

The international significance of Australia's World War I “celebrations”

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The extraordinary campaign being conducted by the Australian government, backed by state governments, the media and education authorities, to commemorate World War I is part of a global ideological offensive by the ruling elites as they prepare to plunge mankind into another catastrophe, this time with potential nuclear consequences.

Last January, when launching the commemoration, which will involve some form of activity every single day over the next four years, Prime Minister Tony Abbott said it would be a “people’s celebration” because World War I was the “crucible that forged our nation.”

The federal and state governments are set to spend \$300 million, augmented by corporate donations—at least twice the outlays planned in Britain. The schools are being flooded with propaganda, while competitions, excursions and special projects are organised, particularly directed at children in their most formative years.

During the Cold War, Australian governments and media outlets used to denounce such activities as “communist brainwashing.” Today they are organising a pro-war propaganda campaign on a truly industrial scale. Over the next four years, no young child or teenager passing through the school system will be able to escape the barrage. Instead, they will be forced to participate in it.

The intensity of this operation points to its underlying motivation—the conditioning of the population for the role being played by Australia in the ongoing preparations for a new world war.

Like their counterparts around the world, the Australian ruling elites are confronted with mass anti-war sentiment. Hence they must now seek to break it down by every means possible, above all by poisoning

the minds of the youth.

Opposition to war was revealed in 2003 when the largest anti-war demonstrations in country’s history took place against the planned US war against Iraq. While that movement was dissipated by the orientation of its leadership, which claimed that mass pressure could halt the invasion, the sentiments that produced it have not gone away. Indeed the cycle of endless violence over the past decade has meant they have deepened.

At the same time, the descent toward a new world war has increased, with Australian imperialism playing a key role in the war drive of the US.

Having signed on to the US administration’s “pivot to Asia,” officially launched from the floor of the Australian parliament by President Obama in November 2011, the Australian military apparatus is now totally integrated into the Pentagon’s escalating military preparations for a conflict with China. Situated between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, Australia is crucial to US military operations, part of the Pentagon’s Air/Sea Battle Plan for attacks on the Chinese mainland, to close off the choke points in the vital sea lanes to the immediate north of the country, through which pass oil and other vital imports to China.

US communications bases, above all the facility at Pine Gap in central Australia, are already engaged on a daily basis in American military operations, stretching from the Middle East to East Asia. Such is the level of integration, that any US offensive would, by its very nature, involve its Australian bases. In other words, no decision would even arise about Australia joining a US-provoked war with Russia and/or China, potentially involving nuclear weapons. It would simply be a fait accompli.

Australian imperialism’s role in US war plans has

been further underscored by the participation of the Australian government, fully backed by the opposition parties, in the provocations against Russia over the downing of Malaysian airliner MH17 in Ukraine. Immediately after briefings by the Obama administration on the morning the plane crashed, Abbott took the lead in international denunciations of Russia. This was followed by an Australian push at the UN Security Council for the establishment of an international investigation team, possibly backed by armed police and military personnel.

Opinion pieces in the corporate-owned media are also advancing the claim that not only was World War I necessary, but Australian participation was essential. Justification of past crimes is always the preparation for the commission of new ones.

According to a comment by Paul Kelly, the editor-at-large of the Murdoch-owned *Australian*, “it was a war we had to fight in” and those who claim otherwise are “fatuous and ignorant.”

Kelly cites Carl Bridge, director of the Menzies Centre of Australian Studies at King’s College London. Bridge’s assertions in support of Australian defence of the British Empire in World War I underscore the essential, particularly material and economic, reasons why the entire political establishment has enlisted in the American war drive.

“Britain was Australia’s trading partner, taking 60 percent of our trade,” Bridge writes. “If Britain got into trouble, then Australia got into trouble. Our whole economy would have foundered. There’s the investment element, by far and away our main overseas investment source was London.”

Today, while China is Australia’s main trading partner, the economy as a whole is ruled by finance capital, which is tied into the operation of global money markets, dominated by the US. Last January, Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop brushed aside any notion of a conflict between the economic and strategic interests of Australian imperialism. While China was Australia’s largest export market, she noted, after investment and finance were taken into account, “our single most important economic partner is, in fact, the United States.”

An earlier generation of capitalist politicians honoured the commitment of Labor leader Andrew Fisher to defend the British Empire and its plunder “to

the last man and the last shilling” in the bloodbath of World War I, recognising it was vital for the defence of the profits, markets and wealth of the class they represented.

Today, for the same fundamental reasons, the entire political elite has aligned itself with the war drive of US imperialism, which could have even more devastating consequences.

The enthusiasm with which the Australian political establishment has backed this agenda, revealed so sharply in its “celebration” of World War I, should not be dismissed as some kind of antipodean peculiarity. Rather, it is the surest sign that worldwide the imperialist war gods are once again athirst and will plunge mankind into a catastrophe unless the international working class puts an end to their outmoded social order.



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