

Australia: Keen interest in socialist perspective at *Tsar to Lenin* screenings

Our correspondents
17 December 2012

The Socialist Equality Party presented a lecture on the historical and contemporary political significance of the 1917 Russian Revolution, followed by a showing of the documentary *Tsar to Lenin*, in Melbourne and Sydney over the past two weekends. Both meetings were well attended and provoked keen interest in a socialist perspective, the history of the revolutionary movement and the life and writings of Leon Trotsky, particularly among students and young workers.

Nick Beams, SEP national secretary, delivered the lecture. He stressed at the beginning that the 1917 Russian Revolution had not been a national event. The perspective guiding the Bolshevik Party, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, had been that the taking of power in Russia by the working class was the opening shot of the world socialist revolution.

The revolution's contemporary significance, Beams explained, was that "the conditions that confront the international working class today pose once again the tasks that were begun 95 years ago—the overthrow of the capitalist profit system and the conscious reconstruction of society on new foundations."

Beams reviewed the parallels between the conditions that led to the Russian Revolution and the economic and political situation today. He documented the steady build-up of economic and political tensions within the global capitalist order that culminated in the outbreak of World War I in August 1914 and the descent into barbarism across Europe. Beams quoted Trotsky's characterisation of the war as "the most colossal breakdown in history of an economic system destroyed by its own contradictions."

Today, the opening of the twenty-first century, Beams noted, had not been dissimilar to the beginning of the twentieth. The ruling class had stepped forward with a certain degree of confidence, falsely presenting

the liquidation of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist regime in 1991 as the "death of socialism." Capitalism, its defenders declared, had come through the storms and stresses of the twentieth century stronger than ever.

Such claims were shattered by the global financial crisis that erupted in September 2008, caused by the financial speculation and criminality that had ravaged the world economy. A new breakdown, on the same order as 1914, had taken place. The ruling elites internationally were attempting to protect their class interests, Beams said, "by driving down the conditions of the working class to the 1930s and beyond."

The speaker drew attention to the "international gangsterism" and "abandonment of legality" that prevailed in ruling circles, and particularly in the American capitalist class. Alongside the criminal wars conducted by US imperialism in the Middle East, and its attacks on democratic rights in the US and internationally, Beams noted that it was preparing for a war with China in Asia that would lead to the use of nuclear weapons.

"As the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of World War I approaches," Beams said, "we can say that mankind is once again headed for a global catastrophe, if it is not prevented."

Beams then turned to "the decisive and indispensable role of the revolutionary party in transforming objectively revolutionary conditions into the actual overthrow of the capitalist class."

The revolutionary party and its perspective, Beams stressed, had to be developed in advance of the outbreak of a revolutionary crisis. It was precisely this that was the critical factor in the Russian Revolution. In his 1905 theory of permanent revolution, Trotsky had established the necessity for the working class in Russia to take political power, carry out socialist

measures and fight to extend the revolution throughout the world. This was possible, Trotsky analysed, because the international conditions that would give rise to a revolutionary crisis in Russia would also have prepared the conditions for socialist revolution in the advanced capitalist countries. Trotsky's theory had been crucial to the re-orientation of the Bolshevik Party to take power after Lenin returned to Russia in April 1917.

Beams stressed that the struggle waged by Lenin over decades to demarcate the Bolsheviks from the Menshevik tendency, and from all forms of opportunism that subordinated the working class to the capitalist class, had the most critical practical importance in the revolution. The February 1917 revolution overthrew the Tsar, but brought to power a bourgeois regime, supported by the Mensheviks, that continued Russian participation in the war and could not meet the demands of the masses. The October revolution was carried out, above all, against the Menshevik-backed government, as was so powerfully documented in *Tsar to Lenin*.

The audience listened with considerable attention when Beams explained how the unfolding developments in Egypt since the eruption of mass revolutionary struggles in 2011 paralleled, in many ways, the stages of the Russian Revolution. His lecture established that the struggle of the working class in every country hinged on the building of Bolshevik-type parties, based on the perspective of permanent revolution and world socialism, fought for today only by the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Socialist Equality Parties.

Before the showing of *Tsar to Lenin*, Beams took questions on his lecture. In Melbourne, he elaborated further on the situation in Egypt. He also answered an assertion that the rise of Stalinism in the Soviet Union had been caused by "Lenin's concentration of power from the beginning." Beams reviewed how, in fact, it had been the isolation of the Soviet Union, due to the defeat of the working class internationally, combined with the backwardness of the country, which had given rise to the Stalinist bureaucratic degeneration. The Stalinist betrayal of the international working class had been fought by Trotsky and the genuine Marxists, who established the Fourth International in 1938 to defend the perspective of world socialist revolution.

In Sydney, Beams answered a question on what "model" the SEP held up as an example of socialism. He explained that the Trotskyist movement rejected the attempt to present various nationalist regimes, such as Castro's Cuba or the Chavez government in Venezuela, as socialist.

Beams said: "We base ourselves on the experiences of the Russian Revolution before its degeneration. One can say very clearly that a socialist society, or a workers' state, will be based upon organs of genuine workers' power, such as Soviets and workers' councils. But in this technological age, they will take all sorts of new forms."

A socialist society, Beams stressed, was not "some type of blueprint laid down" from above. It would be based, he said, "on the democratic involvement of the masses of working people, who will decide what the future is, and that will be determined in the course of a struggle." Beams concluded by noting that while the working class faced the same fundamental problem as in 1917—the necessity of overthrowing the capitalist profit system—technological developments over the past decades, particularly in communications, made possible on a far higher scale the democratic involvement of masses of people around the world in the rational organisation and planning of society.

At the conclusion of *Tsar to Lenin*, the audiences applauded to show their appreciation. Many people stayed after the meetings for further discussion. Collections for the SEP monthly fund raised \$4,500, and more than \$1,200 worth of Marxist literature was sold, including numerous *Tsar to Lenin* DVDs.

WSWS readers in Australia who could not attend the events and would like to purchase a copy of *Tsar to Lenin* can do so here via PayPal. Readers who would like to make a donation to the Socialist Equality Party can also do so through PayPal by clicking here.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact