

Nick Beams concludes successful Australian lecture tour

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Nick Beams, the National Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in Australia and member of the *World Socialist Web Site* Editorial Board, concluded a successful two-week lecture tour of six Australian universities last Tuesday with a lecture at the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra, the country's capital.

Delivering a lecture entitled “Globalisation: The Socialist Perspective”, Beams spoke at LaTrobe and Melbourne Universities in Melbourne, Macquarie University and the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Sydney, Newcastle University and the ANU. The lectures were attended by some 400 students, university academics and tutors, professional and industrial workers, retired workers and high school students.

Beams' lecture submitted the contemporary processes in capitalist economy to a theoretical and historical examination, applying the scientific analysis developed by Karl Marx in his major work, *Capital*. For many in the audience it was their first introduction to the methodology and concepts of classical Marxist political economy.

The lecture demonstrated how the globalisation of production has been driven by objective contradictions within the capitalist mode of production, first revealed by Marx, that give rise to a tendency for the rate of profit to decline. Beams showed why, despite all the efforts of the capitalist class, the processes of globalisation have failed to bring about a return to the stable economic conditions of the post-war decades. Rather, they have resulted in a deep, worldwide social polarisation between rich and poor; financial parasitism and increasingly frenzied stock market speculation; and a series of convulsive economic shocks, including the recent Asian economic meltdown. This instability is now centred on the stock market bubble in the United States, the powerhouse of world economy.

Beams outlined the socialist perspective advanced by the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement. The emergence of a highly integrated and interdependent world economy—and the high level of labour productivity that has made it possible—has

rendered utterly obsolete both the private ownership of production and the nation-state system of capitalism. It has transformed the vast mass of the world's population into wage workers and, through the development of global communication and information technologies, laid the foundations for a world planned socialist economy under their democratic control.

Those who, in response to globalisation, call for a revamping of national states and regulations are advancing a historically reactionary perspective that represents, not the interests of the working class, but those layers of the national capitalist class engaged in bitter competition against their international rivals.

The question, Beams explained, is not how to reverse the globalisation of production, but which class—the owners of property and wealth or those who produce it—should control the global economy and the vast productive and cultural potential it embodies. The progressive solution lies in developing a unified political movement of the working class, armed with a genuine socialist consciousness. This requires above all a detailed study of the strategic experiences of the twentieth century and a revival of the program of world socialist revolution upon which the 1917 Russian Revolution was based.

At every university, the lecture provoked a steady stream of questions. Beams was asked about the role played by institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank and about the significance of the Internet, the “dot com” economy and the role of debt.

Several students asked about the character of a socialist society and how it would be possible to involve the mass of the population in economic planning. At UNSW, members of the audience asked Beams to reply to the position that capitalism reflects innate human greed, which is part of human nature.

Beams was also asked at most of the lectures whether socialism had failed and how a degeneration of future socialist revolutions could be prevented. Other questions related to the present state of consciousness in the working

class, why the socialist movement did not have a larger following and how a genuine revolutionary party could be built.

Answering the questions on socialist planning, Beams explained that both the necessity and possibility for socialism arises from processes within the productive forces themselves, taking place before our very eyes. While no blueprint or schema could be presented detailing exactly how socialist planning would be organised, the means for ordinary people everywhere to make known their needs and exercise control over economic activity had been vastly expanded by the technological developments of the past decades. Beams pointed to the operation of the contemporary transnational company and the stock markets, which must have instantaneous access to accurate information from every corner of the world, and the emergence of technologies such as the Internet that enable immediate input and feedback.

In reply to questions on the state of working class consciousness, Beams used the analogy of a person with dementia, who has lost his memory and cannot recall his life experiences. Such a person is rendered incapable of orienting himself in the world. In a similar way, the working class has been profoundly disoriented because of its failure, up to now, to assimilate the experiences through which it has passed. While it has witnessed the decay and collapse of the old national-based organisations of the post-war period—the Stalinist Communist parties, social democratic parties, trade unions—it has not yet come to an understanding of why. But the deepening economic, political and social crisis within every country is seeing wider layers of workers, students and middle class people beginning to seek out answers. The revolutionary party, Beams explained, constitutes the memory of the working class. Its central responsibility is to provide a historical analysis and in this way, establish the necessity for a socialist program.

Members of the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) and its youth movement Resistance attended the lectures in Newcastle and Canberra in order to publicly challenge the analysis made by the WSWs of the globalisation of production. They advocated instead a perspective of radical protest against various institutions of world capitalism, as took place in Seattle last December and more recently in Washington.

The DSP is one of several petty bourgeois “left” organisations that consider globalisation to be little more than a set of “neo-liberal” policies having no objective implications for the international working class. The impact of globalisation can be blocked and reversed, the DSP claims, by a revival of militant trade unionism and protest actions.

Speaking in Canberra, Beams stressed that the central issue in developing a political movement against global capitalism is on what perspective it is to be based. He drew on the experience of the anti-IMF protest in Washington last April, where young people, genuinely concerned about the fate of the working class, were harnessed behind the American trade unions and the right-wing demagogue Patrick Buchanan in nationalist attacks on China and calls for the protection of US industry against its rivals.

He reviewed the pattern of DSP protest actions and the class interests they served. During the East Timor crisis last September the DSP had been at the forefront of demonstrations demanding that the Howard government send Australian troops to the tiny half-island, claiming this was the only way the Timorese could be defended from Indonesian-backed militias.

Beams drew out how the “troops in” campaign politically legitimised the largest military deployment by Australia since the Vietnam War, to carry out the effective colonisation of East Timor by an Australian-led United Nations force. The UN intervention enabled Australian imperialism to secure its stake in the oil resources of the Timor Sea. No aspect of the historic oppression of the Timorese people has been, or will be resolved. The only perspective, in both the immediate and long term, Beams explained, that can advance the interests of the working class and oppressed masses is that of world socialism.

For many who attended, Beams' lecture tour served to clarify the fundamental divide between the socialist perspective advanced by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the various forms of national protest politics. In the course of the campaign and during the lectures themselves, more than 100 students signed up for further discussion with the SEP.



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