

Australian pseudo-left covers for Labor's assault on democratic rights after Bondi attack

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The horrific December 14 attack in the Sydney suburb of Bondi, and its aftermath, are major political events. The mass murder of 15 people and the wounding of dozens more, in a targeted antisemitic action, is one of the worst terrorist incidents in Australian history.

As with all such turning points, the Bondi attack has revealed the true character and role of all political tendencies.

With extraordinary rapidity, governments at the state and federal level, led by the Labor Party, have seized on the attack to dramatically escalate a longstanding campaign to shut down opposition to the Israeli genocide in Gaza. In doing so, Labor is setting precedents for authoritarian measures that will be used against broader opposition, to militarism as well as to deteriorating social conditions and an assault on workers' jobs, wages and conditions.

The offensive has involved the entire establishment media. All of the major outlets are endlessly repeating the lie that the actions of the terrorists, who were apparently motivated by the reactionary communalist ideology of ISIS, were somehow connected to the peaceful, multi-religious and multi-ethnic protest movement against the genocide.

The trade union bureaucracy, tied by a thousand strings to Labor and big business itself, has joined the onslaught on civil liberties, with senior union officials demanding an end to any actions opposing Israel's ongoing war crimes.

Of particular significance for workers and young people is the response of organisations claiming to be socialist.

Whatever their occasional "left-wing" or even "revolutionary" rhetoric, the whole coterie of pseudo-left organisations have exposed their reactionary character in their response to the Bondi attack.

Under conditions of a sharp shift in the political situation, they are seeking to prevent workers from drawing any political lessons. Above all, they are trying to subordinate anger and opposition to the Labor Party and the fraud that endless protests will shift the establishment to the left.

The most striking response is that of Socialist Alternative (SAlt), the largest pseudo-left organisation in the country. Under conditions where coverage of the Bondi attack was wall-to-wall in the last fortnight of 2025, its publication, *Red Flag*, issued just two articles. Neither of them are party statements putting forward any overall assessment of the terrorist atrocity itself or the response.

The first of the articles, published on December 17, is most notable for its omissions. Under conditions where the Labor Party is in office federally, and in the state of New South Wales (NSW), where the attack occurred, Labor is not mentioned once.

The article warns against those "using the Bondi massacre to slander Palestine solidarity." But the ringleader of this campaign, Labor, is given a free pass. That is all the more extraordinary, given that the article was published on the very day that NSW Labor Premier Chris Minns announced that he would urgently recall the state parliament to rush through laws that would provide the police commissioner with the power to ban all public protests.

Minns, who has been hailed by the Murdoch media and the establishment, explicitly based this push for dictatorial powers on the phoney conflation of mass demonstrations against the genocide and terrorism.

That is in line with the role that his administration has played throughout the genocide. Repeatedly, Minns and the NSW Police have sought to ban protests against the mass slaughter. In doing so, they have collaborated closely with the federal Labor government.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's administration has incessantly vilified the mass movement as "antisemitic," passed sweeping hate speech laws last year to outlaw strident condemnations of Zionism, and is directly implicated in Israel's war crimes, including through the continuing export of weapons components.

Rather than referencing any of this, the initial *Red Flag* article focussed exclusively on the opposition Liberal-National Coalition, which is a crisis-ridden rump, the far-right One Nation party and the Murdoch media. The clear suggestion was that the danger to democratic rights came exclusively from these quarters, not from the Labor Party, despite the fact that it is in government nationally and in NSW.

For almost a fortnight, *Red Flag* fell silent. Its second article, published on December 30, made explicit what had been implicit in its first offering. Labor was mentioned, not as a supporter of genocide or an opponent of democratic rights, but as a hapless and unfortunate victim of the far-right!

The article was entirely focussed on the anti-immigrant agitation of forces such as One Nation. It bemoaned the fact that, in the wake of the Bondi attack, "broad right-wing political networks have seized the opportunity to supercharge anti-immigrant sentiment and turn it against the Labor government."

By the time that article was published, Minns' anti-protest laws had been rammed through the NSW parliament and been activated by the NSW Police Commissioner. But the fact that public assembly had been banned, an unprecedented measure associated with open dictatorships, was extraordinarily still not mentioned.

That was all the more striking given that SAlt has been heavily

involved in organising pro-Palestinian protests over the past two years.

Also not mentioned was the role of the Albanese government. Already, it had committed to implementing the full recommendations of a report prepared by Zionist lobbyist and “special envoy to combat antisemitism” Jillian Segal. Those recommendations include defunding broadcasters, universities and other public institutions that are insufficiently censorious of criticisms of Israel; Zionist oversight and censorship of the entire press; and the promotion of pro-Israeli propaganda throughout the educational system.

In effect, *Red Flag* simply suppressed and hid from its readers the assault on democratic rights that was already underway. It did so in order to promote illusions in Labor.

The final *Red Flag* article directly spelled that out. Published on January 3, its headline declared “Supporters of Palestine must stand up to the post-Bondi right-wing offensive.” But again, it was not against the Labor governments that SAAlt said people should mobilise.

Instead, the implication of the article was that workers and youth should come to the defence of the Labor administrations. The article drew a direct identity between SAAlt and Labor. It warned that the far-right “want to strike a blow against the political left”—a term SAAlt uses to describe itself—and the Labor Party.” The response had to be “standing up to an emboldened and rabid political right,” the article concluded.

That article did mention the anti-protest laws in NSW. But they were presented as an afterthought. Minns’ role, as the chief attack dog of the state and of the Zionist lobby, was glossed over as a capitulation on his part to the far-right, not as an expression of the imperialist and authoritarian character of the Labor Party itself.

All in all, the clear message of the article was that it was necessary for workers and youth to build a popular-front style movement, encompassing Labor, the unions, the Greens and the pseudo-left, against the far-right, even as Labor is spearheading the agenda of war and repression.

This is a continuation of the role that SAAlt and the pseudo-left have played throughout the genocide. They have insisted that the mass opposition can only go forward through moral appeals to the Labor government to “see sense” and end its support for Israel. The function of this line has been to subordinate workers and youth, incensed by the genocide, to the very government that is complicit in it.

Far from shifting to the left, Labor has shifted further to the right in response to the mass opposition, which has in the meantime been politically neutered by SAAlt and other pseudo-left forces.

SAAlt’s effective defence of Labor exposes it as a prop of the political establishment and of the capitalist system itself. To the extent that SAAlt employs socialist and occasionally revolutionary phraseology, it is window-dressing aimed at covering over a political program and orientation thoroughly embedded within the existing set-up.

Notably, in the wake of the Bondi attack, *Red Flag* published another article, crowing that its various electoral fronts had exceeded 5,000 members. The article made no mention of Bondi or its aftermath, despite their centrality to political discussion when it was published. Instead, it presented SAAlt’s electoral fronts, such as the Victorian Socialists, as being on an ascendent course ahead of elections in a number of states.

Those electoral outfits have been established on a left-populist program, which peddles the fraud that reforms can be won through parliament, despite the reality of a global crisis of capitalism and an

austerity offensive everywhere. The electoral fronts are oriented to manoeuvres with Labor and the Greens, and have previously won support from the Labor-aligned trade union bureaucracies. In its open defence of Labor after the Bondi massacre, SAAlt undoubtedly has an eye on sordid machinations related to future electoral campaigns.

Those electoral manoeuvres express the class character of SAAlt and the pseudo-left. These are organisations that speak not for the working class, but for a privileged layer of the upper middle-class in academia, the top echelons of the public sector and the union bureaucracy. These social forces seek to advance their own selfish interests within the framework of the capitalist system, through left-populist phraseology, as well as identity politics based on race, gender and sexual orientation, not class.

The same is true of the other pseudo-left parties. Socialist Alliance has lamely requested that Labor rescind its assault on democratic rights. Solidarity, another group, has stated that the only way to oppose the anti-protest laws in NSW, under conditions where demonstrations are effectively banned, is through protests oriented to the government.

In opposition to these forces, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) has elaborated an independent response to the Bondi attack and its aftermath, that articulates the interests of the working class.

The SEP has condemned the reactionary attack itself, and exposed the communalist, Islamist ideology that apparently motivated it. The SEP has exposed the continuous lies, attempting to tar mass opposition to the genocide with the brush of antisemitism and terrorism.

Above all, it has warned that the turn towards authoritarianism is a frontal attack on the working class. The Labor governments are not solely attacking opposition to the genocide. They are seeking to establish a precedent that will be deployed against mass opposition to war, including Australia’s integration into the US-led plans for a catastrophic conflict with China, and to austerity, under conditions of incessant demands from big business for ever deeper cuts to social spending and a “productivity” campaign aimed at driving up the exploitation of workers.

Governments, in Australia and internationally, know that they are sitting atop a social powder keg, which is why they feel compelled to dispense with even the trappings of democratic rule.

The response must be to build a socialist movement of the working class, directly opposed to Labor, the union bureaucracy, their satellites in the pseudo-left and the entire political establishment. The aim of SAAlt is to prevent such a development and to chain workers and young people to a capitalist set-up that is hurtling towards barbarism.

The SEP invites workers, youth and WSWS readers to an online meeting this Sunday, January 11 at 2 p.m. AEDT, to examine the political significance of the Bondi Beach terrorist attack, which is being exploited to implement a raft of anti-democratic measures that will inevitably be used against the working class. Register now.



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