Australian Greens senator talks of war with China

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Acting Greens leader, Senator Scott Ludlam, made statements last week that are noteworthy not only for their content, but for the fact that they generated absolutely no controversy or debate within the Australian media and political establishment.

Ludlam was a speaker at the national conference of the recently established Independent Peace and Activist Network (IPAN), held in Brisbane on July 9. IPAN is a coalition of pseudo-left groupings and individuals that advance pacifist and nationalist opposition to the US-Australia alliance and US bases and military activity in the country. Among the issues IPAN discussed was the large-scale, joint US-Australian "Talisman Sabre" military exercise currently taking place across northern Australia.

Speaking after the event with reporters, Ludlam made off-the-cuff remarks that Talisman Sabre was training for "expeditionary wars and invasions." Most significantly, he stated: "I don't think we should be preparing for a war with China … I don't think we should be participating in that kind of provocation."

It is difficult to think of more newsworthy comments by a public political figure. The acting leader of the third largest parliamentary party, and the Greens foreign affairs spokesman, asserted that Australia, as part of its alliance with the United States, is "preparing for a war with China."

An Australian Associated Press stringer filed a story on his remarks within hours. The online *Guardian* and Murdoch media's news.com.au posted it. Ludlam then posted a link to the *Guardian* story on his Facebook page, with the text, "our dress rehearsal for world war three."

And that is where any public reference to Ludlam's remarks ended. The television news and the major newspapers did not report them. No member of Prime Minister Tony Abbott's Liberal-National coalition government was asked about them. The Labor opposition said nothing. The Greens themselves did not issue a press release about Talisman Sabre and Ludlam has not repeated his statements since.

The explanation for the silence is that what Ludlam said is true and the Australian establishment does not want it discussed. As the WSWS explained in its July 7 article, "Japan joins US-Australian rehearsal for conflict with China," Talisman Sabre is a "large-scale dress rehearsal for a military confrontation with China in the Asia-Pacific region." Over 33,000 American, Australian and New Zealand troops, and a small contingent of Japanese personnel, are practising naval assaults and amphibious landings within the context of sharp tensions over the provocative US allegations that China is threatening "freedom of navigation" in the South China Sea.

Under the auspices of the US "pivot to Asia" since 2011, Australia is fully integrated into the American strategic plans for war on China. Northern and western Australian airbases and ports are regularly visited by the American military. US Marines are based in Darwin. The Australian military is treated by the Pentagon as an adjunct to its own forces, trained to operate as part of larger US units. Such is the integration that if the US goes to war in the Asia-Pacific, Australia will immediately be involved.

The scope of exercises like Talisman Sabre reflects military calculations that the US is planning for war sooner rather than later, when China could be in a stronger position to oppose an onslaught by the US and its allies like Japan and Australia.

Ludlam's posture of concern over the war danger is belied by the record of the Greens. They have loyally assisted the former Labor and current conservative

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governments to block any broad public debate about the preparations for a confrontation with China. In parliament, they do not raise any opposition to the US alliance or the military integration taking place as part of the pivot.

Ludlam, as the Greens foreign affairs spokesman, has played a key role in suppressing critical information about the ever-expanding US military activity in Australia. In November 2013, Ludlam asked questions in the Senate foreign affairs committee about plans for greater "rotation" through northern Australian airbases by US aircraft. He obtained an effective admission from senior military commander Air Marshal Mark Binskin that US aircraft, such as B-52 bombers, would neither confirm nor deny whether they were carrying nuclear weapons when operating from Australia.

Following the admission that Australia might be hosting nuclear-armed long-range bombers, behind the backs of the population, Ludlam made no attempt to make an issue of it on the floor of the Senate. Likewise, he did not use parliament to condemn Talisman Sabre as a "dress rehearsal for World War Three."

Ludlam epitomises the cynical manner in which a section of the Greens occasionally pose as "left" and "anti-war" to select audiences, while at all times serving the interests of the Australian ruling class. No less than the rest of the official political establishment, the Greens have worked to keep the working class in the dark and prevent an anti-war movement developing that challenges the militarist agenda of US and Australian imperialism.

The Greens are assisted in their duplicity by the social types that make up organisations like IPAN. A number of the figures who are active in the network are current or former members of the Stalinist Communist Party of Australia (CPA), Socialist Alliance or the fraudulent "left" of the Australian Labor Party. Hostile to the fight by the Socialist Equality Party to develop an anti-war movement in the working class on an internationalist and socialist perspective, IPAN has been established to try and channel opposition to militarism into politically harmless protests and reactionary Australian nationalism.

The "IPAN Statement" asserts that the US alliance has "put our independence at risk" and calls for Australia to have an "independent foreign policy." Such demagogy, which implies that Australia's alignment with the US is simply because politicians are Washington's lapdogs, is intended to obscure that the Australian ruling class is pursuing its independent imperialist interests.

IPAN reflects the standpoint of a faction of the Australian corporate elite who believe that supporting the reckless US attempt to reverse its economic decline by military means will end in disaster and undermine Australian capitalism's substantial economic ties with China, which is now the country's largest trading partner.

The dominant factions of the Australian ruling class, however, are prepared to tie their fate to US imperialism. Both the government and Labor opposition are committed to the US "pivot to Asia" against China. This political bipartisanship flows from calculations that Australian imperialist interests—strategic influence in the South Pacific, major investments in Wall Street and the prospect of greater market share in Asia and China in particular—are best served by ensuring the US retains its dominant position in the Asia-Pacific and globally.

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