

All Wars Are Fought Against Children

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Every day, hundreds of thousands of children are placed into the care of teachers and support staff in public schools in NSW. As workers involved in the care of children, we develop an organic connection with our students.

We are instrumental in their development as participants and contributors to communities. However, the future of the young people in our care is increasingly darkened by the shadow of war.

AUKUS & the drive to war with China

Set against a backdrop of increased militarisation and the development of active war across multiple regions including the Middle East, Eastern Europe, North-east Africa and Sub-Continental Asia, Australia has set a course to increase military spending at record proportions.

Labor and Liberal alike, as well as the media, beat the drums of war with China, hurtling us towards a potential crisis that will consume our collective futures. Not since the height of the Cold War have we witnessed an intensification of militarisation in Australia and across the Pacific.

Since the conclusion of the Cold War, the US has established itself as the global hegemon, dictating terms to the rest of the world economically, diplomatically, and militarily.



“ AUKUS – A “blueprint” for defence cooperation or an “affront” to Australian sovereignty?

The US is an imperialist force and boasts at least 400 bases and 300 000 troops deployed in the Pacific alone. Its modern dominance of the Pacific was established at the end of WWII, punctuated by the unleashing of the two nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Australia is a critical asset in the American dominance of the Pacific.

Successive Australian governments, (with the sole exception of the Whitlam Government), have unquestioningly engaged in the strengthening of military ties with the US. From the calamity of the Vietnam War, to the destruction of Iraq and Afghanistan, Australia has dutifully followed the US into imperialist adventure after imperialist adventure. With each conflict, Australia has further integrated into the US imperial apparatus and demonstrated its willingness to put US interests ahead of our own.

AUKUS makes that clear. Slated to cost \$250 billion to half a trillion over the next three decades, AUKUS is presented as a necessary spend, while our schools, hospitals and social services languish, underfunded. Weeks after Trump's inauguration and at the same time tariffs were being imposed, Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles visited Washington and made a down payment of \$800 million toward the \$4.8 billion ship-building cost-component of the broader deal. Coincidentally, \$4.8 billion is the cost to fully fund NSW public schools. Funding which will be delayed for another decade.

While much of the commentary around AUKUS focuses on the nuclear submarines and whether they will ever be delivered; an often-overlooked aspect is that AUKUS ushers in an huge expansion of so-called 'joint-facilities', effectively integrating the Australian and US militaries. Facilities like Pine Gap have long been controlled by the US, but the quest to develop blue-water naval ports for US nuclear attack submarines turns Australia into an operations base for a future war with China.

Australia must strive for an independence from the USA and their desire to be the dominant global power. Labor politicians often argue that increases to social spending are not 'economically responsible', yet the half a trillion spent on AUKUS presented as irrefutable. Not only is it a huge waste of social wealth, but it is a dangerous development. We should demand that Labor set a course towards a peaceful and prosperous future alongside our neighbours, whereby a peaceful future for our children is secured.

Striving for Peace is What We Do



Sam Lewis (pictured) was a notable President of the Teachers Federation in the post second-world war period. As a leader of a teachers' collective in the 1930s, known as the Educational Workers League, Lewis and others believed that teacher unions should organise in an industrial fashion and use their strength to fight for better wages and conditions. Their views won the support of members and were soon adopted as the central tenet of the way the Teachers Federation set about its work for the next eight decades.

The influence of Lewis and the like-minded around him transformed the Teachers Federation into a fighting and striking union which vigorously pursued improved teacher wages and conditions, as well as school resources. For the likes of Lewis, the material conditions of teachers were not separate from the pursuit of justice everywhere. This was particularly the case in their advocacy for global peace.

In 1948, Lewis attended the UNESCO conference in Mexico. After returning from the conference, UNESCO declared: "All Wars Are Fought Against Children". Lewis ensured that this declaration became a slogan for the Teachers Federation moving forward.

In his 1951 address to the Federation's Annual Conference, he stated:
 "The greatest single factor on the world scale causing inflation and leading to the undermining of the living and cultural standards of the people is enormous expenditure on production of armaments. Teachers are concerned very deeply with conservation: conservation of natural resources, conservation of human resources. They are the agents in the battle against material and moral erosion, against the scorching of human flesh and the searing of the human spirit." Goodall et al. (2019, pp. 200) cited in Mulheron. CPL Journal Sem1. 2022

In July 2023, at the Teachers Federation Annual Conference, a comprehensive resolution was adopted, 'On Peace', which noted an extensive history of teacher unionists fighting for peace. From opposing war in Vietnam, calls for nuclear disarmament, calls for Australian troop withdrawal from the Middle East on the eve of the 1991 Gulf War and again in 2003; and statements of opposition to Israeli government collective punishment of Palestinians in 2010 and again in 2014.

Reflecting on AUKUS, the resolution stated: "AUKUS would again make Australia a nuclear target if it is allowed to proceed." (NSWTF 2023 Annual Conference Decision 5, On Peace)

It's not just teachers, but workers of all stripes who have played a significant role in the push for peace in Australia. In 1938, waterside workers, particularly members of the Waterside Workers' Federation, famously refused to load pig iron onto the ship SS Dalfram, which was bound for Japan. They argued that the pig iron would be used to produce military materials for Japan's war in China.

In 1945, wharfies again used their industrial might to ban the loading of Dutch ships in support of Indonesian independence from the reimposition Dutch colonial rule. In the 1960s and 70s, the trade union movement was pivotal in opposing the Vietnam War, and later South African Apartheid.



In 2003, on the eve of the war waged in Iraq in the pursuit of so-called 'weapons of mass destruction'; nearly half a million marched in Sydney, joining tens of millions across the planet calling for a halt to the push for war. Unions and workers played a critical role in such demonstrations. Perhaps it is worth noting, that unlike in halting involvement in Vietnam, an organised working class response to the 2003 pre-emptive strike was left wanting.

What is clear is Australia has a history of a vibrant peace and anti-nuclear worker-led movement. This history must be resurrected to head off the impending drive towards war.

Why Palestine Matters

Estimates based on munitions tonnage suggest that the equivalent of five Hiroshimas worth of explosives have been dropped on two million Palestinians crammed into an area the size of Campbelltown. The untold devastation wreaked against Gaza since late 2023 should serve as a warning to us all.



Unquestionably backed by the US and its clients like Australia, the war on the people of Gaza has opened a new frontier for the future of all wars. Schools, hospitals, aid workers, medics, journalists and civilians of all ages have been attacked with impunity using the most advanced weaponry. The prospect of any future for the children of Gaza or Palestine more broadly is grim. Tens of thousands of them are wounded, orphaned, starved and forever traumatised by the Israeli war machine. Most concerning for educators is what has been termed scholasticide.

“According to an assessment published by the Global Education Cluster on 1 April 2025, 95.2% of schools in Gaza have sustained varying degrees of damage, and 88.5% of school buildings require complete reconstruction or major rehabilitation. A total of 241 public schools have suffered severe damage, while 111 have been completely destroyed. Additionally, 91 public schools and 89 UNRWA schools have been directly bombed or vandalised.” (Reliefweb, Apr 2025)

With an estimated 700 teachers killed, and more than 3000 wounded, teachers and educators have continued to strive to deliver some form of education to the young amongst the rubble and in tents. Despite the declarations by established organisations such as Amnesty, Human Rights Watch, the UNHCR, the ICC and the ICJ, the Israeli war machine has been continually rearmed and provided logistic support by western allies, including Australia.

While such aggression has led to sanctions against Russia for its war in Ukraine, the lack of any such diplomatic response suggests a total endorsement for the tactics employed by Israel. The war on Palestine indicates that mass civilian casualty is now endorsed as an acceptable cost of pursuit of dominance and control by global powers led by the US. This is a dangerous development for everyone.

PEWA for Peace

As workers in public education, PEWA believes we have a duty to fight for a peaceful future. We see our work as educators and support staff as inseparable from ensuring the world our youth inherit is one in which they can be free from the threat of war.

As working people, we recognise that all wars rely on workers doing the killing and dying, and the financial costs of war are always borne by the working class.

We urge all public educators and associated workers to integrate a pro-peace dimension to their work and union activism as part of the development of a renewed broad peace movement. We emphatically endorse the notion that, ‘all wars are fought against children’.

In a practical sense, we encourage you to visit our website, where you can find pro-peace materials for your classroom including printable posters, stickers and badges. Furthermore, we are developing material that can be utilised as teaching resources around the concept of peace.

We encourage teachers to ensure that their school create entries into Teachers Federation annual Sam Lewis Peace prize. To support such work, establishing Peace Clubs at schools is a sound way in which peace can be advocated for amongst students and your communities.

