

Australian council cancels hall booking for SEP anti-war meeting

Defend the democratic rights of the SEP! Oppose political censorship!

The Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
11 April 2015

In a flagrant act of political censorship, the Labor Party-controlled Burwood City Council in Sydney has cancelled a booking by the Socialist Equality Party to use the Burwood Library Auditorium for its public meeting on April 26, entitled “Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism and the drive to World War III.”

The SEP was informed of the cancellation in a phone call to its national office at 2.15 p.m. on Friday, April 10, after the Council had received payment earlier in the day. The council representative, with whom the booking had been made on April 3, argued that the cancellation was due to “complaints from residents” and complained that the SEP was “putting out flyers for this event.” She said that the meeting was “more of a protest than a meeting, and we don’t allow protests in Burwood Council area.”

When questioned as to how many complaints had been made, the council representative said “two.” She did not respond when reminded that the Council had been well aware that the SEP was holding a public meeting, not a protest. Under further questioning, she asserted that the meeting was a “conflict of interest with Burwood Council.” She then asked for a copy of the promotional flyer to be emailed to her and stated that the decision to cancel the booking had been made “by management.”

Within minutes of sending to the council a link to its meeting announcement, the SEP received an email at 2.27 p.m. confirming the cancellation and providing, as the sole reason, “a number of complaints from residents about the nature of the meeting.”

Investigations by the Socialist Equality Party quickly revealed that it was not residents of Burwood who made the complaints, but people active on the extreme right-wing and nationalist Facebook page “The Great Aussie Patriot.” Along with other right-wing organisations, such as the Australian Defence League and the Australia First Party, the page heavily promoted the xenophobic anti-Muslim “Reclaim Australia” rallies held on April 4.

At 10.17 a.m. on April 10, the unnamed administrator of the Facebook page published a photo of the SEP meeting flyer, with the threatening text: “Pure Left Wing filth plan to put down our ANZACS.... All Aussie Patriots gate crash this meeting on Sunday April 26 2:30pm Burwood Library Auditorium.”

The administrator wrote that the leaflet had been given to a “friend,” who had scanned it and sent it to be uploaded to the “The Great Aussie Patriot” page. Earlier that morning the SEP had distributed the flyer at just one location—Marrickville Railway Station—the only place the “friend” could have received it. And only one person—among the dozens who took the leaflet with interest that morning—had verbally abused the SEP members and called police to demand that they stop the SEP campaign. Police arrived, tried to intimidate the SEP members, but then, when the latter upheld their democratic right to campaign for a public meeting, admitted they had only received one complaint and left.

Comments to the Facebook post included: “[A]nyone who wants to put them down [Anzacs] should be shot and called a traitor,” “They should be deported from

our country!!!” and “These people should be gaoled for treason!” Amid hypocritical assertions that Australian soldiers had died in World War I for “freedom” and “freedom of speech,” the phone numbers of Burwood Library and Burwood Council were posted along with appeals for supporters of the page to call and demand that the meeting be cancelled. Shortly after, a comment was posted stating: “Awesome: Burwood Council, the police and the media have been alerted.”

Thus, it is already clear that Burwood Council cancelled the hall booking in a knee-jerk response to phone calls from racist and nationalist elements. Without the slightest concern for basic democratic rights, let alone any attempt to carry out an independent investigation into both the purpose of the SEP meeting and the nature and agenda of its opponents, the Labor Party-controlled Council simply acceded to extreme right-wing demands for an anti-democratic and discriminatory act of political censorship.

The willingness of the Labor Party-controlled council to align itself with representatives of “The Great Aussie Patriot” underscores the correctness of the assessment made by the SEP about the agenda behind the multi-million dollar commemorations of the centenary of World War I and the Anzac landing at Gallipoli. As we wrote in our announcement of the April 26 meetings: “The coming Anzac Day ‘celebrations’ are about the present, not the past. They are part of the conscious efforts of the media, and the corporate and political establishment to indoctrinate youth with patriotism, drown out anti-war sentiment and ideologically condition the population for new military confrontations.”

Behind their backs, the Australian population has been placed by the former Labor government, and now the Liberal/National Coalition government of Prime Minister Tony Abbott, on the frontline of the US “pivot” to Asia, which includes advanced and detailed plans for war with China. These plans, which are being openly discussed in strategic and military circles, amount to preparations for a nuclear World War III. The media, the unions, the Greens and the fake “lefts” are all collaborating to suppress any public debate on the implications.

The actions of Burwood Council are a timely warning of the profound connection between preparations for imperialist war and the assault on the democratic rights

of the working class. As the ruling elites escalate their militarist agenda, the authorities at every level resort to repression and censorship, while whipping up the most reactionary and right-wing forces to intimidate and suppress popular opposition.

During World War I, anti-conscription campaigners were vilified and physically attacked, while working class opponents of the war, such as the Industrial Workers of the World, were illegalised and imprisoned. During World War II, the Trotskyist Communist League of Australia was declared illegal due to its exposure of the imperialist character of the war. During the early years of the Cold War, when the US government was contemplating nuclear war against the Soviet Union, attempts were made to illegalise the Stalinist Communist Party, while in the course of the Vietnam War, numerous anti-war campaigners were subjected to police violence, arrest and jail.

Today, millions of workers and youth oppose militarism but their views find no expression within the official political establishment. Only the Socialist Equality Party is fighting to alert the working class to the war dangers and to fight for the development of an international anti-war movement grounded on a socialist and internationalist perspective.

The working class must resolutely defend the right of the SEP to conduct its political work and hold anti-war meetings, and the right of workers and youth to attend. We call on SEP supporters and *World Socialist Web Site* readers everywhere to demand that Burwood Council reverse its anti-democratic cancellation of the April 26 hall booking.

Emails should be sent to the Labor Party Mayor of Burwood, Councillor John Faker, at mayor@burwood.nsw.gov.au, and to Burwood Council management, at council@burwood.nsw.gov.au. Please specify “Complaint” in the subject field and CC all emails to the SEP at sep@sep.org.au.

The email addresses of all seven current Burwood councillors can be found [here](#).



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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