A pall of silence in the Victorian election on the dangers of war

Travis Ward, Peter Symonds
26 November 2026

The major parties—Labor, the Coalition, the Greens and One Nation—standing in the Victorian state election have evaded the most fundamental issues confronting workers and youth in Australia and internationally.

While they pay lip service to the anger boiling up over the worsening cost of living, making limited, empty promises that will not be kept, there is a conspiracy of silence over the immense dangers posed by the interlocking military conflicts and confrontations that threaten a global nuclear conflagration.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and its candidates Morgan Peach and Peter Byrne, who are standing in the Northern Metropolitan Region, are alone not only in warning of the looming threats but in campaigning to mobilise workers and youth as part of a unified anti-war movement of the international working class on a socialist perspective—the only means of halting war.

The wars already underway in Europe and the Middle East are neither limited nor isolated conflicts. Nuclear-armed powers confront each other in a proxy war in Ukraine, with the US and NATO arming Kiev with ever more powerful weapons to strike ever deeper inside Russia. The US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza is part of a broader military offensive that extends to the West Bank and Lebanon and is engulfing the Middle East following the unprovoked US-Israeli war on Iran. Trump has repeatedly threatened to annihilate an entire country of more than 90 million people.

These wars are enmeshing ever wider areas of the globe and threaten to draw in other powers. The sheer recklessness of US imperialism is driven by its determination to use its military might to reverse its historic economic and geopolitical decline. Washington regards the wars underway as the prelude to all-out war against the chief threat to its global dominance—China.

US preparations for conflict with China, in which Australia has been intimately involved, have been underway for more than a decade. Successive Labor and Coalition governments have collaborated in transforming northern Australia into a vast staging ground for the US military, with Australian forces increasingly integrated into its operations.

In September, the *Guardian* published maps based on a study of Australian defence facilities. Of the 151 facilities whose US access status could be established with reasonable confidence, the US military directly controls 17 and has access to another 75—92 in all, or more than half. Such is the extent of the integration of the two militaries that Australia is already positioned to participate in a US war against China.

The state governments, including in Victoria, have not been passive bystanders as the Albanese government has integrated Australia into US war plans. All of them are vying for a slice of the hundreds of billions to be spent on nuclear-powered submarines, missiles and other military hardware, as well as the upgrading and extension of military bases, military manufacturing and defence research and development (R&D).

While the principal centres of the US military build-up are outside Victoria, the US military plans to establish a significant logistics base costing up to $US30 million at Bandiana, near Wodonga, for the US Army, Air Force and Marine Corps. The Puckapunyal military base north of Melbourne has also been used for joint military training with US forces.

The focus of successive Victorian Labor governments has been weapons production and military R&D integrated into supply chains for Australia, the US and other military allies. In 2007, the Victorian Labor government established Defence Council Victoria to advise on strategies to develop and sustain Victoria's defence industry capabilities. Last year, the Allan Labor government issued its Victorian Defence Vision Statement 2030, proclaiming its ambition to make the state a "global defence and national security powerhouse."

The statement boasted that Victoria had the country's largest manufacturing workforce and a defence sector that received $10.9 billion in direct annual Department of Defence expenditure, employed 29,000 workers and earned $1.7 billion in annual exports. More than 2,500 businesses in the state are involved either directly or indirectly in the defence supply chain, encompassing a wide range of military-related activities and major international corporations such as Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Hanwha.

Extensive manufacturing already takes place. In Benalla, Thales and NIOA manufacture munitions. Thales also builds Bushmaster and Hawkei military vehicles in Bendigo. In Geelong, Hanwha manufactures the AS9 Huntsman self-propelled howitzer, the AS10 armoured ammunition resupply vehicle and the Redback infantry fighting vehicle. The

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Melbourne-based company SYPAQ has supplied drone systems to Ukraine.

The Defence Vision Statement makes a pitch for corporations to base military R&D in Victoria, emphasising the expertise concentrated in major universities and TAFE colleges and highlighting the state's research and industrial precincts in Melbourne and regional areas such as Geelong-Avalon, Bendigo, Benalla, Gippsland and Wodonga. According to the statement, $210 million is spent annually on military R&D in the state.

The government is transforming the former GMH site at Fishermans Bend—where engine production was shut down in 2016—into a huge Innovation Precinct in a bid to attract major corporations and their R&D money. The first stage is costing nearly $200 million. Boeing Aerostructures Australia, Leonardo Australia, QinetiQ, Supacat and SYPAQ already have a presence. Fishermans Bend is also the site of the federal government's Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG), whose facilities are being upgraded at an estimated cost of $160.9 million.

A frantic arms race and military expansion are taking place around the world, including in Australia and Victoria, for the wars already underway and new ones being prepared. Yet there is a deathly silence from all the major parties in the Victorian election about the dangers. The fear in ruling circles is that the widespread anti-war opposition evident in the sustained protests against the Gaza genocide will escalate dramatically as the unfolding global war becomes apparent.

Working people are only too well aware that the illegal US war on Iran has driven up the prices of fuel and other commodities. And the huge sums being spent by the Albanese Labor government on expanding the military and acquiring military hardware are being paid for by slashing essential services, including through cuts to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) that will impact hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities.

The barrage of war propaganda vilifying Russia, China and Iran has been complemented by a vicious campaign falsely identifying opposition to the Israeli genocide with antisemitism and the persecution of academics, health workers, artists and others. Moreover, a host of police-state measures have been enacted over the past two decades under the guise of the "war on terror" that will be used to suppress anti-war opposition and resistance.

The trade unions function as the industrial police for governments and corporations in war as in matters of jobs, wages and conditions. The unions have pushed for a defence industry build-up, particularly since they suppressed opposition by workers to the closure of the car industry. The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) postures as a militant opponent of the Gaza genocide but has not stopped a single military shipment to Israel. On October 30, when dock and port workers struck at 113 ports in 22 countries across five continents under the banner "Dockers do not work for war," the MUA blocked the participation of Australian waterside workers.

As the government seeks to dramatically expand the ranks of the Australian military, advertising campaigns and games have been used to counter anti-war sentiment and steer young people into the military and military research. The federal government's Schools Pathways Program links arms manufacturers such as BAE Systems and Raytheon with secondary schools. Everything is done to obscure the fact that many of the bright careers being offered to youth are bound up with preparations for wars in which young people will be sent to kill and be killed. If these methods fail to round up the necessary cannon fodder, the ruling class will, as in the past, seek to press-gang young people into the military through conscription.

None of the major parties oppose imperialist war. Labor, the Coalition and One Nation are all openly committed to escalating military spending and maintaining the US alliance as the means for Australian imperialism to secure its own interests, as Australia is drawn into the US-led wars underway and the build-up to war with China. The Greens try to disguise their support for Australian militarism by calling for a more independent foreign policy and withdrawal from AUKUS. But they do not call for the abrogation of the ANZUS treaty and at the last federal election unveiled a $4 billion plan to expand domestic military manufacturing.

The Victorian Socialists are no alternative. Their leading force, Socialist Alternative, has openly supported the imperialist-backed operations to overthrow governments in Syria and Libya and the NATO-provoked war against Russia in Ukraine. A party that claims to oppose war but backs the proxy war between nuclear-armed powers in Ukraine is not anti-war and not socialist. It is a pro-imperialist party trying to put on a "left" face.

In contrast to the silence of all the other parties, the SEP has warned of the mounting dangers of an unfolding world war and called on workers and youth to join us in fighting to build a unified anti-war movement of the international working class to abolish capitalism—the root cause of war. We call on you to vote for our candidates in the Northern Metropolitan Region, but more importantly to join the SEP and build it as the necessary revolutionary leadership for the struggles ahead.

Authorised by Cheryl Crisp for the Socialist Equality Party, Level 1/457-459 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills, NSW, 2010, Australia.

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