

Australian election: Military spending is war preparation, not “industry policy”

James Cogan—SEP candidate for the Senate in NSW
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At the very centre of the policies of both the Liberal-National Party Coalition and of the opposition Labor Party are plans to spend at least \$194 billion over the next decades on a massive program of military acquisitions. Defence spending as a whole will reach \$495 billion over the coming 10 years—money that will be gouged from essential social services such as health and education.

Contracts have been entered and projects begun to equip the Australian Navy with 21 new ocean-capable patrol boats; 12 offshore patrol vessels; nine missile-guided frigates and 12 submarines. The Army is to be provided with hundreds of new combat vehicles, land-based missile systems that are primarily intended for use against ships, and new helicopters for its Special Forces’ units. The Air Force will acquire up to 72 F-35 Joint Strike Fighters; long-range drone surveillance aircraft and transport aircraft. At least 5,000 more armed forces personnel will be recruited.

Billions more will be spent on various northern Australian airbases so that they can accommodate larger aircraft. An airfield on the tiny Cocos Islands, in the Indian Ocean, will be upgraded for military purposes at a potential cost of \$200 million. Naval bases such as HMAS Stirling in Western Australia will be enlarged to cope with more regular visits by US aircraft carrier battle groups and nuclear submarines.

One of the most striking features of the first weeks of the Australian election campaign has been the efforts across the media and political establishment to conceal the reasons for this militarist agenda.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, when he announced the election on May 8, declared it was to “equip our armed forces with the capabilities they need to keep us safe” while “investing in Australian advanced manufacturing, in Australian technology, in

Australian science, in Australian industry creating thousands of high-tech jobs right across our nation.”

Speaking on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s “Q&A” program on May 23, Liberal cabinet minister Christopher Pyne said the military spending was “to drive high-technology advanced manufacturing jobs in naval ship building and in other parts of the defence industry, because that creates jobs here and amazing spin-off effects in terms of research, development, new ideas that create jobs.”

Speaking on the same program, Labor Party powerbroker Anthony Albanese agreed and declared the increased military spending was a “bipartisan position.” Echoing Pyne, he asserted that there would be a “spin-off in terms of advanced manufacturing, smart manufacturing...”

That is, the greatest expenditure on military hardware since World War II is being portrayed to workers and youth as something resembling a program of beneficial public works, intended to generate jobs and stimulate economic growth. To the extent that either Labor or Liberal refer to what the array of warships, fighters, anti-shipping missiles and Special Forces squads will be used for, they claim it is for “national defence” or “to keep the country safe.”

The only party in the election telling the working class the truth about the military build-up is the Socialist Equality Party.

Tens of billions are not being spent on upgrading the armed forces for “national defence,” let alone to create jobs or new manufacturing industries. The real purpose of the vast expenditure is to better equip the Australian military to fight alongside the United States in a major war against China in the Asia-Pacific region. The US “pivot to Asia,” involving the concentration of 60 percent of the American Navy and Air Force in the

region and now regular US provocations against Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea, has brought tensions to breaking point. (See: “Spy plane ‘intercept’ highlights US push for South China Sea confrontation”)

Air bases are being upgraded so that northern Australia can be used by long-range American B-2, B-1 and B-52 bombers to attack mainland China. The F-35s are intended to give the Australian Air Force a capability that can match the most advanced Chinese aircraft.

The Army is acquiring anti-ship missiles so it can deploy units to assist in enforcing a naval blockade against Chinese ships trying to pass through the key sea lanes between the Indian and Pacific Oceans—such as the Sunda and Lombok Straits through Indonesia.

In the short-term, Army Special Forces are getting new equipment so they can operate more effectively in the US-led wars in Iraq and Syria.

Yesterday, the media reported the little known details of what Australian troops are doing in Iraq. They are on the front-line of an assault on the Islamic State (ISIS)-held city of Fallujah, accompanying the troops of the Iraqi government they have trained over the past year. Australian F-18s are among the aircraft carrying bombing missions against targets in Fallujah. Up to 75,000 civilians, predominantly of a Sunni Muslim background, are trapped in the devastated city and living in terror of air strikes and reprisals by sectarian elements among the Shiite-dominated government forces.

The election candidates of the Greens and the pseudo-left Socialist Alliance—both of which once postured as “anti-war”—say nothing about the dangers of conflict with China, and rarely even comment on Australian operations in the Middle East. They are part of the conspiracy of silence surrounding the preparations for a catastrophic war.

The candidates of the SEP will use every opportunity during the election to oppose militarism and war. As our statement makes clear, we call for the repudiation of the US-Australia alliance and all military basing arrangements with the US and other countries. We demand that all Australian troops, as well as police and intelligence personnel, be immediately withdrawn from Afghanistan, the Middle East and Asia-Pacific countries. The military apparatus must be disbanded,

and the vast resources wasted on war preparations reallocated to socially useful purposes, including building badly-needed social services and infrastructure throughout Australia and the region.

Our election campaign is part of the fight by our world party, the International Committee of the Fourth International, to build a new international anti-war movement on the foundations of socialist and internationalist principles.

If you oppose war, the only party you should support and vote for in the 2016 Australian election is the Socialist Equality Party.

To contact the SEP and get involved, visit our website or Facebook page.



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