

To Defend Palestine: Break the U.S. Connection in the Workers Movement!

The Palestine solidarity movement is at an impasse. Having had no impact on the escalating slaughter, protest leaders have doubled down on liberal appeals to the moral compass of politicians and the “world community”—begging Israel’s imperialist sponsors to lean on their Zionist client to grant any sort of temporary halt to the killing. Mass protests have dwindled. Increasingly frustrated activists take to desperate and ineffectual small-group actions against arms manufacturers or Israeli ships, making them easy prey for state repression. And the movement leadership in Melbourne has begun tearing itself apart with recriminations against “too many whites” amongst the organisers, including a former IDF soldier.

How did this come to be? The imperialist ruling classes have a material interest in maintaining Israel as a crucial outpost, one whose basis is the denial of Palestinian national existence. The U.S. pours billions of dollars a year into Israel to maintain it as a pivotal base to project their power in a volatile region. The existence of Zionist Israel guaranteed the Middle East would be poisoned by Arab-Jewish enmity, leaving the imperialist robbers greater freedom to plunder the oil-rich region. Israel is a strategic component of the U.S.-dominated liberal world. Now more than ever, as U.S. imperialism’s grip is challenged, from Eastern Europe to China, the capitalist powers cannot afford to abandon this strategic foothold.

Many have been shocked at Australia’s hardline support to Israel. Some liberal commentators put Australia’s embrace of Israel down to its affinity for another white colonial-settler outpost. They often note Australia was one of the first to recognise the state of Israel, and that it was under the leadership of Labor Party grandee H.V. Evatt that the UN voted to partition Palestine in 1947. This is true but the Australia-Israel relationship can only be understood through the prism of the U.S. alliance.

Australia was born an outpost of Anglo imperialism in Southeast Asia. It was established to function as deputy sheriff of the British Empire. When the baton of world policeman passed to the U.S., from then on orders were handed down from the Oval Office rather than Downing St. As Labor PM Gough Whitlam learnt in 1975, these orders were not up for discussion. The quid pro quo is that the U.S. polices the liberal world order, throwing some of the profits of their plunder to Australian finance capitalists. The latter get to be overseer of their own little Pacific bailiwick as long as they work under the U.S. umbrella, including hosting U.S. bases and forces, joining U.S. military incursions, and supporting other outposts like Israel.

As a token of its commitment to the imperialist world order Australia’s rulers have long supplied troops to UN missions whose job is to help guard Israel’s border with both Egypt and Lebanon. More importantly Australia has militarily joined every key U.S. assault on and occupation in the region. Today, as U.S. hegemony breaks apart, their Australian junior partners are more desperate than ever to try and hold it together. When the U.S. sent warships to back Israel as it prepared to invade Gaza, Australia leapt to contribute planes and ADF personnel. Clinging ever tighter to their big brother protector, Australia’s rulers unconditionally embrace

the AUKUS pact which ties Australia into U.S. war moves against their main trading partner, China.

Major force must be brought to bear to break this link in the imperialist chain supporting the Zionist killing machine. The only force with the social power and objective interest to do this is the organised working class. Tens of thousands of workers have mobilised in mass protests, but they have not been organised through their unions. Trade unions representing hundreds of thousands, from the Victorian AMWU to the MUA, have perennially declared themselves Friends of Palestine. But words of solidarity need to be translated into concrete action against the government’s political and material support to Israel’s mass murder. Victoria’s Labor government has turned Melbourne into a regional hub for Israel’s biggest military contractors from Elbit Systems to Rafael. Unionised workers build, transport and ship components for various war platforms and systems supplied to Israel.

The size of protests in defence of Gaza guarantees that a strike against the government’s support to the slaughter or a blackban of military cargo to Israel would be immensely popular. So why hasn’t the anger been translated into action? Because union action to impede Australia’s support of the Israeli offensive would immediately run up against the ALP government and its allegiance to Washington. Union leaders, both left and right, are beholden to the ALP who today run point for Australia’s support to Israel. This is simply part of the job for the party occupying the government benches in Canberra, which requires enforcing the needs of the Australian capitalist rulers including their U.S. alliance.

U.S. Imperialism’s Lapdogs Out of the Workers Movement!

After 7 October, word came down from Washington to Canberra that there could be no dissent from support to Israel. All statements had to condemn “ Hamas terrorism ” and uphold Israel’s “right to defend itself” (read: right to annihilate Palestinians). This memo was immediately forwarded to ALP headquarters who ensured every union got the message. A red line was drawn. Every federal Labor MP dutifully lined up to vote for the mandatory parliamentary resolution in support of Israel’s war. State Labor MPs were also required to pledge their allegiance. The ACTU was silent. Expressions of solidarity with Palestine evaporated. The NSW Labor government threatened to ban all pro-Palestinian protests as a vicious witch-hunt was unleashed to tar defenders of the Palestinians with the label of anti-Semitism.

The main guard dogs in Australia of this U.S.-sponsored genocide are PM Albanese and Foreign Minister Wong. Albanese is a co-founder of Parliamentary Friends of Palestine, and Wong has long been considered an ally of Palestine within Labor. This shows that what really counts in the ALP is the U.S. alliance. Politicians can say all sorts of nice things and conferences can pass all sorts of pacifist motions, but when Labor is in power it will serve the interests of the capitalist rulers and their Uncle, Sam. This is facilitated by its liberal talk about the need for “peace.”

Thus the government's weasel words about Israel needing to "respect humanitarian law" and its eventual UN vote for a ceasefire are used to more easily sell its backing of genocide. Albanese and Wong pontificate that Israel should allow aid into Gaza while also joining the U.S. in cutting *off* aid funding, and as the bombs keep falling.

As the body count in Gaza grew, several Labor politicians distanced themselves from Israel's industrial murder. Right-wing minister Tony Burke's comments made clear that if he didn't defend the local council flying the Palestinian flag his western Sydney constituents, 25 percent of whom are Muslim, would be waving him a goodbye flag at the next election. Of course, not all Laborites are simply concerned for their career. Forty ALP branches are reported to have opposed the government's position, including Albanese's own branch. Before last year's national conference the Victorian branch voted for the Labor government to recognise a Palestinian state. But those claims of political affinity with the Palestinians merely deceive supporters because they are not based on a break with the U.S. alliance which ensures the ALP's unwavering support to Israel's slaughter.

For their part the Greens have grandstanded on Palestine. Knowing they will never be at the helm of the good ship U.S.S. *Canberra*, they can wax all they want about ending the occupation of Palestine. This sounds good. But the Greens' program will never challenge the fundamental interests of Australian capitalism. They uphold the U.S. alliance—only wanting to renegotiate it on more favorable terms. But to really fight for Palestinian liberation means fighting to break the chain that ties Australia to the U.S. empire, an issue the Greens are not about to touch.

What sets the ALP apart from the bourgeois Greens, giving their stance strategic importance, is their control of the unions. The utter subservience of the trade-union bureaucracy was illustrated by their silence for weeks after 7 October. Until right-wing cabinet ministers dissented from unconditional support to Israel, no union, with the sole exception of the CPA-led Sydney branch of the MUA, dared raise a peep in defence of Palestine. This was a reprise of the reaction to AUKUS. Union motions against AUKUS were cheap as chips when it was "Morrison's baby," but as soon as Labor was running the show you could hear a pin drop—until right-wing union-buster Keating broke the cone of silence. Of course, the Labor left's cowardice over Palestine has been reinforced by their humiliating defeat over AUKUS, followed by their having snatched defeat out of the jaws of victory in the Voice referendum.

Those union leaders who could not come out openly for Israel without alienating many of their members, were either silent or, like the Victorian AMWU, issued liberal handwringing statements condemning violence "from both sides." The CPA-led Sydney branch of the MUA were allowed to maintain their paper support to Palestine, so long as they didn't rock the boat by calling out the whole pro-imperialist edifice.

"Block the Boat, Don't Rock the Boat"

With the left bureaucrats looking like the whipped dogs of imperialism that they are, the leftists of Solidarity rushed to throw a lifeline, initiating a "unionists for Palestine" petition. Eventually thousands signed on. Masses of unionists registering their opposition to the Zionist onslaught could be a good thing. But without the intention to turn paper declarations of solidarity into union action, this is worse than useless. In fact this liberal call for "Peace, Justice and Solidarity" was used by left bureaucrats precisely to

hide their inaction in practice. Naturally it said nothing about the Labor government's support to Israel's mass murder. But as the toll in Gaza mounted even this was not enough to cover for the union tops' betrayal.

Enter Block the Boat. Many who took to these community "pickets" against the working of Israeli ZIM ships undoubtedly did so over a felt need to take some sort of direct action. Braving cop attack, a number have been arrested in Sydney and Melbourne. A united front needs to be built to defend them and demand the dropping of all charges. Some activists may also have seen these protests as a way to reach out to the working class, particularly when Solidarity crow that these actions were initiated with the support of the MUA. But these blockades do not seek to mobilise the working class as a force conscious that its interests include defence of Palestine. Those interests run up against the same ruling class that is driving down the conditions of all workers in the service of propping up a fading U.S. empire. The obstacles to an effective struggle are union leaders that say they want to fight, but are committed to Labor and its undying fealty to the U.S. alliance.

The reality is that delaying a couple of Israeli ships for a few days has done nothing to stop the bombing or advance the fight for Palestinian liberation. But even worse, in trying to substitute for dock and transport workers, these blockades potentially set up individual workers—who must decide whether to honour a community "picket"—for victimisation. The net effect is often to divide the workforce and create hostility to the activists' cause. When Solidarity and other leftists have tried to sell these blockades as union actions, they in fact provide a cover for the left bureaucrats' refusal to mobilise their base. Instead, these actions are conducted in the framework of the liberal BDS campaign whose whole strategy comes down to relying on Israel's imperialist patrons to pressure their Zionist clients to "end Apartheid."

The so-called socialist groups perpetually gravitate around "left" union bureaucrats. Rather than attempting to break workers from their Laborite grip they bolster their left credentials, seeking to ingratiate themselves with these poseurs who oppose AUKUS and defend Palestinian rights in words only. Thus Solidarity praise unions from the ASU to the MUA for supporting Palestine. But all these union tops are welded-on Laborites who refuse to violate the bounds of capitalist acceptability. They are committed to upholding unity with the open pro-imperialists and backers of Israel who dominate the union movement and run the ALP. The ALP leaders in turn are committed to faithfully serving the core interests of Australia's capitalist masters including their alliance with U.S. imperialism.

It is this political bloc of "socialists" and working-class leaders with the capitalist rulers that subordinates the working class to its "own" bourgeoisie and consequently the U.S. alliance, paralysing any class struggle for workers' most immediate interests including against Israel's onslaught. The desperately needed working-class struggle to force the imperialists to yield will not happen while also trying to influence and maintain unity with their defenders. To fight for Palestinian liberation the left need to build a revolutionary anti-imperialist pole against the current misleaders of the workers movement. A line must be drawn in the unions against all who support or conciliate the alliance with U.S. imperialism. There can be no unity with the supporters of imperialism! There can be no unity with the murderers of Palestinians! *Pro-imperialists out of the workers movement! Break the American connection in the workers movement!*

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