

Anti-AUKUS demonstration in Australia promotes nationalism, “effective” military spending

Our reporters
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A demonstration in Melbourne on Saturday to protest the Australian-British-American (AUKUS) military alliance promoted Australian nationalism and an alternative form of militarism to that now being implemented by the federal Labor government.

Speakers at the event promoted the illusion that Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and his colleagues can be pressured into junking their \$386 billion commitment to purchase US nuclear powered submarines. They insisted that military spending could be directed towards more effective weaponry supposedly aimed at “defending Australia.”

The event, “Truth Not War,” was held by a coalition of organisations led by the No AUKUS Coalition Victoria and the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN). The mainly older audience of between 500 and 1,000 rallied outside Melbourne’s state library.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has previously noted that neither the anti-AUKUS Coalition nor IPAN represent genuine anti-war tendencies. Instead, they articulate the perspective of one wing of the ruling elite that has only tactical differences with AUKUS and its submarine program, and that calls for a more effective and “independent” Australian imperialism.

IPAN, for example, has stated that its aim is the development an “alternative defence policy,” in order to “secure the nation against potential adversaries” on the basis of “armed neutrality.” This, the organisation has outlined, would involve significant expenditure on, among other things, “long-range precision strike and sensor capabilities,” i.e., medium-range or greater missile systems.

At the Melbourne rally, speakers included Margie Beavis of the Medical Association for Prevention of War, Dave Sweeney of the Australian Conservation Foundation, and former Australian diplomat to China John Lander. The political orientation of the event was explained by the main and final speaker Professor Richard Tanter of RMIT University’s Nautilus Institute.

Tanter complained that the Australian military was “barely an autonomous force at the moment” because it was so closely integrated into the US armed forces. He continued that “submarines are very important for Australia in a rational world” but the problem with the ordered nuclear submarines is that they are not being designed to “defend Australia.” Tanter continued that the nuclear submarine spending is “disabling genuine defence of Australia, there will be no money left over for anything else—this is going to disable the possibility of an independent Australian foreign and defence policy.”

Tanter emphasised his agreement with aspects of the ideological offensive against both the Chinese and Russian governments. He said that he was “happy” to see the International Criminal Court issue an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin for alleged war crimes in Ukraine, and added that he regarded the issues in Tibet and Xinjiang as being the result of Chinese “settler colonialism.” Those statements dovetailed exactly with the positions of the Biden administration. The rank hypocrisy of US and Australian imperialism on both of these matters went unmentioned.

Tanter concluded with a lament that he had mistakenly anticipated that Anthony Albanese “might be halfway reasonable” on defence policy. The academic nevertheless insisted that the Labor government had “only” committed an immediate funding allocation of \$9 billion to the submarine project. The several years before the bulk of the \$368 billion commitment was due, Tanter continued, represented a “backdoor out of the trap.” He called for further protests and challenges to Labor parliamentarians, in order to “pressure” them into exercising this “backdoor.”

The Labor government is in reality marching in lockstep with Washington as it prepares for war against China, not in one- or two-decades time but in the immediate future. This was underscored by the militarist propaganda “Red Alert” series recently published in the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* newspapers, which demanded the population be

conditioned for war by 2026.

None of the speakers at last Saturday's rally called for the unification of working people internationally against war. The American working class was not mentioned, in line with the nationalist denunciations of the US. This anti-American politics represents, as the WSWS has previously characterised, the "anti-imperialism of fools."

The Melbourne rally's occasional rhetoric for "international solidarity" represented an appeal for an alliance of different nationalisms. This was the basis of the speech delivered by Alexia Fuentes of Bayan Australia, a Filipino expatriate organisation that has a common political line with the Stalinist-Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines. Fuentes falsely asserted that China is an imperialist power, and declared: "The US is not committed in defending the Philippines, as demonstrated in the face of Chinese incursions in the West Philippine Sea [South China Sea]."

The Anti-AUKUS Coalition and IPAN event underscored the pro-establishment orientation of these organisations. A genuine anti-war movement will not be built on the basis of a nationalist perspective that is oriented to the very parliamentary setup that is locked into the war drive against China. The social force that must be mobilised against war and militarism is the working class, with an independent, globally unified movement against the threat of a third world war developed through a struggle against the source of conflict, the capitalist system.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with some participants at the rally on Saturday, most of whom had not known about the event beforehand but stopped to listen to the speakers as they were passing by. The anti-war sentiments of ordinary working people sharply contrasted with the political orientation promoted by the event organisers.

Hassan, who works in the public sector, said: "I think that in war the people who are going to fight will be middle class or poor people in the army, they'll be who's dying. And the elite—they'll just be sitting in their homes, they won't be doing anything except giving orders and making money. Clearly, the amount of money that is going to be spent on the AUKUS deal, the billions and billions of dollars—I think if we'd have spent that money on healthcare, education, and other things, Australia would have been a better place and we could have created more job opportunities and invested in poorer countries."

He said that the US government saw China as a threat only because of its economic expansion. "I don't remember China invading any other countries and starting any wars, but on the other side, the US has fought many wars after World War II, they've been everywhere around the globe. So I don't think Australia should follow in those footsteps,

we should consider growing our economy and helping people within Australia. It's better to be friends with China rather than giving a signal that we're going to have a war with China in a few years."

Dee said: "Any kind of war, doesn't matter how small or big it is, I'm completely against it. Because it's not for the people, it's for a certain group of people—whether you call them the elite, or people on top—to make the maximum amount of money. I was looking at a chessboard the other day, and I was thinking how the people on top push all the pawns in front. It's like the soldiers—they have to fight, but the people who declare war just take a back seat and get entertained while making money."

Asked if she had been surprised by the Labor government's continuation and deepening of the pro-war policies of the previous Liberal-National government, Dee replied: "I'm not surprised at all. Because the government, at the end of the day, they support the big guys, the corporations, the people on top, they don't care about the poor people, the hardworking people, they don't care."

Con, a retiree, said: "Imperialism just isn't working out. Borders and nation-states, the conception of how we live, I just find it isn't working. Nations and nationalism, borders create this identity. I'm for being international. Look at the break-up of the Soviet Union and all of the different nations now, with the number of wars that are happening that didn't happen previously. Governments perpetuate this nationalism, look at what the US is doing in Ukraine. Now the US is funding the Ukraine war as much as it can. All I hope in coming here is to create awareness—the media controls the narrative at the moment."



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