

AUKUS Military Alliance Driven by Shared Economic Interests, Not China ‘Threat’

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Sam Wainwright is a [Socialist Alliance](#) National Co-convenor and active in Stop AUKUS WA. He spoke with Green Left’s Federico Fuentes about Australian imperialism, its military alliance with the United States and prospects for working-class solidarity across borders.

Wainwright will feature at [Ecosocialism 2024](#), speaking on the panel “[Against war and imperialism: People-to-people solidarity in the Asia-Pacific region](#)”.

Federico Fuentes (FF): Tensions between the US and China are of great concern. What is behind US military strategy in the region? How do you view China’s role in the conflict?

Sam Wainwright (SW): The US is determined to block China’s growth, both economically and militarily. This is the main driver of the escalation in tension.

While the US and Australian governments, together with the capitalist media in these countries, constantly hype up Chinese aggression, China’s response is fundamentally defensive. China is the one being encircled by US military bases, alliances and missile systems.

However, in its determination to break out of this encirclement and preserve access to its maritime trade routes, it has long ridden roughshod over its near neighbours in the South China Sea.

FF: Australia is clearly siding with the US in this conflict. Why is this the case, particularly given Australia’s trade connections with China. How do you view Australia’s role in the

region?

SW: Shared global military interventions and projects of the Anglo-imperialist powers under US leadership — such as the Iraq invasion or Five Eyes intelligence alliance — do not just flow from a shared culture, although that is part of it, but from overlapping economic interests.

The US and Britain are the biggest sources of foreign direct investment in Australia and the biggest destinations for foreign direct investment by Australian capitalists.

When former Australian prime minister John Howard described Australia as the Deputy Sheriff in the Asia-Pacific, he accurately described its place in the region and its relation to its near neighbours.

For Australian capitalism there is a particular contradiction in joining this aggressive push to “contain” China, given it is Australia’s largest trading partner for both imports and exports.

Australian capitalism constitutes a mid-sized imperialist power in its own right. It could instead adopt a relatively neutral position and seek trade with China and the US on its own terms.

This is the position advocated by former Labor prime minister Paul Keating. How many big capitalists and senior policymakers share this view, I don’t know.

However, it seems clear that a decisive majority have fallen in behind the US plan. This has been accompanied by a call to reduce the country’s reliance on trade with China, though it is not clear how successful this will be.

Australian capitalists want the best of both worlds: to join the US in blocking China’s development — by force if necessary — while continuing to trade with China. China has recently reduced some of its tariffs on Australian imports, but the contradiction has surely not been resolved.

FF: How have these tensions impacted politics in Australia?

SW: The decision of the Australian ruling class and its political servants to embrace the US war drive against China fundamentally shapes Australian politics. Opposing it is a primary strategic task for socialists in this country.

The AUKUS plan to produce nuclear-powered submarines in conjunction with the US and Britain is coupled with the US-Australia Force Posture Agreement. The latter is Australia’s contribution to the US “Pivot to Asia” that began under President Barack Obama.

Among many things, it allows for a significant increase in interoperability of Australian and US armed forces, unimpeded US access to and use of Australian bases, B-52 bombers carrying nuclear warheads to be based on Australian soil, and US military intelligence personnel to be embedded within Australia’s defence intelligence organisations.

The announcement of the AUKUS deal was preceded by a concerted media scare campaign about a supposed threat from China. The notion that China has an interest in sabotaging its trade with Australia, let alone has the means to invade, is absurd.

Consequently, the China threat narrative rests a lot on the fear that China might invade Taiwan and the authoritarian surveillance features of the Chinese state.

FF: What stance has the Socialist Alliance taken on the issue of Taiwan?

SW: The Socialist Alliance believes that the US and its allies are the primary aggressors responsible for the rising military tensions. If anything, it is almost as if the US is trying to provoke China to launch military action against Taiwan.

However, that does not diminish our belief that the Taiwanese people have a right to self-determination and that any attempt by China to forcibly annex Taiwan would be a terrible mistake.

FF: What kind of initiatives could the left promote in striving for regional peace?

SW: In Australia it has to start with opposing AUKUS, the Force Posture Agreement and the entire military alliance with the US.

Unlike our South-East Asian neighbours, who are caught between demands to side with either the US or China, pushing back against our own government's belligerence has to be our primary target.

We should also aim to rekindle a sense of working-class internationalism. Our job is to help Australian workers realise that our immediate enemies are our own ruling class, not working people in other countries.

Regionally, we need civil society peace initiatives that emphasise the need for cooperation and that build understanding and a sense of common humanity across borders. In doing so, we should emphasise that humanity will not be able to confront the existential threat posed by runaway global warming while pouring resources into a new Cold War.

Instead of further militarising the region, we need to push our governments to fund programs that develop people-to-people solidarity, something Cuba has done in the South Pacific with medical training.

Read the full interview at links.org.au.

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