

Socialist Equality Party holds public meetings in Australia against Iraq war

Our reporters
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On the eve of the US-led invasion of Iraq, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Australia held public meetings last week in Melbourne and in Sydney to discuss the political tasks of the antiwar movement. As rallies and protests were erupting against the decision to go to war, these forums opened up an important discussion on the underlying causes of the war and the necessity of advancing a socialist strategy.

Speaking in Sydney just hours after the first cruise missiles had been launched against Baghdad, SEP assistant national secretary Linda Tenenbaum opened the meeting by declaring that March 20, 2003 was “a day of infamy that will go down in the annals of history. The Socialist Equality Party, the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site* condemn unequivocally the invasion of Iraq by the United States, Britain and Australia.”

She explained that the war against Iraq was an imperialist war being conducted for entirely predatory aims. It was an unprovoked act of aggression by the world’s largest superpower, the US, in league with Britain and Australia, against one of the most impoverished and defenceless countries on earth. Moreover, this was an illegal war that represented a violation of UN resolutions, of international law and of international conventions and protocols governing the conduct of war.

Tenenbaum posed the question: did the present display of US military might signify that capitalism was so powerful that it was impossible to influence, much less overthrow? “In the first place the use of force was not a measure of power and strength,” she explained. “The turn to gangsterism was in essence an expression of profound weakness and crisis—an expression of fundamental contradictions that are ripping apart the entire social order. The second and the most critical feature of the current situation is the reemergence of masses of ordinary people back onto the stage of history.”

She pointed to two features of the protest movement: its striving for global unity and the political vacuum created by the absence of any of the official parties. “The issue is what program and perspective is going to guide it. The International Committee and the SEP are dedicated to educating and clarifying the new forces that are being thrust forward by these events on the basis of a socialist alternative.”

The main address at the meetings was delivered by Nick Beams, the national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party and a member of the *World Socialist Web Site* Editorial Board. Beams provided a comprehensive analysis of the economic and political motivations behind the US-led war on Iraq, detailing in particular Washington’s longstanding preoccupation with securing its dominance over Middle Eastern oil reserves.

Beams drew the historic parallel between the current conflicts in the UN Security Council and the great power rivalry that produced two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century. The opposition of France, Germany and other powers to the US actions was not based on hostility to military interventions or humanitarian considerations, he explained.

“Their concerns centre on what a US invasion of Iraq portends for the future relations between the major powers. They know full well that the agenda does not finish with Iraq—it is only the beginning. In short, what we see in the clash over Iraq are the conflicting interests of the major imperialist powers, which must sooner, rather than later, lead to a third imperialist war. How can such a catastrophe be prevented? What way forward for the future of mankind?”

Beams explained that the answers to these great questions could only be discovered through an historical analysis of the present situation. In the course of his report, he reviewed the crucial issues of political program and perspective that were fought out in the Marxist movement in the course of the twentieth century, focussing in particular on the issues raised by the debate between Lenin and Kautsky on imperialist war.

More than 100 students, young people, workers, pensioners and housewives from a wide variety of backgrounds and countries attended the two meetings and listened carefully to the speakers. Many were regular readers of the *World Socialist Web Site*, while others decided to come after reading SEP leaflets distributed at antiwar protests and elsewhere. Some had decided to attend an SEP meeting for the first time and to consider more carefully the socialist alternative, rather than go an antiwar rally.

A lively discussion on a wide variety of issues opened up after Beams’ report. Reflecting concerns about the long-term implications of the Iraq war, a number of questions focused on the reasons behind the growing conflict between the US and

Europe. Other questions included: whether the Bush administration could be characterised as fascist; would the war lead to a rise of anti-Semitism; what was the likelihood that Iraq would fight back; and the role of the trade unions.

The two meetings concluded with collections for the WSWs Expansion Fund of more than \$2,500. Many of those in attendance remained behind for some time to discuss the issues raised by the speakers and to examine the selection of Marxist literature on sale. A number of pamphlets and books, including the latest issue of the *World Socialist Web Site Review* were sold.

WSWS reporters spoke to several of those who attended the meetings.

Anouk, a young student in Sydney, said: “I look around me and it seems like the world’s becoming a more dangerous place and it was great to see the antiwar protests back in February. I was at the protest at Hyde Park. I got your leaflet. I had read it beforehand on the web site. It was just great to see all different kinds of people. Most of them probably didn’t have a clear internationalist perspective, but it was just great to see them come out. At least it’s a start.

“I try to steer clear of those leading protest politics because I think they all have their own agendas. For example, the Greens, I don’t think they have much of a perspective. And Labor’s always pretended to represent the workers but they represent the same interests as the government, so we’d end up in the same situation.

“On the question of the US being driven to war out of its desperate economic situation, I’m no expert on the US economy but I can see how that would happen. It happened to Germany [in the 1930s].

“Socialist revolution is an enormous task. I think throughout the twentieth century, the degeneration of the Soviet Union into a totalitarian state sort of disillusioned the working class and held them back. It made them think this is socialism and they’d be better off with what we’ve got. But when they see that the Soviet Union never really represented socialism, perhaps except in the early days of the revolution, that will lay the foundation for a socialist perspective.

“Apart from the WSWs there are not many sources of information. We are bombarded every day in the media with rubbish about what’s happening with Iraq. Most of the information is not true. Until you get sites such as WSWs, you don’t realise that there’s a whole lot of truth out there and people are just being sheltered from it.

“I have been reading the WSWs for about a year. A lot of the articles I didn’t know enough about them, so, I tried to keep an open mind, but as I went on it just seemed to make so much sense. One thing that distinguishes the WSWs from any other media source I’ve ever come across is the integrity ... they don’t change perspective. It’s always the same, not only ethically right but economically just and socially just and they never deviate from that. That’s why I respect the writers

especially Nick Beams, David Walsh and David North, they’re fantastic.

“The mainstream media shows a great deal of compliance. I’m studying the media. But the role of the media doesn’t often come up in discussion. There might be a critical attitude among academics and students but I don’t think there’s a clear enough perspective on why the media would play the role they do.

“I can see the war in Iraq turning into World War III and that’s terrifying. I like to think the antiwar movement will not just continue the way it is but grow bigger and turn into a unified and more oriented movement, towards, hopefully socialism.”

Ruth, a student of media and communications in Melbourne, commented: “The US media has transformed itself into an arm of the Bush administration. Bush has changed laws and the media agree. It is really surprising. If you disagree with the war, they can say you are pro-terrorist. It is like the Spanish Inquisition. The press people have given up freedoms, they’ve silenced plenty of the opposition. Yet supposedly they’re fighting against suppression of freedom in Iraq.

“It’s quite reassuring to see the *World Socialist Web Site*. The media goes on with all this talk about ‘decent Australians’ and you think you’re alone. It’s good to have the alternative, and the meeting was very good, I’ll tell my friends about it. Clarity is a good thing. There has to be a common goal, for mankind to have a future. We’re at the beginning of this whole new eruption of war. It is very frightening.”

Michael, a TAFE student in Melbourne, said: “The whole question of the division between the major powers is pretty scary. I wouldn’t have thought about that at all without the lecture. From the smaller war, this will be the start of bigger things.

“I watch anything on TV I can see, read anything I can find about what is happening. The most frustrating thing about it all—is how they pretend to have the moral high ground and continually lie to everybody. They do not say what it is about at all. The truth is nothing like the pro-Western stuff we hear.

“Iraq is in big trouble, the whole place won’t be able to work. They are all going to suffer a fair bit. It is big trouble for everyone. There will be more political consciousness as this goes on. Trying to educate people to the real issues will be the challenge. People are against the war, but they don’t understand capitalism is causing the war.”



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