

Well-attended ISSE meeting discusses US war threat on Iran

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Four and half years after the invasion and occupation of Iraq, another catastrophe is being prepared—a war against Iran. This warning was one of the key points made in an address by Socialist Equality Party National Secretary Nick Beams to a meeting of students at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Sydney.

“It is clear, both from a series of reports in the mass media, many of them based on leaks from the highest levels of the Bush administration, that the United States, either in collaboration with Israel or on its own, is preparing a military attack on Iran,” he told the meeting organised by the UNSW International Students for Social Equality (ISSE).

Called to discuss the socialist alternative to war, social inequality and the assault on democratic rights, the meeting was attended by students from many different faculties, including Law, Science and Engineering and from several countries, including the United States, and the Indian sub-continent.

In the lead-up to Wednesday’s meeting, ISSE members campaigned extensively on campus, distributing thousands of flyers—including an SEP statement “The socialist alternative to war, social inequality and the assault on democratic rights”—engaging in discussion with hundreds of students.

Preparations for an attack on Iran, Beams told the ISSE meeting, were being openly discussed in Washington and the capitals of Europe. He referred to comments earlier this week by French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner who warned that the world must “prepare for war”; while the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed ElBaradei, warned Monday about an “out of control” drift to military conflict—reminiscent of the build-up to war against Iraq.

Turning to an examination of the underlying war-aims of the United States, Beams referred to a newly-published book by former US Federal Reserve chief Alan

Greenspan, who wrote: “I’m saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil.” But this, said Beams, was only part of the story. “The US views the control of the vast wealth of the Middle East and Central Asia as decisive in maintaining its position of global dominance.”

The tensions and conflicts between the capitalist great powers were developing along the lines of those that produced two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century.

“Imagine for a moment a meeting such as this one, 100 years ago, in 1907. Political discussion would centre on the Moroccan question, the Balkans question, the Bosnian question, the Eastern question... These were various parts of the world, some of them somewhat remote, in which the interests of the great powers and empires clashed—the interests of the British, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, Russia, France, and the rising power Germany.

“The colliding interests of the capitalist Great Powers led eventually to the eruption of world war in 1914. We have now entered into a new pre-war period. That is the meaning of the Iraq war and the threats against Iran.”

The present generation, Beams stressed, does not approach the present period bereft of analysis. Rather, the socialist movement of the twenty-first century “stands on the shoulders of giants”.

“In his book *War and the International*, Leon Trotsky explained that the war arose out of a contradictory process at the very heart of the capitalist economy. On the one hand the vast developments of technology meant that the productive forces had now expanded on a global scale. The world, he wrote, had become one economic workshop, the different parts of which are inseparably connected with each other. At the same time, however, the world was divided by the capitalist great powers each of which sought to establish its predominance over the others, leading to a collision.

“Lenin explained that with the eruption of war, capitalism had entered a new historical era of imperialist wars from which there was no way out, other than the overthrow of the profit system itself. It may be possible, he acknowledged, that some kind of temporary equilibrium could be established among the capitalist powers, but it was destined to collapse because economic developments would change the relationships upon which it rested, setting in motion a new round of military conflicts.”

Was this analysis refuted by events since 1945? “After all, there has not been a military conflict between the major powers for decades,” Beams said.

“The post-war period did see the suppression of the inter-imperialist antagonisms which had torn the world apart in the previous 50 years. A kind of ‘peace’ was established. Economically it rested on the overwhelming supremacy of the United States. Politically it was based on the Cold War—the conflict with the Soviet Union providing the framework for the regulation of the conflicts among the major capitalist powers.

“All of that has changed over the past 20 years. The vast economic processes which we know as globalisation have completely transformed the world economy. The contradiction between the global character of the productive forces and the division of the world into rival nation states, to which Trotsky pointed in 1914, has been intensified to an enormous degree.”

Beams emphasised that the struggle against war can only be successfully waged if it is organised on the basis of a scientific analysis of its causes. “This is where we differ at the most fundamental level with all varieties of protest politics which in one way or another, seek to pressure the ruling elites into another course of action.”

In reality no section of the official political establishment was opposed to the eruption of militarism. Beams reviewed the role of the Democrats in the United States, who have used their Senate and Congressional majorities to support an escalation of the war in Iraq.

Turning to the record of the major “opposition” parties in Australia since 2003, Beams dispelled any lingering confusion that the ALP or Greens are opposed to the Iraq war. Labor had never issued a call for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq and were resolute backers of the US-led occupation. According to Rudd, the occupation of Iraq was not illegal and the occupying forces had to stay because under the UN charter they had a “duty of care” to perform.

As for the Greens, their “differences” with the Iraq war

were purely tactical, calling for the redeployment of Australian troops to the South Pacific—where they are currently being used against the masses of East Timor and the Solomon Islands.

An extended question and answer session followed Beams’s report with a series of fundamental issues raised. “What is the inherent flaw that makes the capitalist nation-state unviable?” asked one student. “Is it too late to avert war and the destruction of the planet?” asked another. One student, who attended the recent protest against APEC in Sydney, claimed the major problem was that masses of people were fearful of the anti-terror laws and that future protests had to mobilise “the labour movement”.

Beams said it was important to recognise that the previously existing labour movement, based on a national-reformist program, had collapsed. The central task was the development of an alternative socialist and internationalist perspective. While students in attendance readily expressed their disgust with Labor’s bi-partisan support for war and reaction, some questioned whether an independent socialist campaign could be “successful”. Beams explained that the elections themselves would resolve nothing, but that the central task, to which the SEP’s campaign would be dedicated, was the development of the political consciousness of workers and young people.

The meeting ended with discussion about the future work of the ISSE club on campus, including the election of office-bearers for 2007-08. At the close of the meeting many students stayed behind for further discussion with Beams and ISSE members.

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