

# Letter to Burwood Council from SEP National Secretary James Cogan

13 April 2015

Monday, April 13, 2015  
Cr. John Faker  
Cr. George Mannah  
Cr. Sally Deans  
Cr. Tony Doueihy  
Cr. Lesley Furneaux-Cook  
Cr. Justin Taunton  
Cr. Ernest Wong

Dear councillors,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, to register our opposition to the decision of your Council to cancel a booking, made by the SEP, of the Burwood Council Library Auditorium, and to demand that this cancellation be immediately reversed.

In a phone call to the SEP at 2.15 p.m. on Friday, April 10, the council employee instructed to inform us of the cancellation stated that complaints had been made about the meeting. When questioned, she said that there had been two such complaints.

In response to our objections, she relayed an opinion, apparently expressed by Burwood Council management, that the SEP was holding “more of a protest, than a meeting” and that the SEP event constituted “a conflict of interests” for the council. When we again objected and asked how a public meeting against the dangers of war represented a “conflict of interests,” she asked that we send her a copy of the promotional flyer that we were distributing to advertise the meeting. She then ended the phone call.

At 2.24 p.m., the SEP emailed the link to our public announcement of the meeting, which had been published on the *World Socialist Web Site* and Socialist Equality Party website on April 6. Just three minutes later, at 2.27 p.m., we received an email from the

council representative stating that our booking had been cancelled on the sole basis that “there have been a number of complaints from residents about the nature of the meeting.”

The SEP was given no opportunity to clarify with the council representative, or with the management of Burwood Council, the character and purpose of the meeting, for which dozens of people had already purchased tickets. Moreover, no-one in Burwood Council management could have read the announcement, which made clear that the meeting was called to discuss growing international tensions in the Middle East, Europe and Asia which, one hundred years after World War I, threaten to trigger a new global conflict.

Following receipt of the email, the SEP quickly established that the “complaints” were motivated by the administrators of the extreme right-wing “The Great Aussie Patriot” Facebook page. At 10.17 a.m., these administrators had posted an image of the SEP flyer promoting the public meeting, and were accusing the SEP of a “plan to put down our ANZACs.” The phone numbers of both Burwood Council and Burwood Library were posted shortly after, along with appeals for the page’s supporters to call and demand the cancellation of the booking.

The only conclusion we can draw is that your management either made no attempt to investigate the nature and agenda of those demanding that the SEP meeting be cancelled, or agreed with them.

Thus the reality is that Burwood Council, which is controlled by the Labor Party, has carried out an act of political censorship against the Socialist Equality Party—a registered political party—on behalf of the political positions of an extreme right-wing group that espouses anti-Muslim xenophobia and anti-immigrant racism and seeks to deny anyone who opposes them the

right to freedom of speech.

The SEP and its predecessor, the Socialist Labour League, have been politically active in Australia since 1972. We are well-known opponents of the foreign policy of the Australian and US governments and have held literally hundreds of public meetings, at council and university venues across Sydney, to explain our opposition to nationalism, militarism and war and to provide a forum for public debate. We booked the Burwood Library Auditorium because of its quality, excellent audio-visual facilities, proximity to where many of our members and supporters live, and its seating capacity.

The SEP is currently seeking advice as to the legality of your actions. We have also publicised your management's attack on the democratic rights of our party, of those who wish to attend our meeting, and of all workers and young people committed to defending freedom of speech. Over the weekend, hundreds of residents of Burwood and neighbouring suburbs signed petitions insisting upon the reversal of your decision to cancel our booking. We understand that many others throughout the country have emailed you to register their complaints and to seek the lifting of your ban on the SEP's public meeting.

We again insist that you immediately instruct your management to reinstate the SEP's booking of Burwood Library Auditorium between 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. on April 26, 2015.

Given the gravity of your actions, and their consequences for the political work of the SEP, I expect a reply no later than 4 p.m. Tuesday, April 14, 2015.

Sincerely,

James Cogan  
National Secretary  
Socialist Equality Party



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**