

The Australian Defence White Paper and the drive to war

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The Defence White Paper released by the Australian government last week is yet another warning that the global breakdown of capitalism is plunging humanity toward the abyss of a third world war. The document is predicated on the claim that Australia, as a key strategic ally of the United States, is threatened by China's efforts to exert greater influence in Asia and internationally. The White Paper commits Australia to a US-led military confrontation with Beijing to preserve what it calls the "rules-based global order"—that is, the ability of the US and its allies, under conditions of intractable economic crises and geopolitical turmoil, to dictate the international rules in the interests of their financial and corporate elites. Australian imperialism has joined the US war drive as the means of advancing its own economic and strategic interests not only in its immediate sphere of influence in the South West Pacific but more broadly in Asia and around the world.

Australia has been placed on a war footing against China. Military spending will be ramped up to at least 2 percent of gross domestic product in order to finance a massive expansion of the country's armed forces. Over the next decade, some \$195 billion is to be spent on new submarines, warships, jet fighters and an array of other military hardware. The sole purpose of the acquisitions is to better equip the Australian military to participate in what the Pentagon has labelled the "AirSea Battle Concept"—plans for devastating air strikes and missile attacks on mainland China, supported by a naval blockade to strangle the Chinese economy. It is an open secret that the US military has parallel plans for the wholesale use of nuclear weapons in any conflict with a major rival such as China.

Such is the debased state of official Australian politics, that not one politician, media commentator or

public figure has stepped forward to expose—let alone denounce—the criminality, not to mention insanity, of collaborating in the preparations for a nuclear holocaust. No reference is made in the Australian media to the military calculations that are undoubtedly being made behind the scenes as to how many millions of Australians let alone Chinese, Americans and many others would be slaughtered. The potential triggers for such a catastrophe are increasing. The US and its regional allies are challenging Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea; a highly volatile state of affairs exists on the Korean Peninsula; and sharp Sino-Japanese tensions are continuing in the East China Sea.

The entire political establishment has endorsed the central thrust of the White Paper. The opposition Labor Party's sole criticism is that the conservative Coalition government has not yet followed Washington in provocatively sending Australian warships into territorial waters around Chinese-controlled islets in the South China Sea. The only concern expressed by the Greens was that the level of military spending might delay returning the government's budget to surplus.

The pseudo-left organisation Socialist Alternative, which denounced opposition to the US-led neo-colonial intervention in Syria as "knee-jerk anti-imperialism," has consciously downplayed the threat of war. Since the former Labor government endorsed the US "pivot to Asia" in 2011, the entire fake "left" has maintained a conspiracy of silence about the US military build-up throughout the region, including in Australia, in order to block the development of an anti-war movement of workers and youth.

The only party that has warned the working class of the danger of war—through constant analysis on the *World Socialist Web Site*, public meetings and election campaigns—is the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the

Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

The publication of the Australian White Paper underscores the correctness of the analysis made in the ICFI statement of February 18, 2016, “Socialism and the Fight Against War.” The war drive, the statement stressed, “is a conspiracy of the capitalist elites, orchestrated by the highest levels of government, the military-intelligence apparatus, the corporate-financial oligarchy and a corrupted right-wing media, without even the pretext of democratic debate.”

The militarist agenda spelled out in the White Paper is incompatible with the democratic and social rights of the working class. The expansion of the armed forces will be financed through devastating spending cuts to health, education and other essential social services.

Mass opposition to austerity and the lunacy of war will emerge. That is why the Australian ruling class is seeking to condition the population by devoting vast resources to stoking up xenophobia and nationalism through the persecution of refugees, and promoting narrow-minded patriotism by glorifying the actions of Australian imperialism in World War I. At the same time, under the guise of the “war on terror,” it is preparing police state methods to suppress any opposition.

The situation in Australia is replicated, to one degree or another, in all the imperialist centres in North America, Japan and Europe. Everywhere, the capitalist class has responded to its crises by turning to militarism. The bogus “war on terror” has been used to justify the destruction of entire countries and regions, from Afghanistan and Iraq, to North West Pakistan and Yemen, to Libya and Syria, and to inflict unspeakable human suffering. Now, the supposed “threat” posed by Russia and China is being exploited to prepare new wars so as to ensure the global domination of the US and its allies. The nationalist rhetoric and military build-up of the regimes in Moscow and Beijing—the political representatives of corrupt capitalist oligarchies—only fuels the danger of war.

More than a century ago, Leon Trotsky wrote that World War I represented the “most colossal breakdown in history of an economic system destroyed by its own inherent contradictions.” Today, the struggle between rival capitalist elites and antagonistic national-states for sources of profit again threatens the survival of human

civilisation.

However, the same contradictions are providing the impulses for the greatest revolutionary movement of the international working class in history. Workers in Australia, in the United States, in Japan and across Asia, in China and Russia, and around the world are not going to be passively dragged into the maelstrom of war and catastrophe. They have class interests and will fight for them. The critical issue is the development of the necessary revolutionary leadership to lead the working class in the overthrow of capitalism and its outmoded nation-state system, and the establishment of world socialism.

The ICFI is that leadership. In its statement of February 18, the ICFI set out the historically-derived and verified principles that provide the essential political foundation for the unification of the immense social strength of the working class into an international mass movement against war and imperialism. Workers and youth in Australia, as in every country, should do everything they can to ensure the statement is circulated and discussed as widely as possible, and join the SEP and the ICFI to fight for a socialist and internationalist perspective.



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