

Australian PM promotes AUKUS as platform for a total war economy

Mike Head, SEP candidate for NSW Legislative Council
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Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese this week outlined a truly chilling vision of basing the country's entire economy on militarism and war.

He was speaking alongside US President Joe Biden and UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak at the US naval base in San Diego to unveil details of the AUKUS plan to supply Australia with nuclear-powered long-range submarines, which are designed specifically for attacking China from its coastal waters.

Albanese boasted that his Labor government was making “the biggest single investment in Australia's defence capability in our history,” predicted to cost an astronomical \$368 billion over 30 years.

This was dressed up as “deterrence” from “aggression” but it is a pivotal part of the escalating military encirclement of China by the US and its closest partners, accompanied by the provocative “Red Alert” declarations in the corporate media of the necessity to prepare for war with China within three years.

Albanese equated the AUKUS pact to the establishment of a car industry in Australia by the US transnational corporations General Motors and Ford in the wake of World War II. “The scale, complexity and economic significance of this investment is akin to the creation of the Australian automotive industry in the post-World War II period,” he declared.

Albanese thus likened the expansion of civilian industry following the last world war with the building of an economy based on destruction—the production of weaponry for the next world war, almost certainly a nuclear one that would threaten the very survival of humanity!

This would require, the prime minister emphasised, a “whole-of-nation effort.” That means the establishment of a total war economy in which all else, including social spending and the jobs, wages and conditions of

the working class, must be subordinated to the requirements of a vast military expansion.

Albanese proposed tying the future of young people to the fortunes of the military and weapons manufacturers, feeding off the eventual construction of eight submarines in Australia. He spoke of “creating jobs and growing businesses, right around Australia” and “educating young Australians today for the opportunities of tomorrow.”

In reality, comparatively few jobs are going to be created by the AUKUS deal, and even within an expanded military. Those who are incorporated are going to be trained to produce and use weapons capable of killing millions. The vast majority of youth will be condemned to unemployment and poorly paid, insecure casual jobs.

To compare the auto industry, which once directly or indirectly employed hundreds of thousands of workers, with AUKUS submarine production, touted to create 8,500 jobs at its peak in the 2040s, is a reactionary fraud on every level.

In the first place, an escalating US-led war is already underway, against Russia in Ukraine, and this is a prelude to war against China, with US generals and media outlets warning of war by 2025. Under the AUKUS deal, US nuclear submarines will be already based in Western Australia by the end of this year.

Secondly, the post-World War II launch of government-subsidised car assembly production in Australia, first by General Motors from 1948 and then by Ford in the 1950s and 1960s, was predicated on the military victory of US imperialism in the world war against German and Japanese imperialism.

After two such global conflagrations in the first half of the 20th century, at the cost of tens of millions of lives, the United States prevailed. Washington

established a military and economic hegemony over most of the world that paved the way for the global expansion of US industrial and financial giants.

On that basis, and with the assistance of the Stalinist bureaucracies in suppressing the revolutionary post-war struggles of the working class, global capitalism was restabilised after disastrous decades of war and depression. That laid the foundation for a short period of boom, during which workers forced the ruling class to make certain concessions, such as health, education and welfare programs.

During this period, American companies set up auto, whitegoods and other industries in other countries, including Australia. By the late 1980s, however, globalised production and the corporate exploitation of cheap labour platforms had shattered the post-World War II model. In Australia that led to the ruthless closure of the auto assembly industry, and many other manufacturing facilities, culminating in the shutdown of the last GM Holden assembly plant in Elizabeth, South Australia in 2017.

For decades, especially since the Hawke and Keating Labor governments of 1983 to 1996, Labor and the unions have enforced the dictates of the financial elite and globally-mobile transnational entities that scour the world, looking for the cheapest production costs and the highest rate of return for ultra-wealthy shareholders.

Albanese, echoing Biden, held out the prospect of “good jobs, with good wages.” In reality, the conditions of workers, whether employed by the giant weapons makers or enlisted in the armed forces, will be brutal, dictated both by corporate profit-making and the “sacrifices” demanded for the “war effort,” as happened in both world wars.

Far from an era of well-paid jobs, what is being prepared is sweatshop conditions in industries of mass destruction.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is standing in the March 25 New South Wales state election to oppose this entire program of militarism and war. We are the only party doing so. As we explain in our election statement, together with our sister parties around the world we are building an international anti-war movement of the working class, directed against the source of war, the capitalist profit system itself.

We say: “Two world wars are enough! Stop the warmongers! Tens of billions for education and

healthcare, not for militarism and war!”

Albanese’s propaganda about a future jobs bonanza is a cynical effort, working hand in glove with the trade union bureaucrats, to overcome widespread opposition among workers and young people to the prospect of a catastrophic nuclear war.

A “whole-of-nation” war economy requires political repression. It means silencing the anti-war sentiment that has continued since the horrors of the barbaric US-led interventions in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq, all based on proven lies.

Against the war-mongering nationalism of Labor and the unions, workers and young people need an international perspective, aimed at unifying their rising struggles globally against the corporate oligarchies and governments that demand they fight and kill each other for the benefit of the wealthy elites.

Above all, what is required is a socialist perspective, aimed at establishing workers’ governments to completely reorganise society in the interests of social need, not private profit. Socialist measures, including placing the massive corporations under public ownership and workers’ control, are the only way to establish basic democratic and social rights—including to decent, well-paid jobs and high-quality free education and healthcare for all.

We urge all our readers to support our election campaign and, above all, to join the SEP to build the revolutionary party needed to overturn capitalism and halt the plunge into World War III.

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