

Australian SEP launches 2013 election campaign

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, launched its 2013 federal election campaign at two well-attended meetings in Sydney and Melbourne on Sunday. The audiences included young people and workers who had taken part in recent SEP public meetings on the Russian Revolution and the 15th anniversary of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Speakers at the election launches made clear that the SEP campaign will focus on the necessity to develop a unified struggle of the working class, in Australia, throughout the Indo-Pacific region and internationally, against the US-led war preparations against China, on the basis of a socialist program. The SEP will stand Senate candidates in five states across Australia.

Opening the Sydney meeting, SEP assistant national secretary James Cogan drew attention to the breakdown of the world capitalist system, marked by a systemic economic crisis wracking all the main centres of the global economy, and ever-sharpening rivalries and military tensions between the major powers.

“Twice in the twentieth century, such processes culminated in plunging mankind into a catastrophic world war—between 1914 and 1918, and then again, between 1939 and 1945. The working class cannot allow another world war. To prevent it requires the development of a broad, international anti-war movement on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program.

“That is why the SEP’s intervention into the 2013 Australian election is part of a coordinated campaign by the ICFI and its sections internationally to build such a movement. The danger of war is particularly acute in this region, the Asia-Pacific, due to the desperate and reckless drive by US imperialism to use its military superiority, and the services of compliant allies such as

Australia, to contain and destabilise China.”

Delivering the main report to the Sydney meeting, SEP national secretary Nick Beams said the SEP’s campaign was the only one raising the decisive issues being buried by the political and media establishment. “Our world party is seeking to organise a counter-offensive of the international working class against the great dangers that now confront it: the drive to war, the unleashing of a counter-revolution as the ruling classes around the world seek to re-impose the conditions of the 1930s, and the growing threat of dictatorship and authoritarian forms of rule,” he explained.

Behind the backs of the Australian people, Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s Labor government, “with the support of the Liberal and National parties and the collaboration of the Greens, has extended unconditional support to the Obama government’s ‘pivot’ to Asia, aimed at not only ‘containing China,’ but preparing war against it.”

Beams gave a detailed presentation on the war preparations, showing maps of the strategically-located Australian military bases and of the Indo-Pacific region, featuring the “chokepoints”—the Malacca and Indonesian straits—identified by the Pentagon as locations that could be used to cut China’s access to energy and raw materials supplies from the Middle East and Africa.

The SEP national secretary emphasised that the drive to war was rooted in the historic contradictions of the global capitalist economy. “It is now five years since the onset of the capitalist breakdown that began in September 2008. Not only has nothing been resolved, the crisis is deepening.”

The global crash had not only exposed all the claims, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, that world capitalism was about to enter a new era of peace,

prosperity and democracy. It had brought to the surface the protracted economic decline of the United States. “Herein lies the source of the war drive. US imperialism is seeking to maintain its global dominance through military force.”

Beams explained that China was not a new imperialist power, but its emergence as the world’s chief cheap labour manufacturing platform had “placed it in conflict with the determination of the US to maintain its grip over key resources, raw materials and markets, wherever they are to be found.”

The speaker cited a recent report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, a government-funded think tank, noting that the Pentagon had started to “think about the unthinkable,” that is, to prepare “a military strategy for fighting and winning a potential war against China.” Beams outlined the US strategy to encircle China, by strengthening alliances and strategic partnerships with countries throughout the region, including Australia.

Beams stressed the political lessons of the failure of the largest global anti-war demonstrations in history, in February 2003, to halt the US invasion of Iraq. That movement was subordinated to the existing political establishment, and channelled behind the election of governments, such as Obama’s, that had embarked on new atrocities and imperialist wars in the Middle East and Africa.

Moreover, the political forces that dominated that anti-war movement had undergone a rapid shift to the right. Examining the trajectory of the Australian Greens, Beams explained that their opposition to the Iraq War had been only tactical. They declared that Australian forces should be redeployed to the Asia-Pacific region, pointing to the increased presence of China in the region. Now, with Obama administration’s pivot to Asia, the Greens had obtained their wish.

Beams also highlighted the role of the various pseudo-left tendencies, such as Socialist Alternative, that now lined up behind the US regime-change operation in Syria, saying it was necessary to drop what it called “knee-jerk anti-imperialism.” These groups did not speak for the working class, but the interests of upper middle-class layers “whose material interests are bound up with the domination of imperialism over resources and raw materials around the world.”

Beams’s report elicited many questions, including on

the international dimension of the SEP campaign, why politicians were failing to act against inequality, and the role of money under socialism.

In the course of the discussion, Beams said there could be no “ifs or buts” about defending refugees. Anti-refugee xenophobia was used to split the working class along national lines and divert attention from the source of the offensive underway against jobs and conditions, which lay in the capitalist profit system itself. The working class had to stand for the basic right of people to live freely where they wanted, as part of the fight for the unification of the working class to overthrow this system.

Responding to a question about the SEP’s attitude to China, Beams explained that the Trotskyist movement fought for the overthrow of the bureaucratic capitalist regime in China but that task could be accomplished only by the Chinese working class, not US imperialism. By opposing the ruling class at home, the working people would lay the basis for uniting with the workers in China and around the world.

At the meeting in Melbourne, where the main report was given by the SEP’s WSWS national editor Peter Symonds, many questions were also raised, including on the recent Israeli bombing of Syria, the significance of the US invasion of Panama in 1989, and the relationship between the government’s anti-refugee “border protection” regime and the monitoring of strategic sea lanes in the Indian Ocean.

The meetings concluded with an appeal for workers and youth to actively support the decisive campaign that the SEP has launched. Audience members stayed behind for further discussion and expressed their views to the WSWS.

The authors also recommend:

Youth and workers comment on the SEP election campaign
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