

Australia plays central role in US plans for war with China

Oscar Grenfell
1 May 2023

This is the report delivered by Oscar Grenfell, a member of the National Committee of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia), to the 2023 International May Day Online Rally. To view all speeches, visit wsws.org/mayday.

The imperialist war drive, together with a massive social crisis, is engulfing the entire world. There are no exceptions. Past depictions of countries like Australia and New Zealand as placid and even idyllic alternatives to the stormy events abroad are being refuted. Everywhere, the issues of war and class struggle are coming to the fore.

Australia is on the very frontlines of the US preparations for war against China. That was confirmed last month, with the Labor government's announcement that the country will acquire a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines.

The submarine deal has nothing to do with defence against Chinese aggression. Instead, the submarines, dubbed the "apex predators of the sea," are to play a key role in aggressive operations off China's coastline. They are being purchased to prepare for an all-out shooting war with China, which would be aimed at ensuring US imperialist hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region.

AUKUS, the militarist pact between Britain, Australia and the US, is central to these plans. It is a cockpit of warmongering and military preparations. Not only is Australia acquiring nuclear-powered submarines. It is also slated to receive hypersonic missiles, sea mines, drones and advanced missile systems. US aircraft and attack submarines, together with warships, are to be stationed in Australia on a semi-permanent basis, completing the country's transformation into a massive virtual US aircraft carrier.

The implications of this program were spelt out in a series of articles published by the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age* in March. The *Red Alert* series was based on the statements of five "experts," who are all connected to the Australian government or US-funded think-tanks.

This warmongering propaganda proclaimed that Australia must prepare to fight a war with China within three years. This, it declared, meant that "taboos" needed to be confronted. The "psychology" of the population needed to be changed. Ordinary people would have to accept the stationing of US nuclear weapons in northern Australia and the introduction of mass conscription. The series was nothing less than a call for nuclear war against China.

But workers and young people don't want war. There is a long history of opposition to war and conscription in the Australian working class, of which the government is well aware. For more than a decade, the preparations for war with China have largely occurred behind the backs of the population. The warnings of our party, that Australia was centrally involved in plans for a catastrophic conflict with China, were derided by the upper middle-class pseudo-left organisations.

Now, however, with AUKUS and the submarine deal, the war plans are increasingly out in the open. And they have provoked major shock and opposition. Polls have indicated that up to 75 percent of the Australian population is opposed to AUKUS.

The turn to war, being spearheaded in this country by the Labor government, goes hand in hand with a war against the working class. Labor has already made it plain that the submarines must be paid for through cuts to health, aged care and other vital social services. The scale of the cuts to come is indicated by the price tag for the submarines: \$368 billion. This amounts to

almost \$15,000 for every single person in the country.

Already, workers are confronting the worst cost-of-living crisis in decades. Last year, workers received an average real wage cut of 4.5 percent, the biggest on record, after decades of stagnating or declining pay.

For young people, the situation is dire. A youth barometer survey, conducted earlier this year, found that in 2022, 90 percent of young people in Australia experienced financial difficulties. And 45 percent had experienced unemployment at some point last year. Because of poverty, 68 percent of young Australians ate less than they thought they should, 67 percent were not able to eat healthy and nutritious food, 66 percent were hungry but did not eat, and 51 percent had had to go without eating for a whole day.

As is the case internationally, housing costs are at unprecedented levels. At least a quarter of homeowners with a mortgage are already in housing stress, while the figure is even higher for renters. Young people are increasingly unable to find anywhere secure to live.

The social crisis is untenable. Already, this has provoked major struggles by workers in Australia, including nurses, teachers and rail staff. Each of these movements has come up against the corporatised trade union bureaucracy, which is a police force of governments and big business.

There is widespread hostility to Labor, the Liberal-National Coalition and all the official parties. And there is a growing anti-capitalist sentiment.

It is this emerging movement of the working class that provides the basis for a fight, not only against government austerity but also against war and its source, the capitalist system. The only way to fight AUKUS, and the accompanying onslaught on the social conditions of workers, is by building an international anti-war movement that unites workers around the world. That is the perspective being fought for by the IYSSE, the SEP and the world Trotskyist movement, in Australia and internationally.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)