

A bipartisan conspiracy

Australian imperialism and the Middle East war

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia)

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The Socialist Equality Party unequivocally condemns the commitment of Australian jet fighters and special forces to indefinite combat operations in the US-led war in Iraq and Syria. The military deployment is a bipartisan conspiracy, carried out against widespread opposition in the working class, to assist US imperialism extend its domination over the entire oil-rich Middle East.

The justification for war given by the Liberal-National coalition government of Prime Minister Tony Abbott and the Labor opposition under Bill Shorten—that its purpose is to protect the Iraqi people from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)—is no less a lie than the claims in 2003 that the US invasion of Iraq was about “weapons of mass destruction.”

ISIS is a reactionary by-product of the mass killing and ethno-sectarian divisions inflicted on the Iraqi people by the US occupation of the country. Until it became the pretext for another illegal war, ISIS had been tacitly supported by Washington. As US Vice President Joe Biden has admitted, ISIS fighters had received funding and arms as part of CIA-directed operations to equip the so-called “rebels” waging a civil war against the Iranian- and Russian-backed Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad.

The Obama administration has seized on ISIS attacks in Iraq as the pretext for intervening into Syria, and installing a pro-US puppet regime in Damascus. Obama declared bluntly on September 28: “We are not going to stabilise Syria under the rule of Assad.” The US, supported by Australia, was on the verge of launching war in Syria last year but put it on hold in the face of popular opposition in Britain and the US, and objections from the Putin regime. With Russia weakened by the imperialist-backed coup in Ukraine, Washington calculates it can now proceed unchallenged.

After Syria, Iran will be Washington’s next target, followed by stepped-up provocations against Russia and China. The lives of millions of people are under threat.

This ruthless US war drive is being propelled by the intractable economic crisis of world capitalism, which, six years after the 2008 meltdown in financial markets, hovers on the brink of even more disastrous shocks. As in the years before World War I and World War II, all the imperialist powers, including Germany and

Japan, are rearming in order to use military force to gain control of markets and sources of profits. As tensions and conflicts rise, the intractable contradictions of the capitalist system threaten humanity with the catastrophe of a third World War.

Amid this global turmoil, the support of Australian imperialism for US militarism stems, at the most fundamental level, from its weak and isolated position. As a middle power, lacking any independent means of asserting its interests against greater powers, it depends entirely on its alliance with the United States, just as it depended on Britain prior to World War II.

Economically, Australia is plunging into recession. The investment and export boom in the mining sector, which shored up economic growth and government tax revenue after 2008, is now sharply contracting, with the mining industry wracked by over-capacity, plummeting prices, dog-eat-dog competition and job destruction.

Class antagonisms are growing rapidly. After decades of widening social inequality, the global crisis threatens millions of workers with destitution. The real rate of unemployment is already 10 percent. According to the most recent study by the Australian Council for Social Service, one in seven Australians now live in poverty, and one in six children. While over \$100 billion has been pledged to the purchase of new jet fighters, warships and other military hardware, every tier of government is slashing spending on essential social services and benefits.

As whole sections of industry face collapse, the Australian ruling elite has become ever more dependent on US-based banks, investment funds and finance corporations, as well as on parasitic speculation in stock, currency and real estate markets. Cumulative US investment in Australia is more than \$570 billion, compared with \$21 billion from China, while total Australian investment in the US is now over \$430 billion, compared with just \$18 billion in China. Wall Street’s continued domination of the world financial system, through endless wars, is just as vital for the Australian super-rich as for their obscenely wealthy US counterparts.

The vested interests of Australian imperialism are expressed in its unconditional backing for the US on the world stage—from the confrontation with Russia over Ukraine, to the provocative US “pivot” against China in Asia, and renewed military intervention

in the Middle East. Canberra functions as a bellicose diplomatic mouthpiece for Washington, the host for some of the most strategic US communications and spy facilities, and an essential staging base and partner for US forces in the Indo-Pacific.

Australia's new international role underscores the significance of the June 24, 2010 political coup that ousted Kevin Rudd as prime minister. A cabal within the Labor Party, operating in league with the Obama administration, organised Rudd's removal behind the backs of the parliament and the population. Rudd's appeals for the US to accommodate with China—Australia's largest trading partner—conflicted with the agenda of Washington and its supporters within key sections of the Australian political, corporate and media establishment. The coup opened the way for Obama to announce the “pivot to Asia” on the floor of the Australian parliament in November 2011.

Since the 2010 coup, no dissension has been permitted within the parliament over Canberra's unconditional alignment with US imperialism. Regardless of whether Liberal-National or Labor is in office, a de-facto “national unity” government has been established, aimed at militarising the economy and society, and imposing austerity measures on the working class.

There is not a sliver of difference between the Coalition government and the Labor opposition on the deployment of Australian military forces to the Middle East or the imposition of draconian new anti-terror laws at home. Labor leader Shorten has declared that security issues are “above politics” and silenced the slightest sign of dissent in the party's ranks. For his part, Abbott effectively rebuked his Treasurer Joe Hockey for remarks questioning Shorten's commitment to bipartisanship on the war. Despite differences on other issues, Abbott declared, “it's good that we stand shoulder to shoulder” on national security.

This absolute unity is not some sign of parliamentary strength, but of the weakness of the entire official set up, in which there are deep fears about the eruption of mass protests and struggles against war. The constant lies and falsifications, the manufacture of one terror scare after another, and the whipping up of anti-Muslim xenophobia, in alliance with the corporate media, are aimed at sowing confusion and division, and blocking the emergence of a mass anti-war movement of workers and youth. At the same time, the anti-terror legislation has established the framework for police state measures against any opponents of the war. Innocent people have already had their homes raided and ransacked and been dragged off for interrogation on baseless allegations of planning terror attacks.

It is precisely these fears that lie behind the unprecedented “celebrations” being held to mark the centenary of World War I. The glorification of past wars and promotion of patriotism, at a cost of over \$500 million, is a reactionary attempt to create a social base for militarism, dictatorial forms of rule and “sacrifice for the nation.” It is aimed at indoctrinating young people in particular, to goad them into serving as cannon fodder in the current military interventions, and the even more catastrophic wars that are being prepared.

Within the political establishment, the Greens perform a special function. They are positioning themselves to act as a political lightning rod to ensure that opposition and discontent remains

confined within safe, official parliamentary channels. Their anti-war posturing is a sham. While they oppose Australian involvement in the war for tactical reasons, the Greens do not oppose the criminal US-led war itself. They support regime-change in Syria, help foster the war propaganda that ISIS is an imminent threat to the entire world, including Australia, and are participating in the nationalist orgy surrounding World War I.

The working class needs a new perspective and leadership in order to break out of the straightjacket imposed by the existing political order and launch an independent struggle in defence of its own class interests.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP), along with its co-thinkers in the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), is fighting to unite the international working class in a political movement against war and militarism, and in defence of democratic and social rights. War and social counter-revolution can only be defeated on the basis of a socialist program that has as its aim the abolition of the capitalist system—the root cause of war—and the establishment of a workers' government. To achieve this, the working class must take political power into its own hands, expropriate the banks and major corporations, and reorganise society from top to bottom on the basis of social needs of the majority, not the profits of a parasitic, wealthy few.

As part of the fight for socialism, the SEP demands the immediate withdrawal of Australian military forces from the US-led wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan, the closure of all military bases in Australia, including Pine Gap, and the repudiation of the ANZUS military alliance with the United States. The vast array of anti-democratic laws must be repealed and Muslims, immigrants and refugees defended against police persecution and racist attacks.

We urge all workers and youth who agree with this perspective to study the ICFI resolution “Socialism and the Fight Against Imperialist War” adopted on June 9, 2014 as well as the resolutions of the recent congresses of the SEP (US), the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG) in Germany and the SEP (Australia), and apply to join the Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the ICFI.



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