

Australia: SEP and IYSSE meetings discuss dangers of new world war

Our reporters
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Students, workers, retirees and youth participated in well-attended and lively public meetings and speak-outs at universities in Melbourne, Sydney and Newcastle this week on the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of World War I.

Entitled “On the centenary of WWI: Socialism and the fight against war,” the events were organised by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).

A number of students from the University of New South Wales, Newcastle University and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, who heard SEP and IYSSE members at campus speak-outs, came to the public meetings in the evenings.

Socialist Equality Party national secretary Nick Beams spoke in Sydney and Newcastle. SEP national committee members Patrick O'Connor and Will Morrow addressed the Melbourne meeting.

The speakers explained that contrary to the government and mass media glorification of World War I and the bogus claims that it was fought for liberty and democracy, the bloody conflict was a product of the capitalist system—an imperialist slaughter fought by all sides for profits, markets and control of colonies.

In Sydney, Beams said WWI had been “correctly characterised as the seminal catastrophe of the twentieth century from which all other disasters flowed.” This included the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy, the Depression and mass unemployment and the outbreak of World War II.

Beams pointed to Israel’s murderous assault on Gaza, explained the dangers posed by the US and German provocations against Russia in Ukraine, and reviewed how the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 had been used by the Obama administration and other powers to whip up anti-Russian fervour.

The speaker also referred to Washington’s “Asian pivot”—the military encirclement of China—and the role of the Abbott Liberal government, with the support of Labor, the Greens and the pseudo-left, in this campaign.

“All the contradictions of world capitalism, which exploded in an orgy of death and destruction, one hundred years ago, are erupting again,” Beams emphasised, “this time with potential nuclear consequences... It is as if the imperialist powers are preparing to ‘celebrate’ the centenary by doing it all again, with even more devastating results.”

The speaker quoted Leon Trotsky’s brilliant pamphlet *War and the International*, which explained that the war was not the result of particular capitalist powers but the outcome of the workings of

the profit system itself.

WWI not only revealed the historical bankruptcy of the capitalist mode of production but “laid bare a deep-going crisis in the workers’ movement.” Only Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks opposed the war on the basis of an international socialist program to overthrow the profit system, Beams said.

“Lenin insisted that a new perspective and a new international—the Third International—was required to carry this out... This perspective was to lead to the Russian Revolution of October 1917...

“The question of the hour on this 100th anniversary of the outbreak of WWI is how to prevent a catastrophe and the destruction of human civilisation? This can only be answered by the working class in the struggle for the program of international socialism. It is the only social force that has no interest in the insanity of the capitalist nation-state and profit system...

“This requires a new revolutionary leadership which has been developed in a ruthless struggle against opportunism. That is the International Committee of the Fourth International.”

Beams’s report provoked a range of questions, including how to develop socialist consciousness among workers and youth, the role of Stalinism and the political significance of the Red Army in World War II. One audience member suggested that Red Army soldiers fiercely opposed Nazism because “they were fighting for survival.”

In response, Beams said the struggle against fascism and imperialist war today was a “life and death question.”

“The struggle against imperialist war must begin not when the war breaks out but before it starts,” the speaker said. “We have to prevent the capitalist class from doing it again. That is our unity with past generations of workers around the world who went through the experiences of war and became socialists as a consequence. This is the challenge before you today.”

More than \$2,000 was raised in donations for the SEP’s monthly fund and a broad range of Marxist literature was purchased.

In Melbourne, **Tao**, a young mother, said: “I was shocked to hear that the government is spending more than \$300 million celebrating World War I. This is incredible under conditions where the government is cutting millions off the budget. All this war celebration is just propaganda. It seems to me that it is about diverting attention from the real problems. There has never ever been such a divide between the rich and the poor as there is today.”

Ravi, an RMIT student, said the SEP meeting was “very interesting [because] it dived deep and explained socialism, and social equality...”

“The war danger,” he said, “is a product of imperialism trying to crush China and Russia in order to gain its own advantages and financial profits. The European powers, like Britain and Germany, are also seeking their own advantages.”

“I think we have to prevent the tendencies for war through organisations such as the Socialist Equality Party. We have to unify the working class around the world, including in the US and the NATO-allied countries. People should not celebrate World War I but work against the tendencies leading to World War III.”

Samuel, attended the Newcastle public meeting on Tuesday night after hearing SEP and IYSSE speakers at the university the previous day.

“War is violent, unethical and there is no need for it. Look at Abbott who has bought jets for billions of dollars which could have funded the people in poverty in Australia. I think this is wrong... It’s the people in power who think war is necessary,” he said. “They do this to heighten their position by gaining more land, attempting global domination. Above all war is for profit.”

Commenting on the imperialist provocations in Ukraine, he said: “The people of Ukraine are stuck between two forces they do not want; one being Putin and the other being the US and European Union represented by the fascist Kiev government who are attacking Russian-speaking people across the country. They have nowhere to go.”

“On the question of MH17,” he continued, “I think that this is going to start a path towards a war that they want to wage...It is such a stupid campaign of overt propaganda targeted at Putin. It is directed at him because he has not taken part in the US and EU agenda and has his own agenda.”

Simon, another Newcastle student, commented on the government attacks on whistleblowers Assange, Manning and Snowden: “They have spoken up about the truth but as soon as they did so they had to be silenced or imprisoned straight away...”

“The governments are trying to protect their secrets and are concerned about the public’s reaction to this information being revealed. The NSA spying operation and taking personal information without permission is a violation of our rights.”

Asked about the growing danger of another world war, he simply answered: “War represents greed.”

In Sydney, **Scott**, a casual retail worker, said: “The most important thing I received tonight was the necessity to oppose nuclear war. The earth might be destroyed if war starts.”

Asked if the ruling elites would pull back from war because of mutual destruction, he said: “I don’t think that will stop war because they fight it out over money and resources and even about culture. They always talk about the country—whether it’s China or another country. The rulers always say, ‘We fight for our country’.”

Commenting on the WWI commemorations, Scott said: “It’s not good to celebrate any kind of war. The war itself is about killing ourselves, so why celebrate? They don’t want people to study history. They don’t want people to know it, so they change the history. They want us to think war is for our freedom and defence.

Actually, it is not. It is about getting more money and resources.”

Abeer, a UNSW student from Palestine, brought her 14-year-old son to the meeting. “Gaza will not end with negotiations,” she warned. “And it’s not just Gaza. It’s the same in Libya, Iraq and Syria. People need to be more aware of what is happening and that there’s a hidden plan. People need to be more aware of their rights and they need to decide how they want to change their reality.”

James, a UNSW international studies student, decided to attend the meeting after hearing Beams address the IYSSE speak-out on campus.

“I thought [tonight’s speech] was a very realistic depiction of the present situation,” he said. “Nick Beams explained the tensions in the world and, particularly when he spoke about Gaza, explained the nature of the system that allowed these atrocities to happen...”

Asked why he attended the SEP meeting, James said: “This is not something I normally do. But this is a view [about war] that I’ve always had, and that makes sense to me, not necessarily from a political point of view.”

Asked if his response reflected broader sentiments, he said: “I can’t speak for my generation but we do know that a lot of people are being affected by it. And the fact that people are not clear on why it is happening is another reason why people are taking my kind of approach.”

James said he agreed that the fight against war required a struggle to overthrow the capitalist profit system. “My response is nothing but to support this perspective. The very fact that 85 people in the world have as much money as half of the rest of the world’s population doesn’t make sense, even for someone who doesn’t have a political background. When there are people explaining that it is the system itself that is wrong, it makes sense. It speaks out to a lot of people.”



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