

SEP (Australia) first national congress

Resolution 7: Build the SEP!

9 May 2012

The following is the last of seven resolutions passed unanimously at the first national congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) held from April 6 to 9, 2012 in Sydney (see: "Australian SEP holds first national congress"). See resolutions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

1. This First National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party takes place on the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the Socialist Labour League (SLL), forerunner of the SEP. In 1972, the SLL founding congress took the historic decision to seek affiliation to the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) as its Australian section. This decision was based on the recognition that the ICFI alone represented the historic continuity of Trotskyism, and that the Australian working class, like its counterparts internationally, could only advance its historic interests through the building of the world party of socialist revolution.

2. The SEP stands on the proud record of four decades of indefatigable struggle to establish the political independence of the working class from Laborism, Stalinism, trade unionism, and all forms of national opportunism promoted by the various anti-Marxist "left" tendencies that have sought to subordinate the working class to the Labor Party and thereby to the capitalist state.

3. The fight for the Trotskyist program of world socialist revolution provided the basis for the SLL to align itself with the majority of the ICFI in the struggle against the national opportunists of the Workers Revolutionary Party and their supporters in the SLL, in the split of 1985–86, and to play its role in the renaissance of Marxism that has followed.

4. The intransigent struggle waged by the ICFI and SLL-SEP since then is now intersecting with powerful objective processes. The social struggles that erupted in 2011 have confirmed the two central perspectives of the ICFI: firstly, that the global integration of production signified that the next great upsurge of the class struggle would be international in form as well as content. Secondly, that the objective contradictions of the capitalist mode of production would bring the class struggle once again to the very centre of world politics.

5. Vast changes in world economy over the past four decades, culminating in the breakdown of the capitalist order that began with the financial crisis of 2008, have led to the collapse of the old national-based organisations and parties that dominated the workers' movement for decades. Today all the so-called "workers' parties"—including the Australian Labor Party—which have played such a key role in propping up the capitalist order, have been utterly discredited in the eyes of millions. A political vacuum has opened up. The change in the objective situation has created the conditions for a profound shift in political consciousness.

6. Far from being "exceptional", Australia has been swept into the maelstrom of the global crisis. Like its international counterparts, the Australian ruling class has responded by launching a steadily escalating offensive on the living standards of the working class. While mining transnationals reap unprecedented profits from record mineral and natural

gas exports, virtually every other sector of the economy faces near-recessionary conditions, aggravated by the volatile appreciation of the Australian currency. The major banks remain dependent on overseas borrowing and are threatened with insolvency if a new financial meltdown cuts off their access to global funds. Both federal and state governments have halted stimulus measures in favour of savage cutbacks to meet corporate demands for budget surpluses. The Gillard Labor government's commitment to transform a deficit of close to \$40 billion into a surplus by mid-2013 will require even harsher austerity measures as a proportion of GDP than those being inflicted on the working class in Spain.

7. Finance capital, represented by the banks and investment funds, insists that the old Australian "business models" are no longer internationally competitive. In industry after industry, the unions are collaborating with corporate management to deliver "flexibility", including the unfettered right to use ever greater numbers of casual or contract workers, who have no entitlement to the job security, set hours, sick pay, holiday pay and other conditions associated with a permanent full-time position. In the public sector, the banks, and in the steel, airline and car industries, among others, cost-cutting is being pursued relentlessly through the elimination of full-time jobs. Close to 40 percent of the workforce is now employed on casual or contract terms, while more than one third of all jobs are classified as part-time, providing less than 18 hours of employment a week.

8. Unemployment is rising, with net job growth in 2011 the lowest in 20 years. The real unemployment rate, which includes all those seeking work, reached 10.3 percent in January 2012—nearly double the official government statistic. It is predicted that another 300,000 to 400,000 manufacturing positions—out of barely one million—are at risk. Hundreds of thousands more are threatened in the public service, construction and real estate, tourism, banking and finance, information and education services, as well as sectors of agriculture and supporting industries. By the beginning of 2012, the combined level of real unemployment and underemployment had risen to 17.8 percent, or 2.2 million people.

9. Budget austerity and the corporate assault on jobs and working conditions will widen already historic levels of social inequality. The real income of the richest one percent of Australian households rose by 189 percent between 1980 and 2007—comparable with the rate of increase in the United States. The top one percent of income earners, with annual incomes exceeding \$197,000, took in 10 percent of the entire national income in 2008, compared with 5 percent in 1980. The top 0.1 percent had increased their share of total income from 1 percent in 1980 to close to 4 percent by 2008, for the first time since 1950. The share of household net worth owned by the richest 20 percent of Australian households rose from 58.6 percent in 2003–04 to 62.2 percent in 2009–10, while the share of the poorest 20 percent of households remained at barely 1 percent. At the apex of the capitalist aristocracy stand the richest 200 billionaires and multi-millionaires, whose personal wealth grew by 23 percent in 2010 to \$167.3 billion. At the other end of the scale, 3.8 million Australians were living in poverty (defined, as in the European Union and the UK, as living

on less than 60 percent of median income) in 2006, the latest date for which statistics are available. In that same year, Australia spent less than half the OECD average on income support as a proportion of GDP (3.2 percent as opposed to 6.5 percent), despite having more than the OECD average proportion of people of workforce age living in jobless households.

10. This Congress resolves that the SEP will decisively intervene in the emerging social, economic and political struggles of the working class, on the basis of the Marxist program of scientific socialism, which expresses the objective historical interests of the working class itself. What distinguishes genuine Marxism from all forms of national opportunism is its insistence that the working class is the sole consistently revolutionary force in society, and that the fundamental task of Marxists is to work tirelessly—politically, theoretically and practically—to establish its political independence. The socialist revolution is the end product of this sustained and uncompromising work. There are no tactical short cuts. The political independence of the working class can only be achieved through the education of its most politically conscious layers in the lessons of the strategic experiences of the past century.

11. As Lenin and Trotsky emphasised, the task of the party in preparing the socialist revolution is to “patiently explain.” This has nothing to do with gradualism. It means that in every situation, the party must fight for its revolutionary program and principles, and not flinch from telling the workers the truth: that there is no way forward other than through the overthrow of capitalism and the taking of political power. To “patiently explain” means to develop within the working class a historical materialist understanding of its political tasks, even when this conflicts with its immediate moods and consciousness.

12. This Congress affirms that the work of the SEP and its members is based on the Leninist understanding that no matter how great the spontaneous movement, or how powerful its form, it can only advance to the extent that workers become aware of their objective historical interests and tasks. In other words, it is directed at making the working class conscious of its own, as yet unconscious, elemental strivings to end imperialist war, exploitation, repression and inequality, and remake society on genuinely democratic and egalitarian foundations. Whatever the immediate vicissitudes of the situation, the political, theoretical and practical initiatives of the party will play the decisive role in advancing the actual movement of the working class, developing a genuinely revolutionary situation and creating the conditions for the conquest of political power.

13. The SEP will strive to win the most politically conscious elements to socialism. It will relentlessly expose the efforts of the middle-class pseudo-left to sow illusions in the Labor Party, the trade unions, and the Greens, in order to trap the working class within the confines of the bankrupt parliamentary setup and the nation state. It will likewise expose their attempts at regroupment, aimed at creating new mechanisms to stymie the emergence of a mass, independent socialist movement of the working class, thus providing the bourgeoisie more time to make its counter-revolutionary preparations.

14. This Congress emphasises the critical role of the youth in the struggle for socialism. Like their counterparts around the world, young people in Australia bear the brunt of the global crisis, and face a future, under capitalism, of mass unemployment and war. The SEP will actively fight for the development of branches of the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) at universities, TAFE and schools around the country, for the education of students and youth in the history, program and perspectives of the ICFI and to turn them to the working class. At the centre of this fight will be a theoretical offensive for Marxism against subjective idealism in all its forms, including post modernism. The SEP will clarify the reactionary role of both “identity politics”, which seeks to deny the primacy of the class struggle, and the anarchistic “no politics”

slogan—promoted internationally by the pseudo-lefts in the Occupy protests—which is aimed against revolutionary politics, and thereby at maintaining the domination of bourgeois politics.

15. This Congress declares that the cornerstone of the SEP’s program is to forge the international unity of the working class. The Congress denounces all forms of nationalism, racism and chauvinism, dredged up by the bourgeoisie and its political and media establishment to divert the social tensions generated by the crisis of capitalism against the most vulnerable layers of society, including refugees, immigrants and the country’s indigenous population.

16. In all the struggles of the working class, the SEP will encourage the development of new organisations, entirely independent of and opposed to the trade unions and the official political establishment, including workplace rank-and-file committees to defend jobs, wages and working conditions, and action committees to defend social rights such as education, health, housing and a safe environment. Such organisations will fight for the extension of all these struggles to encompass every section of the working class—employed and unemployed, young and old, skilled and unskilled, Australian-born and immigrant—into a common movement, across industries, workplaces and localities, that reaches out to workers internationally.

17. The SEP will develop and adopt a program of transitional demands for these struggles, which begins with the immediate needs of the working class and directs it to the conquest of political power through the establishment of a workers’ government based on socialist policies. The purpose of such a program is, as Trotsky explained, “to help the masses in the process of daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of revolution.” The program will be grounded on the conception that the working class has fundamental social rights, including a full-time, well-paid job, decent housing and free, high-quality health and education, which are essential in today’s complex and global mass society, and thus non-negotiable. The experience of fighting for these social rights will assist in clarifying to the working class that they can only be achieved by taking power, overthrowing the profit system and establishing the broadest democracy in every aspect of social, economic and political life.

18. This Congress commits the SEP to the closest collaboration with the ICFI and all its sections in the further expansion and development of the *World Socialist Web Site*. The site has become, as the ICFI intended when it was launched in 1998, the scaffolding of a new socialist and internationalist movement of the working class and new sections of the ICFI.

19. This Congress declares that the political independence of the working class is expressed, at the highest level, in the recruitment of workers and youth to the SEP. The ability of the coming mass movement to withstand the immense pressures that will be generated by the bourgeoisie and all its agencies in a period of revolutionary upheaval will depend on the degree to which it is imbued with socialist consciousness and politically led by a Marxist cadre. This Congress affirms that the work of the SEP, its branches and members, will be oriented to winning new forces to the party and to educating them on the basis of the historical and international foundations of the SEP and the ICFI, the world party of socialist revolution.



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