

The ANZAC Myth

Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group

25 April 2013

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A myth is born

Australian, British and other imperialist troops land on the beach at Gallipoli. It is 25 April, 1915. It is a side-show during World War I, a vain attempt to score a knock-out blow against the Ottoman Empire and deprive Germany of an ally. The war is a clash of two great imperial alliances, attempting to re-divide the world in a struggle for markets, colonies and resources. Gallipoli is a huge waste of human life, within the gargantuan waste of life that was WWI. Official and unofficial reports to home, however, seek to glorify the ANZACs so as to promote recruitment. Events are embroidered and sometimes outright invented, with Simpson and his donkey projected as displaying a supposed heroism and nobility unique to the Australian character.

The myth continues

In subsequent wars, the myth of the nobility of the ANZACs has been used and, if possible, developed. WWII gave us the Rats of Tobruk, while even the Vietnam War is being rehabilitated through stories of the Battle of Long Tan. There, as well as in wars from Korea to Afghanistan, Australian soldiers are portrayed as heroic, benevolent, egalitarian, chivalrous and whatever other adjectives the military command think will impress public opinion. Supporting facts, while desirable, are optional, while contrary facts are suppressed whenever possible.

The uses of myth

The idolisation of the Australian soldier is promoted for two reasons. Firstly, it serves the cause of recruitment. Young men and, increasingly, women won't volunteer to be put in harm's way for a grubby cause like oil or an ignoble one like suppressing a national liberation movement. So attention is focused instead on the nobility of courage and the esteem of society. Secondly, the idolisation undercuts peace sentiment once a war starts. On the eve of the Iraq War, hundreds of thousands marched the streets of cities and towns across Australia, but once the troops landed, it was a different matter. It is easy to oppose a lying politician, but to continue when one will be accused of betraying "our troops" requires political courage of a higher order altogether.

Facing the truth

In war, soldiers do ugly things. They kill – and civilians are often the victims. Australian soldiers are no higher breed than those of other nations and if crimes like My Lai and Abu Ghraib are not attached to them, it is only because of the lesser scale of Australian imperialism and the reluctance of the capitalist media to penetrate the propaganda and expose the myth. Ugly things need to be done and lies need to be told because the Australian military are enforcers for imperialism, maintaining an unjust world order where the United States dominates and Australian capitalism has the South Pacific franchise. In reality, the working class has no country. In whatever country we are, our enemies are our own capitalists. We can unite together and make a revolution, one which will abolish capitalism and end war forever.

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This morning, members of the Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group handed out an
anti-militarist leaflet at the 8 Hour Monument in Melbourne.

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