

# Pseudo-left “Marxism” conference in Australia suppresses any discussion of Iran war

Owen Howell, Oscar Grenfell  
14 April 2026

Over the Easter long weekend, the Australian pseudo-left organisation Socialist Alternative (SAlt) held its annual “Marxism Conference,” drawing an estimated 2,000 people.

Any of those attendees seeking a socialist perspective to fight the massive US-led assault on Iran and the broader threat of an imperialist world war left empty-handed. Over four days, not a single one of the conference’s nearly 150 panels was dedicated to the war on Iran.

That can hardly be ascribed to a pre-arranged schedule or an innocent error. It was an entirely deliberate decision to suppress discussion of the war, its vast global implications and what must be done to stop it.

The conference was held more than a month after US President Donald Trump launched his sneak attack on the night of February 28. In the period between that first volley and the conference, the character of the war, not only as one of regime change, but as an utterly criminal attempt to annihilate an entire society, had become undeniable.

The day before the conference began, Trump declared his intent to return Iran to the “stone ages.” And immediately after it concluded, he declared that if the Iranian regime did not accede to his demands, amounting to a complete surrender, a “whole civilisation will die tonight, never to be brought back again.”

As the WSWS has explained, the statements by the commander-in-chief of American imperialism are unprecedented. They are the sort of remarks that even Adolf Hitler confined to behind-closed-doors discussions. The war, its genocidal intent and the vast bombardment that has already been inflicted are the sharpest expression of capitalism’s descent into imperialist barbarism. Masses of people are shocked, horrified and deeply hostile to this turn, but SAlt and its leaders are not among them.

The war, moreover, is undeniably part of an emerging global confrontation, with the US targeting Iran as part of its broader aggression against Russia and its advanced preparations for a catastrophic war against China.

Under those conditions, it’s almost inconceivable that a political event could be held anywhere in the world where the war on Iran and its global fallout were not a central focus. And this was not simply any event. It was a conference organised by SAlt, which claims to be socialist.

The great Marxists of the 20th century, Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, frequently noted that a major war is among the decisive tests of a political organisation.

The most resolute and active opposition to imperialist war, grounded in a scientific Marxist analysis and the fight to mobilise the working class on a socialist program, has been one of the defining features of the genuine Marxist and Trotskyist movement, against all national-opportunist currents which, whatever their left-wing and socialist rhetoric, ultimately defend the interests of imperialism and their own capitalist government.

From that standpoint, SAlt’s complete indifference to the war on Iran,

an oppressed nation of 93 million people which posed no threat to the United States, is an unanswerable indictment. It brands the entire conference as a politically reactionary and dubious event, having nothing whatsoever to do with socialism. The event would more accurately have been dubbed the “Anti-Marxism Conference.”

Of course, the war, the dominant political and news issue globally and in Australia, could not be ignored entirely. At the opening event of the conference, it was mentioned, but only briefly and in passing, as “yet another war for oil.” That was a conscious attempt to downplay the shift in world politics that the war has revealed, the scale of it, and the immense dangers of a global conflict, and to present it simply as “more of the same.”

The aim was to promote political complacency. That dovetails entirely with SAlt’s protest politics, based on the fraud that governments can be pressured to adopt a more “humane” policy, and its various electoral fronts, which peddle illusions that reforms are possible through the framework of parliament, in an era of capitalist breakdown, austerity and war.

It also served to downplay the significance of the Australian Labor government’s participation in the war. That too was mentioned, but only in passing.

In reality, the fact that the government was among the first to endorse the criminal war and is actively participating, including through deployments to the Middle East, is the sharpest expression of Labor’s character as a party of imperialist war. It is also a demonstration that Australia is on the frontlines of the developing imperialist war, not only in the Middle East, but globally, particularly in the build-up against China.

These life and death questions for the working class were relegated to a footnote at the conference, to the extent that they were referenced at all. That continues a clear tendency, especially over the past five months, of SAlt providing cover for a Labor government that is increasingly in crisis as it openly carries out an agenda of militarism, inflicting the cost-of-living crisis on the working class and eviscerating democratic rights.

The reasons for SAlt’s disinterest in the assault on Iran became clearer in one of the few panels touching on war, “Imperialism: capitalism and war.”

As with virtually all of SAlt’s events, the opening remarks at the panel, by *Red Flag* editor Eleanor Morley, appeared to be unprepared and were rambling.

Morley noted a growth of war. She began with the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, giving the horrific death toll of that war crime, before referencing the assault on Lebanon and doing the same. Morley then said these events had “spread over” into Iran. She gave the understated official death toll of the war, which at this stage is far lower than that of the genocide, before rattling off a host of other conflicts in the

world, from Sudan to Ukraine. Again, the deliberate and cumulative effect was to present the massive war against Iran, which raises the real and immediate danger of world war, as one unfortunate event among many.

Morley stated that we are “living in crazy times.” At one point, she did reference the threat of world war, noting that “experts” had said that it was a possibility. But Morley did not state her own or SAlt’s position on that question, nor provide any analysis of the underlying driving forces, in the crisis of capitalism, behind the current eruption of militarism.

The most significant element of the event, though, was that in one of the only panels ostensibly dedicated to opposing imperialist war, Morley and other SAlt leaders actively promoted war. It became clear that SAlt’s indifference to the Iran war, and discomfort in even speaking about it, is because of the organisation’s pro-imperialist line on key fronts of what is an integrated program of global war, led by American imperialism.

Morley denounced “Russia’s war in Ukraine which has killed 1.5 million people,” giving the absolute upper estimate of casualties, i.e., dead and wounded, and ascribing the toll exclusively to Moscow. Later, she said that the war was solely the product of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s “fantasies” of reviving an imperial empire.

At one point, Morley drew a parallel between the positions of Iran and Ukraine, claiming they “have a right to defend themselves” from “imperialist domination.”

The presentation was a grotesque falsification. In reality, the war in Ukraine is above all a war of the US and NATO against Russia. Washington deliberately provoked Putin’s reactionary invasion, in a bid to enact longstanding plans for a direct assault on the Russian landmass aimed at breaking up the Russian federation and securing its vast resources.

The references to Ukraine “defending itself,” are directly from the imperialist playbook and are entirely false. Ukraine does not have the character of an independent state, but serves as a garrison of American imperialism, with its entire political and military system under the de facto control of the CIA and subordinated to the US program of war against Russia.

Conversely, Iran is being subjected to a massive US-led bombardment and war of regime-change. The comparison between a Ukraine that has been transformed into a base of American imperialism, and an Iran that is in the cross-hairs of that very same imperialist power had the character of a complete inversion of reality.

The issue of SAlt’s pro-imperialist line came to a head in the discussion period.

A member of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), stated: “The war against Iran is a major turning point in world politics. It is clearly one of the opening stages of a Third World War driven by the US, which threatens the destruction of humanity and the planet as we know it. But at this conference, there has not been a single session dedicated to the war on Iran. On *Red Flag*, in the first nine days of the war, you wrote just one article. How do you explain this indifference to a major war of extermination against a country of 90 million people?”

In a second question, the SEP member noted: “For over a decade, Socialist Alternative has cheered on US-armed Islamists in Syria to carry out regime change there in the interests of Washington. That resulted, not in revolution, but in an Al Qaeda regime that is now allied with Trump and Israel, and which your member Omar Hassan hailed when he visited last year. That war was part of broader US war efforts to reshape the Middle East, which have now culminated in the war on Iran. How do you justify this pro-imperialist support for the war on Syria, which paved the way for the attack on Iran that we are now witnessing?”

In answer to the first question, SAlt’s leaders simply offered no reply for the organisation’s indifference to the Iran war.

Multiple leading members of SAlt spoke, hailing the “Syrian Revolution” and saying nothing about the character of the regime it had

resulted in.

They also said nothing about the relationship between the regime-change campaign in Syria and the war on Iran. But there is a very direct relationship. Beginning in 2011, the CIA funnelled tens of billions of dollars in weaponry and cash to Islamist rebel forces, in the agency’s largest operation in decades.

Syria was targeted, because of its close ties to Iran, as well as to Russia and China. The US aim was to remove the Syrian regime, as a stepping stone to a further offensive for total dominance of the Middle East, which is now unfolding in the assault on Iran. And that in turn was connected to the global strategy of American imperialism, of confrontation with Beijing and Moscow.

In a desperate attempt to refute the questions, Tom Bramble, one of SAlt’s central leaders, gave a contribution that was full of falsifications. Bramble said that the SEP’s “whole argument is about states and imperialism and which side you stand in relation to the United States. So essentially the world consists of the United States and all these other countries. The working class doesn’t come into it...Politics is about a chessboard.”

The response was an utterly cynical exercise in deflection. Rather than address in concrete terms the SEP’s exposure of SAlt’s pro-imperialist line, Bramble suggested that the SEP is disinterested in the working class. As anyone with the slightest familiarity with the SEP or the *World Socialist Web Site* well knows, its entire political program and perspective is based on the fight to politically educate, organise and mobilise the working class.

That was followed by an even more brazen falsehood. Bramble declared that, for the SEP, “the working class never features in your discussion, that’s why you basically think China is still a socialist country. You have no sympathy for the working class.”

That was not only a lie, Bramble knew full well that it was a lie. Paraded as a theoretician by SAlt, Bramble has been active in politics for decades and has authored several books.

He is very well aware that the SEP is the Australian section of the world Trotskyist movement. That is the movement that has fought against the nationalist Stalinist bureaucracies in all of their variations, from the standpoint of genuine socialist internationalism. The Trotskyist movement has a decades-long record of opposition to the Stalinist regime in China. That has included exposing capitalist restoration, documenting its horrific social consequences and elaborating a socialist perspective for the Chinese working class.

Bramble, turning to the playbook of the “big lie,” was attempting to suppress any discussion of the issues raised by the SEP, and to whip up SAlt’s members and supporters against it.

Bramble’s falsification was taken up by other speakers, who asserted that the SEP had supported the Syrian regime of Bashar Al-Assad. By the conclusion of the panel, leading SAlt member Sarah Garnham, clearly referencing the SEP, was bemoaning the fact that there were “some on the left” who “support the Iranian regime.”

All of which is untrue. The Trotskyist movement opposes the Stalinist regimes, the former Stalinist regimes and the bourgeois nationalist governments of countries such as Syria and Iran. But it does so from the left, i.e., from the standpoint of developing a socialist movement of the working class against them. And that is inseparable from complete opposition to imperialist attacks on historically oppressed countries, and to all imperialist war, based on the fight to unify the working class globally.

For SAlt, such a principled Marxist standpoint is anathema. Their line, that opposition to imperialist war implies political support for the regimes that are in the crosshairs is essentially the imperialist line, summed up by George Bush in relation to the war in Iraq, that “you are either with us or against us.” And ironically, for all of Bramble’s fulminations, SAlt’s

politics do revolve on the “chessboard,” only they are on the side of the imperialist powers.

His hysterical references to the SEP’s indifference to the working class notwithstanding, the SAlt panel and the conference as a whole did not even pretend to outline an independent strategy for the working class to oppose imperialist war. That is because SAlt is a pro-imperialist party of the upper middle-class, whose social constituency pursues its own privileges within the framework of the capitalist set-up, especially in academia, the top echelons of the public sector, and the trade union bureaucracy, which is fully aligned with imperialist war.

The Marxism conference marked a further shift to the right by SAlt, reflecting the response by this pseudo-left party and the class interests it represents to the breakdown of capitalism and the lurch to the right by the major powers themselves.

A socialist anti-war movement, mobilising the vast social and political power of the working class on an international scale and fighting for the abolition of the source of war, the capitalist system itself, can only be built in intransigent opposition to the pseudo-left.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**