SEP public meetings in Australia oppose preparations for war

Our reporters
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Socialist Equality Party (SEP) public meetings in Sydney, Newcastle, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth last week prompted important political and historical questions from the audiences. The meetings were entitled: "Why have Australia's parliamentary parties all signed up for war?"

Among the many questions were the nature of the Chinese regime, why Australia is an imperialist power, and whether it is possible to contain US aggression against China and Russia.

SEP national secretary Nick Beams, a member of the *World Socialist Web Site* international editorial board, was the featured speaker at the Sydney meeting and James Cogan, SEP assistant national secretary, addressed meetings in Newcastle and Melbourne. SEP national committee members spoke in Brisbane and Perth.

Beams told the Sydney meeting that the Abbott government, backed by Labor, the Greens and all the other parliamentary parties, was one of the most active and aggressive allies of US imperialism. It was necessary, he stressed, to study history in order to understand the growing danger of global conflict and Australia's role in it.

The speaker explained that Australia was a middle-range imperialist power that had always depended on an alliance with a dominant power—British imperialism in World War I and up until 1941 and then the US during and since World War II—in order to advance its own imperialist interests.

Outlining the essential economic driving forces behind both world wars, Beams said they "had nothing to do with defending democracy and freedom but were wars of imperialist plunder." The global conflagrations "arose out of the contradictions of the capitalist system itself—the conflict between the development of a global economy and the division of the world into competing nation states."

Beams said the only organisation warning of the danger of a new world war, and fighting to mobilise the working class against it, was the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). He referred to the ICFI plenum resolution—"Socialism and the fight against imperialist war"—adopted in June this year.

Beams said the resolution was rapidly vindicated in the renewed US-led military operation in Iraq and Syria, escalating provocations against Russia in Ukraine, and the increasingly aggressive US "pivot" against China over the past six months.

The Abbott government's belligerent foreign policy, Beams said, was driven by the breakdown of global capitalism and its impact on the Australian economy, which is being hit by falling commodity prices, plunging mining investment and the collapse of manufacturing industry. The unconditional alignment with Washington reflected the Australian capitalist class's dependence on a web of financial relations with their US counterparts, and on the domination of global markets by US banks and hedge funds.

The Australian government's "celebration" of the centenary of World War I and its military role in other past wars was aimed at undermining deeply-held anti-war sentiments among youth and workers and conditioning them to even more disastrous military catastrophes.

Beams referred to the Prime Minister's Literary Award for history which was given last week for *Australia's Secret War: How the unions sabotaged our troops in World War II*. Written by Hal Colebatch, the book claims that industrial action by workers during war was sabotage and that those involved were

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responsible for the deaths of Australian soldiers.

"Colebatch's book, and why it was awarded this prize, aims to make opposition to war illegitimate and any actions by workers to defend their interests criminal and treasonous," Beams said.

The speaker detailed the role played by Labor, the Greens and the pseudo-left groups in Australian imperialism's preparations for war, and the necessity for workers and youth to study the strategic experiences of the international working class in the twentieth century.

"Our party represents the continuity of the struggle for Marxism throughout the twentieth century and we are based on the understanding that all the great issues of last century remain unresolved. The task that was begun with the 1917 Russian Revolution, the ending of world capitalism, remains to be completed and it can only be completed by the working class.

"Everything depends upon building the ICFI as the revolutionary leadership of the international working class," Beams said, appealing to audience members to join the Socialist Equality Party.

In Melbourne, SEP assistant national secretary James Cogan said the public meetings were part of "an international anti-war offensive" by the ICFI.

Cogan detailed the deepening austerity measures against the working class and growing social inequality in Australia. The international drive to war and the accompanying national chauvinism, he said, "was viewed in ruling class circles as essential in diverting the immense social tensions within Australia outward against the so-called external enemy."

Cogan detailed the role played by the Greens and pseudo-left organisations in falsely claiming that China is an imperialist power, in order cover up the aggressive role played by US imperialism and its allies. The most pernicious promoters of this line, groups such as Socialist Alternative, also supported US-backed regime-change operations in Libya, Syria and Ukraine.

In Sydney, one audience member asked why Australia is an imperialist power and China is not. This opened up an important discussion on the historical emergence of Australian imperialism, the nature of the 1949 Chinese Revolution and historical and scientific basis of Marxist movement's definition of imperialism.

Beams explained that the ICFI gave no support to the Chinese regime, and fought for the working class to overthrow it as part of the international struggle for socialism. Nevertheless, "the state that emerged out of the restoration of capitalism by the Stalinist apparatus in China is not an imperialist power but wracked by immense social contradictions and dominated economically by the major powers." Beams added: "To claim that it is imperialist is ahistorical and used by Socialist Alternative and other pseudo-left organisations to support Washington's intrigues against China."

At the Melbourne meeting, audience members asked about differences between the SEP and the pseudo-left groups, and the "humanitarian" justifications of US-led bombing operations in Iraq.

In Brisbane, questions were raised about the re-militarisation of Japan and Germany, the domination of US finance capital in Australia and how the US is provoking territorial conflicts between China and the Philippines.

At the Newcastle meeting, a detailed discussion arose on the anti-war posturing of the Greens, while in Perth a question was asked about the development of anti-war sentiment in China.

Perth audience members also listened intently to the recording of David North's panel discussion on his book, *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century*.

In total, the meetings raised more than $4,600 in collections for the SEP Special Fund. Several workers and young people gave interviews to WSWS reporters after the meetings.

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