

Workers and young people speak at SEP (Australia) anti-war meetings

Our reporters
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Workers, students, and young people who attended SEP's meetings on Sunday entitled "Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism and the drive to World War III," spoke to the WSWs about the issues raised as well as the attempts by Burwood Council and Sydney University to prevent the events from taking place.

Martha, a public hospital nurse originally from South Africa, came to the Sydney meeting with her daughter, and grandchild. Asked about the attempts to politically censor the SEP, she said: "It's my democratic right to come to this meeting."

"I'm totally opposed to war—there's no need for it in this day and age. The way the world is moving, we're going to end up destroying ourselves.

"I believe we should remember the fallen soldiers—some of them weren't informed, and went to war because they were forced to, others were underage. It's still happening today. They thought they died to save their country, which they didn't. I don't believe we should glorify war. We as working class people are struggling, and we're the ones who pay for war.

"We should inform people. There are a lot of people not aware of what's happening. I've got young teenagers, and they're the ones who are being targeted. Those are the people who were sent to war 100 years ago. But if we inform the young people of the truth today, we've got a better world to look forward to."

Ben, a 33 year-old IT worker from the United States, found the *World Socialist Web Site* the day before the meeting while researching Anzac Day, and felt compelled to attend.

"During my first Anzac Day I was shocked. I thought it was very bizarre. The Australian government invaded a country on behalf of a third country, suffered a huge failure and now you're not just remembering that but celebrating it and making it your national identity, which is being used for pro-war purposes. Whereas in the US we have the 4th of July where the American revolutionaries defended their homeland and told dictators to get out, Australia has nothing to look back to in comparison.

"The articles on the WSWs articulated well how bizarre Anzac Day is and that it is indoctrination and priming the country for future wars. The *Soldier Boys* review informed me that they had military training in schools before World War One, telling young people that the British Empire was all that mattered and brainwashing in order to get them ready for war. So the excitement at the start of WWI wasn't an organic, natural response.

Toa, a Year 11 high school student from the New South Wales

Central Coast, was attending his first SEP meeting. He said, "I don't think they should glorify war. They only glorify it so that young people grow up to celebrate war and think it's a good thing.

"From this meeting I learnt more about the historical events and the role of Lenin and Trotsky and the socialist revolution in Russia and how it started. I'm a little more aware politically about the need for socialism and not having to keep living under this rotten system of capitalism.

"They don't teach us anything like this at school. When they teach us about history it is more about glorifying it, like how we won the wars."

Bob, a retired teacher, said, "The analysis of Anzac Day and the promotion of militarism was very good. To understand the real historical background to this is really important. I was not surprised by the promotion of militarism by the government but I've been very concerned about how this is aimed at young people. I heard [Prime Minister] Abbott's speech yesterday and it was like something from a school principal lecturing students. The government is trying to indoctrinate young people.

"Everything being taught to young people in high schools is against violence and all that sort of thing but then Anzac Day comes along and the students are told that war is necessary. The banning of the SEP meeting at Sydney University was particularly shocking. They [the universities] are supposed to be a place where you can have a meeting on virtually anything."

Tenile, 18, a University of Sydney student said, "The attempts to ban this meeting were utterly ridiculous. I was shocked that Sydney University wouldn't let an anti-war movement have its say. Being prevented from being able to be heard is wrong and so I had to come and show support.

"Every year Anzac Day has gotten bigger and bigger especially over the past five years. So for the 100 year centenary I was expecting a really, really big set-up. However, seeing the amount being spent on it was actually quite jarring. That's one of the things that most struck me at the meeting, especially when the government is cutting hospital and education spending.

"When I went to school I wasn't taught anything about the Russian Revolution or the end of WWI. Everything I was taught was to do with Gallipoli and how the men fought in trenches and they got all sorts of diseases and it was very hard for them but they kept going because we were in the right. Even though technically it was an invasion, it was painted as a battle that was 100 percent necessary. It was only as I got older and started looking into

history myself that I realised that the things that I was taught in primary school were not correct.

“I don’t think that anyone wants to go to war, but I think we’re heading down a very shady path. I’m not sure if it will break out into WWII but at the rate that we’re going it definitely seems like something big is going to happen. Either a revolution or a very serious catastrophe.

At the Melbourne meeting, **Johann**, an international student from Germany studying Engineering said, “ANZAC day is a new topic for me. I was interested to come to this meeting to hear what the SEP had to say as I don’t trust the mainstream press’ view of things. In Germany only a small number of people own the popular media companies and many of these same people have ties to other large industries, particularly military ones.

“I was surprised to learn how much the government is spending on ‘celebrating’ WWI. I was also convinced about the connections between the past and the present situation and how important it is to learn about history if we are to avoid the mistakes of the past.

“The majority of ordinary Germans do not support war. They are not following the anti-Russia line and are very critical of what the media is publishing about Russia.”

Jane, who works at a theatre, said, “I was a child of the 70’s and ANZAC day was barely noticed on the calendar. My memory is that maybe a couple of thousand went to the dawn service and it was a very low key event. I don’t even remember talking about it at school much. Now this year their entire curriculum seems to have been based around it for the last month.

“I have quite a few friends with young children who were disturbed by the level of indoctrination in schools. They told me a young child came home from school saying ‘I want to fight in a war when I grow up.’ Another friend’s five-year-old came home using militaristic phrases such as ‘those we left behind.’ They were also upset her class was singing at an Anzac function at the RSL (Returned Service League) but they had not been consulted.

“Another parent took her kids out of school the day before Anzac Day as they did not want them involved in the official events at school which they felt glorified war. One friend gave her six-year-old a Wilfred Owen poem to take to school and in response their teacher told them to research Anzacs on the computer. At the same school, teachers patrolled the class to make sure all the kids were singing the national anthem. Frankly it sounds like something out of 1930’s Germany.

“Some teachers I know who are anti-war found the level of propaganda in their schools really hard to stomach. With all the overload of Anzac glorification it was good to be physically in a space with people questioning the Anzac myth and how it’s being used to justify more war. I congratulate the SEP for standing up for freedom of speech.”

Evrin, a physics student at the University of Melbourne said, “I think the most impressive thing about the meeting is the broad historical knowledge it brings. With that comes an objective understanding of the evolution of social movements and the reasons for the way things are at the moment. So, that historical passage helps to explain the contemporary situation. That’s extremely important, and that’s not something that many other

organisations will supply.

“The historical understanding of how the clashes between the imperialist state system and the capitalist economic system is what basically necessitates world wars. So the historical perspective I’m talking about is the understanding of how those contradictions lead to wars.

“That’s particularly pertinent now when you look at the situation with the worldwide economy crashing in 2008 and continuing to crash. Looking at the increased militarisation in the US and Germany, it’s glaringly obvious that we’re going through a similar thing that we’ve gone through in recent history, so that historical perspective is a way of understanding the contemporary situation as well.

“Nick [Beams] explained about political leadership, how Lenin saw it as imperative, because it was inevitable that there would be mass uprisings and struggles: the question is what the political perspective of those struggles is, and for that you need political leadership.

“With regards to the blocking of the SEP meetings, it’s obvious that it’s politically motivated, Credit has to be given to the SEP to have followed through with it, it’s important to have this perspective shared.”

At the meeting in Wellington, New Zealand, **Tim**, an artist from Wainuiomata came to the meeting after reading the article “

New Zealand’s WWI exhibitions falsify history and glorify war for a new generation.”

He said, “This meeting’s given me a huge amount to think about. I’m keen to find out more about the Russian Revolution, which is why I got the book [*The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century*].

“I’m appalled by the Anzac Day events, the nationalism. It’s not just shameless, it’s seriously worrying for the very reason that these are the very things that presaged the First World War. There’s a whole new level of propaganda at the moment. It needs to be unmasked and it’s good to see you guys doing that.

“I grew up in the 1970s and 80s and Anzac Day was problematic because the RSA [Returned Services Association] were ultra-conservative. They’d come out with appalling things every time, including anti-Asian stuff. It’s sad to see how the day’s being manipulated now.”



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