

# **A National Myth**

Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group

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## **The Beginning**

On 25 April 1915, Australian troops, accompanied by others from the British Empire, stormed a Turkish beach at Gallipoli. The landing didn't go well and presaged a disastrous campaign that ended in Australian withdrawal in December that year. The whole debacle was a sideshow, an attempt to take the Ottoman Empire out of World War I and deprive Germany of an ally. The 300,000 Allied and 250,000 Turkish casualties constituted a major crime, inside the gargantuan crime of World War I itself. Capitalism was at an impasse and, as a result, two great imperial alliances clashed over who was to steal whose colonies, resources and markets. Tens of millions died for profits.

## **The Myth**

Out of the debacle, a national myth was formed, of a supposedly unique Australian military: excellent soldiers with bad British leadership, fiercely loyal to each other and with a subversive attitude to authority that didn't prevent them going over the top to face the enemy's guns when ordered to. The Anzac myth has been a foundation for the ideology of Australian nationalism, something that acknowledges Australia's origins as a British colony while at the same time distancing it from Britain itself – and disappearing Australia's original sin, the dispossession and attempted genocide of the Aboriginal people.

## **The Role**

The myth of Australia's unique military has been deployed to boost support for Australian participation in all subsequent imperialist wars. The less justification there is for the war, the more the propaganda focuses on the supposed virtues of the troops rather than the justice of the cause. While the virtues of the Anzacs were part of the propaganda for World War II, they were more prominent during the Korean and Vietnam Wars and have become the dominant theme in reporting and discussion of Australia's participation in the imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

## **The End?**

In recent years, the media campaign for universal commitment to the Anzac myth has reached unprecedented heights. Media people lose their jobs for stepping out of line and, if you're an immigrant woman, you can be driven from the country. At the same time, though, public participation in Anzac Day events has collapsed. Crowds have fallen by an average of 70% from 2014 to 2019, including at Gallipoli, Canberra and Melbourne (thus before the COVID-19 pandemic). Meanwhile, investigations of the conduct of Australia's SAS in Afghanistan have revealed a string of war crimes, including murder, and prosecutions of alleged perpetrators are being prepared. The reputation of Australia's military is becoming tarnished. Anarchists should do everything possible to puncture the Anzac myth. The time is ripe.

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