

May Day 2016: The glorification of war and the preparation for future conflicts

By Cheryl Crisp
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The following speech was delivered by Socialist Equality Party (Australia) assistant national secretary Cheryl Crisp to the International May Day Online Rally held on May 1, 2016.

In 1938, on the eve of the outbreak of World War Two, Leon Trotsky warned the international working class in *The Transitional Program*, the founding document of the Fourth International. He wrote:

“Imperialist war is the continuation and sharpening of the predatory politics of the bourgeoisie. The struggle of the proletariat against war is the continuation and sharpening of its class struggle. The beginning of war alters the situation and partially the means of struggle between the classes, but not the aim and basic course. The imperialist bourgeoisie dominates the world. In its basic character the approaching war will therefore be an imperialist war. The fundamental content of the politics of the international proletariat will consequently be a struggle against imperialism and its war.”

Trotsky then pointed to the basic principle for socialists in a period of war: “The chief enemy is in your own country.” By that he meant, the enemies of the working class are not other workers, but the ruling class and capitalist government at home.

Trotsky emphasised this to counter the poisonous fumes of nationalism and chauvinism, which every government was promoting. His words resonate so profoundly in today’s perilous conditions, where the drive to war by imperialism is proceeding at a frightening pace. There are clear parallels between 1938 and today.

This week the populations of Australia and New Zealand have been bombarded with an outpouring of militarism and jingoism. The occasion was Anzac Day—the public holiday commemorating the World

War One battle fought in 1915 at Gallipoli, in Turkey.

The Australian government is spending \$325 million—more than any other country—on a four-year commemoration of the centenary of World War One. The campaign is particularly targeting young people, including pre-schoolers, promoting historical falsifications about the glory of military sacrifice for the nation. Every political party, including the self-styled pacifist Greens, have supported this campaign.

Make no mistake, the political establishment’s glorification of wars—past and present—is aimed at preparing the next generation for future conflicts. It coincides with the full support being given by Australian imperialism to the US war preparations against China.

At the same time, the Australian government has spearheaded the establishment of racist and illegal detention centres, or, more accurately, modern day concentration camps, where refugees, stripped of all rights, are imprisoned on remote Pacific Islands for years on end in intolerable conditions. This brutal model is now being used by European governments against the hundreds of thousands of desperate refugees fleeing the wars in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

In Japan, the government of Shinzo Abe, the most right-wing since World War Two, has enacted legislation to allow for the deployment of the Japanese military alongside US forces. This has been accompanied by a campaign to whitewash and sanitise the crimes of Japanese imperialism. New history textbooks have been introduced in schools that falsify the atrocities committed by the Japanese militarists in the 1930s and during World War II.

As the only population to have suffered the horror of nuclear attack in the US atomic bombing of Hiroshima

and Nagasaki in 1945, the Japanese regime is highly conscious of the opposition of the population to their government's war preparations. It is attempting to suppress this anti-war sentiment by demonising China and presenting it as a military threat to Japan.

In China itself, the Communist Party regime has responded to escalating provocations by the US and its allies by stoking Chinese nationalism. This takes the form of virulent anti-Japanese chauvinism. Beijing's promotion of racism has led to physical attacks on Japanese citizens. The government has encouraged demonstrations against Japan's claim to the disputed Senkaku Islands, with protestors carrying banners depicting a nuclear mushroom cloud over Japan. Such reactionary nationalism only serves to divide the working class of Asia and play into the hands of imperialism.

The real concern of the Chinese regime is defending the wealth of its capitalist elite, not just against the United States, but against the working class of China, the force it fears the most. China is now among the most unequal of countries. It has 470 US dollar billionaires, more than any country other than the United States, while more than 500 million Chinese workers and rural poor eke out an existence on \$3 a day or less. And in every Asian country, conditions are similar.

As Trotsky explained in 1938, war abroad coincides with war against the working class at home. Years of attacks on the conditions of workers in every country have resulted in levels of social inequality unseen for almost a century. There is no future for humanity under this system.

Racism and xenophobia can only be opposed through the fight for the international unity of the working class. Workers in every country face the same attacks, by the same banks and the same transnational corporations. And the threat of war hangs over us all. The masses of America and Asia, including workers and young people in Australia and New Zealand, must reach out to our Chinese brothers and sisters and reject the attempt to turn them into the enemy.

We must unite in a common struggle to overthrow capitalism, the source of war. I urge you, our listeners and supporters, to take up the fight to build an international anti-war movement of the working class and youth based on the fight for world socialism.

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