

SEP holds final election meetings on Trotskyism and the struggle for socialism

Our correspondents
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Socialist Equality Party election meetings in Melbourne and Sydney this week commemorated the 70th anniversary of the assassination of Leon Trotsky and the significance of the principles for which he fought for the working class today.

Nick Beams, SEP national secretary and Senate candidate for New South Wales, addressed both meetings. Patrick O'Connor, Senate candidate for Victoria, spoke in Melbourne while James Cogan, SEP national organiser and the party's candidate for Grayndler, addressed the Sydney meeting.

Both meetings were well attended by workers, professionals, students and pensioners. Several had only recently come into contact with the SEP, most through reading the party's election manifesto, which had been delivered to their homes or handed out by party campaigners in shopping centres or other locations in their electorates. The audience followed the speakers intently as they explained the connection between the SEP's program and the protracted struggle for Trotskyism on which it was based.

Speaking in Melbourne, Patrick O'Connor began by pointing out that only the SEP had explained the underlying reasons for the June 23-24 political coup in the Labor Party that ousted Kevin Rudd and installed Julia Gillard as prime minister. He quoted from an SEP statement issued just days after the coup, which warned that an early election was being prepared "to short circuit any debate on how Rudd was ousted and why". None of the parties—Labor, Liberal or the Greens—were addressing the significant issues confronting the working class, he said, or discussing the real agenda they would implement after the election.

O'Connor examined the issues underlying the coup in some detail. He pointed to the role of the giant mining corporations in demanding the junking of the mining tax, but explained that was only part of a wider agenda being demanded by big business to impose the brunt of the global financial crisis on working people.

Drawing out the international context of the coup, O'Connor warned: "The driving down of workers' wages in the US and Europe and destruction of various social welfare and infrastructure programs has heightened long-standing demands from the ruling elite here for equivalent measures aimed at bolstering Australian capitalism's international competitiveness.... No aspect of social

and economic life will avoid the full destructive force of the capitalist market and the profit motive."

O'Connor also noted that a key factor in the ousting of Rudd was the growing rivalry in the Asia Pacific region between the US and China. He highlighted the significance of an article that appeared on the *Business Spectator* web site reporting that following his last meeting with Rudd, Obama had told one of his closest associates that someone else had to be present at any future meetings. "Remarkably, the press here has completely buried this story," O'Connor said, and had failed to challenge Rudd or anyone else over the reasons for the apparent estrangement between the two leaders. He noted that after taking office Gillard immediately demonstrated her unswerving loyalty to Washington and pledged continued and unconditional Australian military involvement in the Afghan war.

Explaining the significance of the SEP campaign, O'Connor quoted Leon Trotsky: "We are not a party as other parties. Our ambition is not only to have more members, more papers, more money in the treasury, more deputies. All that is necessary, but only as a means. Our aim is the full material and spiritual liberation of the toilers and exploited through the socialist revolution."

The speaker explained that the SEP candidates were standing in the election to prepare the working class for the class struggles that would erupt in its wake. He said that to defend their interests "involves workers and youth making a complete break with the Labor Party and all its adjuncts and satellite organisations". He highlighted the role of the Greens and the various pseudo-left groups, such as Socialist Alliance, in promoting Labor as a "lesser evil" and thereby keeping the working class tied to capitalism and the existing parliamentary framework.

O'Connor explained that the only way to put an end to war, social inequality, attacks on living standards and democratic rights and the destruction of the environment through climate change was to unify workers to abolish capitalism and reorganise the world economy on a socialist basis.

Chairing the Sydney meeting, SEP assistant national secretary Linda Levin pointed out that the political coup against Rudd had marked a political turning point. Despite the best efforts of the entire political and media establishment, "the anti-democratic stench of the coup will simply not go away. In the future one will be able to look back and recognise that this event was one of the final nails in the coffin of the Labor Party, the principal agency of

bourgeois rule in the working class.”

Levin said that the working class had to begin to draw “the lessons of all the essential strategic experiences of the working class, not only in Australia, but throughout the world, in the course of the past 100 years.” Above all, that involved an examination of the life and work of Trotsky and understanding of the significance of his struggle for socialist internationalism. The entire course of historical development since his assassination 70 years ago had vindicated his ideas, principles and program, she said.

SEP national organiser James Cogan also outlined the underlying reasons for the political coup, pointing to the role of the Afghan war in particular. He noted that just prior to the ousting of Rudd, Defence Minister John Faulkner had announced a timeframe for the withdrawal of Australian troops from Afghanistan—a move that was certainly opposed in Washington. Just days later, newly installed prime minister Gillard declared that there would be “no further discussion on a timeframe for an end to Australia’s involvement in Afghanistan” by her government. Cogan predicted that a re-elected Labor government would move to increase Australia’s military involvement in that country.

In a comprehensive report to both meetings, SEP national secretary Nick Beams reviewed the significance of the assassination of Leon Trotsky in August 1940 and the protracted struggle for Trotskyism in the subsequent 70 years (See full speech at “The Fourth International and the Perspectives of the SEP”).

Beams explained that in the course of the election campaign he had been asked at one meeting how workers could be sure that the SEP would not compromise and betray like other parties. “I explained that the orientation of our party is to be judged on the basis of its program and the historical struggle it has waged for that program. There was not sufficient time at that meeting to fully respond. Tonight my remarks on the historical foundations and struggle of the Fourth International will be an extended response to this very important question.”

Beams explained that Stalin had recognised that the outbreak of World War II in 1939 would produce an upsurge of revolutionary struggles internationally, which Trotsky and the Fourth International could come to the head of and thus threaten the Soviet bureaucracy. Trotsky was murdered by a Stalinist assassin in a desperate attempt to block that possibility.

The SEP national secretary reviewed how the post-war revolutionary upsurge had been betrayed by Stalinist and social democratic parties, paving the way for the temporary restabilisation of capitalism and an economic boom. These difficult conditions, he said, gave rise to opportunist tendencies within the Fourth International that attacked its Marxist foundations and sought to destroy the movement.

Beams explained that the fight against these tendencies led to the formation of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in 1953, which waged a long and protracted struggle to defend Trotskyism during the post-war period culminating in the defeat of the opportunist leadership of the British Workers Revolutionary Party in the split of 1985-86.

Shallow political thinkers, Beams said, always sought to dismiss the battles within the revolutionary party as “storms in teacups” but there was “a profound connection between these struggles and

broader economic, social and political developments.”

To evaluate the significance of the split with the WRP, Beams examined three interconnected processes over the past 25 years: the transformation of the world economy over the past quarter century, the evolution of the working class and the preparations of the revolutionary party, the ICFI.

“We are seeing the intersection of the long and difficult struggle for Marxism and the actual movement of the working class,” he said. “Such a coincidence means that we are entering a new epoch of social revolution.”

The meeting reports elicited thoughtful and serious responses from those in attendance with many questions and animated discussion about the SEP’s history and socialist perspective. Collections at the two meetings raised more than \$3,000 for the SEP’s \$40,000 election fund and over \$600 worth of literature was sold, including copies of the SEP’s new pamphlet: *The June 2010 political coup: a warning to the working class* and the recently-published book by David North, chairman of the SEP (US) and of the *World Socialist Web Site* international editorial board, entitled *In Defence of Leon Trotsky*.

In Melbourne there was a range of questions: how would the revolutionary party guard against political degeneration and opportunism; why did the official campaign reflect a broader political crisis; how could workers break from the trade unions; and did countries like North Korea, Bolivia and Iran have anything to do with socialism.

In Sydney audience members asked about the relationship between international strategy and national tactics; whether workers could defend their living standards via immigration and other forms of national controls; would there be a final crisis of capitalism; would sanctions against Iran lead to war.

After the speakers had answered the questions and formal proceedings had concluded, there were further lengthy and lively discussions at both meetings, indicating a growing interest among workers and young people in a genuine socialist alternative to the old parties, organisations and leaderships. (See “Audience members speak about Trotsky, socialism and the SEP”.)

Click here for full coverage of the SEP 2010 election campaign

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