

SEP public meetings in Australia

The enduring significance of the founding of the Fourth International

James Cogan
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The following speech was delivered by James Cogan to a meeting in Sydney held by the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) on September 28 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International. Cogan is a staff writer for the World Socialist Web Site who has written extensively on the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Tomorrow we will commence the publication of the report given to the meeting by SEP national secretary Nick Beams, entitled “Capitalist breakdown and the revolutionary perspective of the Fourth International”.

The declassified records of the Soviet secret police, the GPU, show that at least 1,548,367 Soviet citizens were arrested during 1937 and 1938 alone, in what is known as the Great Purge.

Of those who were arrested during the Great Purge of 1937-38, the official records show that 681,692 were executed, most after a summary trial lasting less than 20 minutes. Those who were not executed were condemned to labour camps in the wastelands of Siberia, where hundreds of thousands died.

The crucial question in the founding of the Fourth International was not numbers, but political clarity. The first responsibility of a socialist is to tell the working class the truth. The truth was that under the leadership of the Stalinist Communist parties, or the reformist Social Democratic, Labor and trade union apparatuses, the working class would be incapable of advancing its independent interests against the barbarism being produced by the capitalist system.

The assembled delegates directly represented 11 countries—including the United States, France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Holland, South Africa and the Soviet Union. Others from countries in Europe, Latin

America, Asia, Africa and Australia were unable to attend but later endorsed the congress and its resolutions. While small in numbers, the assembled delegates represented the accumulated political knowledge and experience of the working class and ensured the continuity of the struggle for international socialism.

In the one day of formal proceedings, the Fourth International’s founding congress adopted a series of resolutions, including an historic founding program, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*, also known as the Transitional Program.



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