

Australian workers and youth oppose Labor council's ban on SEP anti-war meeting

“If they wanted to honour the dead, they would have stopped all wars”

Our reporters
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Workers and youth last weekend in Sydney, the Entrance, Newcastle, Brisbane and Melbourne condemned the Burwood City Council's cancellation of the Socialist Equality Party's hall booking for its April 26 public meeting “Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism and the drive to World War III.”

In a fundamental attack on the SEP's democratic rights, management of the Labor-controlled inner-west Sydney council revoked the booking on Friday, claiming it had received complaints from residents about the event. The calls to the council, in fact, were not from so-called residents but racist and extreme-right elements (see: “Australian council cancels hall booking for SEP anti-war meeting”).

Over the past two days more than 400 people have signed SEP petitions demanding that the council reverse its decision. All those backing the SEP campaign raised concerns about the implications of the council's attack on democratic rights and expressed their outrage that a council would carry out such a blatant act of political censorship.

SEP supporters campaigned at the Burwood, Campsie and Ashfield shopping centres in Sydney's inner west on Saturday, where scores signed the petition. The response was overwhelmingly against the council's actions, with people, at times, waiting to sign.

The campaign has tapped into deep-seated opposition to war as well as widespread hostility to the major political parties. Some said they were not surprised by the Labor council's decision, while others pointed out that there were no differences between the Labor and Liberal parties on the issue of war.

In Campsie one person bought two tickets to the meeting, telling the SEP that she was concerned about the growing war danger. A former soldier initially walked away after receiving an SEP leaflet about the council ban, saying it was not for him. Five minutes later he returned, shook the SEP supporter's hand and said, “I agree war is wrong.”

Other people emailed the council to express their opposition to its decision (see “Defenders of democratic rights condemn

Australian council's anti-war meeting ban”).

In Burwood, **Camilo**, 25, who works for a logistics company bought a meeting ticket and signed the SEP's petition. “This meeting should be able to go ahead,” he declared.

“Just because the council doesn't agree with it doesn't mean they should ban it. Your group is willing to bring forward ideas against militarisation in a state that focuses too much on defence and not on health care or education. There's something very wrong with the way things are being carried out, not just by our government, but all around the world. The world has come to a point where every state feels the need to militarise under the guise of safety, but it really is backwards to say that being safe means buying more guns,” he commented.

A young woman angrily denounced the Burwood Council. “It has no right to tell us what to think and say. It's disgusting,” she said. “Having a meeting about WWII is not going to affect the government, but if we stand up and protest then it will. I can't speak for the government but I think all this is so it can try and put WWII into action because war creates money for the rich and makes the poor poorer.”

Jennifer, a retired factory worker originally from South Africa, said the council ban was “deplorable” and like a “dictatorship.”

“We live in a democracy,” she continued, “and people have the right to choose whichever way they want to go. I think you should fight it. The council don't have a right to do this. I don't believe all this nationalism and right to fight and all this crap. I'm a pacifist and I think everyone has a right to protest against war.”

“War has never stopped because of the money they push into it... It's always ordinary people and workers that pay. [Governments] are frightened about people becoming aware. They want to keep people happy by saying that your forefathers fought for this great freedom. But what freedom do we have when they can stop you from speaking if you oppose them?”

Many of those who signed the SEP petitions said World War I was a bloody slaughter and disagreed with how the war

centenary was being used by the government to promote militarism.

In Newcastle, a retiree commented on army recruitment advertisements. “They make it look like they are movie stars... they make war out to be a big game.” Another highlighted the connection between the current US-led military conflicts and the Vietnam War. “I was part of the anti-Vietnam War rallies. That war was a stitch up, just like the wars in the Middle East today,” he said.

A young working-class mother said she “couldn’t believe the saturation coverage of WWI on the television... This has nothing to do with remembering the dead. If they wanted to honour them they would have stopped all wars.”

Pam, a retiree from New South Wales’ Central Coast, signed the SEP petition and explained that her uncles and cousins were killed in WWI.

“A lot of the young people who went to the war were talked into going. They thought they were going to defend their country, but sadly they were killed for nothing. The war did not achieve anything, as most wars don’t,” she said.

“When it comes down to the bottom line, war is about money. While everything goes backwards for us, the big companies make mega bucks... War is a diversion for other things [and] utilised to distract people.”

In the Melbourne suburb of Brunswick, **Carmine** opposed the council ban of the SEP’s anti-war meeting. “It’s crazy,” he said. “We are told all about celebrating the sacrifices to preserve and propagate democracy and yet you’re not entitled to question and challenge that.”

Carmine said that the wall-to-wall media promotion of the WWI centenary and Anzac was “like a build up to Christmas or something like that—a celebration, which is not relevant for today. It is misappropriated.

“The aim is to reiterate war and imperialism. They want to keep people on edge, ready to fight. It’s their idea of a national identity...It’s easy to give people the illusion of democracy but it’s abstracted. You can have your voice—but with conditions,” he added.

John, an engineer, said he was “disgusted” by Burwood council’s cancellation of the SEP’s hall booking. “This speaks volumes about where Australia is in the evolution of its civil society. I’ve lived in third world countries where there is more freedom of speech.”

“Governments are inclined to war because war creates profit and business. It’s also the ultimate distraction from domestic issues, a distraction from our actual problems and onto fabricated ones. The glorification of war is a way to make sure questions are not asked about the budget and the fact that defence spending is increasing, whilst spending on teaching, nursing and things that really matter are neglected,” he said.

At Brisbane’s West End Market, **Odette**, an office worker, said the council’s decision was an attack on “freedom of speech and the collective right of people to have a point of

view. You have to question why they’ve done that—not what reason they give—but what is the hidden agenda?

“Is this the way the world’s going? That you are not allowed to express your political beliefs? That you can’t ask why and oppose the lies that people have been told? Does this mean that in the future, if you have a point of view then you are going to be targeted by the police and the political forces behind them? Is this the way society is going, toward a totalitarian regime?”

Odette said people needed to understand the real meaning of World War I. She was repulsed by the government calling the WWI centenary a “celebration.”

“Why call it a celebration? The soldiers who went didn’t really have a choice. They would have been told: ‘You’ve got to go.’ They wouldn’t have known what the war was really all about and why Australia was involved. This could happen again, definitely, but maybe this time people will say ‘No. What has this war got to do with us?’”

Jennifer, a volunteer worker, condemned the council ban. “It’s fair for people to air their point of view, even if it’s not mainstream. Why does the council react that way? There’s always some motive behind it.”

Jennifer she said was concerned about the danger of another global war: “We really hope there won’t be another world war. It’s good to have an understanding of history. A discussion about Gallipoli would be great to also consider the operation’s impact on the people of Turkey. It was fought on their land. That also needs to be considered.”

The SEP is continuing its campaign to have Burwood Council reverse its anti-democratic cancellation of the April 26 hall booking.

WSWS readers should send emails to the Labor Party Mayor of Burwood, Councillor John Faker, at mayer@burwood.nsw.gov.au, and to Burwood Council management, at council@burwood.nsw.gov.au. The email addresses of all seven current Burwood councillors can be found [here](#).

Please specify “Complaint” in the subject field and CC all emails to the SEP at sep@sep.org.au.



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