What the SEP was prevented from asking at the anti-AUKUS meeting in Sydney

Oscar Grenfell, Max Boddy
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On Sunday, the Marrickville Peace Group held a meeting opposing the AUKUS military pact and Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines from the US and Britain.

The meeting did not represent a genuine opposition to the US-Australian plans for war against China. Instead, it reflected the interests of a section of the Australian ruling elite, fearful of the consequences of all out conflict.

The organisers promoted as lead speaker Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, who as Colin Powell's chief of staff, drew up the infamous UN speech containing lies about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and links to Al Qaeda to justify invading Iraq. That address was the essential prelude to an illegal war that claimed a million lives. Labor politician Bob Carr also addressed the gathering, despite his long record as a US informant and warmonger.

Discussion from the floor was all but suppressed. Only three questions were permitted. WSWS writer and Socialist Equality Party candidate for the NSW election Oscar Grenfell was able to speak very briefly, before interruption. SEP assistant national secretary and candidate for Bankstown Max Boddy was among those not able to ask a question.

We post below what Grenfell and Boddy would have raised had they been permitted to speak.

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My name is Oscar Grenfell. I'm a journalist with the *World Socialist Web Site*. We've written extensively in defence of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange. I'm also an SEP candidate for the upper house in the NSW election.

We say very clearly that the fight for Assange's freedom and the fight against war requires an independent political movement of the working class. Workers are hostile to war, they have a deep going commitment to democratic rights, and they're being propelled into struggle all over the world by the crisis of capitalism.

The perspective of this meeting is very different. It's an appeal to sections of the political establishment and the ruling elite to see sense and turn away from war because of its impacts. Such appeals failed to halt two world wars in the 20th century. They also served to derail the mass anti-war movement 20 years ago, which despite its potential strength, was unable to prevent the invasion of Iraq.

My questions are these. To the organisers, you claim to be building an anti-war movement.

Why then are you promoting Colonel Wilkerson, a man who as Colin Powell's chief of staff, played a key role in concocting and promoting the lies about weapons of mass destruction used to justify the invasion of Iraq? Whatever his subsequent mea culpas, Wilkerson has never been held to account for his role in the greatest war crime of this century.

Secondly, why are you promoting Carr? This is a man who first became an informant for the US embassy, that is the CIA, in the 1970s just before the coup against Whitlam.

As foreign minister, Carr further aligned Australia with the US preparations for war against China. That included support for the stationing of US Marines in Darwin, US military aircraft rotating through Northern Australia and greater naval cooperation. In other words, Mr Carr and his Labor government were directly responsible for the genesis of what is taking place now with AUKUS and the further military build-up, again being overseen by a Labor government, this time led by Anthony Albanese.

Also as foreign minister, Carr called on Washington

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to begin assassinating Syrian government leaders. That was nothing less than advocacy for US state terrorism, which would have violated international law. He was intensely hostile to WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange, who he denounced as “amoral.” In 2012 Julian’s mother Christine Assange pleaded for the Labor government to intervene in her son’s defence. Carr rejected that plea with contempt. As per a 2012 AP article, Christine responded at the time by asking whether Carr was “a stooge of the US or did not care about her son.”

These are the individuals you’re promoting. To conclude: you can’t build an anti-war movement on the basis of figures who are directly responsible for US-led wars and imperialist crimes.

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My name is Max Boddy, I’m the Socialist Equality Party candidate for Bankstown in the NSW election. We have placed the fight against war at the centre of our campaign, unlike every other party including Labor, the Greens and Socialist Alliance.

What we’re witnessing today is an explosion of militarism. The US is seeking to overcome its historic decline through the waging of a proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. We opposed the Russian invasion, but the chief responsibility for this war rests with US imperialism and its allies, including Australia. This war threatens a third world war. A victory against Russia is seen by US imperialism as the essential component in Washington’s plans for war against China, which it views as its chief threat.

In your platform and reports today you do not mention this war, which is currently underway. Why is that? In your reports today, you have made only passing references to this war, but you have not opposed it. Why is that? You cannot oppose the war against China without also opposing the war against Russia.

The perspective of this Coalition is to appeal to the Labor government to pull back from war. This is bankrupt and futile. You are appealing to the very same Labor government that fully supported the pivot-to-Asia in 2011 and has escalated the drive to war against China.

You cannot oppose the threat of world war from a nationalist basis. Australia is an imperialist power. It has always advanced its own predatory interests in the Pacific in alliance with the dominant imperialist power of the day. You say nothing about Australian imperialism’s sordid record. That is because you support it. We say that the critical issue is to build an international anti-war movement of the working class, based on a socialist program that is directed against the source of war, the profit system.

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