

On Anzac Day, New Zealand leaders talk peace, prepare for war

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Monday April 25, a holiday in Australia and New Zealand, marked 101 years since the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) troops landed at Gallipoli as part of the Allies' disastrous failed attempt to invade Turkey during World War I.

The first Anzac Day ceremonies in 1916 glorified the thousands killed at Gallipoli in order to encourage more young men to fight and die for the British Empire. Such efforts failed to produce sufficient recruits. In the face of growing anti-war sentiment in the working class, the New Zealand government introduced conscription later that year. Altogether 18,000 New Zealanders died in World War I and more than 41,000 were wounded—more than 5 percent of the country's population.

This year's military-led dawn services, in towns and cities throughout the country, were held against the backdrop of escalating geo-political volatility, resembling the tense periods leading up to World War I and World War II. All the imperialist powers, led by the US, are once again preparing for war. Washington's aggressive "pivot to Asia," aimed at encircling and subordinating China, involves a vast military build-up in the Asia-Pacific region.

American allies are supporting the drive toward war. US Secretary of State John Kerry praised Australia and New Zealand for "continuing the legacy of ANZAC" by contributing troops to the current war in Iraq and joining US military exercises that are aimed against China.

New Zealand's population has been deliberately kept in the dark about the country's military alignment against China. The ruling elite is highly conscious that there is no support for armed provocations that could spark a conflict between nuclear-armed powers, with potentially catastrophic consequences for the entire

world.

At the same time, the government has spent more than \$100 million on exhibitions, films, books and events celebrating the centenary of World War I. The aim is to promote obedience and respect for the military and ideologically prepare the country, especially young people, for new wars.

Prime Minister John Key, in a brief Anzac Day video address, declared that "we lost far too many men" at Gallipoli, but praised those who "fought for the values and principles that underpin our country." He did not elaborate what these values were. New Zealand's ruling elite joined World War I to defend the British Empire and extend New Zealand's colonies in the Pacific by seizing German-held Samoa and part of Nauru.

At the dawn service in Wellington, governor-general and former army chief Jerry Mateparae declared: "Our hope is that there will be a time when war and conflict are consigned to history." He immediately added, however: "For now, the reality of our situation is that we still need people who are prepared to serve their country in our Defence Force—in our Navy, Army and Air Force."

None of the speakers at any of the services referred to the enormous increase in military spending being planned in Australia and New Zealand to assist the countries' integration into US war plans. The NZ government plans to spend \$11 billion over the next decade on new planes, frigates and other hardware.

In a video statement, opposition Labour Party leader Andrew Little said: "New Zealand's international reputation is about peace. It's why we're nuclear-free, but we should never forget about the tragedies of war because it's the best way to avoid them in future."

What a fraud! Labour has always been a pro-

imperialist party. It supported New Zealand's participation in World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and Bush's occupation of Iraq. The 1999-2008 Labour government also sent troops to East Timor and the Solomon Islands to support the Australian-led military occupations. Little recently called for "troops on the ground" in Iraq and Syria.

Labour's defence spokesman Phil Goff has repeatedly attacked the government from the right for reducing military spending. This month, Labour and its ally, the right-wing populist NZ First Party, called for a major increase in funding and recruitment into the navy.

NZ First leader Winston Peters, who Labour sees as a potential coalition partner for next year's election, hypocritically stated in his Anzac Day speech: "Let us commit ourselves to working for a world where differences between nations can be resolved without resort to war." At the same time, he hailed "the contribution our service veterans have made—not just in the two world wars but in Korea, Malaya, Vietnam, Kuwait, Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Timor and [the Solomon Islands] and the many other theatres."

This month, NZ First's defence spokesman Ron Mark attacked moves to close two army training areas, accusing the government of being "short-sighted with respect to what it takes to train and prepare for war." The party has also called for unemployed youth to be encouraged to train in the army.

NZ First and Labour have sought to whip up anti-Chinese sentiment—blaming Chinese immigrants for the housing shortage and unemployment. The xenophobic campaign aims to divert social tensions and align New Zealand with Washington's anti-China "pivot."

The references to peace in the Anzac Day speeches reflect fears that the government's World War I propaganda may backfire, amid deeply entrenched anti-war sentiment. A *New Zealand Herald* editorial noted: "The centenary of the Great War is not yet halfway through and already we have probably read enough of it, just like those who were living through it."

The *Herald* also published a comment by the Ministry of Culture's chief historian Neill Atkinson. He wrote that Anzac Day "can be a powerful force for unity and understanding, offering a form of collective solace and sense of belonging," but warned that

"tensions regularly surface in debates on topics that challenge the popular Anzac narrative, including wartime dissent, conscientious objection and military executions." He called for recognition of "those who supported, endured or opposed the war."

One sign of hostility to the militarist "narrative" is the support for anti-war sculptures installed anonymously in Wellington the night before Anzac Day. They depict the brutal "field punishment" endured by conscientious objector Archibald Baxter and others during World War I. Dozens of comments on the *Dominion Post's* web site applauded the objectors. One said: "They believed no one should have been fighting that war. They defended their comrades by striving for an end to senseless killing. They were quite prepared to die for that."

A campaign must be waged to stop the descent into a catastrophic third world war. We urge readers to register today to take part in the upcoming International Online May Day Rally, hosted by the International Committee of the Fourth International. The purpose of this unique event is to unite workers throughout the world in opposition to imperialist war, based on the fight for socialism, which is the only means to prevent war.



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