

Anzac Day 2019: Conditioning the Australian population for war

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Held amid the May 18 federal election campaign, Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Labor leader Bill Shorten used the annual Anzac Day ceremonies to pledge their fealty to the “Anzac spirit”—that is, to reactionary patriotism and militarism. Both parties of big business are committed to accelerating the US-led war drive against China and Russia.

Anzac Day venerates the April 25, 1915 invasion by Australian, New Zealand, French and British troops at Gallipoli Cove of Turkey during World War I, and is exploited to glorify all of the imperialist wars in which Australia has participated over the past 100 years. The media and political establishment has transformed the event into a quasi-religious affair; any criticism being treated as tantamount to treason.

Morrison and Shorten called a “truce” for the day, suspending all election attack ads and political statements, and came together to hail the Anzac traditions of militarism.

Both leaders offered their condolences to “the fallen”—the saccharine phrase used to hide the horror and barbarity of a century of imperialist wars. They called for young people, in particular, to honour the “selfless devotion” of military veterans and prepare to do the same.

Other politicians chimed in with the lie that the Australian military forces fought to defend “democracy” and “freedom.” This is a blatant lie. Australian soldiers have been sent off to kill and be killed as junior partners of the major powers—first Britain, then the US—in the bloody struggle for profits, raw materials and markets.

Australia’s defence of the British Empire in WWI was bound up with its own long-held imperialist ambitions to secure German colonial territories in the South West Pacific. Its alignment with the US in WWII

was to block Japanese imperial ambitions and expand Australian influence in the Asia-Pacific. Canberra’s involvement in every US-led war in the past 50 years—from Korea and Vietnam to the ongoing occupation of Afghanistan and the invasions of Iraq—has been to further Australian capitalism’s economic and geo-strategic interests in Asia and internationally.

Morrison and Shorten separately addressed soldiers in northern Australia’s military bases at Townsville and Darwin during Anzac Day. These bases are on the frontline of Washington’s war planning against China. Morrison boasted that the number of US Marines based in Darwin, as part of the 2011 agreement reached by Labor prime minister Julia Gillard with US President Obama, will reach 2,500 by July.

In the course of the election campaign the Liberal-National Coalition, Labor Party and the Greens have all maintained a conspiracy of silence about the advanced US-led preparations for war against China. They all fear that any discussion of the issue will unleash the deep-seated anti-war sentiment that exists among workers and youth.

These pro-war parties are committed to the military alliance with the US. Labor, backed by the Greens, signed up to Obama’s aggressive “pivot to Asia” against China which has included a massive US military build-up throughout the Indo-Pacific. Subsequent Coalition governments have maintained that commitment as the Trump administration intensified the confrontation with Beijing.

The Pentagon regards Australia as an essential base of operations in any war with China, in particular the major spy and communications base at Pine Gap in Central Australia. Australia is part of the US-led “Five Eyes” intelligence network. While governments declare

there is no money for welfare, health and education, more than \$37 billion will be spent this year on military hardware to enhance “interoperability” with US forces.

The media and politicians have over the past two years whipped up a hysterical campaign against Chinese “interference” in Australian politics which has set the stage for unprecedented, draconian laws against “foreign interference”. This campaign is aimed at conditioning the population for war with China and establishing the means to suppress any criticism and opposition.

This takes place amid a creeping militarization of society which is epitomized by the appointment of former defence force chief Peter Cosgrove as governor-general, who has wide-ranging “reserve powers” in times of emergency. At the same time, military call-out powers have been put in place so the army can be mobilized to deal with domestic crises.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is the only party warning that the world stands on the brink of a catastrophic global conflict.

Last year, the Trump administration threatened North Korea and Iran and withdrew from nuclear weapons treaties setting a new nuclear arms race in motion. The Pentagon issued documents outlining its plans for “total war,” including the use of nuclear weapons against Russia and China.

The headlong drive to war can only be prevented by a unified movement of the international working class on a socialist and antiwar policy to put an end to the capitalist system and its outmoded nation state system that is the root cause of war.

This is the perspective fought for by the Socialist Equality Party in Australia and its sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International. In Germany, the SEP is campaigning for the same policies in the European Parliamentary elections.

The struggle against war will be central to the ICFI’s annual International May Day Online Rally on May 4. Workers and young people seeking a way to fight militarism and war should register here and make contact with the SEP and get involved in its election campaign.

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