

Australian pseudo-lefts block socialist perspective at student meetings opposing Gaza genocide

Our reporters
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At two university meetings in Melbourne last week, members of the pseudo-left Socialist Alternative (SAIt) resorted to flagrantly anti-democratic methods to prevent the discussion of a socialist perspective to end Israel's genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza.

The meetings, at the University of Melbourne (UofM) last Thursday and Victoria University the day before, were part of a series nationally. Held under the auspices of the National Union of Students (NUS), the meetings have been billed as a student referendum on the genocide.

At least 600 students attended the UofM meeting, surpassing the quorum required for it to be officially recognised as a Special General Meeting (SGM) of the student body.

The attendance reflected the upsurge of hostility and anger more broadly to the genocide and the federal Labor government's complicity. Last month 300,000 marched across the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and subsequent anti-genocide protests have been attended by hundreds of thousands across the country.

The growth of popular hostility, combined with Israel's rapid escalation of its ethnic-cleansing operation, poses more sharply than ever the question of how to end the genocide.

SAIt, which has played a leading role in the protest movement, was determined to prevent such a discussion. Its perspective of endlessly issuing plaintive appeals to the Labor government has manifestly failed. Labor continues to fully back the Zionist regime, including through weapons exports and a vicious crackdown on opposition, which it defames as "antisemitic."

Prior to the meeting, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth wing of the Socialist Equality Party, distributed hundreds of copies of a statement it had written for the student referendums.

Many students responded with interest and agreement to the IYSSE's call for them to draw the lessons of the past two years, above all the failure of protest politics directed to Labor. The IYSSE raised the need for a political struggle against the government, and a fight to mobilise the working class to take strike action to halt supplies to Israel, independent of the Labor-

aligned union bureaucracies that have suppressed any such action.

While the meeting was held under the auspices of the University of Melbourne Student Union (UMSU), SAIt leader Bella Beiraghi, a co-convenor of their "Students for Palestine" group was permitted to chair it.

Prior to the meeting, IYSSE club president Morgan Peach had asked an UMSU official whether students would be permitted to speak freely during the meeting. When Peach raised that Beiraghi was likely to block all oppositional voices, the UMSU official said that would be a breach of the rules governing an SGM.

But that is precisely what Beiraghi did, trampling on any semblance of democracy. The event, which lasted less than half an hour, could hardly be described as a meeting. The gathering was essentially an anti-democratic hand-raising exercise.

Beiraghi introduced the official motions, cooked up between SAIt and UMSU, which is politically dominated by members of the Labor Party.

As with meetings at other campuses, the motion included a "censure" of the government over its complicity.

As the IYSSE explained in its statement, a censure, two years into the Israeli regime's mass murder, is meaningless. It does not commit anyone to anything, or provide any political lead to students wanting to fight against the Gaza genocide and the Australian government's complicity. It is identical to the empty appeals to Labor that have failed over the past two years.

The other motions were exclusively focussed on UofM. To suppress the broader political issues raised by Israel's crimes, SAIt and other pseudo-lefts have increasingly sought to limit discussion to the ties of individual universities to weapons companies and their repression of student opposition.

The narrow focus on individual universities is to cover up the Labor government's role in transforming the universities into militarist hubs, especially for a war against China, and overseeing a coordinated crackdown against student opposition.

The motions opposed the establishment of a new defence-related campus and called on UMSU to "campaign for the end of the repression of Palestine activists" and to "organise a

fundraiser to send money to the Freedom Flotilla Coalition.” UMSU is a thoroughly corporatised body dominated by political careerists.

Beiraghi made no attempt to explain how these vague, limited proposals would do anything to halt the mass murder of Palestinians or to take forward the fight against imperialist war.

Beiraghi repeatedly blocked Peach from speaking. When he spoke up, and demanded that he and other students be permitted to speak to the resolution, she begrudgingly announced a “general discussion” period. But having responded to Peach, Beiraghi then ignored him and gave the floor to selected fellow SAlt members, who dutifully gave little speeches in favour of the official motion and promoting protest politics.

It was not only Peach and the IYSSE that were silenced, but the vast majority of students present. When students not affiliated with the IYSSE raised that they wanted to present an alternative motion, they were told they were “speaking out of order” and were shut down.

Beiraghi put the official motions to a vote, without any further discussion. They passed and the meeting ended with chanting. A number of students approached Peach afterwards to express their anger over the blatant censorship and to ask what he had wanted to raise.

If anything, the August 27 meeting at Victoria University was even more farcical. SAlt put a similar motion with a “censure” of the government. SAlt’s Oskar Martin, who chaired, exclusively nominated other SAlt members to speak. In a room of just 30 people, he refused to give a young IYSSE member the call, despite her at times being the only student indicating to speak. As at UofM, the meeting was wound up rapidly.

At both events, SAlt was determined to prevent the IYSSE from moving its motion, contained in the statement it was distributing, because it cut entirely across their line of appealing to the government and of endless campus-based protest. The motion stated:

- This meeting condemns the Labor government’s complicity in the Gaza genocide. Through its support for the atrocities against the Palestinians, Labor has again revealed itself to be a blood-soaked party of imperialist war. The experiences of the past two years have demonstrated that the task is not to appeal to this government, but to organise the most determined political fight against it.

- Urgent action must be taken to halt the genocide, including through the blocking of all weapons shipments and trade with Israel to cripple the Zionist war machine. That will come from below, not above.

- Students should initiate a campaign in the working class for industrial action, including strikes, at the ports, the logistics hubs, the universities and more broadly, to make that a reality. Given that the unions have blocked such action and have not held up so much as one shipment to Israel, students must join with workers to establish rank-and-file committees against the corporatised, Labor-aligned and pro-war union bureaucracies.

This perspective is based on the lessons of the last two years, and an understanding that the imperialist powers, including the Australian Labor government, are all supporting the genocide as part of their involvement in a broader eruption of militarism, including the US-led conflicts with Russia and China.

SAlt’s unprincipled methods and hostility to the IYSSE’s motion expose the real character of this organisation. Its occasional socialist rhetoric is window-dressing. In reality, this pseudo-left party collaborates closely with a Labor-aligned trade union bureaucracy that has not called a single strike against the genocide, or deviated in its support for the Labor government throughout the onslaught on Gaza.

SAlt’s refusal to even allow the IYSSE’s motion to be heard expresses weakness, not strength. Its protest politics are increasingly discredited. There is growing anger over the refusal of the unions to take action. And there is a sense among young people that, contrary to SAlt’s presentation, the genocide is not a single issue that can be ended through protest alone, but one horrific manifestation of the broader crisis of global capitalism.

In addition to censorship, SAlt has resorted to slander. At the UofM meeting, its members were heard urging students not to read the IYSSE statement because the IYSSE “opposes the MeToo movement.”

The IYSSE rejects the insinuation that it has ever defended sexual predation or abuse, for which there is not a shred of evidence. We oppose the reactionary MeToo campaign, concocted by the *New York Times* and the US Democratic Party, because it promotes gender identity politics and seeks to bury class issues, including the necessity for a unified fight against imperialist war. Above all, MeToo was used to attack core democratic rights, including the presumption of innocence, the right to a trial and to due process.

It speaks volumes that in defending its own attacks on democratic rights, SAlt invokes the discredited and anti-democratic MeToo movement, whose chief proponents are ferocious advocates of imperialist war and supporters of the genocide in Gaza.



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