

SEP meetings oppose US-Australian war drive against China

Our reporter
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Australia held successful public meetings entitled “Oppose the US-Australian war drive against China” last week in Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney. Important layers of workers, youth and students attended in order to discuss the escalating preparations for war against China.

Detailed reports by SEP speakers provoked serious, and at times passionate, discussion about the danger of war, as well as the emerging political developments in Greece and the necessity for the development of a new revolutionary leadership in the working class. Some in attendance came after seeing posters or receiving leaflets. Others had been to the SEP’s “Anzac Day, the glorification of militarism and the drive to World War III” meetings on April 26 and wanted to find out more about the party’s socialist program.

SEP national secretary James Cogan and SEP national committee member Will Morrow spoke at the Melbourne meeting on June 28. Cogan and national committee member Oscar Grenfell gave detailed reports to the Sydney event, which was held on July 5 and chaired by Nick Beams, a member of the WSWs international editorial board.

Beams opened the Sydney meeting by reminding audiences about the attempts by Burwood Council and University of Sydney to block the SEP’s April 26 meetings opposing the Anzac Day celebrations of militarism. The attempted bans, he said, were in line with the Abbott government’s preparations for war. They had been followed by the sacking of SBS journalist Scott McIntyre for daring to criticise Anzac Day.

Oscar Grenfell reviewed Washington’s “pivot to Asia,” and the extent of its military build-up against China. Using PowerPoint graphics and maps, Grenfell said the Obama administration had seized on longstanding disputes between China, the Philippines and Vietnam over tiny islands in the South China Sea to stoke up tensions.

“Washington was hysterically denouncing China over its land reclamation of tiny islands when, in fact, the Philippines, Vietnam and other claimants to the area were involved in even more extensive land reclamation projects,” the speaker said.

“The US claims to be defending freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, but for Washington, ‘freedom of navigation’

means the freedom of the US and regional states acting under its authority to carry out provocations against China.”

Grenfell reviewed the rapid US military build-up in the region, including recent US surveillance flights near islands occupied by China. He pointed out that nuclear capable B52 bombers were being rotated through northern Australia, with plans for the deployment of B1 bombers as part of the Pentagon’s AirSea Battle strategy against China. Australia, he said, was deeply involved in what would be a naval blockade of China and the bombardment of its military infrastructure.

In delivering the main report, James Cogan explained that militarism and war were being driven by the intractable economic breakdown of global capitalism. He focussed much of his speech to the Sydney meeting, which was held on the same day as the Greek referendum, on the political dangers facing the Greek working class, the role of the pseudo-left Syriza government and the political lessons for the international working class.

Cogan reviewed the massive social assault on the Greek working class since the 2008 global financial crisis and explained that Syriza’s aim was not to mobilise the working class to challenge the profit system, but to promote the illusion that a “left” government could re-negotiate a deal with the banks. The groupings that made up Syriza, he said, insisted that the overthrow of capitalism by the working class was “unrealistic and impossible.”

While millions of workers were being confronted with the ruthless demands of finance capital, backed up by senior Greek military officials and the entire establishment media, Greek Prime Minister Tspiras was appealing, cap in hand, for new negotiations over modified austerity measures, Cogan declared.

The social counter-revolution now being imposed, he emphasised, could only be defeated through the mobilisation of the working class in Greece, throughout Europe and the world, on the basis of a socialist and internationalist perspective to put an end to the profit system itself. This fight had to be based on an assimilation of the key strategic political experiences of the working class throughout the twentieth century, particularly the 1917 Russian Revolution and its aftermath, Cogan said.

The speaker referred to the mass struggles that had erupted internationally following the Russian Revolution, but pointed to

the inability of the working class to take power because it lacked the necessary, Bolshevik-type revolutionary leadership.

Today, Cogan said, the most important task facing the working class in Greece and every country was to build the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), which bases itself on the internationalist legacy of the Russian Revolution, Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism, and the fight against all forms of national opportunism. He urged those in attendance to join the Socialist Equality Party.

The meeting reports provoked a range of questions.

In Sydney animated discussion developed on the 2008 financial crisis and the current situation in Greece; the role of Syriza; the pseudo-left and the "pivot" to Asia; and the forthcoming joint US-Australian Talisman-Sabre military exercises.

Nick Beams explained the relationship between the 2008 crisis, Greek debts and the rise of financial parasitism. Greece was "a testing ground for Europe, the US and internationally," he said. "The conditions that have been imposed on the Greek working class have to be implemented, and far worse, on the international working class."

Spontaneous applause erupted when Beams pointed to Syriza's cynical political manoeuvres with the banks, contrasting them with the actions of the Soviet government, established by the 1917 Russian Revolution, which immediately repudiated all bank debts.

"Unlike the Bolsheviks, Syriza refused to make this call. Tsipras should have said: 'We're not going to be bled white to pay Goldman Sachs and finance capital anymore,' then refuse to pay and issue a revolutionary appeal to the German and European working class," Beams said.

An audience member said he wanted to be a "devil's advocate" for capitalism, which he claimed had created a planned global economy, referring to the existence of international corporations and a global market. He said that the current crisis was caused by "overpopulation."

Nick Beams and other SEP speakers rejected these claims, pointing to the anarchy of the capitalist market and the fundamental contradictions of capitalism, which were pushing humanity towards the catastrophe of a third world war.

While globalised production had created the foundations for a planned socialist economy, Beams said, "mankind remains trapped within the capitalist nation, private profit system, where rational planning for the majority is impossible because society is run to benefit a tiny minority, and at the expense of millions of workers, whose intellectual and physical labour produces all wealth."

A student asked what were the historical lessons that the Chinese and Russian working class had to understand and how could the party assist?

James Cogan said the workers in Russia and China had to understand how the Stalinist bureaucracy arose and why these regimes were not socialist, but a product of the betrayal of

socialist internationalism on which the Russian Revolution had been carried out.

Another SEP member spoke from the floor. "The workers in Russia, China, Greece, Australia and around the world face the same problem: the breakdown of the world capitalist system and the drive towards a third world war.

"Socialism or barbarism: that's the choice facing the international working class today. War can only be fought on the basis of assimilating the lessons of the strategic political experiences of the 20th century. First, the reason that the Russian Revolution—the first shot in the world revolution—failed to extend to other countries was because no organisation like the Bolshevik Party existed in any other country. Secondly, there was an alternative to Stalinism, and that was the internationalist program advanced and fought for by Leon Trotsky against all forms of national opportunism, and through the founding of the Fourth International in 1938. This is the program that our party fights for today ..."

The engaged response of the audience to the political analysis presented at the SEP meetings was another indication that important layers of workers and young people are recognising that they need to study and understand the history of the twentieth century, and the past struggles of the working class, in order to confront the enormous political challenges and social upheavals that lie ahead.

The SEP is the only party that encourages, and provides the opportunity for workers, students and youth to discuss and debate these vital issues. Appreciation of this fact was reflected in the more than \$2,700 collected in donations at the SEP meetings.



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