

Address to Marrickville Council*

by John Butcher

The Gallipoli Centenary Peace Campaign (GCPC) strongly urges councillors to reject the proposed change of the agreed date for the debate at Petersham Town Hall.

I assume that there is a feeling that such a debate on the meaning and significance of ANZAC Day and the Gallipoli Centenary is somehow disrespectful to all those who died on the battlefield. The GCPC disagrees with this assumption. We honour and respect all those from all nations who have died in war both combatants and non-combatants. We wish to remember and acknowledge not only those who died on the battlefield but also those who returned home badly damaged in body and mind with lifelong adverse consequences for themselves and for their families.

Many of these returned veterans were angry and distressed by the way they had been used as cannon fodder by politicians and military commanders. The sentiments of these veterans are best expressed by the words of Alec Campbell (26 Feb 1899 – 16 May 2002), the last surviving Australian veteran of the Gallipoli Campaign who, on his deathbed, said:

“For God’s sake don’t glorify Gallipoli. It was a terrible fiasco, a total failure and best forgotten”

The GCPC also wishes to remember and honour the peacemakers. Those brave conscientious objectors, the pacifists and all those who resisted the call to arms and called for non-violent methods of resolving conflict.

At this time of commemoration the GCPC considers it necessary and essential to tell the whole story of WW1, a story which includes the record of the social divisions generated in the Australian community, including in Marrickville, by the war effort. Social divisions which were highlighted during the conscription referenda and also came to the fore in the process of sending white feathers indicating cowardice to those who didn’t enlist.

It is also imperative that at this time of commemorating the victims of wars fought in other countries that Australia also remembers and acknowledges those who died in the Frontier Wars fought on Australian soil against the Indigenous people of this country.

The GCPC firmly believes that the best way to respect the victims of past wars is to learn the lessons from those horrendous episodes so as to ensure that such horrors do not keep recurring. It’s vital that the people of all nations learn to live in harmony with each other and that conflicts are resolved by non-violent, non- military means.

The time of the official Gallipoli Centenary Commemoration is the appropriate time to reflect upon the tragedy of past military adventures, to remember all those who died or suffered as a result of those tragic episodes in Australia’s history and to resolve to learn the lessons so that past mistakes are not repeated.

The Gallipoli Centenary Peace Campaign therefore urges all councillors to oppose the motion to change the date of the proposed debate.

25 Nov 2014

- *Text based upon the author’s speech notes.*