

The fight against war is a fight against Australia's Labor government

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This is the report delivered by Cheryl Crisp, the National Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia), to the 2023 International May Day Online Rally held on April 30. To see all rally speeches, visit wsws.org/mayday.

On behalf of the SEP in Australia, I send my revolutionary greetings to all those participating in this May Day rally.

My comrades from all over the world have, in this meeting, warned of the escalating danger of world war, the result of the acceleration of the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. The reckless descent of the US and NATO allied countries into a direct war with Russia, a nuclear-armed country, would undeniably result in the use of nuclear weapons, threatening the very existence of humanity.

But the main target of American imperialism is, in fact, China. In Australia, the Albanese government, which is approaching one year in office, is acting as a spearhead for the provocative and accelerated US plans for war against China.

The Labor government rules with its so-called “left” faction holding almost half of Labor’s parliamentary caucus and nearly all the leading portfolios, such as the prime minister, foreign affairs, health, finance, housing, infrastructure and environment. That has not prevented it from being one of the most right-wing governments in decades. Its policies are based on the demands of the Australian ruling class, global financial interests, and imperialist war preparations.

Prime Minister Albanese’s first act, within hours of last May’s election, and before the result had even been decided, was to rush off to the Quad summit in Japan to consolidate his government’s place in the line-up against China. This trip was immediately followed by visits by Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong to all

the Pacific island nations, to force them into line with Australia and the US against China. She boasts that by the government’s first year in office she will have visited all Asian countries except Myanmar.

Last month, Albanese announced, along with US President Biden and UK Prime Minister Sunak, that the Australian government would commit \$368 billion to pay for nuclear-powered submarines. This is on top of the \$537 billion in military spending already announced for the next decade. With an historic government debt of nearly \$1 trillion—money that does not exist—this vast war spending will be paid for through massive budget cuts to social services and the increased exploitation of workers.

It has been stated by others today that war abroad means war against the working class at home. This is precisely what the government is undertaking here in Australia. Paying for war against Russia and China requires an unprecedented assault on the wages, working conditions and social rights of the working class.

While wages have remained stagnant for decades, inflation levels of almost 7 percent, along with 10 consecutive interest rate rises, have created social conditions not seen for more than three decades.

Household debt in Australia is second highest in the world next to Switzerland, the result of property price increases. With the median price of a house in Sydney now at \$1.2 million, mortgage loan repayments are the highest in history. Interest rate rises impact Australian households more than any other country due to most mortgages being on variable rates. Rents have increased by 24 percent in Sydney in a year. A staggering one in every 200 Australians are now homeless.

Nothing highlights the profit-driven policy of the Labor government more than its actions regarding the

COVID-19 pandemic. Since the May 2022 elections, 50 percent more people have died of COVID than in the previous two and a half years. Officially recorded deaths from COVID now exceed 20,000, with excess deaths in 2022 alone estimated at over 25,000—the highest rate since the end of World War II.

This figure is not an anomaly, but the result of the deliberate elimination by the Labor government of all remaining measures to stem COVID infections and deaths. Even mask mandates for visitors and health workers in hospitals have been rescinded.

While the capitalists and their politicians responsible for this health disaster go unpunished, principled scientists and doctors like David Berger have been persecuted for speaking out against the homicidal pandemic policies.

With the collapse of the support base of the other main party of capitalist rule in this country—the Liberal Party—the capitalist class is relying on Labor to rule on its behalf. There are now Labor governments in all mainland states and at the federal level. However, Labor also has historically low support, obtaining less than 33 percent of the votes at last May's election. The role of the trade union bureaucracy in suppressing the struggles of workers is therefore critical.

The recent threat by the Western Australian Labor government and the state's Industrial Relations Commission to fine the state's nurses union \$36 million for defying the commission's ruling that banned a one-day strike last November is a warning to the working class as a whole. It is meant as a club against all workers. Any fight to claw back lost wages, reverse intolerable working conditions and for safe workplaces will be met with the full force of the state. If this is what governments will do to nurses, "our frontline heroes," what have they planned against the working class as a whole?

And what has been the response of the nurses union leaders? To pledge they will never again allow their members to defy such rulings and strike illegally. Virtually all strikes in Australia are illegal unless approved by the industrial relations commissions in the states and federally. These anti-strike laws were imposed by Labor from the late 1980s on and are used mercilessly by the union leaders to suppress the class struggle.

There is a very important lesson for workers to draw.

Any fight of the working class means a fight against the capitalist state. That fight cannot be waged with the union leaders shackling and tying workers to that very state. The formation of independent rank-and-file committees is an essential means of freeing workers from these constraints and enabling the unification of their struggles throughout Australia and internationally. After all, workers in every country face the same issues.

It is on that basis that the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees has been formed and must be built, alongside the IYSSE campaign for an international antiwar movement to prevent World War III. Thank you.



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