

# Australian broadcaster sacks journalist for criticising Anzac Day

## Defend Scott McIntyre! Defend freedom of speech!

The Socialist Equality Party  
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In a flagrant attack on freedom of speech, the state-owned Special Broadcasting Corporation (SBS) has sacked sports journalist Scott McIntyre for making twitter comments critical of the April 25 Anzac Day commemorations.

McIntyre is a respected reporter on international football and has covered two Fifa World Cups and four Asian Cups. His tweets are followed by some 33,000 people.

On the afternoon of April 25, amid the veritable avalanche of media coverage of the centenary of the 1915 landing at Gallipoli by Australian and New Zealand (Anzac) troops, as part of an Anglo-French invasion force, he tweeted five messages between 5.39 p.m. and 5.40 p.m.:

“The cultification of an imperialist invasion of a foreign nation that Australia had no quarrel with is against all ideals of modern society.”

“Wonder if the poorly-read, largely white, nationalist drinkers and gamblers pause today to consider the horror that all mankind suffered.”

“Remembering the summary execution, widespread rape and theft committed by these ‘brave’ Anzacs in Egypt, Palestine and Japan.”

“Not forgetting that the largest single-day terrorist attacks in history were committed by this nation & their allies in Hiroshima & Nagasaki.”

“Innocent children, on the way to school, murdered. Their shadows seared into the concrete of Hiroshima.”—posted with the image of the shadows from the nuclear-devastated city.

However he expressed it, McIntyre’s tweets conveyed his entirely legitimate disgust at the glorification of the Gallipoli invasion and World War I, and his opposition to militarism and war in general. Among his football-following audience, the tweets provoked criticism from some and support from others. Large numbers of people, to one degree or another, share McIntyre’s sentiments.

The political response to his tweets, however, was swift and brutal.

At 9.07 p.m., SBS managing director Michael Ebeid intervened on his own Twitter feed to publicly condemn McIntyre for exercising his right to oppose the Anzac Day celebrations, denouncing the journalist’s comments as “disrespectful” and “not at all the views of SBS.”

Within minutes, Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull, one of the senior ministers in the government of Prime Minister Tony Abbott, tweeted at 9.11 p.m.: “Difficult to think of more offensive or inappropriate comments. Despicable remarks which deserve to be condemned.”

Turnbull’s intervention provoked a stream of tweets, many from individuals associated with right-wing nationalist social media groups, including “The Great Aussie Patriot,” heaping abuse on McIntyre and demanding that he be sacked.

On the morning of April 26, with the clear endorsement of the Abbott government and Communications Minister Turnbull, Ebeid and SBS director of sport Ken Shipp issued a joint media release stating that McIntyre had been “terminated” with “immediate effect.” They declared his tweets had made his position at SBS “untenable” and alleged that he had

compromised “the integrity of the network and audience trust.”

SBS management concluded: “SBS supports our Anzacs and has devoted unprecedented resources to coverage of the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings.”

SBS management acted in the knowledge that not one finger would be lifted to defend McIntyre by the trade unions and the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) in particular, which covers journalists. A cynical MEAA statement today expresses its concern “about the application of the social media policies of media employers,” but does not even name McIntyre, let alone call for his reinstatement or industrial action against SBS. The unions function today as nothing more than adjuncts of corporate management and the government.

The sacking of Scott McIntyre is a transparent act of politically-motivated persecution. It is another stark warning of the reactionary motives behind the Anzac centenary “celebrations.” The Abbott government’s glorification and historical falsification of past wars, with the full complicity of the Labor party, Greens and Independents, is a desperate effort to cultivate nationalism and pro-war jingoism in order to prepare for new, and far bloodier ones. Already, the Australian ruling elite is at the very centre of US-led preparations for a military confrontation with China, while continuing to commit troops to the ongoing, criminal US wars in the Middle East.

Any challenge to this ideological agenda, even a few critical tweets, is being met with abuse, threats of violence and censorship. Democratic rights are being shredded without a hint of resistance from the official political and media establishment. The so-called Human Rights Commissioner in Australia, Tim Wilson, a conservative appointee of the Abbott government, has already publicly endorsed McIntyre’s sacking.

What measures are in store for the next expression of opposition to militarism and war? Criminal charges? Preventive detention? The illegalisation of political parties?

This attack by the government-controlled SBS on McIntyre’s right to freedom of speech comes in the wake of a similar attack on the democratic rights of the Socialist Equality Party to hold public anti-war meetings on April 26, entitled “Anzac Day, the

glorification of militarism and the drive to World War III.”

Burwood Council in Sydney cancelled the SEP’s initial hall booking on April 10, on the grounds that “residents” had complained about the “nature of the meeting.” In fact, the Council received a handful of complaints motivated by the “The Great Aussie Patriot” nationalists.

The University of Sydney quickly followed suit, rejecting an SEP venue request on April 17 on the grounds that there was “a significant risk” that the holding of an anti-war meeting would cause “disruption” to other, Anzac-themed events taking place elsewhere on the campus.

The public meetings proceeded in Melbourne, Sydney and Wellington, New Zealand, only because of the determined political campaign waged by the SEP to defend its democratic rights to freedom of speech, and the democratic rights of all those who oppose war. (See: Workers and youth defy Anzac Day propaganda barrage to attend SEP meetings)

Important questions need to be raised about the decision to terminate McIntyre’s employment. Who took part in the discussions with SBS management? Was Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull involved? Was the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance or other union organisations consulted in advance?

The Socialist Equality Party demands the immediate reinstatement of Scott McIntyre and condemns SBS management for its cowardly attack on freedom of speech and democratic rights. We call on journalists and staff across SBS and in every other media organisation, along with workers and youth in Australia and internationally, to do likewise.



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