

International school examines the century's central problems of history, politics and culture

The IWB Editorial Board
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The International Summer School held in early January by the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Socialist Equality Party of Australia represented a milestone in the revival of classical Marxism. Entitled “Marxism and the Fundamental Problems of the Twentieth Century,” the school, held in Sydney from January 3 to 10, was the first such international symposium organized by the world Trotskyist movement.

The nine lectures delivered over eight days by leading members of the world party, as well as the Russian Marxist historian, Professor Vadim Rogovin, were the product of protracted theoretical work carried out by the International Committee on the most critical questions of history and perspective facing the international workers movement.

The lectures focused on such as questions as the significance and legacy of the 1917 Russian Revolution; the role of Stalinism and the significance of the socialist opposition, led by Trotsky, to the Soviet bureaucracy; the globalization of capitalist production and its implications for the working class; the record of nationalism and guerrillaism; a balance sheet of trade unionism; problems of art and culture and their relationship to the development of Marxism.

David North, the national secretary of the SEP of the United States, gave the opening lecture, entitled “Leon Trotsky and the Fate of Marxism in the Twentieth Century.” It examined the critical role of revolutionary leadership and socialist consciousness in the modern historical process, and explained that the policies fought for by Trotsky and his followers represented a viable revolutionary alternative to the counterrevolutionary policies of Stalin. North’s focus

on the role of the subjective factor in history, and its relationship to objective conditions, was a central theme of the lectures and discussion at the school.

North also lectured on the political and philosophical underpinnings of Eduard Bernstein’s reformist challenge to Marxism at the turn of the century, and the nature and historical role of the trade unions.

Nick Beams, the national secretary of the SEP of Australia, lectured on the significance and revolutionary implications of the globalization of production.

Vadim Rogovin presented a lecture entitled “Where is Russia Going? A Sociological Analysis and Historical Prognosis.” During his lecture, Professor Rogovin was presented with the first proof copy of the English translation of his recent book *1937*, the fourth in a six-volume history of the struggle against Stalinism in the USSR.

Presenting the book on behalf of the International Committee, David North predicted Rogovin’s work would have an enormous intellectual impact on the international workers movement and would play a major role in shattering the lies and falsifications of the Stalinists and their accomplices in academic circles, who perniciously identify Stalinism with Marxism.

Peter Schwarz, the secretary of the ICFI and a leader of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, presented a historical assessment of the role of Stalinism in postwar Eastern Europe, focusing on the rise and fall of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany).

Two lectures examined Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution in the light of the experiences of the twentieth century. The first, on the lessons of India and China, was given by Wije Dias, the national

secretary of the SEP in Sri Lanka.

The second, entitled “Castroism and the Politics of Petty Bourgeois Nationalism,” was presented by Bill Vann, the international editor of *The International Workers Bulletin* in the US.

David Walsh, the arts editor of *The International Workers Bulletin*, examined the complex relationship between art and the development of a socialist culture among working people in a lecture on the topic “Art, Culture and Socialism.”

Nick Beams opened the school by drawing attention to the financial breakdown of the East Asian economies as an expression of a crisis of world capitalism. “The century now drawing to a close,” he said, “has been the most bloody and turbulent in history. Yet none of the problems that have erupted in the form of war, fascism, mass unemployment and poverty have been resolved. Indeed, as the next century approaches, all of the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production which exploded so violently over the past 100 years are maturing once again.”

In their totality the lectures represented a major contribution to the assimilation of the strategical lessons of the twentieth century, a task that is indispensable for the rebirth of a socialist culture in the international workers movement.

The central premise guiding the school was that a renaissance of Marxism is fundamental to the development of a perspective that can answer the burning issues of the day—growing social inequality, deepening economic crises, the decline in the cultural level of society and the prevailing political paralysis of the workers movement.

Each of the presentations in its own way illuminated the fact that there was an alternative to the great betrayals of Stalinism, social democracy and the nationalist movements: the struggle for the continuity of genuine Marxism and the development of socialist consciousness in the working class undertaken by Leon Trotsky and the Fourth International.

The international nature of the school was expressed not only in the lecturers, but also in the international character of the audience. Present were more than 200 workers, students and intellectuals, including delegations from the Australian SEP’s sister parties in Germany, Britain, the United States, Canada and Sri Lanka, as well as the Socialist Labour League of India.

Of great significance was the participation of Trotskyists from the former Soviet Union and East Germany.

The audience also included students and workers from various parts of Australia, including Brisbane, Newcastle, Wollongong, Melbourne and Adelaide. They too represented many different nationalities. Often new to Marxism, they nevertheless listened and participated intently in more than six hours of lectures and discussion each day.

Each lecture was followed by a lively exchange of questions and answers, and the discussion was at an extremely high level. A further measure of the seriousness of the response was the purchase of over \$4,000 worth of Marxist literature. Another was the more than \$20,000 donated in cash and pledges to the Australian SEP’s \$100,000 Party Development Fund, launched at the closing session.

One of the most moving and memorable events was an international tribute to Jean Brust, a pioneer American Trotskyist who died on November 24, 1997 after 60 years of struggle for socialism. Leaders of all of the sections of the ICFI spoke of their collaboration with Comrade Jean and joined in honoring her indelible contribution to the world party.

The ICFI is making preparations to publish the lectures in their entirety, as well as some of the more important contributions in the discussions that followed.



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