Arms maker Lockheed Martin opens University of Melbourne research centre

Eric Ludlow, Will Morrow
30 December 2016

Behind the backs of the student body, the University of Melbourne has agreed to host a leading new research centre for the American arms manufacturing giant Lockheed Martin.

The decision represents a further step in Australia's integration into the US global military build-up and Washington's preparations for war against Russia and China.

The $13-million Science, Technology, Engineering Leadership and Research Laboratory (STELaR Lab) will open its doors in 2017 at the university's Parkville campus. According to Lockheed Martin Australia, it will be the first "multi-disciplinary R&D (research and development) facility" established outside the US.

It is inconceivable that such a decision could be made without the active involvement of the highest levels of the American and Australian states, in tandem with the university chancellor. Lockheed Martin (LM) is the largest arms maker in the world. It is responsible for developing some of the latest, and most highly-coveted, American war technology, the secrecy of which underpins Washington's ability to remain militarily in advance of its geo-political rivals. LM's designs include the next generation of F-35 Joint Strike Fighter combat aircraft, as well as Hellfire-II missiles, the signature weapons of Washington's fleet of Predator and Reaper drones, which have become synonymous with the Obama administration's criminal wars in Iraq, Syria, Pakistan and Yemen.

STELaR Lab will play a major role in advancing this technology. According to an August 1 report in the *Age*, one of its goals will be "developing sophisticated computer software to help direct attacks" on targets. LM Australia and New Zealand chief executive Raydon Gates said it would develop "the ability in a conflict situation to analyse that data and then make the correct decision." This technology is crucial for waging war against a major adversary, which involves attacking targets from multiple positions at once.

The lab will develop on "autonomous systems, robotics, command, control, communications, computing, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance," according to the arms maker's web site. It will also focus on development of hypersonic aircraft, which travel at more than five times the speed of sound. The US already conducts hypersonic aircraft tests at the Woomera testing range in South Australia.

In other words, unbeknownst to students and staff, the University of Melbourne is being made into a central node for Washington's preparations for new wars.

STELaR Lab's inaugural director is Dr. Tony Lindsay. Linday's role underscores the central involvement of the US and Australian governments. From 2005–2008, Lindsay worked in Washington as the Department of Defence's top science diplomat at the Australian Embassy. His last position was at the Defence Science and Technology Group (DST Group), the Australian government's lead agency for developing military technology. DST Group is the second largest publicly-funded research institute in the country, with an annual budget of over $400 million and a staff of 2,300, mainly scientists and engineers. Lindsay headed DST Group's National Security and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance division.

Less than two months before announcing the new centre, Lockheed Martin Australia placed former Australian Labor Party leader Kim Beazley on its board. Beazley was ambassador to the US from 2010 until February 2016 and is highly connected and trusted among the upper echelons of the American state. He earned the nickname "bomber Beazley" for his enthusiastic support for military spending and US-led wars, and is being rewarded with a seat on the board of the Australian branch of the largest US arms manufacturer, where he will help oversee its direction.

Liberal-National Coalition Defence Minister Christopher Pyne, as well as Stephen Conroy, then Labor's shadow minister for defence, and Victorian Labor Premier Daniel Andrews, all attended STELaR Lab's launch on August 2. Pyne made clear that the centre's establishment was part of a broader effort to integrate the universities into the military-intelligence apparatus. The government was committed to "build the innovation capabilities of Australian industry, academia and research institutions and to deliver innovative solutions for Defence capability," he said.

Professor Iven Mereels, Dean of the Melbourne School of Engineering, has stated that the faculty is "looking forward to joining with Lockheed Martin to pursue training opportunities in systems engineering in support of the significant defence effort presently underway in Australia."

© World Socialist Web Site

According to the *Australian* on August 5, LM's regional head Raydon Gates said the site selection for STELaR Lab followed a rigorous internal evaluation process. He noted that Melbourne was one of the strongest performing university cities in the world, behind Boston and London. In recent years, however, Melbourne has been made a regional hub for US and Australian military research and development. This has taken place alongside Australia's growing integration into the Obama administration's military-build up throughout the region as part of the preparations for war against China, under the "pivot" to Asia.

In 2010, the DST Group—then under Kevin Rudd's Labor government—together with the Victorian state government and the University of Melbourne, established the Defence Science Institute (DSI) on the university's Parkville campus. DSI's stated purpose is to "build defence science research networks" and "assemble disciplinary teams including defence scientists and engineers." It hosts regular symposiums where researchers present before other teams and representatives of giant arms corporations.

DSI also funds specific research projects. One of those publicly acknowledged is led by RMIT University into "unmanned aircraft systems" that can fly and harvest their own energy in "urban environments." Yet another, which has "significant contributions from the DSI and US army," involves development of artificial enzymes which may "decontaminate nerve agents ... offering protection to war fighters and civilians in a range of chemical and biological threats." In other words: research for urban conflicts and chemical-biological warfare.

In October 2014, LM established its Asia Pacific Information and Communication Technology (ICT) engineering hub at Clayton in Melbourne, which is also the location of Monash University. There is little information available about its operations. LM says the centre would "secure Commonwealth government and international contracts, particularly in South Asia and the Middle East." It would "expand existing local skills in online security, data management, applications development, and larger-scale IT services," expanding the "local skills base" for LM's cyber centre in Canberra.

In 2015, Oxford University announced a Global Cyber Security Capacity Centre—the first of its kind outside the UK—in the Melbourne suburb of Dandenong. The Andrews state Labor government concurrently announced a new Oceania Cyber Security Centre: a collaboration of eight Victorian universities, including the University of Melbourne, "with the broad aim of engaging industry to develop research and training opportunities for dealing with cyber security issues." It is located alongside the Oxford University centre.

These announcements followed the formation of a national Defence Materials Technology Centre (DMTC) by the Rudd government in May 2008. It is located at Swinburne University in the Melbourne suburb of Hawthorn. It received $30 million from the federal government and another $52 million from industry and state governments.

DTMC's website states that it targets "areas of defence priority where an Australian industrial capability footprint already exists." Its research is focussed on advanced materials for armoury, watercraft and aircraft. DTMC comprises a core staff of 60 full-time equivalent employees, mainly scientists, in industry, research centres and universities. "Core participants" include RMIT University, Swinburne University and the University of Melbourne. It also networks with smaller-scale advanced manufacturing companies.

Because of its history as a centre of manufacturing, Victoria also has a broader community of small-scale advanced manufacturing companies that can be integrated into war production. The state is contributing 70 percent of Australia's input into LM's F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

Students and staff at the University of Melbourne should oppose the establishment of the latest centre and the broader effort to transform the university into a bastion of military research. The US military build-up is part of Washington's preparations for a new war that threatens mankind with nuclear catastrophe.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) fights to build an international, socialist movement of workers, students and youth against the drive to war and its source: the capitalist profit system. For more than two and a half years, the University of Melbourne Student Union's Clubs and Societies Committee prevented the IYSSE from affiliating a club on campus. This served to cut students off from the only organisation opposing the US plans for war against China and Australia's integration into the "pivot."

There is no doubt that university and government authorities did not want an anti-war organisation on campus fighting to politically mobilise students against the drive to war and expose the university's integration into the military preparations. The IYSSE's affiliation at the University of Melbourne this year represents a critical step forward in the fight against war. Those looking for a way forward in this fight should join the IYSSE and help build the necessary socialist leadership for workers, students and youth.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site