

Australian voters speak out against drive to war

Our reporters
5 July 2016

On July 2, the day of the Australian federal election, Socialist Equality Party campaigners spoke to voters at polling booths about the mounting threat of a US-led conflict with China and the impact of 25 years of continuous wars and military intrigues.

Throughout the eight-week election campaign, Labor, the Liberals and the Greens, along with the corporate press, suppressed any discussion of the growing war danger.

No reference was made to the report issued in May by the US-based Union of Concerned Scientists warning that tensions between the US and China, particularly in the South China Sea, threatened a military clash that could rapidly escalate into a nuclear conflagration. Similarly, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute report, published in early June, pointing to the likelihood of Australian involvement in any military conflict between Washington and Beijing has also been blacked out.

At the same time, all of the major parties support the massive US military build-up in the Asia-Pacific region, and its reckless provocations against China. In the midst of the campaign, Labor's shadow defence minister Stephen Conroy declared that a Labor government would deploy Australian warships and military aircraft inside Chinese-claimed territorial waters in the South China Sea—an act of war that could spark a clash.

Despite the official conspiracy of silence, many workers and young people denounced the growth of militarism.

In Brisbane, **Connaugh**, a young worker, spoke to SEP candidates for the Senate in Queensland, Erin Cooke and Mike Head.

He expressed opposition to the plans for war against China. "I think at the end of the day we are all one people. War creates violence. There is no point sending more funding into the military. If what is spent on the military was put on hold, you would be able to provide every citizen in the world with a higher rate of education than

they currently have.

"Nuclear weapons are one of the worst things mankind has ever laid hands on. They have the power to destroy the world. One nuclear weapon being set off today, with how tensions are across the world, it could set off a domino effect that could destroy the planet."

Connaugh condemned the Australian government's plans to spend \$495 billion on the military by 2026. "That could build thousands and thousands of houses, and much bigger than what the socially disadvantaged are put into, which is a studio bedroom and the bare necessities. You should provide people with affordable and sustainable housing."

The young worker denounced the inequality of capitalism. "The rich 1 percent are hoarding money. That money should be used to benefit society. The working class has to realise that capitalism and the two-party system are flawed. Labor and Liberal are two sides of the same coin. We have to get rid of the coin."

Susana, a teachers' aide, was worried that her son had decided to join the military. She noted the emergence of economic conscription in working class suburbs. "My son is joining the army because I am a single mother of six children, working as a teachers' aide, and I cannot afford to pay for him to go to university. He wants to study communication and international affairs and through the defence force he will get a diploma.

"I would rather my son went to university ... I'd rather the government put the money into education, because without education we have no jobs. Children end up on the streets. Rather than spending billions on the military, they should put that money into helping children, helping the housing situation, helping education and the schools."

Sean spoke to WSWs reporters in the seat of Wills, in Melbourne's inner city. He voted for the SEP's candidate, Will Fulgenzi, in the House of Representatives and also cast a ballot for the party's Senate slate. Sean

previously spent four years in the navy but is now involved in filmmaking, music and teaching.

“I have been concerned about the [US] pivot for a long time,” he explained. “I was annoyed when Obama put his troops in Darwin. I was concerned about the way he did it. There was no consultation. It gave the Chinese a legitimate reason to be annoyed with us. I think we should be developing a relationship with China, rather than threatening them.

“Hardly anybody is questioning what’s happening.” Sean noted the establishment of a new US Marine base in Darwin under the last Labor government, commenting, “I saw it when Julia Gillard invited Obama in to place a lot of troops here—without a referendum or even any discussion, it just happened.”

Sean also denounced the persecution of refugees, declaring, “I think it is absolutely shameful that both sides are advancing ‘border control.’ Refugees are not about border control, refugees are a humanitarian issue. We need to be looking after them.”

Atif was one of several workers originally from the Middle East and South Asia who spoke with the WSWs in Melbourne about the impact of US militarism around the world. “I think the drive to war in this region is a very important issue, but I didn’t see it highlighted at all during the election,” he said. “I would have voted for you if I had have seen you before ...”

Atif spoke about growing military tensions in the Asia-Pacific. “I know about the South China Sea, it’s open water. I know China feels unsafe by other powers like the US coming in. The US is trying to intimidate other countries. The economic crisis is what drives them to carry this out. I’m totally against war in any way, bombing, and innocent people getting killed. I don’t agree with the drone bombings going on in Pakistan by the US. It’s just indiscriminate killing of innocent people.

“The workers are the ones who will be sent to war. All it enables is business interests to make money, like what happened in the Middle East. The workers are the ones who get killed, the ordinary people are the ones who suffer. The wealthy always get protected. I’ve seen it in many countries in the Middle East.”

In the seat of Blaxland in Sydney’s southwest, the WSWs spoke to **Fredan**, a student originally from Afghanistan. In the last decade, the suburb of Auburn, one of Sydney’s most impoverished, has settled a number of Afghan and Iraqi workers following the invasion of both countries by the US and its coalition partners, including Australia.

Fredan and his family left Afghanistan in 2005 when he was just five years of age. “All wars are based on lies,” he said. “No war is based on the truth. They invaded Afghanistan over 9/11 but all the attackers were from Saudi Arabia. Didn’t Obama say recently that that he was going to release some classified information about Saudi involvement? They still haven’t done it. Why did they go after Afghanistan? It’s all about making money. Companies making money. Rich people making money.

“At the end of the day we get caught in the wars and the ordinary people suffer. You don’t have rich kids going to war. It’s the poor sending their sons and daughters overseas fighting. It won’t make a difference if you vote for Labor or Liberal or the rest of them. Nothing is going to change. Whatever the government, it’s the rich people and the companies that decide.”

He spoke about the impact of wars on military veterans. “Look at those who fight wars and come back. Like the veterans in America or here. They are injured and they aren’t taken care of. They’re left to live on the streets homeless, with no job and no future. Some of them have PTSD. They are put on pills and then kill themselves through suicide because they’re not treated properly.”

In Newcastle, **Julianna**, a disability support pensioner living in community housing noted that war abroad and poverty at home went hand in hand. She said it was “really hard living on welfare payments,” and that medicine alone cost her \$100 a month.

Asked about Australia’s central role in the US plans for war against China, she replied, “I am very anti-war, and no I didn’t know about that. But it doesn’t surprise me. They hide that stuff. I don’t think most Australians would have any idea about the drive to war because they put other things in the headlines to hide it.”

Julianna said that the last 15 years of war in the Middle East “were fought for oil. If they were worried about the people, they would let them into this country as refugees. All of this stuff about ‘taking jobs’ is ridiculous. I think it is disgusting what they do to refugees. After WWII with what happened to the Jews, it was supposed to be that we would never let this happen again. Although what is happening now is not quite the same, it is pretty similar.”



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