

SEP meetings in Australia discuss budget attacks and drive to war

Our reporters
3 June 2014

The Socialist Equality Party held successful public meetings in Sydney, Melbourne and Newcastle last week to discuss the Abbott government's May 13 budget and the rising danger of militarism and war. Entitled "A socialist program to fight war and austerity," the meetings were attended by a broad-range of workers, retirees, students and youth.

Nick Beams, SEP national secretary and member of the WSWs international editorial board, addressed meetings in Newcastle and Sydney and James Cogan, SEP assistant national secretary, was the main speaker in Melbourne.

Beams and Cogan used video and power-point presentations to illustrate their detailed reports. International Youth and Students for Socialist Equality representatives spoke at all three events, with IYSSE national coordinator Zac Hambides addressing the Sydney meeting.

Nick Beams explained that the Abbott government's social assault on the working class, which was prepared by the previous Labor government, was part of an international offensive and paralleled the wide-ranging austerity measures being imposed in Europe and the United States.

The Australian budget was not a "one off event," to be followed by a return to "normal," Beams said, but was aimed at making the working class pay for the ongoing crisis of the world capitalist system, which began in September 2008.

"This means eliminating social measures put in place after World War II that allowed ordinary people to receive some improvement in health, education and other basic living standards," Beams said. The budget's goal was to "provide finance capital with even lower tax rates and other concessions to compete against its rivals in Asia and elsewhere." It was also aimed at "creating reserve funds to bail out the finance industry when the next round of the global economic crisis strikes."

Beams drew a parallel between the ongoing financial crisis and the breakdown of world capitalism in 1914, manifested in the eruption of World War I and the horrors that followed.

"The breakdown of September 2008 did not initially take

the form of war, but war, possibly with nuclear consequences, is now very much on the agenda. This is being fuelled by the drive of US imperialism to overcome its economic decline through military means," the speaker said. "This is the heart of the US drive to dominate the Eurasian landmass and its push against China in the East and Russia in the West."

Beams warned that the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" and its stoking up of regional tensions in the East and South China Seas, the US military-basing agreements in Australia and the Philippines, and its support for the Abe government's reassertion of Japanese militarism, were aimed at militarily encircling China in preparation for war.

"Likewise, Washington's political operations in Ukraine, the speaker emphasised, "are an integral part of its long-term objective of carving up the Russian Federation, and turning it into a series of semi-colonies dominated by the US."

A short video was screened at the meetings on the rise of US and German-backed fascist forces—the Right Sector and Svoboda—which had recently overthrown the Ukraine government. The video showed torch-light demonstrations of Ukrainian fascists, carrying portraits of Stepan Bandera, the infamous collaborator with Hitler's Nazi regime, and chanting "Sieg Heil and "Death to the enemies of Ukraine."

Referring to these chilling images Beams declared: "As the ruling classes in every country turn to the imposition of social counter-revolution, their support for fascist forces in Ukraine constitutes the sharpest warning to workers everywhere of the lengths they will go to ensure their program is implemented."

Beams then turned to the expanding role of finance capital in the Australian economy, using power-point graphs to illustrate the devastating impact of the government's budget on working-class families. Ever-widening social inequality in every country, he said, was "incompatible with any form of democracy, and is producing ever-more authoritarian forms of rule in every country."

Beams explained that the Labor Party was in basic agreement with the Abbott government's economic

measures. “Labor’s opposition to the budget is not based on a defence of the interests of the working class. Rather, it is aimed at convincing the ruling financial elites that Labor in government, in collaboration with the union bureaucracy and supported by the so-called “left,” will be a far more effective means for imposing their dictates than the Liberals.”

The speaker outlined the reactionary role of the pseudo-left groups, such as Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance, which were attempting to “corral the mass opposition behind the very parties—Labor and the Greens—that prepared the way for the budget, and to put them back in office to continue what they began.”

Beams emphasised that the social onslaught against the working class was a manifestation of the crisis of the capitalist system and posed revolutionary questions.

“Either global society is restructured in the interests of the ruling elites or it is restructured and reorganised in the interests of the international working class,” he said, and concluded by emphasising that the principal task was to overcome the political confusion in the working class caused by the betrayals of Stalinism and the Labor and union apparatus.

“The development of socialist consciousness is only possible,” he said, “through an understanding of the strategic historical experiences of the international workers’ movement. That requires studying the international program and perspective of the SEP and joining its ranks.”

IYSSE national coordinator Zac Hambides told the Sydney meeting that every section of youth in Australia had been targeted by the budget cuts, including TAFE and university students, apprentices, high-school leavers, those working and the unemployed.

“The historical legitimacy of any society can be determined by the future it offers its youth,” he said. “By that test, capitalism has failed. All it has to offer the next generation is poverty, indebtedness and unemployment amidst an ever expanding drive to war.”

Zambides went on to explain, “The economic and political conditions are being created to drag young people into another catastrophic war. If the capitalist system cannot provide a decent and fulfilling life for the next generation then it must be swept aside and replaced with one that can.”

Lengthy question and answer discussion followed the main reports at all the meetings and more than \$2,000 was donated for the SEP’s monthly fund.

In Sydney one student asked how he could convince his friends that supporting the SEP in the elections was not a “wasted vote.” This opened up an important discussion on the nature of parliamentary democracy.

Nick Beams pointed out that that while the SEP ran in elections, it told workers the truth that parliament was a

façade. It did not represent the interests of the working class but of finance capital and the ruling elite. “The existing order can only be changed through the revolutionary overthrow of the profit system by the working class,” he said.

Speaking from the floor, an SEP member explained that parliament was a “fig-leaf for the rule of capital” and if governments did not comply they were removed. The speaker referred to the recent imperialist-sponsored coup in Ukraine and reviewed the ousting of Japanese and Australian prime ministers Yukio Hatoyama and Kevin Rudd in 2010 because their policies were not fully in line with US geo-political aims.

“The working class has to break from the conception that by voting for any one of the parliamentary parties—Liberal, Labor or the Greens—it can defend its interests. The working class has to begin to rely on itself and mobilise independently on the basis of a socialist program to put an end to the profit system and reorganise society for the interests of the majority, not the banks and big business.”

In Melbourne an audience member asked about “the relevance of Trotsky today.” James Cogan explained that the Trotskyist movement was the only political organisation that defended socialist internationalism against the counter-revolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy in the former Soviet Union and its international satellites. He pointed out that the Russian Revolution, the only successful socialist revolution in history, was carried out on the basis of Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution.

Cogan referred to WSWS international editorial board chairman David North’s *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*, which exposed the efforts of Robert Service and other academics to slander and falsify Leon Trotsky’s revolutionary struggle against Stalinism and his consistent struggle for Marxist internationalism. He explained that this principled struggle was continued and embodied in the program and perspective of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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