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Genuine Remembrance and Anzac Day 2016

On Monday 25th April this year, Australians will once again commemorate all those who served in the 'Gallipoli Campaign' from April 25, 1915 to January 9, 1916 during the Great War. But Anzac Day has come to mean much more than a commemoration of Gallipoli. It is now a day devoted to the remembrance of service men and women who suffered and perished in all Australian wars.

The **Gallipoli Centenary Peace Campaign (GCCP)** pays tribute to all those who subjected themselves to terrible dangers to serve militarily for causes which, to the best of their knowledge, they judged to be honourable.

However, in doing so, this does not mean that we turn our backs on asking some hard questions about the wars Australians have fought in, such as: (a) How did our country get involved in these wars? (b) What were their purposes and (c) What mistakes were made in prolonging them?

During commemorative occasions such as Anzac Day when these crucial questions tend to be shunted to one side, GCPC upholds a simple principle: 'love the warrior, hate the war'. In other words, we must respect the troops but we *may* reject the war.

As one leading historian of WW1 has said: "We have to challenge the familiar smear, namely that all those who send and keep our troops abroad love, respect and honour them; and all those who question the wars to which the troops are sent hate, disrespect, and dishonour them. *That is contemptible political fakery.*"¹ (Our emphasis)

'Lest We forget' – War, Suffering and the Anzac Legend

It is estimated that some 35 million people died during the First World War. The extent of the slaughter, the suffering and the devastation was truly horrendous. Commemorating the victims of war is perfectly legitimate. However remembrance of the tragedy should be inextricably allied to preventing the outbreak of such hostilities in the future.

It is GCPC's contention that the promotion of Anzac Day, especially since the late 1990s, has made genuine remembrance of those that suffered and perished in war more difficult to observe. If true remembrance is linked to understanding the lessons of war i.e. its causes and how the nation became enmeshed in war so that the risk of similar conflagrations can be minimised in the future, then we believe that Anzac Day has failed to fulfil its proper mission.

As the former Governor of Tasmania, Peter Underwood, said during his Anzac Day address in 2014, "the spirit of true remembrance" should be dedicated to "examining and talking about the causes of war and how we got involved in wars. We should spend less time studying Simpson's donkey and more time looking at why we were fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan for so long. All this is not in order to criticise past decision makers, but in remembrance of the dead, to help us avoid doing it again in some other place, simply because we failed to examine all the alternative means of resolving conflict."

The present day promoters of Anzac Day rarely refer to the historical context i.e. that Australian troops were sent abroad to fight for God and Empire (the British Empire), that the invasion of Turkey was linked to Czarist Russia's ambition to conquer the Ottoman capital Constantinople, and that the Anzac campaign was a failure resulting in half a million casualties on all sides, including over 8,000 Australian soldiers missing and dead.

Such an unhistorical and amoral account of Australia's engagement in the First World War thwarts an accurate reckoning of Australia's past and compromises our ability to embrace a genuine commitment to the prevention of war in the future. In this sense, the Anzac legend fails to do justice to Australia's war dead.

'Anzac Day – An Opportunity to Reflect' at 'Richardson's Lookout – Marrickville Peace Park'

GCPC's *Mission Statement* emphasises the following:

GCPC does not believe that Australia as a nation was born in war. We honour and respect all Australians who have died and suffered in war, both overseas and in Australia's Frontier Wars, and we respect the contribution and suffering of their families and loved ones. We also honour and respect all those who have pursued the path of non-violent resolution of national and international conflicts.²

In the spirit of true remembrance and in keeping with our advocacy of peacemaking and the prevention of future wars, GCPC will be holding an hour of reflection at 'Richardson's Lookout – Marrickville Peace Park' on Monday April 25, 2016. The peace park is located at the corner of Richards Avenue and Holt Crescent in south Marrickville.

The event will include:

- A meditation by Jo Blackman (yoga teacher and GCPC member);
- A reflection by Nadia Wheatley (author and historian) on the predicament of children on the homefront during WW1;
- A period of silent reflection and the planting of a tree in the park to symbolise peace and reconciliation.

A background paper 'Reflections on Anzac Day 2016' can be read here:

<http://www.gcpc2015.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Reflections-on-Anzac-Day-2016b.pdf>

Event: Anzac Day – An Hour of Reflection
When: Monday April 25, 2016 from 10.00am to 11.00am
Where: Richardson's Lookout – Marrickville Peace Park
All welcome - snacks and refreshments will be provided.

For more information:

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Notes

1. Douglas Newton, 'Gallipoli Centenary Peace Campaign talk', Petersham Town Hall, Apr 22, 2015 - <http://www.gcpc2015.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/20150422-Newton-Anzac-Forum-Talk.pdf>
2. Gallipoli Centenary Peace Campaign, *Mission Statement*, <http://www.gcpc2015.org.au/about-us/mission-statement/>

April 17, 2016