

Australian SEP holds first national congress

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), held its first national congress from April 6 to 9, 2012 in Sydney. Meeting under conditions of deepening economic crisis, and a turn by the ruling elites worldwide to austerity, repression and preparations for war, the congress marked an important step forward in the fight to resolve the crisis of revolutionary leadership and perspective in the working class.

During four days of intensive discussion and debate, the congress unanimously adopted seven resolutions. The resolutions focussed on the re-emergence of powerful struggles by the working class, from Egypt to Greece and the United States, and the decisive political issues raised by these experiences—above all the role played by the trade unions and pseudo-left organisations in seeking to channel workers and youth back behind the bourgeoisie and its political and military agencies.

The WSWS will publish during the next few days the seven resolutions adopted at the congress: “The world capitalist crisis and the tasks of the SEP”, “Against imperialist war”, “Oppose the US war drive against China”, “Oppose the US-Australia military agreement”, “The 2010 coup and the crisis of bourgeois rule”, “Defend Julian Assange” and “Build the SEP!”

The internationalist content of the congress was expressed in the presence of ICFI delegates from the United States, Britain, Germany and Sri Lanka, as well as delegations from New Zealand and the Philippines.

Greetings were delivered by David North, chairman of the WSWS international editorial board and national chairman of the SEP (US), Peter Schwarz, secretary of the ICFI and a leading member of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (SEP) of Germany, Chris Marsden, the national secretary of the SEP in Britain, and a member of the central committee of the SEP in Sri Lanka.

In his opening political report, and moving the first resolution, SEP national secretary Nick Beams said the eruption of social struggles and protests internationally during 2011 had vindicated the ICFI’s analysis of the systemic nature of the world financial crisis and the global character of the class struggle. However, in the absence of a revolutionary leadership in the working class, the bourgeoisie has been able to weather these initial political storms.

Beams said the stifling of the Egyptian revolution had enabled the US and European powers to intervene in Libya and carry out similar regime change in Syria. In Europe, brutal austerity measures had been imposed, despite waves of strikes and demonstrations, which had remained dominated by the pro-capitalist trade union apparatuses, aided by various pseudo-left groups.

“As yet, the working class remains confined within the framework set by the trade unions and the old organisations,” Beams said. He also pointed to the role of the Australian trade unions in their recent betrayals of the Qantas workers and Victorian nurses. “There are great dangers unless this crisis of working class perspective is resolved,” he emphasised.

“No matter how deep the economic crisis and how broad and powerful the movement of the working class, no situation is impossible for the bourgeoisie to resolve in its own interests, unless and until it confronts a revolutionary movement of the working class under a revolutionary leadership and guided by a revolutionary perspective... This is the context in which we must place the work of our party in the coming period,” Beams explained.

On the second morning of the congress, in presenting the greetings of the SEP in the United States, David North stressed the extraordinary character of the global

economic and political turmoil and reviewed in some detail the role of the various pseudo-left, semi-anarchist and post-modernist tendencies that work to miseducate and confuse workers and youth as they came into struggle against increasingly intolerable conditions.

North explained that it was important to examine the new political forms of middle-class dominance over the working class that had emerged, particularly in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. He pointed out that so-called modern radical politics reflected the discontent among sections of the upper middle class. They want a larger slice of the economic pie, he said, “but are very hostile to the development of a revolutionary movement of the working class.”

“This so-called radical politics is deeply reactionary and does not express the struggle of the oppressed, but rather a dissatisfied section of the more affluent elements within the middle class... [They] push issues of sexual, racial and ethnic identity to the forefront, but at all costs to bury the profound fundamental issues of class, of property—that is, the real historical questions that have underplayed every great revolution in history,” North said.

“As the question of power begins to raise itself ever more directly, and the working class begins, after many decades, to enter into the field of struggle, the great question arises of freeing it from the domination of other social and political influences,” North emphasised. “To identify the character of those forces that oppose Marxism and that seek to subordinate the working class to their own privileged interests becomes a matter of the greatest urgency.”

In their greetings to the congress, Peter Schwarz and Chris Marsden warned that the unprecedented austerity packages being imposed by undemocratically-installed governments in Greece and other European countries were setting new benchmarks for use against working people everywhere.

Schwarz explained the significance of the campaign being waged by the ICFI in defence of Leon Trotsky against a series of “pre-emptive” biographies that have been written in the past few years to falsify Trotsky’s life and work, out of fear that his political perspective would become a pole of attraction to a new generation of workers and young people. Marsden traced the role of the

pseudo-left groups, such as the Socialist Workers Party in Britain and the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, in attempting to divert workers and young people back into the arms of the rotted social democratic and trade union apparatuses.

Moving the final resolution, SEP national committee member James Cogan noted that the congress took place on the 40th anniversary of the founding conference of the SEP’s forerunner, the Socialist Labour League, which had taken the historic decision to seek affiliation to the ICFI. “Our task, this resolution makes clear, is a determined turn into the working class to educate its most politically advanced layers in the lessons of past struggles and to conduct a relentless exposure of, and demarcation from, the ex-left tendencies.” Cogan concluded: “A mass socialist movement will be built among Australian workers by the SEP, as part of the ICFI, or it will not be built at all. This resolution is infused with the confidence that every opportunity will be afforded us to do so.”

The congress elected a new national committee, which re-elected Nick Beams as national secretary and Peter Symonds as *World Socialist Web Site* national editor, and elected James Cogan as assistant national secretary. Congress delegates paid tribute to outgoing assistant national secretary Linda Tenenbaum, who had held the position for nearly 25 years and who remains a leading member of the national committee.

Summing up the congress, Beams said it had been an important event, not just for the SEP but for the ICFI as a whole. “The road to the working class is above all a political and theoretical struggle to develop Marxism against those forces that are marshalled at every stage to attack it,” he declared. “From this congress, we have important work, with a decisive turn into the working class and the youth, based on these resolutions, which directly address the tasks of the party and the issues on which we will fight to build the new revolutionary leadership of the working class.”



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