

# Australian SEP candidate speaks in Galle in southern Sri Lanka

**Our correspondents**  
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Workers, youths and housewives listened attentively to a speech delivered by James Cogan, Socialist Equality Party (SEP) candidate in the Australian federal election, in the southern Sri Lankan city of Galle on Saturday. Cogan, who is the SEP's assistant national secretary, also spoke at a public meeting in Colombo last Thursday.

In his detailed report, Cogan warned that the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" involved the preparations for war against China. He condemned the Labor government's role in integrating Australia into the US war plans. He explained that the SEP in Australia, together with its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), including the Sri Lankan SEP, were campaigning to build an anti-war movement in Asia and internationally.

Ratnasiri Malalagama, a political committee member of the SEP (Sri Lanka), chaired the meeting. Kapila Fernando, the convener of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, and K. Ratnayake, a member of the SEP Political Committee, also spoke.

The speeches were followed by a lively discussion in which audience members raised important questions. They expressed their appreciation for the way in which Cogan's speech and power point presentation had outlined the drive towards war underway.

Asked about China's economic rise, Cogan explained that the Stalinist Chinese Communist Party began the restoration of capitalist property relations in the 1970s. This provoked a potentially revolutionary movement among the Chinese working class in 1989 that was ultimately drowned in blood. After the regime's violent repression, international capital flooded into China. In the space of just 30 years hundreds of millions of rural people were transformed into a vast, super-exploited

working class, creating massive fortunes for the new Chinese capitalist class.

Cogan said that while the SEP opposed the US war plans, it did not politically defend the Chinese regime. The new Chinese capitalist class, like the Sri Lankan and Indian capitalist class, was seeking to accommodate to the dictates of imperialism. The only social force that would consistently fight imperialism was the working class, the SEP candidate emphasised. The central issue, he explained, is unifying the working class internationally, in the US, China and throughout the region, against the governments and the ruling classes of every country.

An audience member asked how the Australian SEP would respond to the emergence of a broader working-class movement in the South Asian region.

Cogan replied: "Any struggle of the working class that breaks out in the Indian subcontinent is a part of the struggle of the international working class. Trotskyists in Australia will intervene in the same way as we do in relation to the developments in Egypt." He explained that Trotskyists in the US, Australia, Europe and Sri Lanka had developed an analysis of the revolutionary upheavals in Egypt based on the theory of Permanent Revolution, helping lay the basis for the building of a new revolutionary leadership in the country and the region.

Cogan pointed to the struggle waged by the SEP in Sri Lanka for the theory of Permanent Revolution. Workers cannot trust any faction of the capitalist class that claims to represent democracy, peace or the interests of the working class. In the fight for a socialist South Asia, the working class had to establish its political independence from all factions of the ruling class.

Asked about the conditions facing the Australian

working class, Cogan explained workers were facing a deepening social crisis. Poverty and social inequality were rising. The living conditions among the Australian working class had been steadily eroded and dismantled over the last three decades. Some 40 percent of the Australian work force was employed casually.

“The average wage in Australia is about \$A900 a week,” Cogan said. “Workers in this region might think that Australian workers are rich. But a large number of workers do not even get anything close to the average. A small two bedroom apartment in the city of Sydney costs \$A500 a week. For this reason most of the workers live some 20–40 km away from the city where rents are cheaper.

“Now a new stage in the class war is beginning. The Australian economy was highly dependent on mining imports to China. The mining industry is now declining, resulting in rising unemployment under conditions in which welfare is being slashed. This situation particularly affects new migrants to Australia. In many industries, it is said that to maintain production they need to introduce the Asian benchmarks which means a never-ending slashing of wages and jobs to be internationally competitive.”

One audience member said that during the campaign for the Galle public meeting young people and fishermen had asked about Australia’s treatment of refugees.

Cogan explained that the SEP in Australia defended the right of every human being to live and work wherever they choose with full citizenship rights. It stood for the abolition of the capitalist nation state system and the free movement of workers. “Our party stands alone in Australia in defending this right,” he explained. “Many people in Australia express horror and disgust at the policies of the current Labor government, which is violating basic precepts of international law in its treatment of refugees.”

Cogan explained the new policy of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, involving the permanent dumping of refugees in Papua New Guinea, one of the world’s poorest countries, and other Pacific countries. The speaker explained that the Australian government was seeking to block asylum seekers coming from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. At the same time, it stirred up anti-refugee chauvinism to divert the opposition of workers from attacks on their

living conditions.

“By its brutal treatment of refugees, the government is also sending a message to the ruling class that it will suppress any resistance by workers,” Cogan added.



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