

Implications of Rudd coup discussed at SEP meeting in Newcastle

Our reporter
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A lively and well-attended meeting of workers, students and professionals in Newcastle on Sunday discussed the implications of the coup that removed Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the socialist program required to politically re-arm the working class.

The meeting was addressed by Socialist Equality Party national secretary Nick Beams and Noel Holt, the SEP candidate for the federal seat of Newcastle. It was part of a series of conferences and public meetings held by the SEP over the past few weeks on the topic: “The World Economic Crisis, the failure of Capitalist and the Case for Socialism”.

Opening the meeting, national committee member Terry Cook explained that the SEP carried no brief for Rudd, whose government since 2007 had carried out far-reaching attacks on the conditions and rights of ordinary working people. “We are, however,” he continued, “obliged to draw out the implications of his removal for the working class.”

Cook said that Gillard’s installation was another expression of the convulsive political situation internationally: “Under pressure of the global financial markets, and saddled with debt due to multi-billion dollar corporate bailouts, governments internationally are now imposing brutal austerity programs to make the working class pay for the crisis through cuts to public spending, wages, jobs and living conditions. Gillard has been installed at the behest of the mining companies, finance capital and other sections of big business hoisted to carry out the same process in Australia.”

Noel Holt, SEP candidate for Newcastle and former communication worker with Telstra told the meeting he had joined the Socialist Labor League, the forerunner of the Socialist Equality Party, in 1996 in opposition to the class collaboration politics of the unions and the betrayals of Labor.

“This was a turning point in my political orientation,” he said. Holt explained that he had opposed the various Accords between the Hawke and Keating Labor governments and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) while he was active in the trade unions.

“I never accepted this anti-worker, pro-market big business policy which was used to drive down wages and tear up longstanding working conditions to make Australian employers globally competitive,” he said. “For me, the Labor-ACTU Accords of the ‘80s exposed the subservience of the union leadership and the Labor Party to the interests of big business and the capitalist system.”

Holt explained that he had campaigned for nearly two decades among workers and students in the Newcastle region explaining the necessity for a political break from the nationalist perspective of Labor and the unions and for the adoption of an international socialist program.

Holt outlined the destructive impact of the Hawke-Keating Labor governments on industrial centres like Newcastle, citing the closure of the BHP steel plant: “At its peak the steel works accounted for over 30,000 jobs in the region. Its closure helped push Newcastle’s unemployment rate to a peak of 16 percent in the mid-1990s.”

SEP national secretary Nick Beams, who also heads the party’s senate ticket in New South Wales, told the meeting that the value of every crisis was that it stripped away the political façade and laid bare the underlying essential processes.

“The political coup has come as a great shock to millions of ordinary people,” he said. “They are concerned that a man who was installed as a result of their votes less than three years ago was removed from

his position without an election, without even a discussion by forces who they do not know operating in the background.

“These events have a profound significance. What has taken place is that the Marxist analysis of the capitalist state has received dramatic verification in a series of events that have impacted on the political consciousness of millions of people. Marxism long ago explained that behind the facade of parliamentary democracy and popular sovereignty the real source of power is the dictatorship of capital, backed, in the final analysis by the force of the capitalist state.”

Beams drew attention to the marked shift in policy by the international bourgeoisie and governments worldwide from “fiscal stimulus to consolidation to economic austerity”. “The goal of this program is nothing less than the impoverishment of the working class through an endless assault on what remains of social welfare. This issue is the unspoken agenda of this election,” he warned.

Beams explained that the federal election was being held for two interconnected reasons: “It is not to have ‘the people’ decide on the policies of the next government, to judge the parties, the leadership and so on.

“Its purpose to put the so-called democratic stamp of approval on what has taken place, without any discussion, and, above all, to block any examination of the policies of whatever government comes to power. The two issues are interconnected because the driving forces of the coup will determine what comes after the election,” Beams said. “We can now see more clearly the significance of the coup against Rudd. It was a surgical strike within the Labor government to bring to power a regime to organise an offensive against the working class.”

Explaining the significance of the SEP’s election campaign, Beams said: “The events through which we have passed have revealed the central contradiction of this period: that between the advanced stage of the global breakdown of capitalism and the preparations of the bourgeoisie for repressive and dictatorial forms of rule—nowhere more clearly revealed than in the events in this country—and the unpreparedness of the working class for the situation that now confronts it.

“Our election campaign is about overcoming this contradiction, by explaining the real situation which

faces the working class and politically re-arming it. What does this consist of? Above all, it means explaining the necessity for the development of and the fight for an independent socialist program. This will not be handed to the working class. It must fight for it. Our purpose in the election campaign is not just to say what we will do but explain the struggle that the working class itself must undertake and the necessity for building a new mass party.”

The reports to the meeting provoked a series of questions on a range of vital issues including on the opportunist politics of the various ex-left groups, on the removal of Rudd and on the SEP’s attitude to climate change and environmental issues. A collection at the close of the meeting raised more than \$1,000 for the party’s election fund.

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