lefts, both of which oppose any orientation towards mobilising the social power of the working class against the war. Protesters outraged by the genocide have instead been repeatedly told that appeals to the Labor Party will eventually shift government policy, which has been marked by full-throated support for the Zionist state and its military operations.

Muslim Votes Matter is a recently formed lobby group that, in its words, seeks to ensure that the “voice of Australian Muslims strengthens national unity and promotes values-driven policy making.” One of its leaders, Imam Alaa Elzokm, spoke at the election forum and urged people to vote for pro-Palestinian candidates.

The electorate of Wills, in Melbourne’s inner-north, covers increasingly gentrified suburbs like Brunswick in its south, as well as more working-class suburbs in its north, including communities with significant numbers of immigrants and refugees from the Middle East. Wills is currently held by the Labor Party’s Peter Khalil, who is among the most vociferous pro-Zionist politicians in Canberra and who before entering parliament was

complicit in war crimes through his work in Iraq serving within the illegal US occupation regime. The electorate has been targeted by the Greens, with significant resources devoted to advertising and campaigning for their candidate Samantha Ratnam.

At the election forum, Ratnam immodestly presented her election campaign as the culmination of the anti-genocide movement, saying: “If we are able to defeat Peter Khalil on May 3rd, we want people to say, ‘we did this for Gaza, we did this for the Palestinians’.”

Ratnam claimed that protest politics had shifted Labor’s policies, though she made no attempt to substantiate this utterly false assertion.

“Don’t let people deter you, or tell you it’s not worth it, and that [protesting] is not going to work,” she told the forum. “That movement is fundamentally shifting politics in Australia, you can see it especially in the behaviour of establishment politicians and major party politicians.”

She concluded: “The Greens can win [Wills] for the first time. We keep Dutton out, and we are there pushing for that parliament to be as progressive as possible, for Labor to finally do something. There’s a lot more they could be doing, and there’s a lot more that parliament could be doing.”

The Greens’ rhetoric in defence of Palestine amounts to so much hot air. As Ratnam’s comments again indicated, the party is positioning itself to join government with the Labor Party in the likely event of a hung parliament after the May 3 election, either in an outright coalition or via a parliamentary agreement to block no-confidence motions and pass their budget. Any such Labor-Greens government will simply continue where the previous administration of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has left off, with the alliance with US imperialism maintained and support for Israel unaltered.

A fight for the defence of the Palestinian people means first and foremost workers and young people breaking with the Labor Party and all its accomplices, including the Greens, and a turn to mobilise the working class independently of the trade union bureaucracies, which have systematically sabotaged all strikes and blockades targeting the Israeli war machine.

Socialist Alliance's Sue Bolton made clear at the election forum her organisation's opposition to this perspective.

No less than the Greens, the pseudo-left Socialist Alliance rests on affluent layers of the middle class. It presents a somewhat more "militant" case for demonstrations, boycotts, and other protest actions—but directed towards exactly the same futile end, namely pressuring the Labor Party to act.

Bolton uttered not a word of criticism toward the Greens. Like Ratnam, she extolled the Free Palestine rallies, ignoring the fact that protest politics has, in Australia and internationally, done nothing to hinder the genocidal Israeli offensive.

"We have had an impact," she declared, "even though sometimes it might feel like we haven't."

Socialist Equality Party candidate for the Senate in Victoria, Taylor Hernan, challenged both Ratnam and Bolton in the forum's brief discussion period. He demanded the Greens candidate explain her party's recent pledge to support a multi-billion dollar spending program for the construction of missiles and armed drones in Australia. He also asked that Ratnam explain how the Greens can posture as anti-war while preparing to join the Labor Party in government.

The Greens' candidate declared that her party's military program was directed towards ending the AUKUS agreement with Britain and the US, and towards getting out of the US alliance. On the pending coalition with Labor, Ratnam spoke about "changing parliament" and building the Greens' parliamentary presence, before declaring "one of the things we want to avoid at all costs is a [Liberal leader Peter] Dutton prime ministership and government."

In other words, workers and youth must stay chained to the Labor Party via the Greens, on the fraudulent basis that it is the "lesser evil" to the Liberal-National coalition.

This perspective is embraced by Socialist Alliance, which always directs its ballot preferences to the Greens and Labor. Hernan challenged Bolton to explain her party's policy that the Labor government's military budget ought to be reduced by 50 percent, in other words

leaving more than \$25 billion a year for the war machine, representing, as Hernan explained, "an endorsement of Australian imperialism's drive to war."

While Bolton attempted to provide a "radical" gloss for this policy—insisting Socialist Alliance wants an end to the US alliance and the closure of US intelligence and military bases in Australia—she did not attempt to challenge Hernan's characterisation of her party's orientation.

While a significant part of the forum's audience were Greens and Socialist Alliance campaigners, others in attendance received the Socialist Equality Party's election statement with interest.

One participant, Sam, told *World Socialist Web Site* reporters he agreed with Hernan's challenge to the Greens and Socialist Alliance.

"He [Hernan] spoke openly and candidly regarding Australia's role in supporting the United States' military in all of its overseas interventions," Sam said. "I believe, honestly, that without people like you asking questions like yours, without mobilising in the streets, we're not going to have a chance of change in Australia and around the world."

Sam continued: "All the Greens are seeking to do is to get into parliament, and they're not going to put on any pressure. Fundamentally, it isn't going to change anything, as they're going to approve all the bills that go forward regarding military spending increases, regarding deployments, and they're not going to put any substantial pressure on the Australian military. Nor will there be a move away from being essentially America's lap dog in the Pacific which is what AUKUS was about. It's just an encirclement of China and of any of America's so-called enemies."

Authorised by Cheryl Crisp for the Socialist Equality Party, Level 1/457-459 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills, NSW, 2010, Australia.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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