

SEP holds meeting to oppose Australian car industry shutdown

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party held a public meeting in the Melbourne suburb of Northcote on Sunday, titled “A global political strategy to defend car industry jobs.” The meeting, attended by a number of workers, including from the car component and healthcare sectors, opposed the plans by Ford, Toyota and General Motors—to shut down all car production in the country by 2017.

The first speaker, Patrick O’Connor, a regular writer for the *World Socialist Web Site*, said: “The threatened shutdown of the entire car industry marks a significant turning point in class relations in Australia.” He outlined the devastation being inflicted upon working class suburbs with car plants, such as Elizabeth in Adelaide and Broadmeadows in Melbourne.

O’Connor reviewed the historical and international processes that led to the planned industry shutdown. The ruling class responded to the 2008 financial crash with a social counterrevolution aimed at tearing up every social gain previously won by the working class. “Car workers around the world are at the forefront of the offensive,” he said. “In the US, new auto workers now earn lower salaries than their counterparts did in the 1930s.”

Beginning with the “Button Plan” of the Hawke-Keating Labor government in 1984, O’Connor explained how successive governments, assisted by the trade unions, organised the destruction of thousands of auto jobs, in the name of boosting “international competitiveness.”

The main report to the meeting by James Cogan, the Socialist Equality Party assistant national secretary, focused on the connection between the global assault on auto workers and the accelerating drive to war, underscored by the Obama administration’s “pivot” to Asia, and the US and European support for the putsch

led by fascist forces in Ukraine.

Reviewing the events in Ukraine, Cogan explained that they were “part of a concerted drive by US and European imperialism to put the entire territories of the former Soviet Union under their domination.”

Since 2008, a breakdown of global capitalism had erupted, driven by “the fundamental contradictions between an integrated world economy and competing nation-states, and between the socialised character of production carried out by the international working class and the subordination of the productive forces to the accumulation of private profit for a capitalist minority.”

Cogan noted: “A century ago, in 1914, capitalist breakdown gave rise to war and to revolutionary struggles. It is doing so again.”

The speaker exposed the part played by pseudo-left tendencies, such as Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance, which were supporting both the preparations for war abroad and austerity against the working class at home. He detailed the role of Tim Gooden, a Socialist Alliance member and Geelong Trades Hall secretary, in assisting the shutdown of the Ford Geelong plant.

“The most urgent issue in the working class,” Cogan concluded, “is that the most advanced, serious and militant sections assimilate the lessons of the twentieth century. The capitalist class depends upon maintaining the greatest lie of the last century—that Stalinism in the Soviet Union was socialism, and that it failed. The truth, upheld by the world Trotskyist movement, is that Stalinism represented the betrayal of socialism and the revolutionary strivings of the working class.”

A lively discussion followed. A Vietnamese-born worker at the car component manufacturer Metalsa asked how the SEP could call itself communist, given

the long history of crimes carried out by Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union, as well as in China and Vietnam, which he referred to as communist countries.

In response, Cogan reviewed the historical traditions of the SEP. “The Trotskyist movement developed in the 1920s in the Soviet Union and fought against the betrayal of the Russian Revolution and socialism being carried out by a growing bureaucracy around Joseph Stalin.”

Cogan continued: “Stalin killed more communists than Mussolini and Hitler. The Stalinists carried out a blood purge of communists—of Trotskyists. Hundreds of thousands of people, those who had participated in the revolution and dedicated their lives to the end of oppression, and for the advancement of mankind in different fields, including in science and philosophy, were murdered.”

Turning to Vietnam, Cogan explained: “We give no credence to the claims of Ho Chi Minh, that he represented socialism. The Communist Party of Vietnam, Ho-Chi Minh’s movement, took the Trotskyists in 1945 and shot them.” Today, he pointed out, “Vietnam is one of the centres of world cheap labour.” Cogan emphasised: “We fight for the unity of Australian workers with workers in Vietnam, China, Asia and internationally, against capitalism, and for socialism.”

There were many other questions on the international political situation. The meeting concluded with an appeal for the SEP’s monthly fund, which raised over \$550.

Interviewed following the discussion, Steve, who has worked as a nurse in Melbourne for 31 years, said he heard about the meeting on the WSWs, which he began reading several months ago. “I was looking up about what was happening in Detroit, and the SEP came up and lined up with a lot of ideas I had already,” he said. In Detroit, they’re trying to sell all the public assets like the DIA and take away the workers’ pension rights.”

He continued: “It’s a tragedy to see people’s pensions and their livelihoods destroyed to just add cash to New York bankers, to increase their incredible wealth and send one hundred thousand, two hundred thousand people into destitution. There are seven billion people in the world, and the hundred thousand people in the elite think that we’re just to serve them.

It’s becoming more and more like in the 13th Century. Kublai Khan described people as his servants and it’s going that way again.”

Steve commented on his experiences with the trade unions. “I used to be a member of the Australian Nursing Federation. They never did anything for the members; they took dues to line their own pockets. It’s just a vehicle to promote the political aspirations of the elite in the union. When Hawke and Keating said no more strikes, that was a defining line for me.”

Asked for his response to the meeting, Steve commented: “I like how some of the questions were answered. The speakers dealt with that man’s question about ‘communism’ with compassion. Nobody was angry. I have a communist background from my parents. When it was revealed in the 1950s what Stalin had carried out, my parents were ashamed. I know it’s perceived that communism has a bad persona, but that wasn’t real communism.”

Steve concluded: “I think something bad is happening to the world ... a major struggle has to happen. Capitalism is going to dig its own grave. Look at Portugal, 40 percent of young people are unemployed.”



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