

Australian workers and youth denounce war drive after Paris attacks

Our reporters

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Like its counterparts around the world, the Australian government has seized on the November 13 terrorist attacks in Paris to attempt to legitimise the drive to war and further erode basic democratic rights.

Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull declared that the events in Paris were “the work of the devil” and warned that similar attacks were likely to occur in Australia. The corporate media has dutifully ramped up its campaign to promote hysteria and anti-Muslim xenophobia, providing a platform for a host of right-wing figures.

The New South Wales police force has been granted extraordinary powers to “shoot to kill” alleged terrorists on sight, while the Paris attacks are being exploited to promote the barrage of so-called anti-terrorism legislation introduced since September 2014.

Above all, the entire political establishment, including the Labor Party and the Greens, has sought to prevent any discussion of the relationship between the attacks in Paris, and the 14 years of criminal, US-led wars in the Middle East, in each of which Australia has participated.

Over last weekend, reporters from the WSWWS spoke with workers and young people about the Paris attacks, the official response and the drive to war.

In Fairfield, a working-class suburb in Sydney’s southwest, **Alex**, a retired worker from the former Yugoslavia, commented: “If you create millions of refugees who have to flee their country because of American wars, you are going to create terrorists. There’s been 20 years of war.

“What I don’t like is the American government and its illegal war in Iraq, which killed a million people and destroyed all the country’s infrastructure. And now they’re chasing terrorists around. But who are the ones who support terrorism? It’s the Washington gangsters. They have millions of people going hungry in America, and they’re dropping bombs on Syria and Iraq.

“Since the Vietnam War, we know that America starts every war. But Australia is supporting them. At the same time, they are trying to cut the pensions for the poorest people.

“The media makes sure nobody knows what’s going on. They are always blaming [Russian President Vladimir] Putin and the Chinese government, but what about George Bush? Bush, Tony Blair and John Howard should be arrested and charged with war crimes. They are war criminals these people, and the Australian government supports them.”

In Brisbane, **Isabella**, a 15-year-old high school student, said she opposed the government and media response to the attacks.

“The political hierarchies are manipulating all the terrorist attacks to suit their political agenda,” she said. “They are generating a lot of fear and Islamophobic responses, like, ‘we need more police and stop the Syrian refugees coming here.’ I am sympathising with Muslims at the moment and hoping they are safe.”

Asked about the escalated bombing campaigns by the French government and its declaration of emergency rule, Isabella commented: “I think using violence to fight violence, is stupid and it will just fuel terrorist attacks. That’s all we’ve ever responded with, militarism and more war. War is just fuelled by capitalism. Its objective is to gain profit from the rest of society.”

The high school student opposed the ongoing official celebrations of the centenary of World War I and the British-led Anzac (Australian and New Zealand) invasion of the Turkish peninsula of Gallipoli.

“Back then, war was romanticised and presented as heroic. The Anzac legend was used to indoctrinate young workers who were sent off to war, expecting it to be this giddy time in which they could travel. It was all lies and myths. Whenever we speak about it at school, I say I don’t celebrate Anzac Day. The immediate response is

that I am being insensitive to those who died and sacrificed their lives for our country, but the soldiers who came back hated the war being celebrated.”

Brian, a 21-year-old retail worker, said: “The ‘war on terror’ is being used as an excuse to bully other countries and pretty much wipe them all out.”

Referring to the decision to give Australian police “shoot to kill” guidelines, Brian commented: “Do firefighters go out looking to light fires? Do ambulance crews go looking to create emergencies? No, but the police are out there to boost their numbers by being a pain to everyone else. And that’s what the governments are doing as well to every other country, like ‘you’ve got a lot of oil, we’re going to take it.’

“The governments that say they’re fighting terrorism are the biggest funders of terrorism. ISIS is definitely a group made by the US. It’s like these governments are trying to wipe out an entire race, like Hitler did with the Jews. A lot of people now think that Arabs and Muslims are terrorists.”

Cassia, an engineering student in Newcastle, said of the Paris attacks: “It’s sad to say, but I was not shocked. My heart goes out to those involved, but it was only a matter of time. There has been so much political tension building up for years now between the Middle East and the Western world. It seems the Western world is ganging up on them and creating more conflict.”

Cassie said she did not “think terrorism comes from a particular religion. I believe it comes from people who are lost and need to find a sense of belonging and the terrorist organisations are there at the right time. They feel lost because they are excluded from society.”

In western Sydney, **Terence**, an IT worker originally from Singapore, opposed the mass spying being carried out by governments around the world. “They are not collecting data to combat terrorism,” he said. “They are fearful of a social uprising. Have you heard that they want access to everyone’s encryption? That’s crazy. That will only make things less secure.”

Terence spoke out against the official claims used to justify US wars in the Middle East. “ISIS and the Free Syrian Army have been sent weapons by US allies like Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Nobody believes the reasons for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Claims about weapons of mass destruction were used as a pretext to invade. That view is now completely mainstream.”

Alex, a computer programmer from Melbourne who left Chile as a child before the US-backed military coup in 1973, said: “The media is controlled by a few people who

have an agenda. I think it’s to do with controlling all the wealth. I see that in Chile. My parents left just before the coup. I was only 13 and my dad could see it wasn’t an ideal place to bring up children and to live.”

Alex pointed to the decades of US regime-change operations around the world, commenting: “The US is now trying to put in power governments that are just as evil as the one’s they got rid of. It happened in Afghanistan, throughout the Middle East, in Korea and Vietnam.”

Alex expressed his opposition to the entire political establishment, noting that “all the parties, Labor, Liberal, Greens are pretty much the same. There’s not a distinction anymore. They all defend the rich and follow the same agenda.”

Louis, a young administrative worker from New Zealand living in Melbourne, said: “The reason Western governments are in the Middle East and bombing them is to continue to divide them, and get what they can. A lot of those countries still have a lot of oil.

“These governments are also trying to divert from what’s happening in their own countries, like here, where they’re trying to get rid of the social safety net. The government is taking a knife to particular resources or programs like Medicare, pensions and so they need a distraction from all the policies they’re trying to carry out. People are told the problem is the Muslims.”

Louis referred to Australia’s involvement in the US military build-up in the Asia-Pacific as a preparation for war against China. He commented: “It’s like the troops that are stationed in Darwin, which not many people know about. I think the US troops are there with Australian troops to monitor the oceans for strategic purposes. It’s also to develop a military presence in South East Asia. As China gets stronger, the US needs to get its interests in there.”



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