

Australian city council refuses to revoke ban on SEP meeting

Our reporter
15 April 2015

Burwood City Council has refused to reverse its cancellation of the Socialist Equality Party's booking of the Burwood Library Auditorium for its April 26 public meeting, "Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism and the drive to World War III."

The decision, which was emailed today to some of those scores of people who have written to the council in protest over last week's ban, underlines the extent and the seriousness of the attack on the democratic rights of the SEP and the working class as a whole.

Over the past four days, the council has received letters from many people in Sydney, across New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia, Queensland, New Zealand and the east and west coasts of the United States expressing their anger and outrage over its blatant act of political censorship.

Those writing have raised their deep concerns about the council's repudiation of freedom of speech and its refusal to allow any discussion of the real history of Anzac Day, the celebration of militarism and the danger of a new world war. These issues have been totally ignored by the council which has replied to those protesting with a pro-forma letter which simply declares that it is maintaining its ban.

I refer to your recent email in which you express your complaint at Council's decision to cancel the above booking.

I write to inform you that Council has reviewed all facts of the matter and has decided not to reverse its decision to cancel the booking.

Please accept Council's apology for any inconvenience caused by this decision.

Kind regards
Ian McCallum
Deputy General Manager,
Corporate, Governance & Community

Totally contemptuous of the hundreds of people who have signed petitions or written to the council, the letter provides no details of what it deems to be the "facts of the matter" and no explanation or reason for the council's decision to cancel the Library Auditorium booking on April 10.

Nor does it acknowledge, let alone reply to the fact—fully detailed in an SEP letter sent to the council on April 11—that extreme right-wing and racist elements were involved in the campaign to stop the meeting.

At the time of writing the SEP had not received any official notification from Burwood council of its refusal to lift the meeting cancellation or acknowledgment from Mayor John Faker or any councillors that they had received SEP national secretary James Cogan's letter calling for a reversal of the ban.

The council's decision to ban the SEP meeting and arrogantly ignore the appeals of workers and youth across Australia and internationally is a

clear expression of the hostility of the Australian political elite to an opposition based on a socialist and internationalist perspective to the official glorification of Anzac Day, militarism and war.

The SEP calls on workers, youth and *World Socialist Web Site* readers to step up the campaign against the Burwood council's meeting ban. Published below are some of the recent letters sent to the council from New Zealand and the United States.

"The cancellation was 'an anti-democratic and discriminatory act of political censorship'"

The council's decision to cancel a hall booking for the Socialist Equality Party's antiwar meeting on April 26 is an attack on freedom of speech. You have absolutely no justification for this. The explanation given to the SEP—that the meeting was cancelled because it was supposedly a "protest" and there was a "conflict of interest"—only underscores that the cancellation was "an anti-democratic and discriminatory act of political censorship" (as the SEP says).

As a New Zealander who supports the SEP, I wish to add my voice to the many that have already condemned your decision.

The SEP meetings will be extremely valuable for those who attend: they will give voice to the revulsion that millions feel towards the glorification of the battle of Gallipoli and WWI—but which is never given any attention by the media or the political establishment.

Moreover, the SEP is the only political party warning that these celebrations of WWI are aimed at preparing the population to accept today's imperialist interventions—from Washington's war in Iraq and Syria to the military build-up against Russia and China.

Amid an orgy of state-sponsored pro-war propaganda—on both sides of the Tasman Sea—Burwood Council is attempting to stifle the voice of the SEP. Not only that, the council has evidently acted at the behest of extreme right-wing nationalists from the "Great Aussie Patriot" Facebook page—one of the promoters of the racist "Reclaim Australia" rallies.

I urge the council to immediately reverse its decision and allow the SEP meeting to go ahead. As long as the meeting ban remains in place the council is trampling on basic democratic rights while giving support to one of the most thuggish, militaristic and anti-Muslim organisations in Australia.

TP – Wellington NZ

New Zealanders shun "Camp Gallipoli" celebration of war

I am writing as a New Zealand-resident Australian citizen, and the son of a former World War Two serviceman. I am appalled at the decision of Burwood Council to cancel the booking of a public facility for the Socialist Equality Party's meeting "Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism and the drive to World War III" on April 26th. This is an unconscionable act of political censorship.

It is obvious that this decision was taken following a complaint by a member of the right-wing, racist group "Reclaim Australia." That the council has simply given way to the immediate pressure from such an

organization raises alarm bells about a very real threat to democratic rights. What precedent is being set here?

Ordinary people who are nauseated by the patriotic and jingoistic atmosphere being whipped up by the current ANZAC celebrations have every right to convene and attend meetings to discuss these important matters, particularly in the context of the rapidly deepening drive to war around the globe. Between them, the Australian and New Zealand governments are spending tens of millions of dollars, not to remember the past, but to mobilise support for fresh imperialist ventures—already under way with the dispatch of troops from both countries to Iraq.

Opposition to this state of affairs is not restricted to a small minority. Last week, the promoters of a “Camp Gallipoli” event in Auckland were forced to cancel it, having sold just 102 of an anticipated 10,000 tickets. New Zealanders shunned this heavily promoted celebration of war, with many writing to local newspapers to express their revulsion at the event’s crass commercialization of militarist slaughter.

Facilities such as the Burwood library are meant for public use. The SEP, which is a registered political party with a decades-long history of struggle in the Sydney area, fighting for the interests of working people, should not be subjected to any political bans by council. I call on you to rescind this decision and allow the booking to stand. This would send an important signal to the forces of reaction gathering around such fascistic-minded outfits as “Reclaim Australia.”

JT – Wellington NZ

“Every ANZAC day I share Wilfred Owen’s poem *Arms and the Boy* on my Facebook page”

I am a New Zealand painter, and I am disturbed by your decision to politicise your venue hire by preventing the Socialist Equality Party from holding their April 26 meeting opposing the drive towards war. Here in New Zealand there is an increasingly disturbing atmosphere surrounding the WWI commemorations. The sober mourning and bitter reflection, and the urgent warnings of “Lest we forget,” are increasingly being replaced by bravado and a vulgar patriotism.

I believe the same sort of militaristic rhetoric is taking hold in Australia as well, and on a larger scale. While I am quite certain that none of the major powers today desire to provoke a third world war, the US is certainly going about the right way to cause one on several fronts, and I doubt it will relinquish its title to China without resorting to military confrontation. These parallels between the pre-WWI economic tensions and those of today, they disturb me a lot. We ought to be discussing them. We have a right to do so. It is most likely—I hope, for the good of us all—a right guaranteed by Australian law.

If the Burwood Council feels that the SEP has no right to hire a venue from a representative body to hold their anti-war meeting then never mind uttering “Lest we forget”: You have forgotten.

Every ANZAC day I share Wilfred Owen’s poem *Arms and the Boy* on my Facebook page. It is my little way of remembering those in my family who fought in and were affected by WWII. I’d like to share it with you, councillors, for what little it might do:

Let the boy try along this bayonet-blade
How cold steel is, and keen with hunger of blood;
Blue with all malice, like a madman’s flash;
And thinly drawn with famishing for flesh.
Lend him to stroke these blind, blunt bullet-leads,
Which long to nuzzle in the hearts of lads,
Or give him cartridges of fine zinc teeth
Sharp with the sharpness of grief and death.
For his teeth seem for laughing round an apple.
There lurk no claws behind his fingers supple;
And God will grow no talons at his heels,
Nor antlers through the thickness of his curls.

MS – Wellington, NZ

“Not reversing the cancellation, a dangerous example will be set”

This letter is a formal complaint of the decision recently taken by the Burwood City Council in Sydney to cancel an April 26, 2015, public meeting by the Socialist Equality Party on the subjects of history, politics and war at the Burwood Library auditorium.

The Socialist Equality Party in Australia is a legal organization, has a democratic right to freedom of political communication and should not be politically censored and prohibited from holding educational anti-war meetings for interested members of the community.

If Burwood Library has received threats from individuals politically hostile to the Socialist Equality Party, that is an illegitimate reason to cancel the said public meeting. Rather, Burwood Council must provide police protection for speakers, attenders and staffs.

The Burwood City Council will be serving the greater social good by reversing its decision to cancel the public meeting by the Socialist Equality Party. By not reversing cancellation, a dangerous example will be set for arbitrary and undemocratic practices.

Thank you for your time.

AH – United States

From a US Army war veteran

As a U.S. Army veteran (1966–68) and the son of a WWII and Korean War veteran, I urge you to reconsider barring the SEP from meeting in your library. This is so clearly wrong in a country that prides itself in being a “democracy” with freedom of speech I am stunned that this letter is necessary.

The Socialist Equality Party is doing the youth of your nation a service by putting war in the proper perspective. If only we had more branches of the SEP in my country then there would be a chance of ending one war after the next around the world in the name of the American people.

WD – Nashville Tennessee

“Blatant attempt to suppress a political viewpoint”

Your cancellation of the Socialist Equality Party’s booking of the Burwood Library Auditorium for a public meeting on April 26 entitled “Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism and the drive to World War III” is a blatant attempt to suppress a political viewpoint—that is, socialist internationalism—which apparently makes the Burwood Council uncomfortable.

This is an unacceptable attempt at political censorship which must be overturned.

SW – Albuquerque, NM

USA

WSWS readers should send emails 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. The email addresses of all seven current Burwood councillors can be seen **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