

Australian pseudo-left downplays police rampage in Sydney, promotes appeals to Labor after Herzog visit

Oscar Grenfell
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A police rampage against peaceful protesters in Sydney on Monday evening has shocked masses of people across Australia and around the world. While rolling out the red carpet for Israeli president and war criminal Isaac Herzog, the New South Wales (NSW) Labor government erected a police state in the centre of the country's largest city and directed cops to brutalise demonstrators.

The attack, which included multiple unprovoked violent assaults, and the welcome to Herzog led by the federal government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, have underscored the reality that Labor is a party of imperialist war and authoritarianism. The issue of not only a complete break with Labor, but a political fight against it based on a new socialist perspective, is objectively posed by the situation itself to all those who wish to oppose the Gaza genocide and war and to defend democratic rights.

But there are political forces active in the leadership of these protests who seek to prevent the necessary political clarification of this reality. They are the pseudo-left organisations, such as Socialist Alternative (SAlt) and Socialist Alliance. While they claim to be left-wing or even socialist, they work to funnel opposition back behind the existing political establishment, including the Greens, the union bureaucracy and Labor itself, to which they are tied by a thousand strings.

The response of the most prominent of them, SAlt, has been to sow complacency, in the face of the most serious state attacks on democratic rights in decades, and to peddle the fraud that all that is required is more protest, based on the same perspective of appealing to governments that has failed over the course of more than two years of the genocide.

The two articles published in SAlt's *Red Flag* strike an almost jubilant tone that is jarring to anyone familiar with the events of Monday night and the broader context.

The first includes an account of what occurred, including the most egregious police assaults that were caught on video. But its essential conclusion from the onslaught was that "For all of this, the supporters of Palestine haven't been cowed." That was proved by the fact that tens of thousands of people had attended the demonstrations against Herzog, in Sydney and across the country.

The second article was a more extended exposition of that theme. "They wanted to silence us. They failed," it was headlined. *Red Flag* proclaimed that "In the face of endless intimidation, the Palestine movement has defiantly asserted itself and sent a message to Gaza: we are with you."

The article scarcely included a concrete reference to the police violence that had been inflicted. There was no mention of the 27 people who had been arrested at the Sydney protest, ten of whom have since been hit with serious charges. Nor of the fact that several individuals have sustained serious injuries, including a grandmother whose back has been broken after having been pushed by police. Those omissions can only be

described as callous and politically irresponsible.

More fundamentally, no warning was issued of the shift that the massive police operation represented. Even official civil liberties organisations and human rights lawyers, hardly known for their political radicalism, have issued sharper statements than SAlt, pointing out to the population that the NSW Labor administration, acting in concert with the federal Labor government, have gone a long way down the road to erecting a police-state.

While it is of significance that thousands defied government threats and turned out on Monday evening, the actual circumstances of the evening hardly speak in favour of the noisy protest politics promoted by SAlt.

The police were able to enforce a ban on a planned march to the NSW parliament. The activation of "major event" legislation to impose that prohibition creates a precedent for all political rallies and activities to be barred as a threat to public order.

The cops were wholly responsible for the violence that occurred and had clearly been instructed by police command and the government that the "gloves were off." But the generally disorganised character of the rally meant that the police were able to pick protesters off, one by one, including the vulnerable.

The defeat of police state repression requires the mobilisation of a more powerful force than individual protesters, the working class.

The fact that the union bureaucracies ensured no organised contingents of workers is not mentioned by SAlt. Throughout the genocide, SAlt, along with the rest of the pseudo-left, have run cover for the union leaderships as they have maintained their lockstep alliance with the Labor governments supporting the genocide and viciously attacking opposition.

The idea that Herzog's visit should have been met by mass industrial action by the working class was not raised by SAlt, or any other of the pseudo-left groups, because it would have raised the need for a struggle against the bureaucracies that they collaborate with and promote. The union leaderships have said virtually nothing in response to the police attacks or to Herzog's visit itself.

The glaring absences in the *Red Flag* articles are due to SAlt continuing to promote a bankrupt perspective that has been refuted by events themselves. The second article concluded by proclaiming "The Palestine movement has endured two years of intimidation. Two years of slander. Two years of repression. And yet, it remains strong. It remains defiant. We must continue."

That is a call for more of the same and for no lessons to be learned. Throughout the genocide, the pseudo-left has promoted the fraud that continuous protests, appealing to the Labor governments, will compel them to shift course and to end their support for the mass murder. Two years on and Labor has not shifted to the left but dramatically to the right. It has not only identified itself more directly with the mass murder than

ever before, through its fawning over Herzog, it has also moved to ban protests themselves.

The second article, adapting itself to an increasing anti-capitalist sentiment and to the growing recognition that protest politics have failed, declares at one point that “A new socialist movement must be built.” But how is such a movement to be built? The two sentences directly preceding that phrase are the only answer provided: “Anyone with a shred of political conscience should immediately leave the ALP [Australian Labor Party]. This whole saga should be a watershed moment for anyone who considers themselves part of the left.”

That is, the movement that SAlt is calling for is one based upon members of the Labor Party who have a “conscience,” having remained in this rotten, corporatist shell throughout its complicity in a genocide, and other representatives of “the left,” such as the Greens and assorted union bureaucrats.

The development of such a political trap, completely wedded to the parliamentary establishment is not hypothetical, but was on display at the Monday rally itself. SAlt plays a key role in the Palestine Action Group which organised the demonstration, and one of its leading members, Josh Lees, was among the MCs.

Several Palestinians spoke movingly on the horrors facing the people of Gaza, and journalist Antony Lowenstein denounced the conflation of Judaism and Zionism.

But as a whole, the event was bereft of analysis, including from Lees. There was virtually no attempt to refute the pretext for Herzog’s visit, that he was in Australia to comfort victims of the December 14 Bondi terrorist attack. The significance of Labor’s embrace of this war criminal, in exposing the complete futility of appealing to it, was not raised. Instead, MCs directed the crowd to call on Labor itself to “arrest Herzog,” something it obviously had not the slightest intention of doing.

Federal Greens parliamentarian Mehreen Faruqi was provided with a platform, under conditions where her party continues to collaborate with a federal Labor government that is spearheading the offensive against democratic rights. Paul Keating, the Sydney branch secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia, was paraded as a supporter of the Palestinians, despite his union’s complete opposition to any industrial action targeting Israeli shipping and its formal affiliation to the pro-genocide Labor Party.

Most significant of all, the rally was turned over to a member of the very NSW Labor government that had banned a march and has been the most vociferous state administration in its support of the genocide.

Labor MP Sarah Kaine gave motherhood statements about the mass killings in Gaza and bemoaned the decision to invite Herzog. But she is a loyal member of the party responsible for these crimes. Like a handful of other NSW Labor “dissidents,” she is committed to cabinet solidarity and has voted repeatedly in favour of anti-protest laws. The organisers may as well have handed the platform over to NSW Premier Chris Minns or to Albanese himself.

There is only slight exaggeration in such a suggestion. The distinctive feature of SAlt’s line since the December 14 attack has been to cover for Labor and particularly for its leadership.

As the WSWS previously documented, the only two articles that *Red Flag* published last year following the attack simply did not mention that the Labor governments were responding by seeking to criminalise the pro-Palestinian movement, as part of a broader drive to institute authoritarian measures.

That was particularly extraordinary because Labor’s response was immediate. When the second of those articles was published, the NSW Labor government had already moved to recall the state parliament to introduce emergency legislation to ban demonstrations for up to three months in the wake of a terrorism designation, a power that remains in force and was among those used against Monday evening’s protest.

Instead of warning against and denouncing ~~the~~ offensive, *Flag* presented Labor as a hapless victim. It claimed that “broad right-wing political networks have seized the opportunity to supercharge anti-immigrant sentiment and turn it against the Labor government.” Nevermind the fact that Labor itself has spearheaded the assault on refugees and migrants, this was simply a defence of the Labor governments as they were enacting police-state measures.

That was made explicit in *Red Flag*’s first offering of the year. It warned that the far-right “want to strike a blow against the political left”—a term SAlt uses to describe itself—“and the Labor Party.” The response, it asserted, had to be “standing up to an emboldened and rabid political right.” That was a fairly open call for an alliance with the Labor governments themselves.

That is how SAlt prepared workers and young people for the violence that was unleashed on Monday night—by apologising for, excusing and even promoting the very governments that were preparing it.

The record is an abject lesson in the duplicitous politics of the pseudo-left. Their radical phraseology notwithstanding, they are a component of the political establishment, tied to the union bureaucracies, the Greens and Labor itself. They speak, not for the working class, but for layers of the upper middle-class which seek to advance their privileges within the framework of the existing social and political order. The greatest threat to this social constituency is the development of an independent political movement of the working class, which is why the pseudo-left works so intently to subordinate opposition to the official set-up.

In their articles, SAlt has presented the Herzog visit and the assault on the Sydney protest as single issues, unrelated to broader political developments.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The turn to police-state rule simply cannot be explained from the standpoint of the animus of governments and the ruling elites to mass opposition to the genocide alone. That is an expression of more fundamental processes and aims.

Capitalism, globally and in Australia, is in the midst of a breakdown. The Trump administration, responding to the historic crisis of American imperialism, is tearing up all of the old norms of international relations and diplomacy, substituting them for naked gangsterism. Australia, closely aligned with the US, is involved not only in the genocide and the broader plans for war in the Middle East targeting Iran, but also in advanced preparations for a catastrophic conflict with China. Such a war would require conscription, the subordination of the entire economy to the military and police-state rule.

Domestically, there is growing opposition to a social crisis that has seen the biggest reversal to living standards of the post-World War II period. The agenda of the ruling elite is for the dismantling of social services and a “productivity” offensive, aimed at driving up profits at the expense of jobs, wages and conditions.

The global and domestic tensions are roiling the political establishment that has defended capitalist rule for decades. The Liberal-National Coalition is in an advanced state of disintegration. Every day, nervous editorials and comments in the financial press warn that the two-party system is at risk of collapse.

Under those conditions, the capitalist class is heavily dependent on Labor and Albanese himself to ensure stable rule and to enforce its program of war and austerity.

That is the deeper significance of the turn to authoritarian measures. It also underscores the critical role that the pseudo-left plays as a linchpin of capitalist politics. As the old mechanisms of bourgeois rule are strained and threatened, the pseudo-left comes forward to defend them in its promotion of illusions in Labor.

The alternative, fought for by the Socialist Equality Party, is the development of a genuine socialist movement of the working class. That means, not appeals to Labor, but the most determined political fight

against it; a rebellion against the corporatised union bureaucracy, aimed at establishing independent rank-and-file committees controlled by workers themselves, and the unification of the working class internationally on a revolutionary and socialist program as the only means of halting the descent into world war and the associated turn to dictatorship.



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