

The Australian Greens and their phony anti-war posturing

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While the Australian government, backed by the opposition Labor Party, has been in the forefront internationally of the push for the new US-led war in Iraq and Syria, the Greens are positioning themselves as a political lightning rod for anti-war opposition.

The “opposition” of the Greens to the new war unfolding in the Middle East is entirely bogus. The Greens have pushed for a parliamentary debate, which would only lend a false legitimacy to the war, and questioned the efficacy of Australian military involvement, but they have not opposed the war as such, nor the lies being used to justify it.

Greens leader Christine Milne asked on October 3 why it was “in Australia’s national interest to join in another war in the Middle East without a clear strategic objective or risk assessment.” Greens defence spokesman Scott Ludlam argued in the *Strategist* last month that the air war in Iraq and Syria would not be effective in curbing Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militias and that the government had not made “a solid case for committing us to another round of open-ended warfare in Iraq.”

In other words, the Greens have not opposed the latest US war of aggression, let alone denounced its illegality and its neo-colonial aims. One can only assume that if the Pentagon or Australian defence officials could demonstrate to Milne and Ludlum that the war in the Middle East would destroy ISIS, the Greens would become its enthusiastic supporters.

Moreover, the Greens perpetuate the lie that Washington is waging a new “war on terror.” Milne has declared that ISIS is “an horrendous organisation, there is no doubt.” While criticising the US military strategy, Ludlam declared that Australia did have a responsibility to deal with “the institutionalised horror calling itself the ‘Islamic State’ that has taken root in

Iraq and Syria.”

In reality, Washington’s chief objective is not the destruction of ISIS, which is a creation of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its regime-change operations in Libya and Syria. Rather the portrayal of ISIS as the very incarnation of “evil” serves to provide the pretext for the Obama administration to revive its plans, shelved last September, for a war to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and strike a blow against Assad’s backers, Iran and Russia.

The Greens are unabashed defenders of the economic and strategic interests of Australian imperialism. As was the case in 2003 when they postured as opponents of Australian involvement in the US-led invasion of Iraq, their “opposition” to the new war is purely tactical—that Australian military forces should be used to defend its predatory interests in the Asia Pacific region. As Milne exclaimed last month, “What happens in our region if Australian forces are required elsewhere?”

While critical of Australian involvement in the Middle East war, the Greens are fully supportive of the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” and its war preparations throughout the region against China. Former Greens leader Bob Brown heckled President George W. Bush in parliament in 2003 about the Iraq war but warmly welcomed Obama in 2011 when the US president used the Australian parliament to announce the “pivot.”

Milne’s calls for “an independent foreign policy” and criticisms of the Abbott government for “blindly following” Washington are laughable given the Greens’ record. They have lined up fully with the US in its aggressive confrontation with Russia over Ukraine. Milne has pushed for Russian President Vladimir Putin to be banned from next month’s G20

summit in Australia.

Moreover, despite their current objections to Australian involvement in the latest war, the Greens have been fully supportive of the US-led regime-change operations, beginning in 2011 in Libya and Syria. In 2011, Greens deputy leader Adam Bandt was among the first to call for a “no-fly zone” over Libya, which opened the door for an intervention that culminated in the grisly murder of Muammar Gaddafi at the hands of ISIS-style Islamic fundamentalists.

Last September, as the US stood on the brink of launching an air war against Syria, the Greens backed sanctions against Syria, demanded Assad’s resignation and called for “humanitarian action” in Syria, providing credibility to the US war aims, without overtly supporting military intervention.

The Greens’ objection to Australian participation in the latest war is driven by two main concerns. Firstly, while the vast bulk of the political establishment regards unqualified support for US conflicts as the only means for securing Australia’s economic and strategic interests, a small and diminishing layer express concerns about possible damaging consequences for Australian imperialism.

Analysts such as the Lowy Institute’s James Brown have warned that sustaining the operation in Iraq for three years or more could strain the military’s capacity to respond to events in Australia’s region. Conservative commentator Tom Switzer warned in the *Australian* against “breezy confidence that this mission will be painless and relatively easy,” declaring that wars “always have unintended consequences.”

Secondly, and more fundamentally, the posturing of the Greens reflects deep fears across the board in ruling circles of the emergence of anti-war opposition among workers and youth. Those who are backing the war, both Liberal and Labor, have been at pains to repeatedly declare that the current war is not a re-run of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. They are well aware that the criminal war in Iraq, and the lies used to justify it, have left an indelible mark on the consciousness of broad layers of the population.

The Greens are positioning themselves to derail opposition that emerges to the war and divert it into the dead end of parliamentary manoeuvres and appeals to the powers that be—just as they did in 2003 amid the largest-ever anti-war protest movement in Australia and

internationally.

Working in league with various pseudo-left groups in “stop the war” coalitions, the Greens played a critical role in peddling illusions that they represented an anti-war voice in parliament and that pressure could be applied, via the UN or the election of Australian Labor or US Democrat administrations, to stop the invasion. They placed great faith in France vetoing any resolution in the UN Security Council.

In the end, all these hopes proved to be a chimera. The US and its “coalition of the willing” attacked Iraq without bothering with the fig leaf of a UN resolution. The Democrat Obama exploited the anti-war sentiment to win the presidency in 2008, only to wage one war after another. The Labor Party, which won office in 2007 and was kept in power by the Greens after 2010, has supported every one of the US military interventions. France, which only objected to the 2003 invasion because it threatened French interests in the Middle East, has backed the US regime-change operations in Libya and Syria, as well as waging its own neo-colonial interventions in Africa.

The new US-led war in Iraq and Syria in 2014 has far more menacing implications than the 2003 occupation. In the past decade, especially following the eruption of the 2008 global financial crisis, geo-political tensions have greatly intensified. The danger is not simply that the war will become another protracted quagmire but that it has the potential to ignite a conflagration across the Middle East and internationally with catastrophic consequences.

Imperialist war cannot be halted by protests and pleas to the ruling elites. A genuine fight against the drive to war is indissolubly bound up with the independent mobilisation of the working class in the struggle for socialism to abolish the capitalist system, which is the underlying cause of imperialist rivalry and conflict. The Greens, whose party is rooted in the defence of the profit system, are organically hostile to such a perspective and seek to prevent it at all costs.



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