

Australia: State-funded broadcaster at forefront of Anzac glorification

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The government and media promotion of militarism and war reached fever pitch this week in the lead-up to Anzac Day, the centenary of Australia's participation in the disastrous British-led invasion of Turkey's Gallipoli Peninsula on April 25, 1915, during World War I.

The wall-to-wall propaganda, which is part of the four-year WWI centenary, is unprecedented. On current estimates, Australian governments—federal, state and territory—will spend over \$400 million on the centenary, double the combined totals being expended by Britain, France, Germany, New Zealand and Canada.

The funds are being used to produce a vast array of newly-commissioned Gallipoli-themed works and events—music, dance, drama, visual arts, travelling military displays, seminars and books, as well as war history scholarships and research grants. Such is the barrage of military-theme broadcasting that someone visiting the Australia for the first time could easily think they had arrived in a country under military rule.

Leading the media juggernaut is the state-funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). While commercial networks are airing hours of WWI centenary shows and broadcasts, none can match the sheer volume of material being churned out by ABC.

Announcing its Anzac Day coverage this year, ABC managing director Mark Scott declared that the broadcaster would ensure that every citizen could “immerse” themselves in what he claimed was the “most significant moment in the nation's history”—that is, Australia's involvement in the invasion of Turkey. “Drowning the population in Anzac militarism and war” is a more accurate description of the ABC's centenary coverage.

Plans for the ABC's war programming were initiated in 2013, under the former Gillard Labor government.

While Australian governments have always claimed that they do not intervene in the network's programming decisions, the Labor cabinet instructed the ABC to produce a range of shows to “commemorate and raise awareness of the Anzac Centenary.” This would not be confined to WWI but “all the conflicts in which Australia has participated,” it said.

Additional funding would be provided, not just for radio and television documentaries and shows, but also for other programming on a range of media delivery platforms, including TV interstitials, vignettes and on-board airlight snippets.

While all this is promoted as “raising awareness” and “honouring the dead,” its purpose is to promote Australian martial traditions, stifle broad anti-war sentiment, justify current military interventions in the Middle East and condition young people in particular for even more disastrous imperialist conflicts.

In line with the government directives, ABC television, radio, digital services and online content over the past month has been dominated by Gallipoli military history and related documentaries, dramas and interviews, along with readings from war veterans' letters and “personal stories” from soldiers' relatives.

Many of the programs are very similar in giving a sense of the horrors of the battlefield, the suffering of soldiers and the impact on their families. But very few even touch on the reasons for the war and why lives were being squandered over the Gallipoli Peninsula. Those reasons lay in the imperialist rivalries and predatory ambitions of all the Great Powers and their allies.

The network's live coverage of Anzac Day events commences tomorrow at 4.25 a.m. and continues without interruption until 7 p.m. This includes direct

broadcasts of the Gallipoli military ceremony in Turkey, military marches in all Australian state capitals and speeches by the governor general and the prime minister, all of which will be replicated on the ABC's radio network.

Hundreds of ABC jobs were axed in the Abbott government's budget last year but no expense has been spared for the war centenary coverage. The ABC, in fact, has despatched 38 radio and television reporters, presenters, camera crew and technicians to cover the Gallipoli military ceremony in Turkey.

Contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site* yesterday, an ABC spokesman said the network was provided with additional funding by the Department of Veterans Affairs. But he refused to disclose how much, or what the network was spending for either Anzac Day or the four-year war centenary.

Every ABC department is involved in one way or another. There will be separate DVD releases of the military dawn services—at Gallipoli, France and Australia—and the Anzac Day marches in every Australian capital city.

A special interactive app, *Gallipoli: The First Day*, has also been developed in conjunction with the Department of Veterans Affairs, along with a range of commercial products. These include a DVD recording of an Anzac Symphony, which is being premiered in Istanbul and numerous music and spoken word recordings and books.

ABC-TV Education and related broadcasting services are targeting children and teenagers with dramas such as *Small Hands in Big War*, based on children's war diaries, and *My Place*, set in Australia during WWI. There is a *Behind the News Special*, which includes a quiz show for teenagers on the war centenary.

Yesterday, ABC's Radio National featured a program telling parents how to "explain" WWI and war deaths to children. For pre-schoolers, the ABC will publish *Lest We Forget*, a children's picture book.

ABC managing director Mark Scott yesterday sent out a newsletter to all employees, urging them to "absorb as much of our coverage as possible" because they would be subjected to an internal survey.

ABC staff would have to tell the network "what you loved, and what we could do better," he said, so that management could plan "big, pan-ABC projects that really highlight the ABC's unique position in

Australian life." In other words, the state-funded network will be intensifying the war centenary propaganda.

None of this, of course, is simply about history. Included in ABC programming this month is Radio National's *Retrospect: War, Family and Afghanistan*, an audio and interactive online digital series involving six former Australian soldiers. On Monday, ABC-TV's "Four Corners" combined archival interviews with Gallipoli veterans with commentary from current members of the military in a program entitled *Anzac to Afghanistan*. The purpose of these programs is to whitewash Australia's involvement in the illegal occupation of Afghanistan and cover up the war crimes perpetrated in that country.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Labor Opposition leader Bill Shorten constantly use the war commemoration to justify Australian military involvement in the bogus US-led war on terror and the current intervention in Iraq. When Abbott visited New Zealand this week, he pointedly drew comparisons between the Gallipoli campaign 100 years ago and what he called the "sons of Anzac" fighting in the new US-led war in Iraq and Syria.

The flood of Anzac programming underscores the degree to which the ABC is being transformed into an open propaganda arm of the government and state apparatus. Its carefully cultivated reputation for objectivity and even-handedness, which was always within the bounds of what was acceptable to the political establishment, has been abandoned as it has become a vehicle for the glorification of militarism and war.



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