

Growing opposition to censorship of SEP (Australia) anti-war meeting

By our reporter
20 April 2015

Workers, students, academics, and young people from across Australia and internationally have sent letters of protest to Sydney University and Burwood Council, opposing the attempts by both institutions to block an anti-war meeting called by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP).

On April 17, Sydney University denied a room booking for the SEP's April 26 meeting on "Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism, and the drive to World War Three," on the spurious grounds that it posed a "potential for disruption to activities on campus."

The ban followed a decision by the Labor-controlled Burwood Council on April 10 to cancel a booking for the same meeting, following a campaign by supporters of the right-wing, nationalist "Reclaim Australia" organisation.

In an exception to what has been a general media blackout, the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH), one of Australia's most widely-read daily newspapers, carried a report today on the political censorship of the SEP's meeting. (see: "An Open Letter to the Vice Chancellor")

The article noted the remarks by Sydney University Vice-Chancellor Michael Spence, just two days prior to the denial of the SEP meeting booking, in which he declared that his vision for the university was "that of a forum for the free debate of difficult and often confronting ideas." It then quoted SEP National Secretary James Cogan, who said that the university's decision to block the party's meeting, "makes an absolute mockery of its claim to represent freedom of speech."

The SEP calls for letters of protest to be sent to the University of Sydney, demanding that it reverse its refusal to hire its venue for the SEP's April 26 anti-war meeting. Letters should be directed to Vice Chancellor and Principal Dr Michael Spence, at vice.chancellor@sydney.edu.au, who is responsible for the executive decisions of university management. Please CC all emails to the SEP at sep@sep.org.au.

The SEP is continuing to insist that Burwood Council rescind its hall cancellation. WSWs readers and supporters should send emails to the Labor Party Mayor of Burwood, Councillor John Faker, at mayor@burwood.nsw.gov.au, and to Burwood Council management, at council@burwood.nsw.gov.au. The email addresses of all seven current Burwood councillors can be seen here. Please specify "Complaint" in the subject field and CC all emails to the SEP at sep@sep.org.au.

Below are a selection of letters of protest sent by SEP supporters in Australia and internationally.

Marxist Voice calls on South Asian workers to oppose

censorship of SEP meeting

On behalf of Marxist Voice, we strongly condemn the decision of Burwood city council to cancel the SEP public meeting scheduled at the Burwood library auditorium on April 26 2015. We demand that you immediately lift the ban and let the SEP public meeting proceed according to plan. Marxist Voice considers this an attack on democratic rights and discrimination.

The capitulation of Burwood city council to the right wing and warmongers is very clearly aimed to consciously cultivate jingoism to drown out anti-war sentiments of workers and youth. Marxist Voice strongly condemns this undemocratic action and urges the workers of the Indian subcontinent to oppose this action of the Burwood City Council (BCC).

Marxist Voice – Pakistan

From France: "The signs of these atrocious battles are still all around"

I'm writing this e-mail from France to tell you that I find unacceptable, and a serious attack on democratic rights, the refusal to authorise a peaceful SEP event about Anzac and WWI, scheduled for April 26 on your campus, on nebulous grounds of "potential for disruption to activities on campus as a result of the event," that don't even bother to identify those who might cause disruptions.

I'm writing to you from the country that was the main battlefield of WWI, in fact from a place not so far from places now world-famous for the hundreds of thousands of pointless deaths they witnessed, like Verdun. The signs of these atrocious battles are still easy to spot all around. According to experts, the unexploded munitions and mines in the ground will still constitute a threat for farmers and woodcutters in the region for hundreds of years.

This is with outrage, and a certain sadness, that I learn that it is impossible now, 100 years after these dramatic events, to find in your university a place where their causes could be discussed objectively and the associated myths properly debunked with the high standards of work that academia is supposed to uphold.

I strongly urge you, first to **provide more details on the factors in your decision and the process through which it was taken**, and also, **to change your mind on this**.

OL – France

"For a university to silence dissenting voices to imperialist war is shameful"

I am writing to condemn the decision of your University to reject the booking of the Socialist Equality Party of Australia for a room on April 26th to hold a public meeting on the topic "Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism and the drive to World War III."

The fact that the Socialist Equality Party has had two bookings

cancelled is extremely significant. The weekend of the 25th and 26th of April will see saturation media coverage and the involvement of all Australian Governments in “celebrating” World War One and the Gallipoli landing as the “birth of the nation” where soldiers fought to “defend freedom.” However, amongst this tsunami of political propaganda, the SEP is being denied any opportunity to offer an alternative view. It is being denied its democratic right to argue that these “celebrations” are in fact a base attempt to ideologically prepare the Australian public for involvement in current and future imperialist wars, including possibly World War III.

For a university that is supposedly a bastion of free thought to participate in this attempt to silence any dissenting voices in Australia to imperialist war is shameful.

If the university has any commitment to democratic values and freedom of speech and intellectual thought then it has no choice but to reverse its decision to cancel the SEP’s booking. It should be noted that the SEP is the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution. Therefore the actions of the University are being judged by members of the working class from around the globe.

DH – Melbourne

Law professor denounces University of Sydney censorship

As a university academic and law professor, and a life-long socialist, I am writing to express my deep opposition to your decision to prohibit a public meeting at the University of Sydney by the Socialist Equality Party to discuss the glorification of Anzac Day and World War I, and the danger of another global conflagration.

Your ban on the April 26 meeting is an affront to the fundamental democratic right of free speech. It sets a truly reactionary precedent for the suppression of dissenting political opinion, including on university campuses. This is all the more disturbing given that your decision accedes to threats by fascist elements around the racist Reclaim Australia organisation.

Your decision makes a mockery of your claim, in comments published on the University of Sydney’s web site just five days ago, on April 15, that the debate about the incidents that occurred during last month’s public lecture at the university by Richard Kemp, the former commander of British forces in Afghanistan, demonstrate:

The importance of our commitment to academic freedom, the freedom of speech, and the right to protest. We must be a place in which debate on key issues of public significance can take place, and in which strongly held views can be freely expressed on all sides.

It seems that you are prepared to guarantee that freedom to a man like Kemp who is directly responsible for the crimes of the British military in the protracted US-led neo-colonial occupation of Afghanistan, but not to those opposing war and the ideological campaign underway to condition public opinion for another world war.

I call on you to reverse the decision immediately.

MH – Sydney

Universities no longer bastions of free speech

I would like to protest the decision to refuse the SEP use of a room for its meeting. Back in the 60s and 70s universities had meetings like this all the time.

However, I feel the management of universities has been politically cleansed of all left wing sentiment. The decision to disallow the meeting is undemocratic, made by a handful of people, possibly under the influence of a small number of extremists, against the wishes of a large number.

Universities used to be bastions of free speech, now I fear they are faceless corporate entities. I entreat you to reverse this decision forthwith.

SM – New Zealand

“Increasing authoritarianism must be fought”

Quite apart from being outraged at your university’s denial of a meeting hall to the Socialist Equality Party (Australia)’s event “Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism and the drive to World War III,” I am dismayed that such a right-wing step could be taken in Australia. I have watched with increasing alarm the rightward turn of countries in Europe and in particular the blatantly fascist coup in Ukraine. Now this infection has reached Australia.

I live in the United States, a country responsible for most of the mayhem occurring around the world. We had a famous fascist assault on civil liberties during the 1950s of which you may have heard, during which the hysterical anti-communism of Senator Joseph McCarthy and his acolytes, cost thousands of people their jobs and made it impossible for them to get work for years. We now have a government dedicated to war and violence, both in other countries and at home. This increasing authoritarianism must be fought against just as determinedly as the Ebola virus, and that includes in Australia.

I urge you to reconsider your quixotic decision and allow the SEP meeting to go forward.

CZ – San Francisco, California

Students deserve the right to question the growing drive to war

I write to you to articulate my complaint regarding the recent decision by Sydney University in cancelling the upcoming Socialist Equality Party meeting entitled: “Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism and the drive to World War III.”

According to your university’s “about me” section:

“Our scholars and students share a passionate commitment to the transformative power of education. Our research makes a real difference to our understanding of today’s world and how we work and live in it, and we enrich our community by bringing together people from all social and cultural backgrounds.”

If we are to be judged by our deeds rather than our words, what is apparent from the university management’s recent decision is that it is in full support of the censorship of free speech in support of militarism. Universities are meant to be a place of discussion and learning, not of indoctrination and conformism to the prevailing national milieu.

Students deserve the right to question the growing drive to war, to have a frank discussion of historical events, to hear the perspectives of the Trotskyist International Socialist movement.

History is doomed to repeat for those who fail to learn its lessons and I for one have no desire to repeat the events of the 20th century (The great depression, two world wars, fascism etc).

I demand that the university repeal its decision to block the SEP public meeting, and secondly I demand full public disclosure of the nature of your concerns regarding the meeting.

OA – Student in Perth, Western Australia

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>