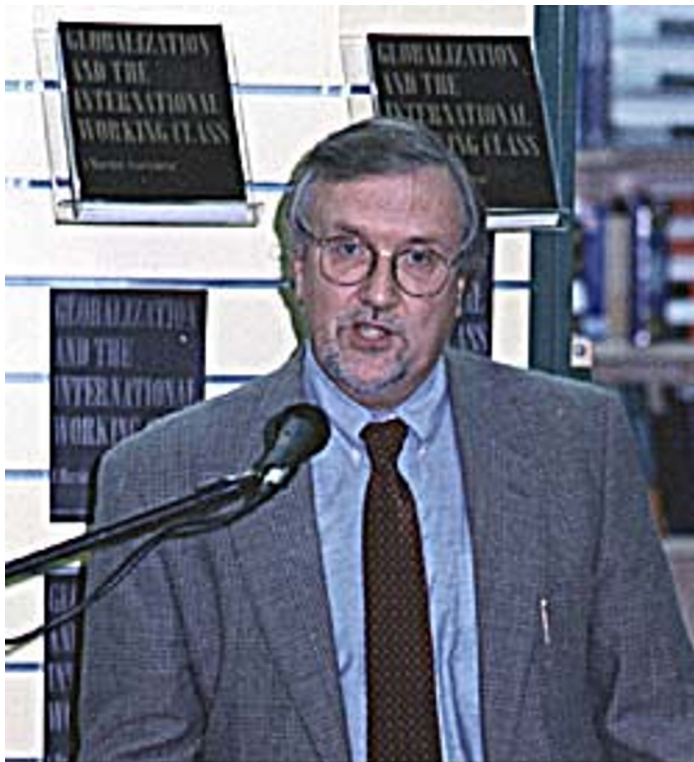


Globalization book featured at Australian bookstore

Mike Head
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Nick Beams

Nick Beams, one of the authors of *Globalization and the International Working Class*, a Marxist assessment of the new stage in world economy, introduced the volume at the Co-op Bookshop in Sydney on June 11.

Beams, the national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in Australia, was invited to deliver a short lecture at the bookshop, followed by questions. It was the second in a series of occasional lectures at The Co-op, a city bookstore that also caters for students and academics from the University of Sydney and the University of Technology, both nearby.

In welcoming Beams to the podium, the Co-op's manager David Breakwell said the lecture series was aimed at bringing to a wider audience, books and authors that would contribute to social, economic, cultural and historic debate. Breakwell commented that

since the late 1980s Beams had undertaken studies and lectured in Australia and overseas on globalisation, the debates surrounding it, and its implications.

In his remarks, Beams explained that the book took the form of a polemic by the International Committee of the Fourth International against one of the middle class radical groups, the Spartacist League, that denounced the International Committee's analysis of globalisation and claimed that the entire process was a myth. This position, which would seem to be so obviously at variance with economic facts, sought to defend the economic viability of the national state and the political organizations that rest on it.

Beams commented on the Spartacist position that the period from 1870 to 1914 was one of intensive globalisation of the capitalist economy. That was true, he noted, but what were the consequences? It had led to the breakdown of world capitalism, the eruption of World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1917. The October 1917 revolution was the first attempt by the international working class to resolve the crisis produced by the nation-state system in a progressive manner through the development of socialism.

The isolation of that revolution and its betrayal by Stalinism had paved the way for the capitalist order to be reconstructed in the aftermath of World War II. The post-war order was marked by a deliberate attempt by its architects—such as Keynes—to contain the globalising tendencies of capitalist production and finance, in order to prevent social upheaval and revolutionary struggles.

“But over the past 25 years these mechanisms have broken down and world capitalism is experiencing the globalisation of production, finance and all forms of economic organisation on a scale far higher than in the period prior to 1914. The consequences will be even more explosive,” Beams said.

“This means that the socialist tasks which were begun in the first decades of this century have to be resumed. Unless a progressive solution is found to resolve the contradiction between the globalised economy and the outmoded nation-state system, the people of the world will be plunged into forms of social barbarism even more terrible than those of the past.”

In the final section of his address, Beams briefly reviewed the disintegration of all the old national-based organisations—the trade unions, the nationalist movements in the oppressed countries and the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The speaker showed that Spartacist’s attempts to explain the political decay of these bodies as simply the result of the subjective cowardice and treachery of individual leaders were bankrupt. Such methods sought to obscure the fundamental objective processes at work—the shattering of the nationally-regulated economies and markets that these organisations and apparatuses had rested upon.

In conclusion, Beams said the book had a far wider purpose than simply the demolition of the politics of the Spartacist League. “Its aim is to address some of the outstanding political issues of the day and in that way contribute to the creation of the intellectual environment which will bring about the revival of a socialist outlook and perspective in the working class.”

During question period, Beams was asked to comment on the viewpoint of Labor Party shadow minister Mark Latham, who had been the first of the Co-op Bookshop’s guest lecturers, speaking on his recent book, *Civilising Global Capitalism*. Beams explained that Latham recognised the collapse of the old program of the Labor Party—that of extracting social concessions from the owners of capital within the national arena. The speaker then refuted Latham’s attempt to maintain the viability of the national state by finding new means of regulating global capital.

Beams took the example of one of Latham’s central claims: that the maintenance of a highly trained workforce would give a national government leverage over the multinationals. Sophisticated skills were now one of the most mobile factors of production, Beams pointed out. Whether they be computer programmers, or even surgeons, highly skilled workers were increasingly able to perform complex tasks around the globe, via virtual technology.

A Spartacist League representative sought to disrupt the question period with hysterical allegations, including the charge that the International Committee was responsible for the collapse of the USSR. When asked to formulate her question, she denounced Beams for failing to mention China, Vietnam, Cuba and North Korea, which she claimed were workers’ states under threat from imperialism.

In the course of his reply, Beams made the point that, far from being a workers’ state, the Stalinist regime in China offered the transnational corporations cheap labour and sweatshop conditions, enforced by an apparatus of repression more draconian than that of ex-President Suharto in Indonesia.

Another questioner asked about the alliance of “left” and right-wing groups that opposed the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) proposed by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Beams emphasised the reactionary role of all those groups that opposed the plans of the transnationals on the basis of strengthening the national capitalist state.

“The working class must develop its independent response,” he said. “The productive forces of humanity have to be organised on a global scale, but that can only be done on a harmonious, democratic and egalitarian basis by the working class.”



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