

Defenders of democratic rights condemn Australian council's anti-war meeting ban

Our reporters
13 April 2015

The Socialist Equality Party has received copies of dozens of emails sent to Burwood Council Mayor John Faker and other councillors opposing the decision on April 10 by council management to cancel the SEP's booking of the Burwood Library Auditorium for its April 26 public meeting entitled: "Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism and the drive to World War III."

Extracts from a small selection of the emails are reprinted below, and more will be published tomorrow. The letters condemn the decision and call on the mayor and Burwood Council to overturn this blatantly anti-democratic and discriminatory act of political censorship.

To the Mayor and staff of Burwood Council,

I read with dismay that you have cancelled a meeting by the SEP at your council building. I am shocked that you have cancelled this meeting due to a complaint by the racist group "Reclaim Australia." Reclaim Australia held a protest in Melbourne and caused incredible offense, insult and even injury to people in the city who were asking for unity across Australia against racism. Reclaim Australia has the mentality of people who caused riots on Sydney beaches.

I wonder if you did any research before you acted on a spurious complaint.

Some may want to celebrate/commemorate Anzac Day. Others see the inherent violence of the war, compounded by this celebration/commemoration. It is legal to have discussion about stopping war. It is moral to allow diverse voices to be heard. You did not have to agree to what was being said. You only had to allow it.

I am very disappointed in you and in your actions in directing your staff to cancel the meeting. I hope that you start to critically think about life and death. Perhaps next time, you may even research the situation before you take action.

JB

From a former military serviceman

As an Australian citizen, former military serviceman, and

human rights advocate I am an avid supporter of the right to organize, meet and discuss issues in public. I am appalled to learn of the cancellation of the scheduled SEP meeting to discuss the meaning of the ANZAC events, legends and effects, in particular, the relationship to the trend to restrict further our rights and liberties in this era of the "war on terror" and overseas military adventures in alliance with American imperialism.

I might take this opportunity to remind you that a good number of ex-servicemen and women are not against a re-assessment of some of the narratives that have been built around their service to country.

I hope that you will ask Council to reverse their decision in the interests of protecting the right to free expression.

GB

"There is no glory in war"

This meeting is not designed to denigrate the "fallen" but to offer hope in another perspective. Inherent in the 2015 celebrations of war is the risk of glorifying it. Everyone knows that there is no glory in war. The loved ones of the fallen know that, and the rest of the world grieves with them at the human and other war-related costs. It is important that this decision be reversed in the interests of developing a more enlightened and cohesive world, locally and internationally.

MA

Burwood library "a poor example"

Libraries are supposed to be public spaces open to all. As depositories of knowledge, their collections are supposed to represent a wide range of views, and as institutions that promote lifelong learning and innovation, they claim to support intellectual rigour and to be apolitical.

The fact that your library has responded to pressure from right-wing groups which openly urge violent response rather than measured discussion on their Facebook page, and that you have not independently assessed the situation makes a mockery of your commitment to the principles of democracy—the right to freedom of speech and intellectual inquiry.

If this unprincipled stance is the future direction of libraries, it is a great disappointment and Burwood library is a very poor example of the great institution of public libraries.

BM

“Those who oppose the meeting need not attend”

I have attended their [SEP] meetings when they were held at Sydney University, the University of Western Sydney, the Australian Museum, Parramatta Council, Ashfield Council, Liverpool Community Centre, Redfern Town Hall and Erskineville Town Hall.

The meetings have always been intellectually informative, respectful of questions or comments offered by those who attend, lawful, peaceful and educational. My background is as a school teacher and as a lawyer so I think I am somewhat qualified to make these observations. I cannot see how the public dialogue of such ideas can be deemed a protest or ‘a conflict of interest’ to the Council. The mere fact that the denied space is a library, where you would imagine there to be thousands of books containing a whole range of contrasting ideas accessible to the general public is no less ironic. Are we going to start burning books which have an anti-war theme? In a democratic, multicultural and politically diverse society such as Australia, I am most concerned that the Council’s cancellation of this public meeting by SEP amounts to nothing short of censorship.

Hiring the auditorium to the SEP for the purposes of this meeting is no different to doing so for any school, church, religious, cultural or political group etc, where the topic and perspective of conversation may not be to the liking of all; nonetheless, we afford a safe forum for such ideas to be presented and debated by diverse groups because it is part of our protection of and right to freedom of speech, religion or political association. Those who oppose the meeting need not attend and those who wish to attend should not be denied.

MT

“Blatant political discrimination and censorship”

I am disgusted to hear that the Burwood Council had

cancelled a booking for a room at a council facility for the Socialist Equality Party’s public meeting “Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism and the drive to World War III” on April 26th. This is an act of blatant political discrimination and censorship.

Under any circumstances such an action would be unacceptable. The right to freedom of expression and dissent is a fundamental democratic principle. However it is even more disturbing that the council has acted on the complaints of far right groups who promote racism and call for violence against their political opponents. These are the same groups who recently organised the Islamophobic “Reclaim Australia” rallies.

DH

“Burwood is a diverse area and the SEP should be welcome”

As a resident of Burwood for nine years, I think it is a mistake, on the basis of the evidence proffered, to cancel this meeting. Burwood is a diverse area and the SEP should be welcome to hold public meetings and to disseminate notification of their intention to hold a public meeting. This is particularly true when the meeting is to discuss matters of importance such as resistance to imperialism and warfare. It is a mistake to pander to the wishes of racist/nationalist groups such as GAP [the Great Aussie Patriot] because ceding to them will ultimately cause conflict with the diverse culture of Burwood.

I hope you reconsider and maintain the booking that was originally granted and that there are other opportunities in the future for the SEP to hold public meetings within Burwood Council.

AS

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.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact