

## Oppose political censorship at the University of Sydney!

# An Open Letter to the Vice Chancellor

James Cogan—National Secretary SEP (Australia)  
20 April 2015

*The following open letter was sent today to Dr Michael Spence, Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of Sydney.*

Dear Dr Spence,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Socialist Equality Party to demand that you rescind your refusal to allow the SEP to hire a venue at the university for the purposes of holding a public anti-war meeting on Sunday April 26, the weekend of Anzac Day. The meeting is entitled “Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism and the drive to World War III.”

The university’s decision constitutes a flagrant act of political censorship and makes a mockery of your own statement, made on April 15, stressing “the importance ... of our commitment to academic freedom, the freedom of speech, and the right to protest. We must be a place in which debate on key issues of public significance can take place, and in which strongly held views can be freely expressed on all sides.”

As you will be aware, the SEP has, over the past four decades, held regular, democratically-conducted and professionally organised meetings, lectures and events at the University of Sydney, as well as at other campuses and venues throughout Australia.

Last Friday, April 17, however, a Sydney university representative informed the SEP of its refusal to hire the lecture theatre on the grounds that the university had “security advice” that there was “potential for disruption to activities on campus as a result of the event being held.” When asked to provide evidence of this “potential” your representative refused to answer.

Today we learn, in an article in the April 20 *Sydney Morning Herald*, that one of your spokeswomen informed the newspaper’s journalist that allowing the SEP to hold a meeting “could affect the safety of staff and students.”

What evidence do you have to substantiate these allegations? If they are true, why did the university not advise the SEP of this information?

In the April 17 phone conversation, your representative stated that the SEP’s booking request had been declined after “widespread consultation within the university organisation” and that it was “discussed at all appropriate levels of the university.”

The SEP demands full public disclosure of these discussions. Who was present? What was said? Were police or intelligence agencies involved? Was the federal government or the NSW state government consulted?

The university’s attack on the democratic rights of the SEP comes in the wake of a similar attack a week earlier. On April 10, the Burwood City Council cancelled an SEP booking of its Library Auditorium, justifying its actions on the basis that it had received “several” complaints from “residents” about the “nature of the meeting.”

In fact, the “complaints” were motivated by the administrators and supporters of the extreme right-wing “The Great Aussie Patriot” Facebook page, which has connections to Reclaim Australia, an organisation that espouses anti-Muslim xenophobia, anti-immigrant racism and threatens to disrupt the activities of anyone who politically opposes it.

According to the University of Sydney, the very *possibility* that the SEP’s meeting *might* face protests or disruption justifies refusing to allow it to take place.

As your remarks of April 15 indicated, this was not the approach taken by the university when retired British Colonel Richard Kemp, a pro-Zionist supporter of the criminal US-led wars in the Middle East and the Israeli military’s assault on Gaza, delivered a March 11 lecture on campus. The university knew well in

advance that students were organising to protest outside the meeting and that there was a possibility it could be disrupted. On that occasion, Dr Kemp's meeting was not cancelled; the university stepped up its security.

That a diametrically opposed standard has been applied in the case of the Socialist Equality Party's meeting underscores the fact that the university's response has been entirely political. The SEP's will be the only public meeting called to challenge the lies and falsifications being promoted around the Anzac centenary. It will reveal that behind the unprecedented "celebrations" orchestrated by the Abbott government, with the full support of the Labor Party, the Greens and the entire political and media establishment, lies preparations for yet another global war, behind the backs of the Australian and world population.

This will therefore be the only public meeting organised to give conscious expression to the widespread and deep-going anti-war sentiments held by the vast majority of the population, including many, many thousands of university students.

You correctly defended the democratic right of Colonel Kemp to express his views at a University of Sydney venue. We insist that you extend that same right to the SEP.

Yours sincerely,  
James Cogan  
National Secretary  
Socialist Equality Party



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**