

SEP (Australia) first national congress

## Resolution 4: Oppose the US-Australia military agreement

9 May 2012

*The following is the fourth of seven resolutions passed unanimously at the first national congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) held from April 6 to 9, 2012 in Sydney (see: “Australian SEP holds first national congress”). See resolutions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7.*

1. This Congress of the Socialist Equality Party calls on the Australian working class to oppose the military agreement made by the Gillard Labor government with the Obama administration in November 2011. The Labor Party has offered up the north and west of Australia as a staging base for the reckless attempt by US imperialism to reverse its historic decline through a military confrontation with China. In doing so, it has heightened the danger that workers throughout the region and internationally will be plunged into a new world war.

2. The agreement to station 2,500 US marines in Darwin by 2016, along with increased access to Australian ports and airbases by US warships and aircraft, including unmanned military drones operating from the Cocos Islands, is deeply provocative. Joint American and Australian military operations threaten China with a blockade of key sea lanes between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, which would cut off its access to essential energy resources and raw materials. The reactionary pretext of “border protection”, aimed at preventing refugees reaching Australian shores, has already been used to maintain a vast system of surveillance over all shipping in the eastern Indian Ocean from bases on Christmas Island. The aggressive US and Australian stance will inevitably prompt counter-measures by China and destabilise relations throughout South East Asia.

3. The Labor government’s alignment with the Obama administration’s militarist agenda is driven by its historic dependence on the American alliance to defend its global economic and strategic interests. Prior to 1941, these interests were pursued under the umbrella of the British Empire. As British power in Asia began to collapse following Japan’s entry into World War II, Canberra turned to the United States.

For over 120 years, the Australian ruling class has regarded the islands to the north of the continent, and in the South West Pacific, as its sphere of influence, ruthlessly plundering their

resources and exploiting their peoples. Today, despite Australia’s overwhelming economic ties to Asia, especially its lucrative trading relations with China, the ruling establishment fears Beijing’s growing influence in the region, and remain strategically dependent on US backing.

4. The US-Australia alliance is a mercenary relationship, maintained at the expense of the Australian working class and the oppressed masses of the region. Successive Australian governments have paid for US support by hosting American bases, unconditionally endorsing its foreign policy and dispatching troops to fight and die in every major war waged by Washington since 1945—from Korea and Vietnam, to the 1991 Gulf War on Iraq, to the invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. In return, Washington has backed Australian military/diplomatic interventions into East Timor, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Vanuatu to suppress social unrest or prevent their governments coming under the sway of other powers.

5. The Obama-Gillard military agreement marks a further, qualitative expansion in the US-Australia alliance, without even the pretence of a parliamentary debate, let alone a popular vote. In this, the Gillard Labor government is continuing the role that Labor has historically played as the pre-eminent party of imperialism and war. At every point of crisis and transition—from World War I, the Depression, World War II, the social and political upheavals of the early 1970s and the 1980s, to today—the ruling class has relied upon Labor, its oldest and most critical prop, to preside over major shifts in policy and orientation.

6. This Congress condemns the militarisation of society accompanying the current preparations for war. For the first time since Vietnam, military strategists are discussing the introduction of compulsory military service to overcome personnel shortages in the armed forces and provide cannon fodder for future conflicts. In school, youth are being subjected to nationalist propaganda glorifying Australian militarism; since 2008 Labor has designated three new days as occasions for national commemoration of past wars. The military is regularly mobilised to reinforce police operations during so-called “national emergencies”, while the draconian powers

concentrated in the hands of intelligence and police agencies under the auspices of the fraudulent “war on terror” are being used domestically for unprecedented monitoring of alleged political dissent.

7. This Congress denounces the Labor government’s attempt to revive xenophobia on the basis that the country faces a threat of invasion from an unspecified northern aggressor. This claim, which will be increasingly used to justify the drive to war, harks back to the racist rhetoric of the 1950s and 1960s: that Australia was at risk from the Chinese communist “Yellow Peril” to the north. The reality is that the danger of war arises from US-Australian aggression.

8. Those political and business figures who have differences over Labor’s unconditional alignment with the US, appealing instead for a peaceful accommodation with China, in no way represent an opposition to militarism. They express concerns within sections of the ruling elite that the descent towards conflict will threaten the super profits being accrued from exports to China. Despite their hesitations, they will nevertheless line up behind a military confrontation. Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd spoke for all of them in March 2009, when he told US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that efforts to accommodate Beijing should be accompanied by “also preparing to deploy force if everything goes wrong.”

9. The Australian Greens, despite their pacifist and anti-war pretensions, serve as direct accomplices of the Labor government and its militarist agenda. The Greens criticised Australian involvement in the Iraq War on the grounds that the military should instead be focused on defending Australian strategic interests in the South Pacific and South East Asia. With the renewed concentration of the armed forces in the north, they have largely achieved their objectives. Providing a clear indication of the role they will play in legitimising militarism, Greens leader Bob Brown voiced his agreement with Barack Obama’s justification of his administration’s aggressive stance against the Chinese regime on the grounds of its human rights record. In 1999, the Greens used such “humanitarian” pretexts to call for military intervention into East Timor to ensure Australian domination over the newly formed state, and again in 2011 to support the murderous US-led air war against Libya.

10. The pseudo-left organisations, such as Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative, play a particularly pernicious role. They seek to block the development of an independent socialist movement by blinding the working class to the dangers it confronts. They deny the objective driving forces behind imperialist war and promote the delusion that the Australian ruling class can be pressured by mass protest to repudiate militarism. Their attitude to the sharpening US confrontation with China was summed up by Socialist Alternative’s Tom Bramble, who concluded in an essay last year that “a war between China and the US is not likely in the foreseeable future.”

11. The pseudo-lefts speak for an affluent section of the middle class that is thoroughly integrated into the official political establishment and trade union apparatus. They played a key role in facilitating the Australian military intervention into East Timor in 1999, the first overseas military deployment since Vietnam, by actively calling for “troops in.” Like the Greens, they gave their full backing to the subsequent Australian military occupation of the tiny impoverished state, providing crucial support to the ruling class when its most vital strategic and economic interests—not least, East Timor’s lucrative oil and gas deposits—were at stake. There is no doubt they will do the same as international tensions escalate, using fake “left” rhetoric to justify neo-colonialism and war.

12. The political principles that must guide the working class in its struggle against militarism were laid out by the Marxist movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. They are grounded in the understanding that the main enemy is at home—namely the Australian government and the financial and corporate elite that it serves. The greatest allies of Australian workers and young people are the working class and oppressed masses throughout the Asia-Pacific region, in the US, in Europe and around the world. The international unity of the working class must be forged through a constant struggle against every form of nationalism, chauvinism and class collaboration.

13. This Congress affirms that the only answer to the threat of imperialist war is the independent political mobilisation of the working class to overthrow the capitalist profit system and establish a workers’ government based on a socialist and internationalist program. A workers’ government will dismantle the state and military apparatus and redirect resources to meeting the pressing social needs of the working class within Australia and throughout the region.

14. This Congress demands the repudiation of all military alliances and access agreements, the closure of all US bases and the removal of all American military personnel from the country. We demand the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Australian troops, police and officials from Afghanistan, East Timor, the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and every other country where they are deployed. We will oppose any future Australian military actions in the Pacific or anywhere else, and expose their predatory motives.

15. This Congress affirms that the Socialist Equality Party, in closest collaboration with its co-thinkers in the International Committee of the Fourth International, will place the struggle against militarism and war at the very centre of its political work.



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