

Australia Day 2014 used to promote the military

Will Morrow
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The determination of the Australian political establishment to use the centenary of World War I later this year to glorify the military and bombard the population with patriotic propaganda was on display at the January 26 Australia Day celebrations in Sydney.

Australia Day does not commemorate a military anniversary. It marks the arrival in 1788 of the First Fleet of British ships at Sydney Cove and Britain's colonisation of the Australian continent. The majority of ordinary people around the country generally spend the public holiday at home with friends and family, having barbeques, watching cricket or the Australian Open tennis tournament.

In Sydney, a series of cultural events are organised around the city which attract large crowds, including tall sailing ships in Sydney Harbour, rock concerts, classical and jazz performances, art displays, children's music concerts and markets. In the evening, fireworks are exploded over the Harbour. The 2014 celebrations last Sunday, however, concluded with a distinctly militarist tone.

The fireworks spectacle in the evening began with a performance by the Australian military band. The 20-minute fireworks and sound and light show that followed openly paid tribute to World War I, accompanied in parts with orchestral military music. The show's centrepiece was a large mechanised red poppy—the flower used to commemorate those who died in the war—floating on barges in the harbour. Midway through the spectacle, the poppy structure opened to reveal a giant water fountain. The Australian Army's "Rising Sun" emblem was then projected onto the fountain's mist. The emblem was followed by a projection of the Australian flag and the playing of the national anthem.

Australia Day was the second time in barely three months that Sydney Harbour has been turned into a stage

for the glorification of the Australian military. Last October, the harbour was the scene of a multi-million dollar extravaganza, featuring dozens of warships and massive fireworks, to celebrate the centenary of the establishment of the Australian Navy. The iconic Sydney Opera House and Sydney Harbour Bridge were used, as the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote at the time, "to screen a sanitised 'history' of the Navy, complete with broadcasts of wartime propaganda footage, laser lights, frenetic techno-rhythms and martial themes."

Last year's "International Fleet Review" and this year's Australia Day celebrations are just the prelude to an unprecedented four-year national campaign by the Australian political establishment to commemorate the centenary of World War I. What is being planned are possibly the largest and most expensive celebrations of the conflict that will be conducted in the world. Beginning on August 4—the date that Britain and its dominions such as Australia declared war on Germany in 1914—a series of events will glorify every major episode in Australia's involvement in the four year-long slaughter. (See: "Australian government plans to celebrate World War One")

Hundreds of thousands of Australian youth were sent off wearing the "Rising Sun" badge to fight and die in WWI for no other purpose but to defend the wealth and interests of the capitalist elite in Britain and Australia against their capitalist rivals. It was a criminal and imperialist war by the ruling classes of all sides, which cost tens of millions of lives. Some 62,000 Australian soldiers were killed and 156,000 wounded—of whom it is estimated at least 60,000 died of their injuries within several years—out of a population of barely 4.5 million.

Underlying the obscene glorification of such carnage are contemporary political calculations. It is aimed at cultivating an ideological climate in which nationalism plays an ever more central role in social and political life

and to drown out, with patriotic nostrums, an examination and understanding of the real causes of war. The lauding of the armed forces is also aimed at deluding young people, under conditions of rising unemployment, into believing that the military is an attractive career path.

The promotion of militarism flows directly from the unconditional support that is being given by the Australian ruling class to the steady build-up by US imperialism toward a military confrontation with China.

Behind the backs of the Australian people, former Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard aligned Australia with the Obama administration's "pivot" to Asia—a diplomatic, economic and military campaign aimed at undermining China and maintaining US economic and strategic dominance throughout the region.

The US military's AirSea battle strategy is premised upon the Australian military assisting American forces to blockade the major sea lanes between the Indian and Pacific Oceans and cut off China's access to essential resources. US marines are now based in Darwin and US warships and aircraft are increasingly operating from ports and airbases in northern and western Australia. There are plans to qualitatively increase the war-fighting capabilities of the Australian military, with multi-billion dollar plans to acquire new submarines, ships and jet fighters.

The Liberal-National Coalition government of Tony Abbott is escalating Labor's unconditional alignment with Washington. After meeting with US political figures last week, including Vice President Joe Biden, Liberal Foreign Minister Julie Bishop declared that the US alliance was "the cornerstone of our national security" and referred to China as the source of instability in Asia.

A century after WWI, an even greater catastrophe is being planned by the ruling class. A critical aspect in developing mass political opposition is the rejection of the nationalist and militarist conceptions that are the ideological preparations for war.



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