# SEP campaigns in Western Australia against US war drive

**Our reporters**
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Socialist Equality Party (SEP) teams have been campaigning in Perth, the state capital of Western Australia, focussing on the US war drive against China and the implications for the working class and youth in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region. The SEP's senate candidates for Western Australia are Peter Symonds and Joe Lopez.

Just south of Perth is the Stirling Naval Base located on Garden Island adjacent to the seaside suburb of Rockingham. Stirling is the main western base for the Australian navy, including its submarine fleet, and the area houses associated engineering infrastructure.

The Gillard Labor government, which has signed up to the Obama administration's aggressive military build-up throughout the Indo-Pacific region against China, has already held discussions with the US on opening up the base to US warships, including possibly aircraft carrier battle groups.

The US regards the Stirling base on the Indian Ocean as critical to its plans for a possible blockade of the key shipping routes through South East Asia used by China to access energy and raw materials from the Middle East and Africa. The Western Australian base is one of the few options that the Pentagon has to station naval forces in the Indian Ocean.

When the SEP campaigned in Rockingham few people knew anything of the discussions taking place about the expansion of the Stirling base or an enhanced American naval presence. The Gillard government and media have worked to keep the working class entirely in the dark as to the Labor government's military commitments to Washington and their implications. Those we spoke to were genuinely shocked at the dangers posed by a major US naval base being established just across the water from the seaside suburb.

Derek, a retired driver, said he knew nothing about the plans, but was not surprised that the government was saying nothing about it. "Well no one tells the truth in the government. We need someone that is going to tell the truth. Lay it out, be honest. But they don't," he said when senate candidate Joe Lopez explained what was being prepared.

Derek recalled what had happened in the lead-up to the US invasion of Iraq and the lies about weapons of mass destruction. "It was basically about oil and the money factor, the dollar, the mighty dollar that rules all this, when they went in there, into Iraq and they killed Saddam Hussein. But there was nothing [no WMDs] there. So who's telling the truth? Who can we trust?"

Speaking in Fremantle Mall, a retired nurse from Melbourne initially told Senate candidate Peter Symonds that she didn't want to be told about the US military preparations if it was going to be bad. But, as the conversation went on, she said she was firmly opposed to war.

"I don't agree with war. I don't think people should be fighting each other. The Iraq war should never have happened. I don't think that any war should ever happen. I think a lot of wars happen because of religion and nationalism. So I don't like that either.

"I don't know why Anzac Day is getting bigger and bigger and bigger. My children have chosen to go and I cannot understand why. They are going along without thinking about the people who died in the war, and those who came back injured."

Other SEP teams in Rockingham came across tradesmen who worked on the base and were disturbed by what was taking place. One who did not want to be named said he had worked on military facilities in several states. "I am frightened of the extent to which US has its operations here and makes Australia a target

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whether we want it or not," he said, adding that "people need to find out more about these covert activities."

A graduate research student told SEP campaigners that his project was associated with the Stirling base. Other research funding was being axed, he said, but not for his work. He was concerned about the dangers of the war drive against China. He was "well aware of the advanced operations already and that work at the naval base is being expanded" and thought it was a "positive thing" that the SEP was raising the issue. "I don't think war should be an option," he said.

The SEP also found real concerns about the danger of war among students at Murdoch University. Again, while few knew the details of the Obama administration's pivot to Asia they were well aware of the role of the US in Asia and the Middle East over the past decade and the Australian government's support for American interventions.

Kannan, a student from Singapore, said: "I don't like these preparations for war by the US. The US is involved in all the countries in the region to make economic gains for itself. They are going into different countries and taking control. It is all very one-sided. I have a friend from the Philippines. There is always a debate as to whether American involvement is good or bad. In the long run I think it has purely been to the advantage of the US. They also wanted to go into Sri Lanka at one point. They really wanted a base there. It is a very central point to the shipping routes across the Indian Ocean."

Pakistani student Sadia commented: "I think the US are trying to extract resources from the countries that they are going into because their own economy is going down. That is a really bad thing to deprive people of their own land and their own resources. What they did in Afghanistan and Iraq was terrible. They have no right to do that. They label it as fighting terrorism. But who they label as a terrorist depends on whether they can get economic gain or not.

"The US does not have a right to interfere with the political situation in any country. I am against the interference of the US in Pakistan, against the use of drones. It is like they are coming into my house. People should be protesting against that. People in the US should be protesting against that. I didn't know about US bases in Australia, but they have had them in Pakistan, and in Afghanistan they have completely taken over."

Zeta from New Zealand said that she was concerned about what the US had been doing in Iraq and Afghanistan. "War is ridiculous. It's power games between governments," she said. Zeta asked about the economic issues underlying the drive to war and asked whether it was true that the top 1 percent of society controlled economic wealth and finance.

She was especially opposed to the Gillard government's decision to take money from university education. "If you can't get a good education then you will be forced into low paid jobs or unemployed. Students are concerned about the financial situation. I know my partner who is studying at present is worried that if money is taken from universities, fees will go up. I am not studying but I want to. I am from New Zealand so the fees are even higher and I cannot afford it. No way."

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