

Australian SEP public meetings discuss third anniversary of Iraq war

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, held public meetings in Sydney and Melbourne on April 4 and 11 to review the lessons of the third anniversary of the invasion of Iraq and the looming threat of a US-led war on Iran. University and high school students, as well as workers, professional people and retired workers, attended the meetings on “Socialism and the struggle against imperialist war”.

World Socialist Web Site staff writer James Cogan, the first speaker at the Sydney meeting, outlined the disastrous consequences of the invasion for the Iraqi people. Tens of thousands had been killed, along with more than 2,500 occupation troops, while the country’s economic, social and cultural resources had been devastated. Far from establishing democracy, the US invasion had stoked sectarian tensions that were plunging Iraq toward civil war and threatening to engulf the entire region in bloody conflict.

Cogan said the torture, depraved abuse and repression that took place in Abu Ghraib prison and throughout Iraq, combined with the devastation of the country “was intended to leave the people in a terrorised state and living a hand-to-mouth existence so that they would submit to US occupation.

“Resistance steadily escalated however, as did demands for democratic elections and improvements in living conditions. The response of the White House and the Pentagon was increasingly to openly base the occupation of Iraq on the policy of divide and rule—setting different religious and ethnic factions against one another.”

The speaker warned that the Iraq war was part of a desperate attempt by the American ruling elite to use military power to reverse its protracted economic decline and assert its global hegemony, in the face of

economic and strategic challenges from its European and Asian rivals.

“The essential issue is that the war against Iraq is part of a broader agenda of US military aggression in the Middle East. The attempt to assert American dominance over the exploitation of resources and markets will inevitably require the overturning of other regimes in the region that present an obstacle to US ambitions.”

Cogan reiterated the demand by the SEP and the WSWs for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign forces and for all those responsible for the planning and conduct of the war, including the Howard government in Australia, to be tried as war criminals.

The second speaker, Tony Robson, a member of the SEP central committee, recalled that the eruption of US militarism did not begin with the Bush administration. The antecedents of the US-led aggression in Iraq were present in the Kosovo war against Serbia, launched four years earlier under the Clinton administration.

“In Kosovo the claims of genocide fulfilled the same purpose as the claims of weapons of mass destruction did in Iraq. Both have proven to be equally bogus. The form changed but the content remained the same—to justify an unrestrained use of military force in complete violation of international law.

“One of the most striking features of the Kosovo war was the support this criminal enterprise won among the liberal establishment and ‘left’ groups. Many of those who had protested against the Vietnam War, and other imperialist interventions, claimed that Kosovo was different. They said that contrary to the wars of the past, NATO’s military intervention should be welcomed. They claimed that for once imperialist military power was being harnessed for the good of

humanity.”

Robson reviewed the conditions that prevail in Kosovo seven years after the supposed “NATO liberation”. Far from being a model of a multi-ethnic society, the NATO troops and UN-run administration had presided over a major exodus of Serbs and other non-Albanian ethnic minorities, while the NATO powers had taken control of the province’s natural resources and strategic location.

Robson said the analysis made by the WSWs at the time of the Kosovo war had been vindicated: “The United States was anxious to exploit the power vacuum created by the Soviet collapse to rapidly project its power eastward and assert control over the vast untapped reserves of oil and gas in the newly-independent Central Asian republics of the old USSR. Within this new geopolitical environment, the Balkans assumed exceptional strategic importance as a vital logistical staging ground for the projection of imperialist power, particularly that of the United States, toward Central Asia.”

The main speaker at both meetings was WSWs International Editorial Board member and SEP national secretary Nick Beams. He explained that the Iraq war marked a fundamental historical turning point. The US administration had utilised the “war on terror” as the pretext for asserting Washington’s right to deploy military force to realise its economic and political objectives throughout the world—in other words, to pursue the course for which the Nazi leaders were charged as war criminals after World War II.

After reviewing US National Security Strategy documents and the discussions currently under way in the US journal *Foreign Affairs*, Beams warned that in pursuing an aggressive foreign policy against its rivals, including China, the US was quite prepared to use offensive nuclear weapons to achieve its objectives.

Beams drew attention to a profound political contradiction. Despite mass opposition to the war and the free-market programs being implemented in all the major capitalist countries, they continued unabated. The fundamental problem, he said, was one of political perspective. To the extent that the opposition remained within the confines of protest, of vainly seeking to pressure the imperialist powers to change course, then it remained impotent.

The international working class had to advance its

own independent perspective. “There is no way out of the impasse other than the remaking of the world on the basis of the program of international socialism—that is, the overturn of the private profit and nation-state system and the utilisation of the resources of the earth and the vast wealth created by the labour of millions for the benefit of humanity as a whole.” (A full report of Beams’ speech is being published in two parts on the WSWs, today and tomorrow.)

There were lively questions from the audience at both meetings, including about the motivations driving the US-led invasion, the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism, the failure of the antiwar protest movement, the role of “left” nationalist governments such as that of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and the nature of genuine socialism.

Significantly, the audiences included young people attending their first SEP public meeting after reading the WSWs for some time. Duncan, a young electrician, had been reading the site for over a year and decided to attend the Melbourne meeting.

“The WSWs has affected how I think, mainly because the articles have referred to aspects of history that I later researched and checked up on,” he said. “Once I started looking into things, I became disillusioned with everything. I like the site’s critical analysis.”

Members of the audience bought Marxist literature, expressed interest in joining the Socialist Equality Party and contributed to generous collections to help finance the work of the SEP and the WSWs.



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