Australia: SEP meetings oppose war preparations against China

Our reporters
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Workers, students, unemployed people and pensioners attended successful public meetings this week held by the Socialist Equality Party in Sydney and Melbourne. The events were addressed by SEP national secretary Nick Beams, a member of the *World Socialist Web Site* editorial board and a leading authority on Marxist political economy.

SEP political committee member Peter Symonds chaired the Sydney meeting and began by explaining that the SEP was the only political party alerting the working class in Australia about the consequences of the Obama administration's so-called Asian "pivot."

Nick Beams told the meeting that on the eve of the centenary of World War I, the conditions were emerging for the eruption of World War III. The first world war, he said, was the "seminal event of the twentieth century" and signified the end of the progressive era of capitalist development and the political death knell of the social democratic and labour parties who supported their own ruling classes in the war.

The 1914-18 war and the events that followed—the Great Depression, the victory of Nazism in Germany and World War II—were the catastrophic result of the contradiction between the growth of the productive forces and the outmoded capitalist nation state system, the same factors driving towards war today, he said.

Beams explained the background to the Obama administration's "pivot" to Asia. China's rapid economic expansion to become the world's largest exporter of manufactured goods, the speaker said, had brought about vast shifts in the global balance of economic forces, shifting the balance of political relations previously under US hegemony.

Beams reviewed some of Washington's political preparation for its "pivot," including the removal of two prime ministers—Hatoyama in Japan and Rudd in Australia—in 2010. Canberra's significant role in the "pivot", he continued, was highlighted by the fact that it was officially announced in a speech by Obama—not to the Congress or another venue in the US—but in the Australian parliament.

For the first time since WWII, the speaker said, US forces are being stationed in Darwin, with plans for upgrading facilities in northern Australia for increasing operational use by US war planes. Various reports by US think tanks are demanding a major expansion of Australian port facilities for US ships and submarines.

Beams explained that US imperialism's perspective was to turn China and whole region into a kind of American semi-colony. Washington's methods, he warned, were creating the conditions for a major military conflict with China.

Referring to *War and the International*, Leon Trotsky's brilliant analysis of the eruption of WWI, Beams explained that it was the very development of the global productive forces which was coming into conflict with the outmoded capitalist nation state system and posing the danger of another world war.

Quoting Trotsky, the speaker said the only way the working class could prevent this catastrophe was the socialist organisation of the world economy. Against imperialist war, he said, the proletariat must advance its own solution, "as a practical program of the day, the socialist organisation of world economy".

This requires an intransigent political struggle against all the parties of the ruling class, and the various pseudo-left tendencies that were creating the ideological conditions for the launching of new imperialist wars. Beams reviewed the pseudo-left's support for the US and European imperialist operations to overthrow the Gaddafi regime in Libya and the pseudo-left endorsement of reactionary Islamist forces in Syria.

When US-backed forces in Syria staged sarin gas attacks in August this year, he said, the pseudo-left joined

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with Washington to help revive the lie of weapons of mass destruction, insisting without evidence that the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria was responsible. Likewise, these forces had maintained a stony silence about new evidence published by Seymour Hersh that the sarin attack in Ghouta was carried out by US-backed forces to provide a pretext for a US military assault on Syria.

Beams concluded his address by explaining that only one program could prevent the eruption of a third world war. This was the perspective of the International Committee of the Fourth International for the international unification of the working class to overthrow imperialism and its agencies, including the Chinese Stalinist regime, as part of the fight for world socialist revolution.

Extensive question and answer sessions followed the reports at both meetings and over $2,200 donated for the SEP's monthly fund.

In Melbourne, audience members asked about the significance of the Trans Pacific Partnership trade agreement that Washington is directing against China; the Obama administration's strategy against North Korea; and for further details on how Chinese economic growth was fuelling tensions between Washington and Beijing.

Those in attendance in Sydney raised questions about the recent purge and execution of senior North Korea leader Jang Song-thaek and its relationship to the US pivot. Others asked about the new grand coalition government in Germany and the inter-imperialist conflicts that led-up to WWI.

Questions were also asked about the relationship between the war and the assault on jobs and living standards. Speaking from the floor, an SEP member explained that there was direct connection between the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs and the rise of militarism. The Australian government, the speaker pointed out, was expanding military spending and had allocated over $100 million to celebrate the centenary of WWI in an attempt to "divert the population and poison the political consciousness of young people with nationalism and militarism."

After the Melbourne meeting Kumaran, who works in financial services, said: "I think the potential for war is real. It is now similar to the preparations that took place before World War I. The fact is that decisions are being made behind the scenes and people don't have any input into these decisions. There's no exposure on these issues and that is a concern.

"I totally agree with fighting for an international program. I don't think it will be easy, but at the same time I don't think there are any shortcuts. I've been reading the WSWS interviews with historian James McPherson on the American civil war. There's an interesting correlation between the abolitionist struggle that went for 40 to 50 years. Those at the head of that struggle were pariahs for many years, but in the end they were vindicated. This is the main issue. There is no short cut. You have to have a long-term perspective."

Cathy, from south-west Sydney, said that she was attracted to the SEP because of its anti-war program. "I came to the meeting because I wanted to hear more about the aggressive US war plans against China. Nick Beams has outlined why the US feels threatened by China. It's like WWII, the same conditions are emerging.

"I was struck in the discussion about the militarisation of American youth. That's been happening in the US for a long, long time… and is beginning to happen here. This really opened my eyes and I started to ask myself 'how are we going to get the message out to young people in Australia about the danger of war?'"

Damien, a university student in Newcastle who also works as a casual truck driver, said the meeting provided vital information about the current political situation. "The views being put at the meeting are certainly not found readily in the media. I think that's very important," he said. "With the nature of 24-hour news you can run over everything and there is less substance to the stories… It pays you to look again and again at history and read the hell out of it in order to understand its lessons."

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