Australia's Anzac celebrations and the fight against war

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The extraordinary campaign in Australia organised around the celebration of World War I, which reached truly frenzied proportions over the weekend with the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the disastrous landing at Gallipoli, Turkey on April 25, 1915, has profound international significance. It is an expression of the reckless turn to militarism of capitalist ruling classes all over the world that threatens to plunge mankind into another imperialist world war.

Another major event took place at the same time, giving conscious political expression to the anti-war sentiment among broad masses of workers and youth in Australia and internationally, and articulating the program of international socialist revolution—the only viable perspective to prevent a nuclear catastrophe.

In the face of concerted attempts to ban them, the meetings called by the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) in Sydney, Melbourne and Wellington, New Zealand in opposition to the official Anzac campaign went ahead—the result of an intense struggle for political clarification in the face of the propaganda barrage unleashed by the government and media establishment.

The character of the audience at the meetings—workers and youth determined to take a stand against militarism and in defence of democratic rights—revealed that the program of the revolutionary party will find adherents to fight for it.

The conventional wisdom spewed forth by the mouthpieces of the political establishment and the corporate media is that the large turnout for the Anzac Day commemorations was a reflection of popular support for militarism. That is a lie.

The celebrations were not spontaneous. They were the outcome of a state-organised and corporate-backed campaign whose origins go back more than a quarter of a century and which now proceeds in lockstep with the drive to war.

The Anzac Day celebrations were initiated under the Hawke-Keating Labor government in 1990, on the eve of the first Gulf War and in line with the drive by US imperialism to take advantage of the dissolution of the Soviet Union to assert its global dominance by military means.

A decisive turn in that campaign came in October 2011, when the Gillard Labor government drew up plans for an official state-backed commemoration of the centenary of World War I. That decision came on the eve of US President Obama's announcement of the launching of American imperialism's "pivot to Asia" from the floor of the Australian parliament.

Since then, the military plans for the encirclement of China and preparations for war against Beijing under the umbrella of "pivot" have proceeded apace. The Air/Sea Battle plan for an attack on the Chinese mainland has been honed and developed over the past four years, denunciations of Chinese "assertiveness" are made almost daily by the military brass and their associated think tanks, and the Australian military and US communications bases in Australia have been completely integrated into the daily operations of Washington's military juggernaut.

No less significant than the military operation has been the ideological and political campaign, involving the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars by federal and state governments. It has penetrated to all levels of the educational system, where teachers have been dragooned, under the threat of official sanction, to involve children as young as five and six years of age. Millions of corporate dollars have been spent either in direct sponsorship of events or in the production of an endless series of pro-war films, documentaries and

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television dramas.

The motivation for this state-organised "celebration" was recognition that the launching of a new war required the overpowering and suppression of the anti-war sentiment that had revealed itself so powerfully in 2003, when the US invasion of Iraq was preceded by the largest anti-war demonstrations in history, both in Australia and internationally.

This campaign has been aided and abetted not least by the shift of all the forces that had played a role in the leadership of that anti-war movement directly into the imperialist camp. Here a major part has been played by the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left groups, all of which are backing the US war drive and its associated regime-change operations, from Libya and Syria to Ukraine, under the banner of "human rights."

There is an inverse relationship at work in the war celebrations. The extent of the official campaign does not reflect the strength of the state, military or political establishment but rather their acute awareness that they confront deep-felt anti-war sentiments.

But sentiments alone are not sufficient to defeat the imperialist war drive. In the final analysis it is the outcome of contradictions rooted in the capitalist system itself. This means that an anti-war movement must be armed with a political program aimed at consciously mobilising the working class for the overthrow of the profit system.

The necessity for this political struggle is underscored by the confusion which characterises the present situation—exemplified by the large turnout of young people in the Anzac campaign, despite the fact that many of them are opposed to the wars of a recent period, recognising they have been conducted on the basis of lies.

The cynical official campaign, using the methods developed by the corporate media, makes an appeal to the idealism of youth, which finds no progressive outlet in the present order, and seeks to turn it in a reactionary nationalist direction. Without the revolutionary intervention of the working class, capitalism is plunging humanity towards a catastrophic world war.

But the same material objective conditions giving rise to the danger of war, together with the deepening attacks on social conditions and the unending assault on democratic rights which accompany it, are creating the conditions for explosive social and political struggles by the working class and the winning of the most politically conscious sections of workers and youth as fighters for international socialism.

The experience of World War I opened the eyes of millions of workers and young people to the realities of the capitalist system. All over the world they turned to the new road opened up by the Russian Revolution of 1917—the outcome of the political struggle, the war against war, waged by Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolshevik Party—and dedicated themselves to the fight for a socialist future free of war and class oppression.

The meetings organised by the Socialist Equality Party in Australia and New Zealand were based on those traditions and the struggle for that perspective. Those workers and youth who attended in the teeth of a deluge of militarist propaganda and in opposition to the attempts to block the meetings are an indication of the many who take up the fight to build the necessary mass anti-war movement of the working class.

The International Online May Day Rally called by the International Committee of the Fourth International for this Sunday is aimed at renewing and extending the struggle for international socialism opened up in the fight against imperialist war 100 years ago. We call on all readers and supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* to sign up for this event and play your part in developing the socialist anti-war movement of the world working class.

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