

Australia's Anzac Day—the gap between official rhetoric and popular sentiments

Our reporters
26 April 2014

While Anzac Day—the annual anniversary of the Gallipoli landing in Turkey during World War I—has always been an official occasion for the promotion of militarism, this year's event has been accompanied by a barrage of government and media propaganda.

Wall-to-wall media coverage and hours of radio and television programming urging workers and youth to attend marches, dawn ceremonies and other events have deluged the population. For the next four years—the centenary of World War I—federal and various state governments and corporate sponsors plan to spend over \$500 million on war commemorations.

Under conditions in which the Australian political establishment has aligned itself with the US-led confrontation with Russia over Ukraine and Washington's war preparations in Asia against China, the avalanche of Anzac Day propaganda is aimed at the conditioning of Australian workers and youth for a new and even more catastrophic conflict.

In contrast to previous years, the marches were headed by military veterans from post-1975 conflicts with contingents from the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, as well as from military missions in Kuwait, Somalia, East Timor and Solomon Islands. This is aimed at whitewashing these imperialist interventions and, as one television commentator admitted, a “reshaping for future conflicts.”

Yesterday's Anzac Day ceremonies attracted thousands of people in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and capital cities and hundreds of regional cities. Hundreds of sons and daughters and even grand-children of World War I and World War II veterans marched amid escalating government efforts to inculcate new generations in military culture. Primary and secondary school students even marched.

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke with some of those watching Anzac Day marches in Melbourne and Sydney yesterday. There was understandable confusion—a

direct product of the onslaught of militarist propaganda and the suppression of the real history and predatory objectives of the Australian ruling class in WWI and subsequent wars. But there was an obvious gulf between the sentiments of those watching the marches and the aims of the government and media.

Many of those watching the events that the WSWs spoke to came because their relatives had been in the military and they wanted to honour their memory. Some said they opposed war, distrusted the government and the media and raised concerns about increased military government spending.

Few were aware of the US military build-up against China as part of the “pivot to Asia”, or the extent of Australian military involvement. This is a direct consequence of the virtual media and government blackout of the “pivot” and any serious discussion of its dangerous consequences.

Sam, 25, a trainee teacher from Queensland attended the march but was also concerned about the danger of new military conflicts.

“War is a way of distracting us... You need to know all the information but sometimes we need to look at alternatives [to war] as well,” she said. “You can't trust the media, they put a glossy spin on everything...”

“For me Anzac Day isn't about war it's about people and what they went through and how that affected their lives. They went through horrors and we are supportive of what they've been through.”

Asked whether she thought this was what the Anzac Day organisers and speakers thought, she replied, “I don't stay for the speeches. Politicians always put a spin on things.”

Gary, a social worker from southwest Sydney suburb of Liverpool, attended with his 22-year-old son Sean, a University of Western Sydney student. They came because Gary's father, who had been in the navy during

WWII, was marching in the event. “I’m not for the military, I’m anti-war and I don’t believe all the stuff from politicians about the war,” he said.

“I think it’s outrageous that the government can say everyone has to be prepared to accept cuts to government speeding—welfare, education, hospitals and all that sort of thing—and then announces that it is going to spending billions on new jet fighters. How’s that supposed to help anyone?”

Asked about the danger of new wars in the Pacific and in Europe, and Washington’s “pivot” against China, Gary said, “I don’t study these issues. I know that I should but I try not to let these things dominate my life.”

Jay, 35, a pharmaceutical company manager, attended the Melbourne dawn service and the march. Asked why he thought WWI had occurred, he said, “The war was run by weapons dealers. They made millions out of it” and said there were parallels to the current situation.

“Nowadays, most countries, doesn’t matter if they’re poor or rich, are in an arms race. They’re spending billions and billions on buying weapons. That mentality is just not right. The money spent on weaponry should be cut and used for real purposes.

“A lot of people are dying all over the world because of not having enough money, enough food and enough medicine. And they should be spending more on providing jobs for people,” he said.

Jamie, a logistics company admin worker from South Korea, said her grandfather had been involved in the Korean War and she decided to watch the march out of respect for him. Asked to comment about stationing of US marines in Darwin, as part of Washington’s pivot against China, she said she knew nothing about it.

“I believe any war is terrible, I hate war. The governments need to think about what people want. I think there needs to be more talk between the countries. America thinks it is the best in the world but I don’t think that is right. We need to be all together as one in the world. War is not the thing we celebrate. We have to remember it but we have to make sure it does not happen again.”

Amy said she was concerned about the escalating danger of war and pointed to developments in Ukraine and said it was “very similar to the situation and the economic situation that was at the start of World War II.”

WSWS reporters explained that the only way to end war was by mobilising the international working class against the profit system.

Amy replied, “I wouldn’t call myself a socialist... [but]

I think the working class has been shafted. I think the unification of the working class, and to give them some power, is an important thing. I would love for us to be the generation that will be the ones to dismantle that power in some way.”

Jordan, a Year 12 student from Ringwood Secondary College attended the Melbourne march because he “wanted to see what it’s like. I think it’s important to honour the people who died.” Asked about the escalating danger of a US-led war against Russia and China, he said, “They haven’t learned a thing from history. It seems like history is repeating itself...”

“The spread of wealth in the United States is unbelievable. The top 5 percent control so much of the wealth. At the core of why WWI happened was because the people at the top wanted too much and the people didn’t want it.”

Jordan continued: “All these soldiers died in WWI because British officers led them into a disaster in Gallipoli. I’m here to mourn them, but not to celebrate war. I thought no one else thought like me...”

“There should never have been a war in Iraq. It wasn’t about weapons of mass destruction. They wanted to go in there and take the oil. It’s the same with Syria now. They want to go in and take the wealth. Before they had even finished the investigation into September 11, they were at war with Afghanistan. They needed it as an excuse to go to war with Iraq.”

Jordan raised the danger of another world war today. “It could all explode at any time,” he said. “It could turn ugly, really quickly....The more the system allows for the rich to control it, the uglier it’s going to turn out. The government is supposed to reflect the opinions of the masses but really it’s controlled by a small minority and its own selfish interests.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact