

South Australian election: Reject Labor's AUKUS war program!

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20 March 2026

This Saturday's South Australian election is being held amid a global eruption of imperialist war, exemplified by the US-led assault on Iran, an historic crime. As in all state elections, there is a concerted attempt by the major parties to exclude the issue of war from public discussion.

But aside from the fact that the war will affect working people everywhere, including in South Australia, there is a very direct connection. The incumbent Labor government of Premier Peter Malinauskas is transforming the state into a central hub for Australian militarism, as part of AUKUS, the pact with the US and the UK directed against China.

On February 14, on the eve of the election campaign, Malinauskas stood alongside Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese at the Osborne shipyard in Adelaide to announce a projected \$30 billion Submarine Construction Yard. Malinauskas boasted that "South Australia is at the centre of one of the most significant defence undertakings in our history... Osborne will be critical to Australia's nuclear-powered submarine program under AUKUS."

During the campaign proper, however, the word "AUKUS" does not appear to have passed Malinauskas' lips once.

The reason is not hard to discern. There is widespread hostility to the onslaught against Iran, and a foreboding that it presages further catastrophic wars. Many people have noted no doubt that the same Trump regime that is setting the Middle East ablaze is also the spearhead of AUKUS.

Albanese was among the first and most enthusiastic world leaders to endorse the US sneak attack on Iran and to repeat all the lies used to justify it. On March 10, Albanese announced the dispatch of a command warplane, missiles and troops, formalising Australia's participation in the war.

The only national polling conducted since the war began shows that more than two thirds of people are hostile to this involvement.

In the state election, Labor is promising a pittance to address the housing and cost-of-living crisis afflicting working people and is doing nothing to address the crisis of the public schools and hospitals. The contrast between the official indifference to social hardship and the tens of billions being expended on submarines that are weapons of war is stark.

The offensive character of the AUKUS subs was covered up in the Osborne press conference, as it always is in official discussion. But the only conceivable purpose of Australia's construction of nuclear-powered submarines, which have greater depth, range,

speed and stealth than their diesel counterparts, is to conduct offensive operations far into the Indo-Pacific, up to the Chinese coast.

The subs are being built because Australia is to play a frontline role in a US-led war against China. AUKUS is just the tip of the spear. The federal Labor government has also vastly expanded US basing arrangements across the continent, while undertaking the largest expansion of the military in decades, centred on the acquisition of missiles and other offensive capabilities.

As the criminal war against Iran demonstrates, the claim that the confrontation with China has anything to do with defending "international law" is a monumental fraud. In reality, American imperialism is seeking to offset its protracted economic decline through the use of its military might, targeting Russia and above all China, which it views as the chief threat to its economic dominance.

The war in Iran is a component of a developing global war, with the Middle Eastern country targeted in part because it is an important supplier of oil to Beijing. Just as the federal Labor government and its state counterparts support the criminal assault on Iran, so too are they on board with the broader war drive of which it is a part.

The connection was underscored early in the first week of the war against Iran, when a US nuclear submarine attacked an unarmed and defenceless Iranian vessel off the coast of Sri Lanka. It was revealed that three Australian personnel were aboard, conducting "training" as part of AUKUS. The mass murder of the Iranian sailors is a chilling indication of what AUKUS is really about.

While covering over the fact that AUKUS is a preparation for war, Malinauskas and the federal Labor government have presented it as a boon for the South Australian economy and for jobs.

At the press conference on 14 February, Malinauskas made the comparison: "There were 1,200 people working at Holden when it closed, 4,000 will be required to construct this facility." This is a fraud. The figure of 1,200 is the residual workforce at Holden's Elizabeth plant at the moment of its closure in 2017—the skeleton crew remaining after years of attrition.

At its peak, Holden alone employed around 6,000 workers at Elizabeth. Across the entire South Australian automotive supply chain—components, parts, associated manufacturing—the total jobs lost at the time of the industry's closure was up to 24,000. For

years, state and federal governments, mostly Labor, enforced the job destruction, together with the corporatised trade union bureaucracy. They provided the car conglomerates with vast subsidies, as they were slashing jobs, suppressed resistance and imposed “orderly closures.”

The result has been an unmitigated social disaster in the northern suburbs of Adelaide, some such as Elizabeth were literally built around car production. Unemployment in those areas approaches 20 percent, and entire generations of working-class youth face a future of poverty, unemployment and insecure work.

The Australian Submarine Agency projects that the Osborne yard will employ up to 4,000 workers during the construction phase and a further 4,000 to 5,500 workers once submarine production is at its peak—but that peak will not be reached for 20 to 30 years. The narrow layer of engineering and professional positions this will eventually generate will do nothing for the mass of workers.

Given the total \$30 billion price tag in combined federal and state funding, this would be one of the most expensive job creation programs in history, if that is what it really was.

The reality is, it is the working class that will pay an extremely high price for war. That is already evident in the massive spike in petrol prices resulting from the assault on Iran, and in the contrast between the crisis-ridden character of public healthcare and education and the tens of billions being expended on armaments. As the wars deepen, every element of social, economic and civil life will be subordinated to the needs of the military.

This can only be achieved through an assault on democratic rights, as is already evident in the relentless attacks on mass opposition to the Israeli genocide in Gaza. The federal Labor government has spearheaded the demonisation of pro-Palestinians as antisemites and has passed a battery of laws aimed at suppressing hostility to the historic war crimes.

It has been joined by the state Labor administrations, including in South Australia. Malinauskas personally demanded the exclusion of Palestinian-Australian author Randa Abdel-Fattah from this year’s Adelaide Writers’ Festival and viciously attacked her simply because she opposes the genocide. That Trumpian attack and the broader crackdown on anti-genocide sentiment is a warning of the preparations to suppress opposition to the war against Iran and the plans for an even greater conflict with China.

Workers and young people must confront the reality that Labor is a party of imperialist war, authoritarianism and austerity. The task is to conduct the most determined political fight against the Labor governments, at the state level and federally.

This basic fact is continuously covered over by the Greens and their satellites in the pseudo-left. The Greens condemn AUKUS and have denounced the war against Iran. Yet they promote the lie that it is possible to appeal to the Labor government to change course.

In their South Australian election campaign, the Greens have expressed their willingness to collaborate with an incoming Labor government, absurdly suggesting that they will “push” it to implement limited reforms. That is in line with the character of the Greens as a party that defends the source of war: the capitalist system.

The pseudo-left SA Socialists and Socialist Alliance have also condemned AUKUS. But they present it as a state-based issue, suggesting that it can somehow be opposed within the limited framework of the South Australian election. This position diverts attention from the federal Labor government’s role in ensuring Australia’s participation in the war drive globally.

The line of the pseudo-left groups is a continuation of their role in the anti-genocide movement. For more than two years, they have insisted that moral pressure will compel Labor to end its support for the mass murder of Palestinians. That has politically neutered the mass opposition, and provided cover for Labor as it has shifted, not to the left, but even further to the right.

The pseudo-left groups, notwithstanding their rhetoric, are not socialist and do not speak for the working class. They are parties of the upper middle-class, tied by a thousand threads to the Greens, the union bureaucracy and through it to Labor itself.

The Socialist Equality Party insists that the fight against war must be based on a socialist program, directed against the source of war: the capitalist system. We fight for the development of rank-and-file committees in all workplaces, independent of the union bureaucracies, which collaborate with the corporations and support the government’s militarist agenda.

Such committees must fuse the fight against war with the struggle for the social rights of the working class, for decent wages and working conditions, and for high-quality and fully-funded public healthcare and education.

What is required is the development of an international anti-war movement, uniting the working class and unleashing its vast social and political power. The revolutionary struggle for socialism is the only way to stop the third world war, which is already in its opening stages. We call on those who agree with this perspective to join the Socialist Equality Party.



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