

ANZAC Day: An Opportunity to Reflect

Speech by Colin Hesse

(Greens Councillor for Marrickville Ward, Inner West Council)

Wednesday 25th April 2018

Richardson's Lookout - Marrickville Peace Park

I was born on the land of the Yuin people on the Shoalhaven River, and am proud to have lived on the land of the Gadigal people here in Marrickville for more than three decades. Though of Anglo-Celtic background, it's important to recognise on whose land we live.

On Monday one of my young workmates asked me "what war are we celebrating on Wednesday", and my mind went back to the line from Eric Bogle's great song of nearly half a century ago, "And the young people ask me, "what are they marching for?"

Fifty years ago of course the horror of war in Vietnam divided us like no war since the First World War that ended one hundred years ago in November this year, and for this generation of young people, in Australia at least, war is now perhaps further away than ever. A good thing too.

So what are we celebrating, for surely we are no longer remembering a war that no-one alive now remembers as anything other than stories from fathers or grandfathers?

The good news is that war now kills so many less people than it did 100 years ago, seventy years ago, or even twenty years ago. Whether it be that the fear of war itself makes wars smaller, though no less devastating for those mostly poor and brown people who experience it, or that the wealth generated by the massive growth in international trade simply doesn't require war for prosperity so that war is more or less redundant I'll leave with you to consider.

But does the relative absence of war mean peace? Indeed, what do we even mean by peace?

To be at peace we surely need to change a few things. First of all, a treaty with the Aboriginal peoples of this land it seems to me would be an important step in recognising that the taking of this land by Europeans was not a peaceful act, but one of plunder.

That we share the benefits of this rich society fairly within Australia, and just as importantly, that the wealth of nations is shared equally among all peoples of the world. Here I might add I'm not talking about everyone having more stuff, but that all people can live in peace, free to enjoy education, a cohesive and caring society, and the joy of friendship and love. This is the richest form of life.

We must also look to living peacefully with our world, and not destroying the very diversity of life that sustains and enriches us all in so very many ways: our environment.

I can only guess at the precise issues that motivated my paternal grandfather, Percy Hesse from Bendigo, to sign up to the AIF in 1915, but I do know through his son, my father, that he was a man motivated by the spirit of community and acting as a good citizen. Perhaps that endeavor is the one that may take us to that peaceful world we need to create a good society, here, and across the globe.

Peace be with you all.