

Australian Labor Party aligns behind Biden's offensive against China

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In a speech last week, the Labor Party's shadow foreign minister, Senator Penny Wong, reinforced her party's commitment to the escalating US conflict with China, echoing the provocative accusations of the Biden administration. In fact, she charged the current Liberal-National government with undercutting military preparations for war.

At the same time, Wong gave voice to nervousness within the ruling class about members of the Australian government openly "beating the war drums," for fear of triggering public opposition to the prospect of a catastrophic war.

Defence Minister Peter Dutton last month provoked considerable alarm by calling for a "frank discussion" about the prospect of war, and declaring that such a war over Taiwan in the next five years "could not be discounted." Dutton himself was actually attempting to keep up with President Joe Biden's administration, echoing utterances by the outgoing and incoming heads of the US Indo-Pacific naval command about the likelihood of a war across the Taiwan Strait.

Labor's concern is that the drum-beating by Dutton and others could fuel popular anti-war sentiment rather than prepare public opinion for war, as intended. Opinion polls have continued to show widespread distrust of the US, and opposition to war. These sentiments erupted in the mass protests against the US-led invasions of Iraq in 2003, and again this month in demonstrations denouncing the US-backed Israeli bombardment of Gaza.

Wong launched a new book, titled *Red Zone*, by *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Age* international editor Peter Hartcher, one of the country's most vehement critics of anyone in Australia who questions the anti-China witch hunt.

In her remarks, Wong aligned herself closely behind

Biden, who publicly declared in a joint address to the US Congress last month his intention to prevent China, or any other perceived rival, from challenging in the 21st century the global and Indo-Pacific hegemony that US imperialism secured following World War II.

Biden has rapidly accelerated the US confrontation with China, first launched by the Obama-Biden administration's military and strategic "pivot to Asia" and intensified by President Trump's punitive trade war measures. In March, Biden hosted the first-ever summit of the leaders of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue ("Quad"), a quasi-military alliance between the US, Japan, India and Australia.

Wong misleadingly claimed that Biden was seeking to bolster such US military and strategic alliances across the Indo-Pacific region in order to "promote peace and security," not encircle and confront China. Standing reality on its head, she accused China of "aggression" in the face of these provocative and threatening developments.

Wong repeated the long list of allegations issued by Biden's administration. Her charges included "militarisation of disputed features of the South China Sea," repression in Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang, and "economic coercion" against multiple countries: "France, Japan, Norway, the Philippines, the UK, Taiwan, Mongolia, South Korea, Palau, Canada and, of course Australia."

This typifies the hypocrisy of the US and its closest allies. Whatever actions the Chinese regime is taking to respond to the US offensive, and to suppress internal working class dissent, its conduct is far outweighed by that of Washington.

Wong made no reference to the decades-long "aggression," "militarisation" and "economic coercion" of US imperialism, including by

orchestrating military coups and other regime-change operations around the world, such as in Indonesia in 1965-66 and Chile in 1973. These include the removal of Kevin Rudd as Australian prime minister in 2010 for suggesting that the Obama administration should accommodate itself to the economic rise of China.

Nor did Wong mention the barbaric and disastrous US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and Washington's financial, military and political backing for the Israeli Zionist regime's mounting violence against the Palestinian people.

Like the Biden administration, Wong declared that China, under President Xi Jinping, would "go to great lengths to remove what it perceives to be threats" posed by "liberal, democratic values" to China's stability. While the Chinese regime is a police-state operating in the interests of its ruling capitalist class, the US and its partners have not the slightest concern for the democratic rights of the Chinese masses, any more than they do for those of the working class at home.

Rather the banner of "human rights" is raised cynically only to seek to justify wars of aggression and plunder, and advance the interests of the US and allied financial oligarchy, as in the Middle East and around the globe for decades.

Wong criticised Prime Minister Scott Morrison's government for not doing enough, militarily and economically, to prepare for outright conflict with China. The Liberal-National Coalition had "presided over eight long years of disastrous failures to deliver the enhanced military, security and diplomatic capability that our strategic circumstances really do require."

Labor's spokeswoman accused the government of "an ongoing national security disgrace" by mismanaging the acquisition of a new submarine fleet, first announced in 2009 by the Rudd Labor government, in which she was a cabinet minister. She condemned Morrison for "cutting \$4 billion from the short-term defence capital acquisition budget," while "re-announcing" upgrades of northern military bases.

Morrison's government had also failed to prepare Australia "by adequately diversifying our economy—which remains the most-China dependent in the world for exports." That reflects concerns in sections of the Australian capitalist class, especially those most reliant on exports to China, about the losses

they could face in the event of any serious conflict or confrontation with China.

Wong criticised what she termed "two fatalisms" about China. One was that China's rise "is inevitable and immune to accountability, and we need to just get used to it." The other was that "conflict is inevitable."

However, the very logic of her presentation is that China must be blocked at all costs, including by military means if necessary, voicing the program of the Biden administration itself.

In her remarks, Wong underscored the bellicose stance adopted at the recent Labor Party national conference, where the party and trade union officials passed no less than six resolutions condemning China. At that conference, Wong and party leader Anthony Albanese presented Labor as the party best able to impose the sacrifices needed in times of war, and boasted of it being the author of the US military alliance during World War II.

There is only one answer to the bipartisan line-up behind war preparations. In the US, China, Australia and every other country, workers have a common interest in preventing a potentially catastrophic war, fought with nuclear weapons. The hostility of workers and youth to the danger of another world war, this time fought with nuclear weapons, needs to be translated into a conscious movement of the global working class against imperialism and all its political agencies, including Labor and the unions, based on a socialist and internationalist perspective.



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