

Australian IYSSE member advances antiwar perspective at pro-establishment “anti-AUKUS” meeting

Our reporters
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Representatives of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) challenged the pro-war record of former Labor parliamentarian Peter Garrett at a public meeting in Melbourne last Friday, organised by No AUKUS Coalition Victoria.

The event, titled “No to nuclear submarines,” was held at Trades Hall and involved around 150-200 people, mostly older. The four speakers were Dr Margie Beavis, of the Medical Association for Prevention of War, secretary of the New South Wales South Coast Labor Council Arthur Rorris, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union state secretary Tony Mavromatis, and Peter Garrett.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has previously noted the pro-establishment political character of the “anti-AUKUS Coalition” and its state affiliates.

This is not an antiwar organisation but rather a group seeking to channel antiwar sentiment among workers and young people behind a wing of the ruling elite that has tactical concerns with the Australia-United Kingdom-United States military deal that involves Canberra spending \$386 billion on nuclear powered submarines. These layers advance the nationalist perspective of a more “independent” Australian imperialist foreign policy, with more “efficient” investments in military equipment.

Opening the public meeting, Garrett told the audience “we are not alone,” and listed establishment figures who have expressed concern over aspects of the AUKUS alliance and nuclear submarines deal. These included former Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating, former Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, former Labor Foreign Minister Bob Carr, multiple other ex-parliamentarians, as well as military figures such as former Chief of the Air Force, Ray Fennell, and Major General Michael Smith.

Garrett added that “a slew of academics” had likewise spoken out, highlighting former intelligence official Hugh White. This figure has publicly demanded that the government double annual military spending, to 4 percent of gross domestic product. Increasing armament expenditure by another \$50 billion every year would inevitably be accompanied by attacks on working class living standards, including through austerity cuts to social services.

Garrett said nothing about such proposals. He emphasised that he supported Australia’s alliance with the US, declaring, “we should have a robust and mutually supportive alliance with the United States.”

Garrett added that the longstanding “political consensus that we needed the protection of a major strategic partner did make some sense.” He only expressed concern that “the unquestioning acquiescence to that strategic partner’s own foreign policy intentions, and the lurch to war that has entailed in the past, post 1945, has been nothing short of pathetic and against our national interest.” The ex-parliamentarian complained that “continuing US failures, in foreign policy adventurism” had not seen Australian governments “recalibrating our defence policy,” and instead, “we’ve simply, completely, and absolutely thrown our lot in, unquestioningly it seems, with the United States.”

This amounted to a whitewashing of the record of US imperialism and its allies, including Canberra. Washington has been on a decades-long militarist rampage. In countless countries—Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya, to name only a few—the American military is responsible not for “adventures” or “failures”, as Garrett puts it, but for extensive war crimes.

Australian imperialism’s active support for these crimes is based on a clearly established quid pro quo, with

Washington backing its predatory operations in the South Pacific and South East Asia. Unsurprisingly, Garrett's speech made no mention of the history of Canberra's pursuit of its "independent" interests in countries such as East Timor, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands.

Garrett concluded his address by declaring that public campaigns over AUKUS should not focus on what the hundreds of billions of dollars for the nuclear submarines could be alternatively spent on, but rather "the challenge is to describe or imagine where defence is taken seriously ... it's incumbent upon us to think deeply about what the defence of Australia really would look like if we weren't in AUKUS."

Garrett's speech underscored his evolution from former rock star and anti-nuclear campaigner to pro-establishment Labor Party shill.

The only challenge to his militaristic speech came from International Youth and Students for Social Equality member Morgan Peach. He said: "The Ukraine war has not been mentioned tonight. This war, now indisputably a US-NATO proxy war against Russia, threatens global disaster. War with Russia is one prong of American imperialism's global strategy, with the other being conflict with China. You cannot oppose one while supporting the other. Yet this panel is tied by a thousand strings to the Labor Party, which is prosecuting Australian involvement in Ukraine.

"Peter Garrett, you were a minister in the Gillard-Rudd Labor government, which deepened and expanded Australia's role in the criminal US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Under Gillard, you and Labor embraced the US 'pivot to Asia' announced by Obama in 2010, which set in motion the preparations for Australia to play a frontline role in a potential war with China—a war that would almost inevitably involve nuclear weapons and threaten life on Earth. My question is—given your record, Mr Garrett, and the pro-war record of the Labor Party, why shouldn't any young person, student, or worker conclude that your attendance at this forum exposes its character as anti-war as a lie?"

Garrett would not and could not answer this question, underscoring the correctness of the points raised by Peach. He shook his head and declined the microphone as it was offered by the meeting chair.

Another meeting speaker, AMWU state secretary Tony Mavromatis, then attempted to defend Garrett. The bureaucrat declared: "What the youth want to think about is future jobs, that's what you should be thinking about. The ability to have a lot more apprenticeships come

along, that's what we're talking about ... You need good future jobs. What we're talking about [is] if we need to build these submarines, if we need to build these submarines, build them here. Let's give the youth an opportunity for the next generation to get educated as tradespeople. That's what we need."

This answer was in line with Mavromatis's earlier speech, in which he spoke about nothing but the implication of AUKUS on manufacturing jobs. He complained that the previous nuclear submarine deal with the French government had involved more Australian construction positions.

The AMWU has collaborated in the destruction of countless jobs in the car industry and other sections of manufacturing. Its nationalist talk of "jobs" in the context of the submarine industry reflects the bureaucracy's efforts to secure an additional dues base while establishing its position within a strategically important sector of the economy.

Mavromatis said nothing whatsoever on the geopolitical and military implications of AUKUS and the US-led preparations for war against China. For good reason—any military conflict between the nuclear-armed powers would lead to a regional and potentially global conflagration, putting paid to talk of new "jobs" for the youth.

The latest anti-AUKUS Coalition meeting underscores the fact that workers and young people seeking to take up a genuine struggle against militarism need to adopt a socialist and internationalist perspective that aims to unify workers around the world in revolutionary opposition to the nationalist warmongers in power.



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