

Socialist Equality Party (Australia) holds Second National Congress

24 April 2014

The Socialist Equality Party held its Second National Congress in Sydney from April 18–21, 2014. The congress unanimously adopted two resolutions: “Australian imperialism and the Obama administration’s ‘pivot to Asia’” and “The social counter-revolution in Australia and the political tasks of the Socialist Equality Party.”

Delegates attended the congress from across Australia, as well as from New Zealand, East Timor, the Philippines and Japan. Leading members of the Socialist Equality Parties in the United Kingdom and Sri Lanka also participated, representing the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

The congress began with the reading of greetings sent by David North, chairman of the international editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site* and national chairman of the SEP in the United States.

North stated: “The national congress of the Australian SEP is being held at a critical point in the crisis of the world capitalist system. You are meeting in the midst of an escalating conflict that raises the danger of military confrontation between nuclear-armed powers. Less than four months shy of the centenary of the outbreak of World War I, essentially the same contradictions and motivations that led to the catastrophe of 1914 threaten to explode into war in 2014. One hundred years ago, it was a conflict in the Balkans that triggered the conflagration. Today, a fight over control of Ukraine has the potential to set the world aflame.”

North reviewed the sharp tensions provoked by American and German imperialism with Russia through their backing for the fascist-led coup in Ukraine. He drew attention to the no less dangerous situation in East Asia as a result of the confrontationalist US “pivot” to the region and the alignment of the Japanese and Australian ruling classes with Washington’s preparations for war against China.

“Marxist politics demands ruthless objectivity in the

appraisal of the political situation,” North explained. “No progressive purpose is served by denying, in the name of a superficial optimism, the immense contradiction between the very advanced stage of the crisis and the present level of political consciousness among the masses. However, the potential for a rapid development of revolutionary consciousness, under conditions of extreme social crisis, must not be underestimated. The relentless deterioration of living conditions over the past three to four decades has steadily undermined confidence in and support for capitalism. Nor has the staggering concentration of wealth in a small elite gone unnoticed. The wars based on lies and the continuous attacks on democratic rights have deepened the alienation of the broad mass of the people from the existing setup. The ‘molecular processes,’ which academic historians recognize and explain, with 20-20 hindsight, in the aftermath of revolutionary eruptions, are already at a very advanced stage of development.”

North stressed the decisive preparations that had been undertaken by the ICFI for the coming revolutionary struggles through its more than six decades of political struggle against opportunism. His greetings are being published in full today.

Greetings were also delivered to the congress by Peter Schwarz, secretary of the ICFI and national committee member of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party of Germany); by Chris Marsden, national secretary of the SEP (UK); Deepal Jayasekera, assistant national secretary of the SEP (Sri Lanka); and Keith Jones, national secretary of the SEP (Canada). These greetings will be published over the coming days.

In his opening remarks to the congress, SEP national secretary Nick Beams stated: “We are now well into the sixth year since the global breakdown of world capitalism that began with the financial crisis of 2008. We have used the term ‘breakdown’ advisedly, seeking to draw attention to the parallel between the events of 2008 and

those of the breakdown of August 1914 and the eruption of World War One.”

Beams posed to the congress the question: “Six years on, how does our analysis stand?” Is world capitalism, he asked, “moving to restore equilibrium, or is in fact the disequilibrium set off by the events of 2008 deepening and intensifying?”

In the comprehensive report that followed, Beams established the systemic disequilibrium and crisis of the capitalist system in the spheres of economy, inter-state relations and class relations, which threatened the working class with war, social counter-revolution and dictatorship.

Beams concluded: “The present political situation in the working class is characterised by anger, disgust, alienation from and hostility to the entire political establishment. But it has yet to take the form of an articulated and developed political movement ...”

“Our movement has the task of politically rearming the working class, through the clarification and understanding of the historical process. And we must understand, as David North emphasised in his greetings, the objective significance of our own work. It represents the way in which the vanguard of the working class has come to understand all the great experiences of the past 100 years. This understanding of all the experiences of the 20th century represents the essential preparation for the revolutionary struggles of the 21st. The task of this congress is to take forward the necessary initiatives, on the theoretical, political and organisational front, to carry this scientifically-derived perspective ever more deeply into the working class.”

The first congress resolution, “Australian imperialism and the Obama administration’s ‘pivot to Asia,’” makes a rigorous assessment of the support by the Australian ruling elite and political establishment for US foreign policy. It traces this support to Australian capitalism’s immense financial and strategic interests in maintaining and defending American dominance over the Asia-Pacific region and globally.

The resolution reviews and refutes the false and ahistorical assertions by various pseudo-left tendencies that China has become an expansionist “imperialist” power. The resolution demonstrates how such claims are being advanced to justify their embrace of imperialism and their support for Australian capitalism as it prepares, in alliance with the United States, to wage war on China. The document makes clear that the SEP’s central task is to build a unified antiwar movement of the working class

in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region, as part of the struggle being waged by the ICFI in the international working class, on the basis of a socialist and internationalist perspective.

The second resolution, “The social counter-revolution in Australia and the political tasks of the Socialist Equality Party,” highlights the social counter-revolution being implemented by the Abbott-led Liberal National Coalition government against the working class in Australia, under conditions of a rapidly worsening economic crisis. This onslaught, the resolution explains, was begun by the Greens-backed minority Labor government of Julia Gillard and is now being intensified.

The document reviews the vast transformation in Australia during the past three decades, as a result of globalised production and the ever greater dominance of banks and investment funds with intimate links to Wall Street. These parasitic entities are dependent on highly speculative financial operations to generate wealth and income for the capitalist elite. The resolution outlines the mushrooming of social inequality and political disaffection as a result, and exposes the political positions being advanced by the pseudo-left organisations to block any independent political struggle by the working class against the profit system. It explains that the central orientation of the political work of the SEP, and of its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), is to overcome the current crisis of perspective and leadership in the working class.

Numerous delegates contributed to the discussion of both resolutions over three days, as well as moving amendments. The amended resolutions were unanimously adopted by the congress, and will be published in the next weeks.

The Second National Congress concluded with the election of a new National Committee, the leading body of the party. The incoming National Committee re-elected Nick Beams as national secretary, James Cogan as assistant national secretary and Peter Symonds as *World Socialist Web Site* national editor.



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