

Anti-AUKUS meeting seeks to divert anti-war concern in reactionary nationalist direction

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A national zoom public meeting held by the Australian Anti-AUKUS Coalition (AAC) last Sunday underscored its role in seeking to divert the rising anti-war sentiment among workers and youth into a defence of Australian imperialism, as a supposedly “decent” middle power in the Asia-Pacific region.

The speakers at the meeting were obviously conscious of the widespread working-class opposition to the Albanese Labor government’s allocation of at least \$368 billion to purchase AUKUS nuclear-powered attack submarines, targeted against China.

Opening the proceedings, Bevan Ramsden, a spokesperson for the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN) and a correspondent for *Green Left Weekly*, the organ of the pseudo-left Socialist Alliance, spoke of the “heightened concern, if not outrage” over the AUKUS deal.

The online meeting was attended by about 200 people, including representatives of all pseudo-left groups and various pacifist, Stalinist and ex-Stalinist organisations.

Far from offering an anti-war perspective, as the AAC claims to do, the speakers advanced a reactionary nationalist outlook and a totally unrealistic one. They claimed that Australia could protect itself from a catastrophic global war—one that would endanger the entire planet!—by becoming independent, or at least a little less dependent on the United States.

Their central criticism of the AUKUS military pact with the US and UK was that it undermines the “national sovereignty” and “national interests” of Australia. That essentially means upholding the profit interests of the Australian ruling class, including in continuing to dominate and plunder the South Pacific and other parts of the region.

The speakers also appealed for a concerted push to bolster the efforts of ex-Labor leaders, notably former Prime Minister Keating, to oppose aspects of AUKUS on

that nationalist basis. They also promoted illusions that petitions, pressure and protests would convince the Albanese government to change course.

In other words, they sought to channel the hostility to the Labor government’s massive military spending and war preparations back into the hands of the same Labor apparatus that is unconditionally committed to the US alliance. Washington, which requires Australia and its military and intelligence bases for war against China, has no intention of permitting the slightest deviation from this alliance, on which Australian imperialism has depended since World War II for its own predatory activities across the region and internationally.

The first speaker, former senior *Australian Financial Review* journalist Brian Toohey, called for a return to a “defend Australia” policy, which he said had been pursued for decades by previous Labor and Liberal-Coalition governments.

Toohey was not opposed to expanded military spending. Instead, he advocated the purchase of a fleet of smaller but “superior” battery-powered submarines from Japan, Germany or South Korea, augmented by submerged drones, for deployment closer to Australia. These would “play to our strengths,” he declared, speaking in the language of the Australian strategic establishment.

This echoed the views of Keating, who last week called for the AUKUS funding to be re-assigned to a fleet of diesel-powered submarines to patrol the Australian coast.

Keating and Toohey speak for a minority wing of the ruling class that fears the disastrous consequences for Australian capitalism of participating in a full-blown war with China, its largest export market. But they would support wars to defend the profit interests of the Australian corporate elite.

Keating is a right-wing Labor leader whose government with Bob Hawke participated in US-led wars and interventions, including the first Gulf War of 1990-91,

which they calculated was to the advantage of Australian capitalism, and conducted neo-colonial activities in the Pacific region.

Keating's views were also hailed by the two other speakers, Alison Broinowski, a former Australian diplomat, and Vince Scappatura, an academic associated with IPAN. Broinowski summed up the meeting's perspective by saying Australia should "just keep on doing what we are doing—being a decent middle power in our region."

Scappatura gave credence to the US and Australian propaganda that depicts Beijing as an aggressive power bent on regional and global domination. In reality, it is the US through its intensifying military and economic actions that is pushing China into a conflict, as was done with Russia over Ukraine. Washington regards Beijing as the chief threat to US global dominance.

Scappatura voiced "legitimate concerns" about Chinese "aggression" in the South China Sea, but said Australia would not be a target, except for the US alliance. This leaves the way open to back a war against China if it were provoked into actions deemed to threaten Australian interests.

This reporter spoke during the question time, pointing out that the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) alone had made opposition to the Labor government's commitment to the US-led offensive against both Russia and China central to our campaign in last Saturday's New South Wales state election, and found widespread disgust and hostility in the working class toward the war drive, as our sister parties had done internationally.

I opposed the Coalition's bid to divert this anti-war sentiment into the defence of Australian "sovereignty," in the interests of Australian imperialism. The defence of Australian nationalism had nothing whatsoever to do with building an anti-war movement. War could be stopped only by a unified movement of the international working class to overturn capitalism, which had already produced two barbaric world wars.

Nor could an anti-war movement be based on promoting warmongers such as Keating, and those who were featured at a March 19 public meeting in Sydney sponsored by the AAC. They were Bob Carr, who as foreign minister in the Gillard Labor government backed the Obama administration's "surge" of troops into Afghanistan and the persecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, and ex-US Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, who drafted the notorious lying "weapons of mass destruction" speech delivered by US Secretary of State

Colin Powell to the UN to justify the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq.

Significantly, none of the speakers attempted to answer the issues raised. Asked by the facilitator, lawyer Kellie Tranter, to respond, Broinowski said she understood the SEP's "passion" but effectively defended the alignment behind Keating, Carr and Wilkerson. She said she did not agree with attacking some of the people who had not been held accountable for the crimes committed in the Middle East.

The most vociferous reaction came in the zoom meeting chat by Ken Blackman, a correspondent for *Green Left Weekly*, which actively promoted the event. He wrote: "Unfortunately, we can't expect to beat the subs deal if we get involved in fighting capitalism! It would kill the AAC/IPAN purpose DEAD."

The comment epitomizes the utter hostility of Socialist Alliance and the other pseudo-left groups represented at the meeting, Socialist Alternative and Solidarity, whose members remained silent, to the fight for a genuine anti-war movement, which can only be based on the working class and the worldwide struggle for socialism.

They have all aligned themselves behind the pro-establishment and nationalist orientation of the Anti-AUKUS Coalition and IPAN. While suggesting that Australia keep out of a US war against Russia, each has lined up behind US imperialism in its escalating war against Russia in Ukraine.

The decisive social force that must be mobilised against war and militarism is the working class, with a globally unified movement against the threat of a third world war through a struggle against the source of conflict, the capitalist system.

The basis for such a revolutionary socialist movement exists in the rapid development of the working-class struggles around the world against the austerity offensives that are being intensified by governments pouring billions of dollars into the war drive.

The development of this movement requires an unrelenting struggle to expose the pro-imperialist pseudo-left and the various nationalist tendencies, such as the AAC and IPAN, that seek to chain workers and young people to one or another section of the capitalist class.



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