

Australian think tank urges social media campaigns to target youth for military propaganda

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Recent articles published by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), a government-funded think tank, have highlighted the concern which exists in ruling circles that young people aren't sufficiently committed to the militarist agenda of Australian imperialism.

The articles, published on ASPI's site the Strategist, highlight the broad opposition among youth, to the imperialist-backed Israeli genocide against the Palestinian people and the AUKUS military alliance with the US and Britain which is part of preparations for war against China.

They call for a government PR campaign to ensure that Australian youth can be herded into imperialist slaughter in future wars through social media, at the universities and in the schools.

An October 4 article, titled "Australia needs to engage its youth population around AUKUS," was written by Amanda McCumber, an analyst intern at ASPI's Washington D.C. program.

In it, McCumber stated: "As Australia's youth will be the generation who will be asked to provide for the national defence when AUKUS comes to fruition, it stands to reason that they must understand its value."

AUKUS includes the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines from the US, in a program costing \$368 billion announced by the Labor government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in March 2023. That is part of a broader transformation of Australia into a central launching pad for war with China, including the largest expansion of the Australian military since World War II and the stationing of US strike assets in the country. More broadly, AUKUS is a cockpit for war-planning and the militarisation of the entire region.

At the same time, Albanese's government has given its full-throated support to the Gaza genocide and the

ongoing US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

None of these conflicts have a popular mandate. And there is significant concern in ruling circles that youth are increasingly hostile to war abroad and the associated attacks on democratic rights, expressed in a massive outpouring of opposition to Australia's complicity in the Gaza genocide over the past year.

In a November 21 Strategist article, Australian National University (ANU) National Security College research assistant Gabriella Chippeck cited a survey conducted by the Lowy Institute in March 2023.

The poll of 2077 Australians showed that only 28 percent were supportive of AUKUS. Among 18–24-year-olds, this was even lower, at 17 percent. A third of 18–24-year-olds thought AUKUS would increase the risk of military conflict and instability in the Indo-Pacific.

More recent polls show that 57 percent of Australians oppose the country getting involved in a conflict between the US and China.

Polls such as these are inherently limited. But they give a sense of broader anti-war sentiment which exists in the population. This social reality, exemplified in the anti-genocide protests, is buried in the corporate media and official discussion.

Chippeck noted that students at ANU have put up posters which call for "Welfare, not warfare." ANU is one of the universities in Australia which has seen the most frequent pro-Palestinian protests, including a months-long encampment of students. The university's administration has responded by engaging in disciplinary action against at least 10 pro-Palestinian students, including expelling two.

Such actions have been carried out at universities across the country. This crackdown on student protests against the Gaza genocide was stepped up in October when

Western Sydney University (WSU) allowed police onto its campus to arrest two students who were peacefully protesting. A third WSU student was arrested at her home that week.

This month, a high school student in Sydney was banned from attending his school formal because he wore a keffiyeh.

While opposition is suppressed on university and school campuses, Chippeck called for the government to work with universities to promote “a sense of urgency and responsibility for the future of national security”—i.e. an aggressive war against China in the Asia-Pacific. This, Chippeck argues, could be done through “digital platforms such as YouTube or Instagram.”

This is highly significant given the Albanese government’s policy of banning children under the age of 16 from social media. The bill mandating the ban was rammed through parliament by Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition on the final sitting day of parliament for the year last month.

As the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) explained in a statement on the *World Socialist Web Site*, the social media ban is transparent censorship aimed at establishing government control over online discussion.

Young people, living through a global crisis unprecedented since the 1930s, have used social media to access political material and organise.

Taken with the Strategist’s proposals, the environment that the ruling elites are preparing for Australian youth is one in which there is no political discussion among teenagers, then, once in university, they will be bombarded with militarist propaganda.

Meanwhile, Chippeck’s piece bemoaned the fact that young people are turning away from the Labor Party and the Coalition, instead increasingly casting votes for third parties.

The Strategist pieces have been met with opposition on social media.

One X/Twitter user, commenting on ASPI’s posting of the November 21 article, wrote: “We don’t want to die for US hegemony and no amount of ‘please consider the stock values of our weapons dealing funders’ propaganda is going to change that.”

Another said: “You need to ban alternative sources of information (social media) or kids will see straight through your lies.”

“We wouldn’t die for USA in Vietnam. Youth today, who have better access to Independent Information than

in the 60’s, won’t die for USA, however Australia’s career politicians dress up the threat they perceive,” wrote another commenter.

An ASPI post of October 4 received hundreds of angry comments.

One X/Twitter user wrote: “Everyone hates AUKUS, and the kids will never be brainwashed into thinking war with China for US interests will be a good thing.”

“Tell Aussie youth the reason schools are underfunded, housing is unaffordable, they can’t afford food & struggle to pay bills is because their govt is throwing billions at the US to turn Australia into a US military base & I’m sure they’ll support aukus,” wrote another.

This anti-war sentiment is widespread in Australia and worldwide. What is required is to translate the hostility to militarism and the associated attacks on living standards and free speech into a politically guided movement against the system which leads to war: capitalism.

Such a movement must mobilise the immense social and political strength of the working class, which produces all of society’s wealth and is the revolutionary force in society. It must be international, uniting workers around the world, and it must be independent from all the official parties, which defend the interests of the capitalist nation-state system including through war. And this movement must be based on the perspective of socialism, the unification of humanity in a peaceful world based on meeting social need, not producing profits for the billionaires and the corporations.

Young people who are interested in taking up this fight should join the IYSSE today.

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