

Australian pseudo-lefts feature at pro-imperialist #SaveGhouta rallies

By Zac Hambides
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Syria Solidarity Australia, a Syrian nationalist organisation, held rallies in Sydney and Melbourne on March 3 under the title, *Emergency Protest To #SaveGhouta: Stop the Bombing*.

The rallies were purportedly to alleviate the plight of the residents of Eastern Ghouta, a base of militia opposition to the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad. However, the essential purpose of the rallies was to urge the US and other Western powers to militarily intervene to overthrow Assad, while covering up the crimes of US imperialism in Syria.

Khaled Sattouf, a member of Syria Solidarity Australia, told the rally of about 50 people in Sydney's Martin Place that the attacks carried out by Damascus were a "holocaust" backed by Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin was a "Hitler." Other speakers insisted that Assad headed the greatest terrorist organisation in the world.

Organisers handed out posters denouncing Assad and Putin, whose administration has backed Assad. One poster featured a bloody hand print over Putin's face and word "KILLER" printed underneath.

No mention was made of the atrocities committed by the US or their proxy forces. Instead the line, repeated again and again by all the speakers, was that the "West" was doing "nothing" to "protect" the people of Syria from Assad's government.

The main speaker was David Shoebridge, a Greens member of the New South Wales state parliament, who presented an entirely one-sided view of the events in Syria. "In the last two weeks 130 children have been killed by the shelling, airstrikes and daily brutality delivered on the Syrian people by the Assad regime supported by Russia," he said.

In reality, the US has carried out brutal interventions in Syria for the past three years, one of the most recent

being the February 26 slaughter of 25 civilians, the majority of whom were women and children, by a US airstrike in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor (see: "US airstrike kills dozens amid mounting Western war propaganda over Syria").

That came after last month's massacre of up to 100 pro-government forces by US warplanes and artillery in the same province, which included the deaths of Russian military contractors (see: "Russians reported killed in US strikes in Syria"), barely a week after US-backed al-Nusra forces shot down and killed a Russian jet fighter pilot.

These provocative actions by the US are threatening to escalate what has become a proxy war against Russia into a direct military confrontation between the two nuclear armed powers.

Moreover, the US proxy forces rely on Islamic terrorist groups like the al-Nusra Front, an offshoot of al-Qaeda in Syria, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. The US has been arming these outfits to fight against Assad's forces, as well as those of Russia and Iran. These "rebel" forces have committed monstrous crimes, including the suicide bombing slaughter of 126 civilians fleeing from government-held towns last April.

None of this was mentioned by any of the speakers. Nor was there any mention of the criminal US-NATO operation in Libya in 2011, which removed and murdered Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and installed elements aligned to al-Qaeda, or other US crimes in the Middle East.

A feature of the rally was the role played by Mark Goudkamp, a member of the pseudo-left Solidarity group, in seeking to provide a "humanitarian" cover for imperialist intervention.

Addressing the rally, representing the Refugee Action

Coalition Sydney, Goudkamp said the purpose of the event was to “condemn the ongoing massacre that’s going on in Eastern Ghouta,” for which he blamed Assad and Putin. Goudkamp also denounced the Turkish government for attacking the US-backed Kurdish nationalists in the northwestern Syrian district of Afrin.

As if to cover his tracks, Goudkamp said: “We don’t want the West to intervene. The West are a bunch of hypocrites when it comes to Syria. They cry crocodile tears, however, the West has refused to do absolutely anything about it.” The obvious, if unstated, conclusion is that the Western powers could absolve themselves of their “hypocrisy” only by intervening more directly and with greater force.

Goudkamp denounced the “left” for not supporting the US-backed “rebels” and for spreading “disinformation.” In an extraordinary public admission of his pro-imperialist positions, Goudkamp turned directly to WSWs reporters: “I know there’s a couple of people here recording me right now who are probably going to report how pro-US imperialism I am, but anyway, so be it, from the *World Socialist Web Site*, that’s life, we’ll go on.”

Goudkamp’s offhand public acceptance of being branded pro-US imperialist speaks volumes about the trajectory of the pseudo-left groups. They once postured as opponents of the 2001 and 2003 US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, only to channel the anti-war protests behind the Greens, Labor and others within the political establishment.

Goudkamp’s outburst was not an aberration. It recalls the 2012 denunciation of “knee-jerk anti-imperialism” by Corey Oakley, a member of Socialist Alternative, another pseudo-left group in Australia. Oakley insisted that any identification of an “imperialist threat” to Syria was “profoundly mistaken,” while defending the right of “Syrian revolutionaries” to obtain arms from the imperialist powers and their allies.

Globally, the pseudo-left outfits are now part of an international campaign calling for imperialist intervention in Syria. Last month the *New York Review of Books* published an open letter signed by 200 people, including Goudkamp and Michael Karadjis, a member of Socialist Alliance, another Australia pseudo-left group, titled “The World Must Act Now on Syria,”

which calls on the West to “forcibly stop” the Assad regime and denounces them for showing “restraint.”

From their anti-war posturing in 2003 at the huge anti-Iraq war demonstrations, the pseudo-left have become open defenders of imperialist military interventions. These groups have nothing whatever to do with socialism. They speak for privileged sections of the upper-middle class who are deeply hostile to any movement of the working class that threatens their interests.

As the WSWs explained on March 2 in drawing out the logic of the open letter: “All the pseudo-left elements are aligning their politics directly with those of US imperialism and in particular with those sections of the US military and intelligence apparatus that are demanding a more aggressive confrontation with Russia. Not only are they functioning as direct accessories to the crimes committed against the masses of Syria, but they are helping to pave the way to world war.”

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