

Sydney pacifist forum blocks motion to oppose bans on SEP's anti-war meeting

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The organisers of a public forum in Sydney last night, held to discuss the centenary of World War I and the British-led invasion of Turkey's Gallipoli Peninsula, refused to allow Socialist Equality Party (SEP) supporters to put a motion condemning the Labor-Party-led Burwood Council and the University of Sydney for banning the SEP's April 26 anti-war meeting.

By blocking discussion on the serious threat to fundamental democratic rights posed by the bans on the SEP meetings, the organising committee took the same anti-democratic position as the two bodies that had carried out the acts of political censorship.

The forum, entitled, "Gallipoli and Anzac after 100 Years: Lessons and the Prospects for Peace Today," was convened by the Gallipoli Centenary Peace Campaign, which was established last year by the Greens, the Marrickville Peace Group, Marrickville Residents for Reconciliation, and Pax Christi, a Roman Catholic organisation.

Before the event commenced, chairperson Jon Atkins agreed that an SEP supporter could put the party's resolution at the end of proceedings. Copies of SEP leaflets opposing the political censorship carried out by Burwood council and Sydney University were widely circulated among audience members.

The SEP motion stated: "This forum at Petersham Town Hall on April 22 condemns Burwood Council and the University of Sydney for banning the Socialist Equality Party's public meeting, 'Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism and the drive to World War III.' These acts of political censorship set a dangerous precedent. Under conditions of rising international geopolitical tensions, it is imperative that anti-war and anti-militarist voices have the democratic right to be heard."

During the interval between the panel of speakers and

the advertised "generous Q&A session," however, Atkins confronted SEP supporters and declared that a "consensus of the committee" had decided that no SEP member could speak and the resolution would not be permitted.

Atkins provided no explanation for the reversal of his position, insisting: "We set the rules. This is not a public meeting. It is a forum." SEP supporters strongly objected, insisting that Atkins should allow the audience itself, as a democratic principle, to vote on whether to consider the resolution. Atkins refused to discuss the matter further, and walked off.

During the Q&A session, Atkins three times refused to give the call to an SEP member who rose to ask the meeting to consider the motion. When this occurred a fourth time, several SEP supporters got to their feet to object. Atkins then shouted that the meeting was closed, and shut down the proceedings.

SEP supporters appealed to the audience of about 60 people for a vote on whether to hear the resolution, but not one of the Greens or members of the pseudo-left Socialist Alliance in attendance defended the SEP's democratic rights. Instead, members and supporters of these organisations vehemently denounced SEP supporters for raising the issue, and threateningly demanded that they leave the hall immediately.

This political line-up mirrored the refusal, over the past week, of all the so-called "progressive" organisations, including the Greens and the pseudo-left groups, Socialist Alliance, Socialist Alternative and Solidarity, to publicly condemn Burwood Council or the University of Sydney.

The politics behind this alignment was expressed in the content of the forum. The three speakers were Douglas Newton, a retired university historian, Margot Pearson, a long-time member of the Women's

International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and Anne Noonan, the state co-ordinator of the Medical Association for the Prevention of War (MAPW).

All three speakers advanced a pacifist perspective, falsely claiming that the threat of war could be averted by pleading to governments to seek “diplomatic solutions” to conflicts, uphold international law and agree to “international arbitration of disputes.”

Pearson described, at considerable length, the WILPF’s attempts to halt World War I, via such appeals to the very ruling elites conducting the bloodbath, before admitting that they went “without success.” Then, after the war, the WILPF promoted illusions in the League of Nations, which collapsed amid the descent into World War II.

While insisting on her abhorrence of war, Pearson emphasised that today her organisation was affiliated to the United Nations—the clearing-house for imperialist intrigues that has facilitated virtually every US-led military intervention and war since its inception after World War II.

In a rather revealing comment, Pearson paid tribute to US President Barack Obama, hailing the recent nuclear technology deal struck with Iran for demonstrating that diplomacy offered “the only way forward” to prevent war. In reality, the deal with Iran, far from bringing peace, is part of Washington’s machinations in the Middle East as it prepares for even more devastating wars against Russia and China.

None of the speakers mentioned, let alone opposed, the US war drive—and for good reason. The Greens and pseudo-left groups have backed, or voiced only tactical reservations about, Washington’s interventions in Libya, Syria and Ukraine, and blamed alleged Chinese aggression for the US drive to encircle China, militarily and strategically, via its “pivot” to Asia.

Conscious of widespread anti-war sentiment in Australia and internationally, organisations such as the Gallipoli Centenary Peace Campaign function as political safety valves, diverting that hostility back behind the same institutions, political parties and parliamentary framework responsible for the drive to war.

Atkins, the chairperson, wrote an article for the Socialist Alliance’s *Green Left Weekly* last November promoting the formation of the Gallipoli Centenary Peace Campaign as a project to present “alternative

narratives to the official version of Australia’s war experiences and history.”

The truth is that, while the speakers at the forum claimed to oppose the jingoism and militarism of the government-media sponsored Anzac Day “celebrations,” they covered over any mention of who was politically responsible for dragooning hundreds of thousands of young workers into World War I.

There were references to the defeat of two referenda conducted in Australia during 1916 and 1917 to impose conscription in order to bolster flagging recruitment as the massive casualties and horrors of war became known. But no speaker mentioned that it was a Labor government that enforced the war effort and initiated the referenda. Nor did they refer to the Second International, whose social democratic parties betrayed the working class when they voted to support their “own” nations in the fratricidal bloodbath.

Likewise, none of the speakers referred to the international socialist opposition to the imperialist slaughter, spearheaded by Vladimir Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky, that culminated in the seizure of political power by the Russian working class in the October 1917 Russian Revolution, which ultimately ended the war.

These omissions were no mistake. The common denominator in the “alternative narratives” of World War I advanced by the meeting’s speakers and organisers, and their refusal to defend the democratic rights of the SEP, is their hostility to a revolutionary socialist opposition to war, based on the international working class.



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