

1914 to 2014

# The glorification of World War I and the preparations for World War III

## IYSSE meetings in Australia and New Zealand

22 February 2014

A four-year campaign is being prepared by the Australian government and corporate elite to glorify World War I. Starting from August 4—one hundred years after Britain declared war on Germany—ceremonies will mark every major episode in the conflict that involved the Australian military. The “highpoint” will be massive patriotic celebrations on April 25, 2015, the centenary of the Anzac landing at Gallipoli as part of the disastrous British and French attempt to capture the Dardanelles Strait in Turkey. In less than eight months, the lives of nearly 9,000 Australian and 3,000 New Zealand troops were squandered in futile and murderous battles.

Federal and state governments intend to spend as much as \$325 million on commemorating the war, while an “Anzac Centenary Public Fund” is seeking to raise as much as \$300 million from companies and private individuals to finance various events and projects.

What is being celebrated and why? World War I was a catastrophe that claimed the lives of more than 10 million soldiers and left millions more maimed and crippled. Out of Australia’s population of barely 4.5 million at the time, 62,000 young men were killed at Gallipoli and on the Western Front in Europe between 1915 and 1918. Another 156,000 were wounded, of whom more than 60,000 died from their injuries within a matter of years. The barbarism and futility of the conflict was recorded forever in powerful and enduring anti-war poetry, such as that of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, novels such as *All Quiet On the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque, songs and films.

World War I was an imperialist war. Its fundamental cause was the breakdown of the capitalist system, expressed in the struggle between the major powers for domination of colonies, markets and profits. As Leon Trotsky was to write, the war signified that the development of world economy had come into explosive conflict with the division of the world into competing nation-states. The carnage was only ended after the 1917 Russian Revolution, the first socialist revolution in history, swept away the old Tsarist autocracy and created the first workers’ state. Everywhere the ruling classes trembled at the prospect of the working class in their own countries following the path of their Soviet brothers and sisters. Barely two decades later, the defeats of the revolutionary striving of the working class, from Britain, to China, to Germany, by their Stalinist and social democratic leaderships, created the conditions for the even bloodier catastrophe of World War II.

Now the same contradictions of the capitalist system have resurfaced, leading to another systemic breakdown. For more than twenty years, the American ruling elite has launched war after war to stem its economic decline and maintain its dominance over its rivals in Europe, and especially in Asia. Numerous flashpoints now exist, from the Middle East, to the Ukraine, to the East and South China Seas and the Korean Peninsula, where conflicts between the major powers threaten to escalate into all-out war.

In Asia, US imperialism is firming up its alliances and establishing military bases to encircle and threaten China. Australia is one of the key partners in the Obama administration’s aggressive anti-China “pivot.”

Under agreements made by the Gillard Labor government, a US marine taskforce has been set up in Darwin, while the US Air Force and Navy has expanded the operations of northern and western Australian ports and air bases. Behind the backs of the population and with no public debate, the Australian political establishment has committed to fighting a war on China that would inevitably escalate into the use of nuclear weapons.

This is what lies behind the glorification of World War I. The ruling class intends to bombard the population with jingoistic propaganda to numb the consciousness of workers and youth and condition them to supporting war. At the same time, the celebrations will be used to divert from the ever-deepening attacks on the economic and social conditions of the vast majority of the population, and the accelerating assault on democratic rights, as social inequality escalates and a tiny parasitic minority amasses obscene levels of wealth.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) is the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party. We are fighting to build a unified international antiwar movement of workers and youth, based on the same socialist and internationalist program that guided the Russian Revolution and the struggle led by Leon Trotsky and the Fourth International against the Stalinist betrayal of world socialism.

We urge all students to attend the IYSSE meetings at campuses across Australia and in New Zealand. The meetings will review and discuss the causes and consequences of World War I and the necessity for a socialist perspective to fight the threat of a new world war.

### **UNSW**

Tuesday, March 11, 1:30 p.m.

The Marsh Room, the Roundhouse

### **University of Newcastle**

Wednesday, March 12, 3 p.m.

McMullin Building, Room MCLG42

### **Victoria University of Wellington**

Thursday, March 13, 2:30 p.m.

Meeting Room SU218, Student Union Building

### **Macquarie University**

Wednesday, March 19, 1 p.m.

Drysdale Room, Level 3, Campus Hub

### **University of Western Sydney (UWS) - Bankstown Campus**

Wednesday, March 19

*Location TBA*

### **Murdoch University**

Thursday, March 20, 5:30 p.m.

Room SS1.032

### **University of Western Sydney (UWS) - Parramatta Campus**

Tuesday, March 25

*Location TBA*

### **University of Sydney**

Wednesday, March 26

*Location TBA*

### **Griffith University** Thursday, March 27, 1 p.m.

Seminar Room N53\_0.60, Willett Centre Building

### **Victoria University**

*Location and time TBA*

### **RMIT**

*Location and time TBA*



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**