

Australia joins the few countries backing the US-led Olympic boycott

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Last week, the Australian government became the first, of barely a handful, to follow the Biden administration in announcing a “diplomatic boycott” of February’s Winter Olympics in Beijing.

The Biden administration declared its boycott on December 6, based on unsubstantiated and grotesquely misleading claims of “genocide” in China’s Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and other unspecified “human rights abuses.”

The following day, the *World Socialist Web Site* stated: “To make a false allegation of genocide is itself a political crime. The immensity of the lie expresses the scale of criminal intent lurking behind it. Washington has a long history of invoking ‘human rights’ to justify its imperialist aggression, but the official boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics may well win the gold medal for hypocrisy.”

A week on from Washington’s aggressive move against China, the list of countries joining it remains tiny—confined to just three key military allies, plus Lithuania and Kosovo, both small US-backed states.

The first to follow the US, like clockwork, was Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s Liberal-National government in Australia on December 7. Canada and the UK joined in on December 8, although British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, a vehement supporter of US militarism, clearly had doubts about the policy’s impact on the profit interests of British companies. “We do not support sporting boycotts,” he told parliament, but added there were “no plans for ministers to attend.”

In other words, the boycott attracted the support of no major powers except for Biden’s partners in this year’s AUKUS military pact against China, plus Canada. *Newsweek*, like other US corporate media outlets, ludicrously described this as a “growing list.”

In reality, the list of governments refusing to participate in the US call, or remaining conspicuously silent, is far

longer. It includes France, whose President, Emmanuel Macron, dismissed the boycott as “insignificant,” and Italy. The European Commission, the European Union’s executive arm, said major sporting events like the Olympics, with their universal audiences, “should not be used for political propaganda.”

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan said on December 7 his country had not yet decided who would represent the country in Beijing. Germany’s incoming chancellor, Olaf Scholz, refused to state a position on the same day.

New Zealand had notified China in October that it would not send any diplomatic representatives, but cited a range of factors, “mostly to do with COVID,” Deputy Prime Minister Grant Robertson said.

To add to the US debacle, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said he had accepted an invitation to attend the opening of the games.

The rank hypocrisy of the US position in claiming to defend human rights after invading and destroying entire countries in the past two decades is even clearer than in 1980, when 66 countries joined a US-led boycott of the Summer Olympics in Moscow. That was meant to be a protest against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which was triggered by Washington’s funding and arming of Muslim jihadists, including Al Qaeda, against the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul.

When he announced Australia’s boycott, Morrison said it should come as “no surprise” because of the breakdown in the relationship with China in recent years. That breakdown was intensified by the first-ever Quad leaders’ summit convened by Biden in March, bringing together a quasi-military alliance of the US, Japan, India and Australia, then the signing of the AUKUS treaty in September.

AUKUS is an unmistakeable preparation for war. Australia formed what amounts to a military alliance

against China with two nuclear powers, the US and the UK, which also pledged to supply Australia with a fleet of nuclear-powered attack submarines designed for long-range use in Chinese waters.

The AUKUS pact has been followed by inflammatory accusations by Canberra against China. Last month, Defence Minister Peter Dutton accused China of wanting to reduce other countries in the Indo-China region to “tributary states” and said it was “inconceivable” that Australia would not join a US war against China over Taiwan.

In an attempt to poison public opinion and overcome the underlying anti-war sentiment among ordinary people, Dutton invoked the spectre of Chinese missile attacks on Australian cities. He claimed that every major city, even the southern Tasmanian capital of Hobart, was now within range of Beijing’s missiles.

Morrison’s rush to back Biden’s boycott came as “no surprise” in another sense as well. He knew in advance that he had the backing of the Labor Party opposition. As Labor’s shadow foreign minister Penny Wong boasted, Labor had already publicly recorded its desire for a common position with the government on joining a boycott.

With the US Olympics boycott call flagging globally, Dutton further ratcheted up the confrontation with China last Friday. Referring explicitly to the “growing threat” posed by China, he said the Coalition government would buy up to 40 Black Hawk helicopters from the US. That meant dumping the country’s 47 European Airbus-designed MRH90 Taipan helicopters, which were originally due to be withdrawn in 2037.

While insisting that the Taipans had proven unreliable, Dutton pointed to closer integration into the US forces. He emphasised that the Black Hawks were “interoperable with our counterparts and with our allies” and “the favoured platform in the United States.”

Blackhawks are manufactured by Sikorsky, which is owned by Lockheed Martin. By buying them “off the shelf” at a cost of \$4.8 billion, the government hopes to rush the first six of the helicopters into service by early 2023.

The full “Americanisation” of the Australian military is proceeding apace. In October, the US State Department revealed it had approved the sale of 12 Romeo Seahawk helicopters for the Australian Navy, at a cost of \$1.3 billion. Earlier this year, the Morrison government scrapped European Tiger helicopters, to be replaced by American Apache Attack helicopters.

The decision to support the US boycott and the military purchases highlights the escalating commitment of the Australian ruling class to US imperialism amid escalating preparations underway for another catastrophic war with China.

Dutton, a far-right figure who is positioning himself to replace Morrison as splits and revolts wrack the unstable government, foreshadowed that the government would announce “many other” military-related decisions “in the coming months.”

A December 9 editorial in the Murdoch media’s *Australian* praised Dutton’s helicopter announcements, saying that he and “fellow members of the national security committee are acutely aware that military conflict may not be far off.”

The editorial hailed what it described as Dutton’s “historic National Press Club address last month,” in which he virtually put the country on a pre-war footing by declaring: “Defence and defence industry can no longer be satisfied with a business-as-usual mindset. Instead, they must be driven by a mission of utmost national significance and urgency.”

Labor reacted to Dutton’s helicopter switch by criticising the government from the right, branding it “the worst national security government in our country’s history” for not gearing up the military quickly enough. Shadow ministers Brendan O’Connor and Pat Conroy said 25 major defence projects were “running cumulatively 68 years late,” meaning military personnel were “not getting the equipment and platforms they need to do their jobs.”

Labor is continuing to present itself as the party best able to lead the country in war, as it did at its national conference in March, which unanimously passed no less than six resolutions denouncing China.

This bipartisan line-up on both the boycott and the military buildup is a warning of the plans underway for a disastrous war. That can and must be stopped by the building of a global anti-war movement, mobilising the working class on the basis of the common interests of workers in the US, China and internationally in overturning the root cause of war—the capitalist nation-state system of corporate profit.



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