

# New Zealanders shun Camp Gallipoli WWI celebration

Tom Peters  
10 April 2015

The Australian-based Camp Gallipoli Foundation announced the cancellation on Monday of its New Zealand event, telling the media that by April 1 it had sold just 102 tickets. It had aimed to attract 10,000 people to an overnight camp-out at Auckland's Ellerslie Racecourse on April 24 to celebrate the centenary of Australian and New Zealand (Anzac) troops landing at Gallipoli in the First World War.

The abysmal ticket sales are a debacle for the foundation and the co-sponsors of the event—the Returned and Services Association (RSA), the state broadcaster TVNZ, and the New Zealand government, which had promoted the camp as part of WWI centenary commemorations.

Considerable effort had gone into promoting Camp Gallipoli. It was to feature entertainment by pop-rock band Evermore and reggae group 1814 with appearances by TV psychologist Nigel Latta and former All Blacks rugby coach Sir Graham Henry. The camp's "ambassadors" included players from the Black Caps national cricket team and the Breakers basketball team.

Despite these high-profile celebrity endorsements the public shunned the event, which was aimed at glorifying one of the bloodiest battles of WWI. The organisers ran up against widespread and deep-seated anti-war sentiment among workers and young people, the vast majority of whom regard World War I as a never-to-be repeated catastrophe.

Camp Gallipoli Foundation CEO Chris Fox lashed out at the public for failing to buy tickets. He told Monday's *Dominion Post*: "You didn't get off your backside... I'd check your pulses to make sure that you're still breathing."

This prompted a deluge of 167 comments to the newspaper's web site, most of them expressing hostility to Fox and his insulting comments.

Several readers denounced Camp Gallipoli as "tacky,"

with one describing it as "an appalling 'commercial event' purely designed to make money out of an event in history that saw tragic losses of life on both sides."

While advertised as "not for profit," the camp had numerous corporate sponsors, including TVNZ, Australia's Bendigo Bank, and the top sports bodies of Australia and New Zealand. Profits from ticket sales were to go to the RSA.

Many comments expressed revulsion at the event's glorification of militarism. One described the camp as "rather bizarre and not my way [of] remembering thousands of senseless deaths in a war started by crazy leaders who were more than willing to send multitudes of young men to their deaths."

"Why don't we stop commemorating war and death?" asked Clinton Jackson. "We invaded another country. While the memory of the brave lads who were forced to kill for the pleasure of European royalty should be honoured, the actual battles should be confined to history along with its causes, religion and the narcissistic royal families."

"I 100% agree with Clinton Jackson's comments," said another reader, who described WWI as a "crime" and added: "NZ was never at risk from WWI. Our young men were encouraged to go and fought for the 'mother country' and were told it was their duty... If you ask a lot of kiwis what they reflect on over ANZAC Day it's most likely to be the futility of war and mankind's continued view of it as a way to solve problems."

Joannie similarly wrote: "I remember all our war dead on Anzac day including my dead son who served his country but to me this Gallipoli hysteria is just so over the top that it is becoming crude. Gallipoli was a disaster caused by the British which slaughtered thousands on both sides. Best buried in History I think."

Another reader bluntly stated: "Kiwis and Aussies were used by the English masters as cannon fodder in an

invasion that history tells us would have not made any difference anyway. We should not be celebrating this, but we should never forget.”

The 1915 invasion of Gallipoli, in Turkey, was a failed attempt by Britain and its allies to gain control of the shipping lanes through the Dardenelles. The fighting killed more than 87,000 Ottoman soldiers and 44,000 Allied troops, including 8,500 Australians and 2,779 New Zealanders. Hundreds of thousands more were maimed or became sick.

As a junior partner of British imperialism, New Zealand’s ruling class joined WWI to expand its wealth and seize more Pacific island colonies. In the course of the 1914–1918 war, 18,500 New Zealanders died and 40,000 were injured, out of a country with a population of about one million. In other words, approximately 6 percent of the population were killed or maimed in WWI.

Successive Australian and New Zealand governments have recast the catastrophe of Gallipoli as an occasion for nationalist celebration. The April 25 holiday, Anzac Day, is at the centre of the WWI centenary campaign, which promotes the battle as central to the “national identity” of both countries.

Several comments denounced Camp Gallipoli as an Australian import, with one declaring that “Australia have turned ANZAC day into some jingoistic fervour.” In fact, while Fox’s organisation has managed to sell many more tickets to its events throughout Australia, there are other signs of public hostility to the celebrations of militarism. Channel Nine was compelled to “burn off” its much-publicised *Gallipoli* television series after audiences turned off. An article berating the public for failing to watch prompted a stream of angry responses.

The Camp Gallipoli fiasco reflects widespread, albeit still latent, opposition to this intensifying militarist and nationalist campaign. At the same time, the comments to the *Dominion Post* indicate that there is little understanding of the purpose of the WWI commemorations.

For the ruling elite, the Anzac centenary is not simply a historical commemoration. On the contrary, the government and the corporate media are seeking to suppress anti-war sentiment and promote unquestioning respect for the military in order to condition the public, especially young people, to support future imperialist wars.

The National Party government, with the support of Labour and all the parliamentary parties, is spending more than \$150 million on WWI related projects, including a

new National War Memorial Park and major museum exhibitions.

A government-produced book, universally praised in the media, hailed New Zealand’s participation in WWI as “largely successful and profitable.” It endorsed the police state measures put in place during the war and covered up the opposition to the war that emerged in the working class.

Today, the world situation increasingly resembles the cauldron of inter-imperialist tensions that dominated in the period prior to World War I. The US has launched non-stop wars and interventions over the past two and half decades in a bid to counter its economic decline through military means. The National government is currently preparing to send New Zealand troops to join the renewed US-led wars in Iraq and Syria.

At the same time, the government and opposition, along with the pseudo-left organisations, have endorsed the Obama administration’s confrontation with Russia over Ukraine, and Washington’s strategic “pivot” to Asia—aimed at a military build-up against China.

The mounting popular opposition to war finds no expression in the political establishment. Every political party supports the military and intelligence alliance with the US. In 2003, tens of thousands of people marched in New Zealand against the invasion of Iraq, however, the pseudo-left groups and Greens politically subordinated the anti-war protests to the 1999–2008 Labour government, which sent troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, despite the mass opposition.

The celebration of WWI must be taken as a warning that the ruling elite will not hesitate to drag the country into a Third World War to defend its predatory interests. While anti-war sentiment revealed by the Camp Gallipoli fiasco is significant, unfocussed hostility will not halt the drive to war. What is required is the building of an anti-war movement of the international working class to put an end to capitalism—the root cause of war. That will be the focus of the International May Day being organised by the International Committee of the Fourth International on May 3.



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