

Australian parliament unites behind warmongering address by Ukrainian President Zelensky

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In a display of all-party unity, both houses of the federal parliament came together on Thursday to cheer on a militarist speech by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

The Ukrainian president was accorded a welcome that can be compared only with the fawning receptions of US presidents and British royalty when they have attended the parliament.

This had nothing to do with the hypocritical invocations of “democracy” surrounding Zelensky’s speech, much less any intrinsic characteristics of the comedian-turned politician. He heads a right-wing regime that has banned most opposition parties, collaborates with fascists and has presided over the further immiseration of working people in Ukraine.

Zelensky was greeted as the frontman of the US-NATO war drive against Russia, aimed at ensuring the hegemony of American imperialism. His government, having come to office based on promises of seeking peace with Russia, sharply escalated the confrontation with Moscow in line with US demands.

Zelensky collaborated with President Joseph Biden on the further transformation of Ukraine into a garrison state on Russia’s borders, deliberately provoking Vladimir Putin’s reactionary invasion. Since the conflict began, his government has been the recipient of tens of billions of dollars of advanced weaponry from the US and its NATO allies, a process of rearmament that began in 2014, in preparation for such a war.

The Ukrainian president has addressed several parliaments over the past month, including those of the US, Britain, Germany and Canada. His video-link speech to Canberra underscores the important role that the Australian political establishment is playing in the US-led war drive against Russia, which goes hand in hand with aggressive preparations for conflict with China in the Asia-Pacific.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison told Zelensky: “Yes, you

have our prayers, but you also have our weapons, our humanitarian aid and our sanctions against those who seek to deny your freedom. You even have our coal. And there will be more.” Morrison announced a further \$25 million in aid, most of it military, on top of more than \$150 million over recent weeks, two thirds of it in weaponry.

Morrison’s description of Putin, whom he refused to even name, was as provocative and bellicose as possible. “[W]e do not stand with the war criminal of Moscow,” Morrison stated. “I know that man; you know that man; we know that man, Mr Speaker; and we know his regime.”

This is the language of war. It is aimed at foreclosing any possibility of a diplomatic solution to the Ukrainian crisis. Morrison is one of the few heads of state to have echoed Biden’s unsubstantiated description of Putin as a “war criminal.” The US president has linked this designation to calls for regime change in Moscow.

The Australian hypocrisy is no less than that of the American president. Under Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition, Australia has joined every US-led war of the past 80 years. This included the illegal invasion of Iraq, a war for oil that claimed a million lives, and the decades-long neo-colonial occupation of Afghanistan.

Both major parties are currently involved in an ongoing attempt to cover up confirmed war crimes perpetrated by Australian special forces in Afghanistan, including the murder of civilians and prisoners.

Labor leader Anthony Albanese was at one with Morrison, as he is on every substantive issue. Albanese hailed Zelensky and Ukraine as the vanguard of a fight against “tyranny.” He effectively likened Putin to Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler. “What we see in Ukraine are terrible echoes of the devastation inflicted by Hitler’s forces in World War II,” Albanese said.

The Ukraine crisis had drawn “the West closer together,” i.e., it had strengthened aggressive US-led military alliances, including Washington’s relations with the European powers.

Albanese concluded by shouting “slava Ukraini!”

This phrase, translated as “Glory to Ukraine,” was first used by Stepan Bandera and his Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), which collaborated with Hitler’s war against the Soviet Union, and perpetrated massacres of Jews, Russians and Poles. In other words, having invoked the spectre of Hitler, Albanese repeated a catch-cry associated with those who fought alongside the Nazi dictator.

In his speech, Zelensky, who works closely with the successors of the OUN, sketched out a proposal for total war with Russia that recalls Germany’s World War II invasion. “Bringing global security is bringing Russia to peace and silence,” Zelensky declared. He called for additional sanctions, on top of the measures already imposed, that would “stop any business activity of Russia.”

As in his other addresses, Zelensky called for an even greater allocation of weaponry, including Bushmaster armoured vehicles. Morrison, with Labor’s full support, announced the next day that a fleet of armoured trucks would be dispatched by C-130 Hercules military planes as quickly as possible.

The government is sparing no effort to conduct international logistical operations that amount to gunrunning. By contrast, the tens of thousands of ordinary people devastated by flooding over the past month have been abandoned. In the New South Wales city of Lismore, residents were left to rescue one another, while the survivors of the disaster, struck by more floods this week, have been given only pittances of financial assistance.

The celebration of Zelensky is part of a broader militarist agenda. In its budget, delivered two nights before the Ukrainian president spoke, Morrison’s government announced a major expansion of military spending, while slashing health, education and other vital social programs.

In his budget reply, delivered immediately after Zelensky’s address, Albanese did not outline a single policy to alleviate the cost of living crisis or wage suppression. But he also insisted on a vast expansion of the defence budget, on top of record spending.

Some commentators have dubbed the federal election, which is due to be held in May, as a “khaki election.” Both major parties are pitching themselves to the US and Australian military-security apparatus as best placed to prosecute an aggressive militarist agenda alongside Washington.

This has a domestic component. The promotion of a wartime atmosphere is aimed at smothering mounting social and political opposition from the working class over the criminal, pro-business pandemic policies, social inequality and inflation.

The official war fever is in line with the underlying US-

NATO strategy. The American government and the Pentagon are activating plans, laid out over decades, for conflict with Russia and China, which are viewed as the chief threats to US hegemony. The response to Zelensky is a signal from Morrison and Albanese that they are fully on board with this program, which threatens nuclear world war.

The response to Zelensky recalls the 2011 visit to Australia by US President Barack Obama. He announced the “pivot to Asia,” a vast military buildup throughout the region, from the floor of the Australian parliament. The Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard immediately signed up to the “pivot,” a clear preparation for war with China, as did the Coalition and all the parliamentary parties. Greens MPs were among the first to congratulate Obama after his militarist address.

It was the same with Zelensky’s speech. Greens leader Adam Bandt hailed the Ukrainian president, having previously campaigned for expanded sanctions against Russia. All the right-wing populists also applauded.

The line-up extended to so-called independents. Andrew Wilkie, who has previously criticised aspects of US foreign policy, wrote on Twitter that while there was “Much nodding and clapping by MPs” during the speech, “what’s needed is for Aus to ramp up its support,” including by providing “serious military equipment and weapons.”

The all-party line up demonstrates that the fight against war can go forward only through the mobilisation of the working class against the entire capitalist political establishment. The Socialist Equality Party alone advances this perspective, as part of the fight for an international anti-war movement based on a socialist program.



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