

Anzac Day marches mobilise contingents of youth

Our reporters
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The Anzac Day processions around Australia last Saturday were carefully choreographed events and far larger than in previous years. Groups of veterans from the wars and military interventions involving Australia since World War II were vastly outnumbered by serving military personnel, municipal bands and contingents of youth.

This display gave voice to one of the central themes of the four-year government-funded celebration of the centenary of World War I—to prepare a new generation of young people to be thrown into war, just as boys, teenagers and young men were 100 years ago. To encourage an atmosphere of nationalist fervor, Australia Post mail delivery motor cyclists drove along the routes beforehand, handing out free Australian flags to be waved by members of the crowd.

The marches involved tens of thousands of people, with probably as many marching as watching. Many of those in attendance did so because they had a loved one—a child, a spouse or a father—in the parade.

Entire army units, warship crews and air force detachments were deployed for the processions in Sydney and Melbourne, which took about three hours to pass through central city streets.

Even more prominent were school children and teenagers, both male and female, who were marched, military-style, as army, navy or air force cadets, members of school bands, dancing troupes or youth groups run by the Returned Services League (RSL) or police.

Among them were pipe bands from elite private schools, such as Scots College and Presbyterian Ladies College, but also government school bands from working class areas, such as Sydney's Homebush Boys High School and Melbourne's South Caulfield Primary School. The New South Wales education department's

Millennium Marching Band, comprised of students selected from across the state, was given pride of place.

These mobilisations were the result of a concerted propaganda campaign throughout the education system. In the lead-up to Anzac Day, public schools were instructed to conduct services to mark the centenary and teachers were ordered to give lessons and assign tasks and exercises to drum into students an appreciation of the “sacrifices” made by the Australian and New Zealand (Anzac) soldiers in the failed invasion of Gallipoli.

Other youth groups providing contingents included Epping RSL's Golden Kangaroos Marching Band, the University of New South Wales Regiment band and the Marching Koalas, another musical and dancing troupe.

The marches were conducted with a heavy and visible police presence, ostensibly to thwart attacks inspired by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), none of which transpired. Prime Minister Tony Abbott and the Murdoch media had urged people to turn out in overwhelming numbers, even millions, for the Anzac Day events in response to the alleged terrorist threats, but the turnout fell far short of that.

World Socialist Web Site correspondents spoke to people watching the processions in Sydney and Melbourne, and found that some were initially swayed by the official appeals and saturation media campaign to honour the dead by joining in the event. However, a probing and discussion of the causes of World War I, the contemporary wars in the Middle East and the confrontations with China and Russia gave rise to a more critical anti-war outlook.

In Sydney, **Col**, a self-employed maintenance worker and former Cockatoo Island Dockyard apprentice, came to the march with his family to watch his son—who is a member of the cadets at a local army reserve

regiment—take part in the procession.

Asked if he was concerned that the official celebrations were glorifying war, Col commented: “I don’t think anyone who went to war would glorify it. I wouldn’t want to go there myself. A lot of those who went to war, never wanted to talk about it.”

When it was pointed out that the Gallipoli campaign sought to assist the British empire and Australia’s own colonial aspirations in the Asia Pacific, Col responded: “Nobody knew what the war was about. People back then did what they were told ... I just came to pay my respects. I never thought about it that way before. The veterans didn’t want to be honoured; they were so humble.”

Asked if another generation of youth could be marched off to war, Col said: “I don’t think it will ever happen. One hit of a button and everyone has gone anyway. We won’t need to go to war; it will happen here.

“One hundred years ago, we were told to go there by the British. I don’t think we’d put up with that today. They wouldn’t have the same number of people sign up. People aren’t here because they support war.”

Joe, a magazine art director, said he had come to pay his respects “to the people who fought for us,” but he did not agree with the wars being conducted by the US and its allies today. “I just don’t agree with any sort of war at all, unless it’s something that is endangering society,” he said. “If conflict or violence is being put upon us, then I guess there would be no solution but to fight.”

Joe said the main cause of war today was the United States. “America is the secret society causing these conflicts without the general public knowing about it.” He agreed that there were parallels between World War I and today.

“There’s that confusion. We’re jumping in for the US government, but for what reason, we don’t know. I guess the Australians jumped into World War I just to please the British government ... That’s the whole confusion with war. Who are we really fighting, and for what?”

“We’re jumping into a war with the newspapers and the news just telling us one side of the story. When I watch the news I tend not to watch the mainstream channels, to try to get both sides of the story.”

In Melbourne, **Lee**, an international student from

Mexico, was taken aback by the character of the march. “Some of my friends were coming here today to the parade. I decided to come to see what’s happening ... I have noticed that the main purpose of this, that it’s for war propaganda.

“I don’t think it’s a positive thing,” Lee said. “I don’t agree with all the wars that are happening at the moment, because I don’t know why in this century, in this year, that the world’s still in war.”

The Mexican student was concerned about the impact of war propaganda on children. “I think everyone should read real history books, and learn about what really happened in those years.”

Lee was critical of the new US-led war in the Middle East being conducted on the pretext of combating terrorism. “I think it’s the media that’s tried to show us another version, that there are terrorists, that there are bad people, but I don’t think that’s the real thing. I think you have to dig deeper into the theme, and search to see what’s going on there.

“I think with the current wars, the reason why they are there is because they have interests in that land, because of the oil maybe. I think the world should be without war. I think it’s a big business for America. I know it’s the same with Australia. In the news they have shown that innocent children have died because of the drone bombings.”



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