

## **ANZAC Day 2008 and the Adelaide Arms Exhibition**

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'We Betray the Sacrifices of our Soldiers'*

The war to end all wars heralded a pretty bloody century. The Great War alone resulted in approximately 10 million deaths and sowed the seeds for an even greater cataclysm two decades later that killed over 50 million people. The cold and hot wars that followed were played out in multiple locations around the globe, and added many tens of millions to the toll. The human costs of the Napoleonic Wars, the US Civil War and every other preceding war were dwarfed by comparison to twentieth century carnage.

As last week demonstrated again, the dead and wounded have earned a permanent and special place in our nation's history. The memory of the 60,000 Australians killed between 1914 and 1918, including 8,700 at Gallipoli, and those since whom we've sent off to do the killing and dying for us, will live on.

And yet if all we do is remember, then we have betrayed the sacrifices made by countless Australians on so many battlefields. The Anzacs did not fight to set a precedent or to be remembered, but to save others from the horrors that they endured. Nearly a century later, we perpetuate the horrors.

There is a significant difference now also. The victims of war's horrors are overwhelmingly civilians. Technology has ensured that little escapes war's ruinous reach - homes, schools, health care facilities and markets are reduced to rubble. In addition, human rights, international law and the environment are all cast aside or disregarded as the juggernaut rolls on.

War is solemnly clothed in moral righteousness and euphemisms such as "defence" and "security", even when we are on the attack and our security is being patently and grossly undermined.

Even as Australia's part in the blood-soaked mess that is Iraq continues, it appears that we have learnt nothing. In November, Adelaide is to host an arms bazaar, the Asia Pacific Defence and Security Exhibition (APDSE). Whether by simple effrontery or obscene insensitivity, the planned opening date is Remembrance Day, November 11.

APDSE is designed to allow weapons manufacturers from all over the world to promote their war-fighting machinery. It promises to maximise "return on investment" and "value for money". Most of the world's big arms exporting nations are already lined up to come.

The promotion will of course follow the standard script. The event will not glorify war. It will promote only modern weapons that are accurate and cause minimal civilian harm (whatever that means, perhaps the Iraqis know).

APDSE organisers state that the Asia-Pacific region is “the significant growth market” for arms sales, and “is the least represented by quality defence and/or security exhibitions”. In other words, untapped potential for militarisation and wars, right on our doorstep. A golden opportunity.

Premier Mike Rann has announced proudly that South Australia will be *the* place to be in November 2008. Almost like a carnival it seems. However we can be assured there will be no blood or stray limbs or screaming to sour the occasion. It will be clean and respectable.

The bottom line is of course “the economy”. Premier Rann describes South Australia’s central role in “the booming Australian defence industry” and the “terrific business and investment opportunities” this represents. He does not add that, a hundred years ago too, many people earned a living in factories churning out machine guns, ammunition and tanks that slaughtered a generation of young men.

If, as Premier Rann’s enthusiasm for the weapons industry implies, there are to be no ethical constraints on our economy, why stop there. Let’s produce heroin and cocaine too. There’s a terrific business opportunity gone to waste for pesky moral concerns.

For the Gallipoli victims, one can only wonder how they would regard such profiteering from the weapons of war. Would they see it as a fitting tribute to all that they endured, or as an unconscionable betrayal of their sacrifice?

The Great War did not end all wars, nor could it. Violence sows the seeds for further violence. After a century that squandered the courage and aspirations of the Anzacs, let us finally honour their sacrifice in the way that matters most – by turning our hearts and minds to preventing war, not promoting it.

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