

Australian SEP candidate Nick Beams campaigns in New Zealand

Our reporters
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Nick Beams, Socialist Equality Party (SEP) national secretary and Senate candidate in the Australian election, is campaigning and speaking in New Zealand this week. His visit is part of the SEP's fight to mobilise the working class and young people throughout the Asia-Pacific region and internationally against the growing dangers of a US-led war against China.

The SEP's campaign is being conducted in collaboration with other sections and supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International across the region and around the world. Beams will address a public meeting in the capital city, Wellington, tomorrow. It follows public meetings in Sri Lanka by SEP assistant national secretary James Cogan last week and by SEP candidates around Australia in recent months.

The New Zealand ruling class is deeply involved in the US war preparations, including as a member of the "Five Eyes" intelligence network led by the American National Security Agency (NSA), together with Britain, Canada and Australia. New Zealand's role was underlined by a vote in parliament yesterday to give the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) extensive new powers to spy on New Zealand citizens.

The legislation was forced through under urgency, and against overwhelming public opposition, following revelations that the agency had illegally spied on Internet entrepreneur Kim Dotcom as part of an operation initiated by the US State Department to shut down Dotcom's Megaupload file-sharing site.

Yesterday, Beams joined an SEP/WSWS campaign team at the Victoria University of Wellington. Like many universities around the world, it attracts students from all quarters of the globe. The team had lengthy discussions with students from Iran, Malaysia, East

Timor, China, Thailand, Samoa, Tonga and elsewhere.

While many students were aware of rising tensions between the US and China, the moves being made by the US Obama administration to encircle and isolate China through the deployment of military bases and troops were not well known. Beams pointed out that this was largely due to a concerted operation by the ruling elite to keep these issues hidden from public knowledge. In its election campaign, the SEP is the only party fighting to expose these preparations, and their implications for every country in the region.

Many students expressed deep concern over the fundamental attack on democratic rights contained in the new GCSB law. They also expressed support for the whistleblower Edward Snowden, who exposed the global spying operations by the US and its partners against the world's population. Some remarked that Snowden had carried out a public service through his revelations, and that his ongoing hounding was a crime.

There was considerable interest shown in Beams' visit and the SEP's election campaign. A number of tickets were sold for tomorrow's public meeting, and many gave their contact details for future meetings of the SEP's youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), at Victoria University.

Joe, who is doing a degree in media studies, spoke to the campaign team. Joe had already been reading the WSWs, initially attracted by its critical coverage of art and cultural issues.

The media studies student was concerned by the lack of mainstream coverage on the US "pivot" to Asia. "I hadn't really heard too much about it, but I guess that's the problem with the media in New Zealand; they never discuss real issues," he said. Referring to the growing imperialist intervention in Syria, Joe noted that

“the Americans like having the ‘war on terror’ because that gives them actual powers. But it is quite ironic that they are the ones in fact funding that terror anyway.”

Joe said he found the manner in which the GCSB bill had been pushed through parliament “quite unnerving,” adding: “It’s been rushed through without any debate or discussion. It’s just been forced upon us.” Referring to the expansion of spying powers more generally, he said: “You’ve got the government, then you’ve got the businesses. They’re all working together, they know what’s good for them, and at the end of the day they’re just going to penalise anyone that is opposed to them in any way. And unfortunately the GCSB and the NSA are all cracking down.”

The media student commented: “At some point, they might say, ‘if you’re not voting for me, then we’ll target you, because you could be a terrorist.’”

Asked for his views on the victimisation of Edward Snowden, Joe replied: “I think he did the right thing. I mean, without him, we wouldn’t have access to the information we have access to. And the same goes for WikiLeaks and other whistle-blowing organisations. These people are just getting penalised for speaking out against what they saw was wrong.”

SEP campaigners also spoke to **Al**, a construction worker, about the threat of war in the Asia-Pacific. “I’d heard of the pivot to Asia and the US Marines in Darwin,” he said. “Apparently, the new American ambassador in New Zealand said the US is an imminent peacemaker in Asia. So I guess they’re about to make peace in Asia? I don’t believe that.”

Al also expressed his support for Edward Snowden. “Good on him! People like him and WikiLeaks have only put out a limited story and there’s more going on. Even if what he’s saying is the full extent of it, it’s pretty scary. But good on him—he’s decided to do what he can to change things.”



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