

# Australian university students oppose the drive to war and militarism

Our reporters

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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality's campaign at Australian university campus orientation events in recent weeks met with a significant response from students.

Members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) distributed copies of the statement "Oppose war and austerity! Join the International Youth and Students for Social Equality!" and other articles published by the *World Socialist Web Site* on literature stalls at a total of nine university campuses in the cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Newcastle.

The IYSSE's campaign centred on the growing danger of world war, opposition to the Australian government's World War I centenary celebrations, which are aimed at glorifying war and militarism, and the necessity for a unified socialist and internationalist movement of workers and youth to put an end to capitalism, the source of imperialist war.

IYSSE literature stalls attracted substantial interest and led to a wide-ranging discussion with students. More than 180 students applied to join the IYSSE or to be contacted about future meetings on campus and more than \$200 of Marxist literature was sold, including several copies of David North's latest book, *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century*.

**Hollan**, a first-year student at Victoria University in Melbourne, is planning to major in history and writing. He raised concerns about the government's WWI centenary celebrations, which are intensifying in the lead-up to Anzac Day on April 25, the anniversary of Australia's military involvement in the 1915 Allied invasion of Turkey at Gallipoli.

"In Gallipoli, we were the aggressors," he said. "It wasn't a war for peace. At the time, Germany was one

of the countries with few colonies and it wanted more. Really, colonialism played a big part in the war. It was colonialism and imperialism."

"Anzac Day is really a nationalistic thing," he continued. "Lots of people like to have it because it's important to honour the deaths of so many people. But the day is really sinister. It's being used to grow nationalist pride so that if war happens, people will fight. Those people died, but they were working people, they didn't have an interest in war... The entire day [Anzac Day] is not about peace and stopping more deaths, it's to prepare for war."

Hollan said that 100 years on, "nothing has really changed" and noted the growing tensions in Eastern Europe. "The US wants its sphere of influence closer to Russia. It is putting embargoes on. The rubble has been destroyed... I wouldn't be surprised if a major war broke out. I'm more surprised that nothing has happened already." An IYSSE member commented that German imperialism was once again seeking expansion to the east, reviving its 20th century ambitions. "That's right," Hollan said. "That's what Hitler's *Lebensraum* was about."

Hollan noted that the military celebrations were being accompanied by the growing "war on terror." "All this is for people to see: there are terror raids happening, there is real evidence, there are terrorists here," he said. "It works sort of the same way as Anzac Day, to work people into a fervour, in defence of the nation, and they market it as self-defence."

Hollan told the IYSSE that he was passionate about history and had studied the Russian Revolution in his final year of high school. "The Russian Revolution is one of the most impactful parts of history in the last 200 years," he said. "You saw that in [John Reed's] *Ten Days that Shook the World*. After the

revolution numbers of countries, including Australia, invaded Russia. They went to quell the workers there. A revolution had never happened before and these countries didn't want it to spread. That was, in fact, Lenin's strategy. He said that you needed a revolution all around the world. It had to be a world revolution."

At the University of Melbourne, **Mario** is beginning a Bachelor of Arts and plans to major in journalism. He said he had been closely following the growing tensions in Ukraine.

"At the moment, it feels like war is an inevitability," he said. "The way capitalism is going, it does create competition between nations like this, and this leads to war."

Commenting on the WWI centenary, he said: "The war had nothing to do with ordinary people anywhere. In Australia, the British government got Australia to fight. They sent young people to die when they had nothing to do with it, in Australia and in Britain. The British were worried that there would be competition from Germany, and that led to the war. As far as the working people were concerned, they got nothing."

Mario also spoke about the revelations of NSA spying by Edward Snowden and police "anti-terror" raids in Australia. "I almost feel stupid about being surprised at these Snowden revelations," he said. "I wasn't expecting that level of 1984-style, government watching everything you do. But it's horrible, the invasion of personal freedom. That's the point America is supposed to stand for—freedom for its citizens—but apparently not freedom from their own government."

The Australian government, he said, was doing the same thing. "They're doing it to control the population. Their justification is safety, to make sure that nothing bad is happening under their noses."

**Angus**, a University of Newcastle student in New South Wales, said: "I'm concerned about the world political situation. Just 100 years since the First World War and we are looking at the same possibility of world war... Tensions are building in Europe between East and West that could spark a major war."

Referring to the Australian government's WWI celebrations, he said that "the mythology about the war is being promoted and not the horrors... I think tens of thousands of Australians were willingly sacrificed to show Britain that Australia was a worthy ally that deserved its protection in its aspirations in this region."

**Toby**, a first-year student at the University of New South Wales, said the WWI centenary celebrations were "not about saying that war is a bad thing and that we should try to avoid it because of the loss of human life. It's much more a promotion of national values."

WWI, he continued "was a clash of imperialist powers over imperialist policy. This encompassed a lot of different issues but ultimately it was the policy of expansion that brought them into conflict and so Australia was dragged into that as a colonial power..."

"You can see that in how the Middle East was split up after the war but these plans were being made in 1911. It wasn't a split up based on cultural lines, or what was correct, it was based on the allocation of resources between France and England. The states of Syria and Iraq are essentially made up for natural resources as opposed to actually having any bearing on the local community."

Toby commented on the promotion of militarism in Australian schools. "There's a lot of a sense of adventure but we had this Australian idea of a traditional soldier, and how great it is. We were constantly taught the idea of the 'Anzac legend' again and again in school. Gallipoli is one of the big ones about how the 'brave Australians' fought, how 'the English betrayed us' and we formed our own 'national identity.' These myths are about generating an Australian identity but that's not in the interests of ordinary Australian people."

Pointing to the political calculations behind the government's WWI war celebrations, Toby said: "If we say that these people died for these values they can much more easily convince people to die for them again."



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