

# Australia: World War I centenary “celebrations” end with stepped-up militaristic propaganda

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Australia’s multi-million-dollar commemoration of the centenary of World War I officially concluded this month with Remembrance Day events in state capitals and regional cities.

Over the past four years, more than \$600 million has been spent on centenary projects and events, swamping the population with patriotic propaganda and the quasi-religious glorification of the Australian armed forces and their military interventions, past and present.

On November 11 itself, the commercial media and the state-funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Special Broadcasting Service radio, along with television networks, provided wall-to-wall coverage of events, marking the 11 November 1918 armistice and end of military conflict in Western Europe, between the UK and its allies, and Germany.

In Canberra, on the eve of Remembrance Day, the names of the 62,000 Australians killed in WWI were projected onto the war memorial from sunset to sunrise, and an intense light beamed from the Australian War Memorial to Parliament House.

The beam, which changed colour from white to pink to red, and represented, according to Canberra organisers, “the symmetry between the political freedoms Australians enjoy through our elected representatives in the parliament and the Australian War Memorial in honouring those who serve.”

Tens of thousands of hand-knitted poppies, a symbol of the dead in WWI, were displayed in the memorial’s grounds. The next day 30,000 poppies were air dropped over the main ceremony in Adelaide, the South Australian capital.

Australian politicians, Liberal-National and Labor alike, along with military chiefs and the media offered platitudes and crocodile tears for the war casualties. These

were interspersed with the standard lie that the WWI imperialist bloodbath, which killed 16 million people, was fought to defend “democracy” and “freedom.”

Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s speech in Canberra was typical. Australian military interventions over the past century, he declared, were about “upholding the highest ideals of humankind, to preserve freedom, to safeguard democracy, to stand against tyranny.” It goes without saying that he made no effort, whatsoever, to substantiate these claims.

In reality, World War I had nothing to do with freedom, democracy or “challenging tyranny” for any of the countries involved. It was waged between rival imperialist powers to expand or defend their respective colonies, global markets and profits. As far as Australian soldiers were concerned, they were ordered to “give” their lives to further the war aims of British imperialism. And in every subsequent war since, Australian governments have committed troops, thousands of kilometres away, as the quid pro quo for the backing of whatever major power—Britain, then the US—on which Australia’s imperialist ambitions in the Pacific have depended.

Morrison, who became prime minister after an inner party coup against Malcolm Turnbull, following US concerns that the latter was “too soft” on China, has ramped up Australia’s involvement in US military preparations for what would be a catastrophic war against China.

Within days of his Remembrance Day speech, he was rubbing shoulders with US Vice President Mike Pence at the APEC Summit in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and rubber stamping the establishment of a joint US-Australian naval base on PNG’s Manus Island.

The military facility, which could accommodate aircraft carriers and hundreds of US and Australian naval vessels,

is another component of the US-led preparations for war against China. The *Sydney Morning Herald* headlined its article “Frontline in US-China power struggle reaches Australia’s doorstep.”

From the outset, the WWI centenary commemorations have suppressed the underlying causes and air-brushed the genuine history of the imperialist slaughter in order to condition the population for the new wars and military barbarities that are currently being prepared.

Primary and secondary students are prime targets of this agenda. Teachers are being supplied with all manner of curriculum aids, while students are being showered with attractive books and pamphlets hero-worshipping Australian troops, hailing the various WWI battles and covering every subsequent war through to Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq.

No aspect of cultural life has been left untouched. Over the four year commemoration, grants were made available for any project—film, television, theatre, music, dance, the visual arts—that venerated the Australian military and so-called spirit of “Australian mateship,” “self-sacrifice” and “patriotic duty.”

In the lead-up to the centenary of Anzac Day—the British-led invasion at Gallipoli of Ottoman Turkey on April 25 1915, the first operation involving Australian forces in WWI, the campaign reached fever-pitch.

But the real character of the official establishment’s “defence of democracy,” was exposed when the local government council, in Sydney’s suburban Burwood, followed by the prestigious, sandstone University of Sydney, both banned the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) from holding a public meeting in their buildings. Eventually held elsewhere, the SEP meeting was the only event that exposed the official lies about Anzac Day and advanced a socialist alternative to the increasing danger of a third world war.

The decisions to censor the SEP, which were taken at the highest political level, confirmed the SEP’s warnings that the drive to war is inseparable from the escalating government assaults on the social and democratic rights of the working class. Courageous anti-war individuals, such as SBS sports journalist Stuart McIntyre, Yassmin Abdel-Magied from the ABC, and comedian Catherine Deveny, were viciously denounced after they dared challenge the official Anzac mythology.

McIntyre was sacked from the SBS hours after tweeting his opposition to the pro-war Anzac Day celebrations in April 2015, and exposing a few of the war crimes committed by the Australian military. His dismissal came

a few hours after then communications minister Malcolm Turnbull contacted the network’s management.

It is no accident that during the past four years of pro-war propaganda there has been an unprecedented increase in military spending. Almost \$200 billion is slated for military acquisitions, lifting overall defence spending to about \$500 billion in the next ten years. This includes scores of fighter jets and other aircraft, frigates, submarines and patrol boats, drones and additional lethal hardware—along with an increase of 5,000 armed forces personnel over the next ten years.

Billions more will be spent on various northern Australian air and naval bases to accommodate larger US jet fighters, aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines.

The Liberal-National Coalition government, with unwavering political support from Labor and the Greens, has also announced that, in the next ten years, Australia will have spent an additional \$600 million on war memorials, including the recently opened \$100 million multi-media “Monash Interpretive Centre” at Villers-Bretonneux in Northern France, and \$500 million to expand the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

Morrison is reportedly considering honouring the parents of Australian military personnel killed in battle by presenting them with medals. Moreover, during the recent Victorian state election, the ruling Labor government promised to fund a weekly “Last Post” ceremony at Melbourne’s Shrine of Remembrance, while the Liberal Party offered to provide an additional \$2 million for military veterans’ clubs and war memorials.

Predictably, Australia’s four-year centenary has been marked by a deathly silence regarding the mass working class opposition that emerged in Australia and internationally against World War I, and which, under the leadership of Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks, reached its highest expression in the Russian Revolution of 1917.

These events—and the fear of socialist revolution elsewhere—finally forced an end to the war in 1918. It is this vital history—i.e. the lessons of the Russian Revolution and the struggle against imperialist war—that workers and youth must study, discuss and assimilate, in order to combat the lies and propaganda of the ruling elites and avert yet another global bloodbath.



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