

Audience members speak about Trotsky, socialism and the SEP

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party's meetings this week in Melbourne and Sydney entitled "Seventy years since the assassination of Leon Trotsky: The Fourth International and the Perspective of the Socialist Equality Party" provoked an animated discussion during question time and afterwards. A number of the participants spoke to the World Socialist Web Site about the main report delivered by SEP National Secretary Nick Beams and the issues raised by other speakers—SEP National Organiser James Cogan in Sydney and WSWs journalist Patrick O'Connor in Melbourne.

Gareth, a 33-year-old labourer, explained: "I hadn't heard much about Leon Trotsky until my involvement with the Socialist Equality Party. I had heard of Marxism just through my own study, mainly on the Internet. But it was limited. I was looking for an alternative to the current political organisation—capitalism. I was trying to get to the root causes of politics.

"At the meeting I got more of an idea of Trotsky, the individual, and about history. His assassination shows just how much of a threat he was on the world arena, how much of an influence he obviously had. Also as the speakers said, in the struggle of the internationalists against the national opportunists over the whole post-war period, it was important that the Fourth International was able to cleanse itself of those trying to 'reform' the Fourth International.

"I always thought if I worked hard I'd get ahead. But the SEP has made me looked deeper. I've been asking myself a lot of questions since my involvement with the SEP. You can't really get ahead these days. I noticed that with my parents as well. No matter how hard you work, the system and the people who run it, they don't let you get ahead. Only a certain percentage of people are doing well financially.

"The working class has to overthrow capitalism, to put it harshly. That's the only way the world's going to change. The people that run the big corporations and control the whole financial situation, they've just lost the plot. They're leading the world on a train that's going nowhere.

"I liked the point that the speakers brought up—that the [nationalist] ideology that is given to us by the government that is actually supporting capitalism. It is putting us against other workers around the world. They say that workers in Bangladesh are the ones that stop us from earning decent money. It's propaganda. It's capitalists, the elite who stop us.

"The SEP is the best alternative I've seen so far and I think workers need to look into this alternative. As far as I can see, it's the way to go, for workers of the world to unite behind Trotsky's ideas."

Craig, a young musician, was attending his first SEP meeting. "I started looking at the *World Socialist Web Site* when I was referred to it from a right-wing US radio program that suggested that it was a very good source of research. I was surprised to see so many articles on the site dealing with your perspective in Australia. I don't know what conclusions to come to, but I thought the discussion tonight was very compelling. I've never heard about internationalism in this way before.

"These are frightening times. At least the agenda tonight discussed the global financial crisis and the threat of war, which none of the major parties is talking about. I wrote to my local [parliamentary] member, Peter Garrett, because I looked at the newspaper one day and another Australian soldier had been killed. It just dawned on me that over the years I'd never thought about why we're in Afghanistan, or why we're at war. I think that was a bit of a political epiphany. So I looked up the *World Socialist Web Site* and I was impressed.

"I really think we are facing an economic catastrophe. We go into austerity but then the next step is going to be war. Whether I vote for the SEP or not, this party is talking about war, about the global financial crisis and about social issues. I don't see any anybody else talking about it, not the Greens, not any of the other parties."

Nicky, a third year electrical engineering student from Singapore, attended the Melbourne meeting. He told the WSWs: "I've come to realise that the international unity of the working class is very important to bring about the changes that the SEP is fighting for—the rights of the working class.

"I've been in Singapore, where workers don't have the right of free speech. They work for 12 hours a day and earn an average wage of \$50, and living costs are very high. I think workers in Australia have freedom of speech in comparison.

"Big business was behind the political coup against Rudd. Labor is supposed to be for the working class, but the coup shows they are for the interests of big business. What will happen to the working class, especially in the current situation where they are losing jobs?

"The whole problem the world is facing now is imposed by capitalism. The rich are getting richer, while the workers are being oppressed. Trotsky managed to predict what would happen in capitalist society.

"I think the fight for Trotskyism is very important because of the historical analysis. This is based on Karl Marx's *Capital*. I think that the analysis that capitalism will fail is true. But workers are not prepared and have to be educated in the principles of socialism."

Gerard, who has been reading the *World Socialist Web Site* since 1998 and had been to one previous SEP meeting, recently contacted the party to find out about joining.

“It was about time I did something further than reading the web site. I had been involved in Stalinist organisations in the past, but when I found the *wsws.org*, it was like a breath of fresh air. A lot of the contradictions that had puzzled me were resolved. The clarity of the writing, the enthusiasm and the wide scope of the articles—and very current things—they have stimulated me over the years.”

Referring to a comment from a member of the audience who had defended immigration controls and “sustainable population”, Gerard said: “He has bought into the myth. The confusion is instilled into people.” The rulers wanted workers to be divided and angry, Gerard said, so as to be able to influence them and so that “they can channel that anger into their war”.

What made the WSWS different was that it “provided a historical perspective which made things very clear. It provides the real story as to what is going on.” The speakers “all spoke really well. Nick [Beams] summarised the entire history in a nutshell. He put it together so well, so clearly.”

James, who attended the Sydney meeting, explained: “I first met the party in 1979 when I was a member of the Young Socialists for a few months. Then I left but I thought they were quite serious then and they introduced me to Communism and Trotskyism. I have continued reading over the years. Earlier this year I began thinking that I wanted to get involved with politics again. I can’t really give an explanation why or one incident that provided an impulse.

“With the sacking of Rudd, I recognised that this was a coup. I thought it was the mining companies who decided to do it simply because he was representing maybe the national bourgeoisie against the international capitalists. The international capitalists said no, we are going to win and got rid of him, and allowed Gillard to come to power. And of course she started negotiating with them.”

James had asked a question in the meeting about the relationship between international strategy and national tactics. “I didn’t quite understand the distinction made between strategy and tactics and how tactics should be subordinated to the international strategy. Now I have a better understanding that you must proceed wholly from the need for the unification of the proletariat across the entire globe. So you can’t have a tactic in any one country, which is going to in any way undermine that in another country.

“On the question of boat people, I had a few concerns with maybe terrorism plus the introduction of what people think is cheap labour—such as students from South East Asian countries and India. Now I am convinced to go the other way. Rather than people being kept out, we should be arguing that immigrants’ wages and conditions should be improved along with everyone else’s. In that way we unite ourselves against the capitalists, instead of being divided among ourselves.

“I was very interested about the developments in the South East Asian economies, where the working class is coming forward. Marx explained that the development of capitalism brings the working class together, unifies it, organises it and eventually brings it into conflict with the capitalist class itself. This is happening in South East Asia.

“This is a great basis for an international global party. If it is happening all over the world, in the US, Australia and the European countries, then there is a chance that there will be a movement of the

working class across the globe in the same direction.”

Elvie, who is from the Philippines, has worked for the car component company Autoliv in Broadmeadows, Melbourne for 18 years. She explained that she had lived under Marcos’s martial law when she was young. Life had been very hard on the southern island of Mindanao.

“At the time, people would go to sleep at night and you didn’t know if your house would be burned that night. Many of the houses were burned down. People had to evacuate and had to go to the towns, but there was nothing to eat. So they would go back to the farms to get food, but many would be ambushed and killed. I didn’t know why the shootings were going on. All I knew was there was martial law. It was like a war against the people.

“My first job here was at Autoliv. In the mid-90s there was a boom in the company. They had around a thousand workers and three shifts. Autoliv supplied to many car companies like Toyota, Ford, GM and Mitsubishi. In 2006, the company announced it would have to close down. Around 700 people were let go, and it went down to around 100 workers. Now we only have 34.

“I was always in the union, but last year we didn’t understand what they were doing. Many of us decided to stop paying our union dues. The union stopped following what the workers wanted. The EBA [enterprise agreement] was due and we had to negotiate what to do. The management said we had to cut the jobs.

“Now daily needs are very expensive. When I lose my job, how am I going to survive? How will I pay for my house? I live by myself. I pay \$300 a week for my house. I think I could end up anywhere if I can’t pay for my house. Also, I help my family back home.

“I didn’t understand the coup against Rudd. But since I came to the first SEP electoral meeting, I have been slowly understanding what this was about. When my friends asked me about the party, I said it’s small now, but its ideas are strong. I understand that if we get what the SEP is saying, we will have equality. When Trotsky was alive, these ideas were continued. It was very difficult after he died, but all workers have to know this history. If workers come together to build this party, it will make a big change.”

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