

Australian Labor leaders endorse Trump's war drive against North Korea

Mike Head**28 September 2017**

Against the backdrop of US President Donald Trump's increasingly inflammatory threats against North Korea, Australian Labor Party opposition leader Bill Shorten and Labor's foreign affairs spokesperson Penny Wong travelled to South Korea and Japan this week to underscore their party's readiness to support the US drive to war.

Reflecting Australia's role as a key linchpin of US strategy and war preparations in the Asia-Pacific, the pair was given the kind of access to political and military leaders normally reserved for government leaders. Shorten and Wong met with South Korean Prime Minister Lee Nak-yeon, former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, the commander of the US Forces in Korea, General Vincent Brooks, and Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono.

Speaking from Japan yesterday, Shorten explicitly defended Trump's latest threats against North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, which included branding Kim a "rocket man" on a "suicide mission." Shorten declared that global peace was at risk due to Pyongyang's behaviour, not the US president's reckless and provocative remarks.

Shorten abandoned his previous stance of refusing to openly support Trump's belligerent remarks. "I get asked on a regular basis about President Trump's language," he said. "I've just got to make clear, the language is not the key issue."

In reality, it is Washington, not the small, impoverished state of North Korea, that is threatening the world with a potential nuclear war. Shorten's comments amounted to an endorsement of Washington's policy of bellicose threats and military provocations against the Pyongyang regime.

The four-day mission featured a visit, under US military auspices, to the South Korean side of the

demilitarised zone (DMZ) to peer across the North Korean border. There, Shorten and Wong did their best to boost the Trump administration's propaganda. Wong said the DMZ trip was a "sobering" reminder of the risk North Korea poses to South Korea, Japan and the world.

In Japan, the pair also echoed Trump in demanding that China and Russia enforce the UN Security Council sanctions designed to cripple the North Korean economy. In line with Washington's demands for complete capitulation by North Korea, Shorten couched his comments in terms of "pressuring" the North Korean regime to stop its missile tests and nuclear weapons program.

By naming China and Russia, Shorten pointed to the fact that the US drive to ratchet up the tensions on the Korean Peninsula is ultimately directed against these two Eurasian powers, which Washington regards as the main threats to US global hegemony.

Shorten and Wong lined up completely with Australia's Liberal-National Coalition government. They said their trip was intended to demonstrate Labor's "strong bipartisanship" in backing the government, which has already committed to taking part in any US war against North Korea.

In effect, Shorten gave a pledge that a Labor government would continue Australia's unconditional alignment behind Washington and its allies. He stated: "Our visit will demonstrate our bipartisan support for the Republic of Korea and Japan, and demonstrate that a change of government will not affect Australia's strong support for both nations at this dangerous and challenging time."

During the tour, Shorten tweeted on September 27: "The govt has been doing 'good work' to encourage an international response against North Korea." This

was just days after the Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop used an address to the UN General Assembly to condemn North Korea and demand that China and Russia apply escalating economic pressure on Pyongyang.

The Shorten-Wong tour also came a week after Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull appeared on breakfast television to voice full support for Trump's fascistic diatribe at the UN, which included a threat to "totally destroy" North Korea—a barely-veiled threat to use nuclear weapons in any conflict.

"I mean, President Trump and I have said exactly the same thing," Turnbull declared. "If he [Kim Jong-un] attacks the United States, that is a suicide note for his regime." Turnbull also gave another guarantee of Australia's involvement if war broke out with North Korea. Australia "will come to America's aid," he said.

Shorten and Wong followed in the footsteps of Defence Minister Marise Payne, who travelled to South Korea earlier this month. There she confirmed Canberra's readiness to again join a US-led war on the Korean Peninsula, as it did during the 1950–53 Korean War. Payne also went to the Philippines to announce that more Australian Special Forces troops would be sent to the southern province of Mindanao to support US and Philippine military operations, under the guise of combatting alleged Islamic State-linked fighters.

Earlier this month also, a flotilla of Australian warships was dispatched on a three-month tour of the Asia-Pacific region to conduct training exercises with the militaries of countries that are broadly aligned with the US against China. In addition, US satellite and spy bases in Australia are intimately involved in identifying targets for attack in the event of military strikes against North Korea.

This line up behind US militarism, which has seen the Australian political establishment join every US-led war since World War II, including in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, is not a matter of functioning as a US puppet. Despite its increasing economic reliance on exports to China, the Australian ruling class depends heavily on the US, both for investment and the military-strategic backing Canberra needs to pursue its own predatory interests in the Asia-Pacific.

The tour by Shorten and Wong is in keeping with

Labor's historical role as the Australian capitalist class's main party of war. That role was reinforced in World War II, when a Labor government was brought to office in 1941 to conduct the Pacific War and establish the US alliance.

The last Greens-backed Labor government, in which Shorten and Wong served as key ministers, fully embraced the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" in November 2011. With the enthusiastic backing of the Greens, Labor provided President Barack Obama with the platform of the Australian parliament to formally announce the military and strategic shift, directed against China and signed agreements to boost American access to Australian military bases.

The Shorten-Wong tour is a further warning of military and ideological preparations for war, in which the entire Australian political elite, including Labor and the Greens, and corporate media are seeking to whip up support for a US-led onslaught on North Korea.



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