

Sydney anti-AUKUS meeting promotes pro-war Labor Party

Our reporters
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A meeting of the Sydney Anti-AUKUS Coalition on Sunday underscored the fact that this organisation has nothing to do with the fight against militarism and war.

To the extent that the Coalition opposes anything, including AUKUS, the militarist pact between Australia, the US and the UK, and the agreement for Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines for \$368 billion, its concerns are tactical. They are entirely within the framework of debates inside the ruling elite itself over how best to prosecute the interests of Australian imperialism.

Above all, the meeting showed that the Coalition aims to channel widespread opposition to AUKUS behind the Labor Party. Speakers insisted that AUKUS could only be fought through the development of opposition within that party itself. To the extent that non-Labor Party members could do anything, it was to protest and seek to pressure the party to shift course.

This line is extraordinary given that Labor is presiding over the deepening of the AUKUS pact, including through the nuclear-powered submarine purchase announced by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese earlier this year. More broadly, Labor is completing Australia's transformation into a frontline state in the US-led preparations for war with China, and is actively participating in the NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.

Significantly, with its open promotion of Labor, the event was chaired by Pip Hinman, a leader of the pseudo-left Socialist Alliance. Hinman did not mention capitalism, socialism or differ from the pro-Labor Party speakers in any way.

Nor did she, or any other speaker, mention the war in Ukraine. That is because Socialist Alliance has promoted the US intervention in Ukraine, fraudulently branding it a war for "sovereignty" and "democracy." It is impossible to oppose US-Australian preparations for war against China while supporting the US-led conflict in Ukraine, because as the strategists of American imperialism have made plain, they are two fronts in what is developing into a global war.

The opening speaker, Professor Stuart Rees, limited his

remarks to vague calls for peace. While he has taken principled stands in defence of democratic rights, including for the freedom of Julian Assange, Rees remains a middle-class pacifist. He presented war as merely a policy choice, covering up the reality that military conflict is a direct result of capitalism and the struggle of the major powers for resources, markets and profits.

Tina Smith, the president and acting secretary of the South Coast Labour Council, spoke almost exclusively on the impact of a potential submarine base in Port Kembla, south of Sydney. Her remarks were entirely parochial. Attempts to promote Port Kembla as a "green hub" are particularly cynical. For years, the trade unions have worked hand in glove with steel producers that have polluted the region. And having done so, the union bureaucracies have enforced round after round of job destruction, creating a major social crisis.

Smith, in keeping with the unions' close alignment with the Labor government, sought to present AUKUS almost entirely as the creation of former Liberal-National Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

Alison Broinowski, another speaker, personifies the establishment character of the Anti-AUKUS Coalition. She worked for decades as a diplomat for the Australian state, including in very strategically sensitive postings. In her retirement, she has become a pacifist.

Broinowski's remarks summed up the position of a minority wing of the Australian ruling elite. She voiced concern that Australia was tying itself to "failing states" in Britain and the US. This would undermine Australia's "international standing" and its position in global geopolitics.

Broinowski particularly bemoaned the decision of former Prime Minister Morrison to scuttle a deal with France for conventional submarines as he was signing the AUKUS pact. This had undermined Australia, she said, including in trade negotiations with the European Union.

Broinowski's remarks confirmed that the Anti-AUKUS Coalition does not oppose Australia's military build-up, or

even the acquisition of strike submarines. Its members merely have tactical concerns over total commitment to AUKUS.

Broinowski also complained that Australia does not have war powers legislation requiring parliamentary approval for military conflict. She had hoped, she stated, that Albanese would introduce such measures and was disappointed he had not done so. Given that all the parliamentary parties are pro-war, such laws would simply be a fig leaf.

Notably, Hinman solidarised herself with these remarks, stating that people (presumably including herself) had voted for Albanese because they thought he would introduce the token legislation.

The final speaker was Marcus Strom, the convenor of Labor Against War. Strom was, until early this year, the senior media advisor for Industry and Science Minister Ed Husic. Strom was thus effectively a member of the Labor government as it committed to AUKUS and deepened Australia's involvement in the confrontation with China. He was previously a senior official in the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance trade union, which has worked closely with the media conglomerates, even as they have slashed thousands of jobs and carried out a continuous attack on conditions.

Strom touted supposed growing opposition within Labor to AUKUS. However, all he could point to was a handful of motions passed by local Labor Party branches and a refusal of the Queensland Labor conference earlier this year to "congratulate" Albanese for the AUKUS submarine deal. Labor Against War has a minuscule following on social media.

Strom proclaimed that Labor figures, such as former Prime Minister Paul Keating and past Foreign Minister Bob Carr, have condemned AUKUS. Both are implicated in criminal US-led wars. Their criticisms of AUKUS are that it will not advance the interests of Australian imperialism, because it risks a war with the country's main trading partner and will inflame social and political opposition among working people.

Strom promoted this purported tendency within Labor as the means of stopping AUKUS. He highlighted Labor's national conference, to be held in Brisbane next month, as a potential opportunity. But Strom was compelled to note that it was unclear if the issue of AUKUS could even be raised at the conference, given it would be a "stage-managed" affair.

Strom claimed there had always been an anti-war tendency within Labor. But the evidence he provided for this was vanishingly thin. It included the split in the Labor Party over conscription in World War I, and condemnations of the Vietnam War by some Labor figures. But as Strom also admitted, the majority of Labor, including its entire

leadership, supported the Vietnam War for the bulk of its duration.

The issues came up again in the question and answer period. A member of the Socialist Equality Party asked the organisers why they were promoting Labor. It was not only the party directly implementing AUKUS, but also the preeminent party of Australian imperialism.

The questioner noted that Labor had supported or presided over all the wars of the past 100 years, including both world wars and the plunder of Vietnam. Keating, whom Strom hailed, was a leader of the government that in 1991 joined in the first US Gulf War against Iraq. Claims that Labor had opposed the 2003 invasion of that country were a fraud. Its then leader Simon Crean had voiced mealy-mouthed and tactical concerns, centring on calls for a United Nations fig leaf for the predatory war. When it went ahead anyway, Crean and Labor fell into line.

The questioner also noted that Australia's central role in the US-led plans for war had not begun with Morrison. Instead, they had been initiated by the Greens-backed Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard, which in 2011 signed on to the US "pivot to Asia," a vast military build-up in the region in preparation for conflict with China.

Strom's response was one of total political bankruptcy. He said he "agreed" with much of what the questioner had raised. Labor had a history of "racism" and "imperialism" but he again asserted, without evidence, that there had been countervailing tendencies.

In the end, Strom was left with the argument that broad "unity" was necessary to end AUKUS. Significantly, this line was taken up immediately by Hinman of Socialist Alliance. It was not necessary to agree on all issues of history and program to build a movement against AUKUS, she insisted. Instead, a "united front" had to be built, including Labor and the trade unions.

In fact, Labor and the unions are the very forces leading the drive to war. This is in line with their entire history, program and political identity as instruments of Australian imperialism and the capitalist system.

The meeting demonstrated that the anti-AUKUS Coalition is a reactionary nationalist trap. Its purpose, above all, is to block the development of a genuine anti-war movement, which must be international, independent of all the capitalist parties and based on a socialist perspective directed against the source of conflict, the profit system itself.



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