

World Socialist Web Site holds conference on the political lessons of the war on Iraq

The Editorial Board
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Today we are publishing this summary account of the WSW-Socialist Equality Party conference held over last weekend in Sydney, Australia. Over the next several days, beginning tomorrow, we will publish the opening report to the conference given by Nick Beams, member of the WSW International Editorial Board and national secretary of the SEP in Australia, as well as the resolutions adopted, the remarks of international delegates and reports of the conference discussion.

On the weekend of July 5-6, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) held an international conference in Sydney, entitled “Political Lessons of the War on Iraq: the way forward for the international working class”.

Convened as US-led forces in Iraq continued their brutal colonial-style occupation of Iraq, the conference followed a similar event organised by the WSW and SEP in the United States on March 29-30 and public meetings in Berlin and London in June. All were held to assess the implications of the renewed eruption of imperialist war and to elaborate the common international strategy required by working people of all countries to wage an effective struggle against it.

More than 100 delegates participated, including representatives of the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in the US, Britain, Germany and Sri Lanka, as well as members and supporters of the SEP and WSWS readers from New Zealand and several states of Australia.

In opening the conference, chair Linda Tenenbaum, assistant national secretary of the SEP, drew attention to the particular significance of the attendance of Shree Haran of the SEP in Sri Lanka, which represented a “small but important political victory”. Like other Sri Lankans of Tamil origin previously invited to Australia by the SEP, the Australian High Commission in Colombo refused Shree Haran a visa. While no reasons were given, the decision was indisputably based on the Howard government’s racist immigration policies. Following a determined challenge by the Socialist Equality Parties in Sri Lanka and Australia, however, the decision was reversed and a second application accepted. “This means we have broken the unstated but all-pervasive ban implemented by the Howard government on young, male citizens of Tamil origin traveling to Australia,” Tenenbaum declared.

Nick Beams, national secretary of the SEP and member of the WSWS International Editorial Board, delivered the opening address, tracing the historical context of the rise of US imperialism

and emphasising that the invasion of Iraq marked a qualitative shift in American foreign policy, opening a new and explosive era in world relations.

Beams stressed that the current eruption of US militarism was not merely the result of a peculiar set of circumstances owing to the irrational policies of the Bush administration or the “so-called neo-conservatives who play such a prominent role in formulating its agenda.”

“Rather, he said, “the Bush regime’s policies are the culmination of tendencies of development that have been steadily emerging over the past decade and a half since the collapse of the Soviet Union,” and which could be clearly seen in the foreign policy of the previous Clinton administration as well.

At the heart of this shift was a profound and intractable social and political crisis. Highlighting the correspondence between the falling rate of profit since the 1970s and the increasingly desperate and reckless trajectory of US imperialism, Beams warned that the crisis in the US would lead to further wars across the world.

“These phenomena—deepening deflation, persistent stagnation, financial speculation and outright looting, industrial overcapacity, massive economic imbalances—are all different symptoms of an acute crisis in the capitalist accumulation process itself. In other words, the downswing in the curve of capitalist development that began some 30 years ago, has, despite all the strenuous efforts to reverse it, become steeper, signifying a crisis at the very heart of the capitalist economy. Moreover, this crisis is concentrated in the most powerful economy of all, the United States. This is the driving force behind the eruption of American imperialism.

“We should recall Trotsky’s prophetic words, written more than 70 years as the US was beginning its global ascendancy. A crisis in America, he explained, would not bring about a retreat. ‘Just the contrary is the case. In the period of crisis the hegemony of the United States will operate more completely, more openly, and more ruthlessly than in the period of boom. The United States will seek to overcome and extricate herself from her difficulties and maladies primarily at the expense of Europe, regardless of whether this occurs in Asia, Canada, South America, Australia, or Europe itself, or whether it takes place peacefully or through war’” [Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin*, page 8].

A solution to the present crisis, Beams declared, required a critical assessment of the international antiwar demonstrations seen in February. This unprecedented social movement, Beams said, “showed the vast potential that exists, but also the problems

that have to be overcome for that potential to be realised. These problems essentially boil down to one: the crisis of political perspective.”

The failure of the politics of protest underscored the need for a political strategy based on the unity of the international working class, in opposition to the capitalist profit system and the nation-state.

The conference unanimously voted for a series of resolutions condemning the occupation of Iraq, calling for the withdrawal of Australian troops from Iraq and the Solomon Islands, for the unity and political independence of the working class, against attacks on social conditions and democratic rights, and for the development of the WSWs.

Introducing the resolution “End the US-led occupation of Iraq!” Peter Symonds, a member of the WSWs International Editorial Board, noted that the US administrator in Baghdad, L. Paul Bremer III, enjoyed dictatorial power “akin to the viceroys who ruled over the British raj in India”. Delegates called for the “immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq, Afghanistan and throughout the Middle East”, and defended the right of the Iraqi people to resist the colonial occupation of their country.

The second resolution “Australian troops out of Iraq and the Solomon Islands!” drew out the connection between Australia’s participation in the illegal invasion of Iraq and its current moves to recolonise the Solomon Islands. The Howard government “sent troops to lend credibility to Bush’s threadbare ‘coalition of the willing’ and strengthen the Australian-American military alliance as a quid pro quo for establishing its own sphere of influence in the Asia-Pacific region.” The resolution denounced the government’s “embrace of militarism and colonialism” warning that it would have disastrous consequences for the Australian people.

Fraternal greetings were delivered to the conference by several international delegates. Barry Grey, a member of the WSWs International Editorial Board and a leading member of the American SEP, said the occupation of Iraq had landed the US “in its greatest international crisis since Vietnam. The statements coming from Washington oscillate between bluster and bewilderment to incoherence. Bush’s macho contribution: ‘bring them on,’ has not pleased the families of US troops who suddenly find their sons and daughters caught in an open-ended police action that promises to grow ever more bloody.”

Grey described the enormous social polarisation in the US, and the “atrophy, corruption and decay” of every political institution. The war in Iraq, he continued, was a terrible forewarning of a social and political crisis of unprecedented proportions.

Stefan Steinberg, of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit in Germany, reported on the consequences of the Iraq war within Europe. Germany and France’s opposition to the US in the lead-up to the war in no way represented a principled challenge to imperialist war. The European bourgeoisie, Steinberg explained, was currently dismantling existing social programs and building up its military forces in order to press ahead with its own imperialist ambitions.

WSWs International Editorial Board member Julie Hyland, of the British SEP, presented a detailed review of the crisis of the

Blair government and the considerations behind its collaboration in the US-led war, while K. Ratnayake, a leader of the Sri Lankan SEP, moved the resolution “For the International Unity of the Working Class.” The resolution highlighted the historic nature of the international protests on February 14-16. “At the most fundamental level they represented the birth of a new international movement against imperialism”. The resolution went on to condemn all attempts to divide the international working class on national, ethnic, racial, sexual or religious grounds.

The resolution “For the political independence of the working class” called on the working class to break with “the Labor Party and all parties that stand with one or both feet in the camp of capitalism.”

The resolution on “War, the social crisis and the assault on democratic rights”, drew out the organic connection between the turn to war and the sustained attacks on democratic rights and the social conditions of working people. It noted that the roots of the intensifying attacks on democratic rights in Australia lay in the dramatic increase in social inequality. “Behind the assault on basic rights stands a ruling elite that has no answers but state repression to growing public dissatisfaction and opposition to its policies”.

The conference condemned the recent passage of the repressive ASIO Act and demanded the immediate release of David Hicks and fellow detainee Mamdouh Habib who are being illegally imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay with the full complicity of the Australian government. Delegates also condemned the Howard government’s attacks on refugees, demanding their release from mandatory detention with full civil and political rights.

The conference concluded with an extensive report on the growing readership and influence of the WSWs. Noting the criminal role played by the media in the propagation of the lies and fabrications used to justify the Iraq war, the resolution “Support and develop the WSWs” highlighted the critical daily role played by the site in “exposing the media and government lies and explaining the fundamental economic and political agenda behind the war.” It concluded: “The conference recognises that the WSWs will play a vital role in the development of a new international revolutionary upsurge. It is creating the framework for a new international revolutionary party capable of leading the coming struggles.”



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