# Workers and youth speak on the issues raised at SEP meetings

**Our correspondents**
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Some of the workers and youth who attended the Socialist Equality Party's public meetings spoke to WSWS correspondents after the meetings.

At the Sydney East meeting, **Belinda**, a regular WSWS reader for about a year, was asked for her response to the meeting. She replied: "The report made sense to me in relation to my own views on neo-liberalism, market fundamentalism, the emphasis on economic rationalism, the rolling back of all the social services and welfare, the spending on military, and using war as a means to prop up economies."

Belinda commented that the title of the meeting, "The socialist answer to Labor's program of war and austerity," fitted "with the way I've been thinking about politics for about 15 years." She explained: "In terms of Australian politics we can safely say that for a long time now there's been a convergence between Labor and Liberal in regard to economic rationalism."

Belinda added: "I wasn't surprised about the point made in the meeting that the liberal wing of Australian politics has so rapidly swung behind the right-wing views of [Opposition treasury spokesman] Joe Hockey, that there's no such thing as 'entitlement,' or their support for Gillard's fierce policies on refugees… under the guise of concern for people drowning."

At the Liverpool, Sydney meeting, **Cathy**, the daughter of a coal miner, explained that she was one of five children, and that her mother had sometimes worked two jobs to make ends meet. She said: "I was always aware of inequality and never agreed with people who said Australia was a classless society."

Cathy agreed with SEP national secretary Nick Beams's analysis of Kevin Rudd's removal as prime minister to make way for Julia Gillard in mid-2010. The event had been decisive in politicising her, Cathy said. "It was when Kevin Rudd was stabbed in the back that I started to think of myself as political."

The opening report about the attack on public education had made Cathy think about her Technical and Further Education (TAFE) course. She explained that she was studying for a Community Services Certificate 2. "We are all struggling with the course," she said. "We all think it's like a 2-year course that has been crammed into one year. Every unit is rushed."

At the Parramatta meeting, **Graeme**, a welder, said he had been reading the WSWS regularly. "The speech by Nick Beams was absolutely fantastic. It opened my eyes to a lot of things where I had been hoodwinked. It was very lucid. I'm going to go away and think about this for a long time.

"I had always been under the impression that unions were there to help and protect people but from I heard tonight, and what I have read before, it's just a big con," Graeme said. "Now the unions are a big business—not to represent workers, but to make sure they just give enough to the workers to appease them so that the profit can be increased for the capitalists."

Asked what he thought workers should do, Graeme said: "Workers around the world have to get hold of this information and start analysing it and realising that you are never going to get anywhere with the system you've got now.

"The quotes Nick used tonight really brought it home. It was revealing. I want to pass the speech tonight along to blokes at work because it will really open people's eyes. We have a massive strength in the working class. Think of all the workers around the world. I'm not talking about revolution in the sense of destroying. I'm

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talking about a revolution where things are changed.

"It's got to change. If it doesn't, working class people will be oppressed more and more and it will just be drudgery. There won't be decent education. It will like in Huxley's *Brave New World*, where they clone people for certain tasks, and the working class will be forced to be subservient and mindless."

Interviewed at the Melbourne meeting, **James**, an IT student at Victoria University, said he was attending his first SEP meeting. He explained that he had to leave Sudan for Kenya when he was 13, and arrived in Australia six years ago, when he was 23.

"I always have been thinking that I had to follow the socialist party or a socialist government," James said. "When I heard about the meeting I thought I should come along. When I was in high school in Kenya, I learnt that socialism usually works for the working class or poor. It brings people together. It brings equality among people mostly."

James was particularly concerned about the cuts to education. "In Kenya I worked as a teacher's aide," he explained. "That's why I want to become a teacher." He concluded: "I say I don't like capitalism."

In Newcastle, **Augustus** explained: "This is my first time at any socialist meeting and because I am doing education at university, I found the report on the current state of the education system most interesting. I found the points on the privatisation of the education system insightful.

"The points on the national testing for students all over Australia were also important as NAPLAN testing is in support of what we see in the education system in America, where there has been, over the last 20 years, actually a recession in the results for students," Augustus commented.

The education student, who also works in a video store, said Nick Beams had raised a critical issue. "He brought up that the governments around the world said that there wasn't any money available for public expenditure, but as soon as the banks went into bankruptcy the government found trillions of dollars to bankroll the financial wrongs of the banks and institutions. The irony is that the people responsible for the whole economic collapse are those who are getting bailed out. Thus, not only do they not get punished, they actually get rewarded."

In Perth, **Liz**, an office worker, said she found meeting "very refreshing, stimulating and thought-provoking."

Asked to elaborate, she said: "I got some clarification on Australia lining up with the US against China. During the presentation I had difficulty grasping this, as I believe that economically Australia is more tied up with China through exports. It was hard to see that the business elite would like to compromise this position by choosing the US. The point was made clearer to me with the use of historical examples, and the similar close relationship between the UK and Germany before World War I."

Liz added: "The SEP has a principled approach in the case of Libya and Syria… the SEP's position is not lined up with 'humanitarian intervention,' nor with the regimes in Libya and Syria, but with the interests of the working class."

At first, Liz had thought that "the references made to the working class by the speakers felt like an ancient and old fashioned phrase which lost relevance in the last decade. But through the discussion, I could sense the meaning and reference to the working class."

Turning to domestic politics, Liz commented: "I believe that Labor, Liberal, Greens are all the same, and that there is no alternative or someone that offers things worth fighting for."

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