

SEP rallies present socialist answer to war and austerity

Our reporters

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Socialist Equality Party (SEP) election candidates addressed successful rallies last weekend in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney—Australia's three largest cities. Entitled “International class struggle returns: A socialist program against war and austerity,” they were the final SEP public meetings before Australia's July 2 federal election.

The meetings were held under conditions of deepening international economic and political crisis, just three days after the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom to leave the European Union.

The Sydney event was attended by about 100 workers, teachers and other professionals, university and high school students, and retirees from across the city and the central coast of New South Wales (NSW).

Audience members listened intently to comprehensive reports from SEP national secretary James Cogan and John Davis, both Senate candidates for NSW, and Oscar Grenfell, the SEP candidate for the Sydney lower house seat of Grayndler.

The Melbourne meeting was addressed by Nick Beams, SEP national committee member, Chris Sinnema, the lead SEP Senate candidate in Victoria, and Will Fulgenzi, the SEP candidate for the Melbourne lower house seat of Wills. Speakers at the Brisbane rally were the SEP Senate candidates for Queensland—Mike Head and Erin Cooke.

For the first time, the SEP streamed the Sydney meeting live on its Facebook page, enabling people to participate across Australia and internationally, including the US, Britain, Canada and the Indian sub-continent. Many posted comments and questions. The video is in three parts and can be viewed [here](#).

The Sydney and Melbourne meetings began with pre-recorded video greetings from Jerry White, the SEP's candidate in the US presidential elections, who emphasised the common struggle of the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International for the international unity of the working class.

In Sydney, Oscar Grenfell reviewed the world political situation, which he said was “marked by endless economic slump, the official promotion of nationalism and xenophobia and the emergence of conflicts between rival capitalist nation-states with long-established parties being torn apart, under the impact of unprecedented economic and social antagonisms.”

Grenfell said the official election campaign further exposed the vast gulf between broad layers of the population and Australia's financial and political elite. “Labor, the Liberals, and the Greens are increasingly seen for what they are—parties of big business and the banks that have nothing to offer the working class.”

He explained that Australia's political establishment—the Liberal-National coalition, Labor and the Greens—was covering up the drive to war and Canberra's key role in the US-led preparations for conflict with China and the danger of nuclear war.

Grenfell warned that whichever party formed the next government, it would intensify Australia's involvement in US provocations against China and impose sweeping cuts to social spending. While these policies would provoke mass social struggles, the essential question was the development of an independent political perspective and revolutionary party for the working class.

John Davis spoke about the social conditions facing young people in Australia and internationally. For the first time since World War II, youth confronted lower living standards than their parents. This social retrogression, he said, was “a damning indictment of the capitalist system.”

Davis detailed the decades-long social assault by Liberal-National Coalition and Labor governments alike and explained how growing under-employment, rising education costs and soaring property prices and rents were impoverishing thousands of young people. “Young people and the working class as a whole,” Davis concluded, “have to turn to a new program, a new perspective, a new strategy, the strategy of international socialism.”

SEP national secretary James Cogan discussed the historic significance of the Brexit vote. The political and economic turmoil it had sparked in Britain and internationally was another expression of the deepening crisis of global capitalism that erupted in 2008-09 and was now “shaking the very foundations of capitalist society.”

Cogan quoted Leon Trotsky's seminal *War and the International*, which described World War I as “the most colossal breakdown in history of an economic system destroyed by its own inherent contradictions.” The speaker explained that

the conditions that produced WWI in 1914 and WWII in 1939—above all, the bitter economic competition between rival imperialist states—were present today.

The speaker reviewed the increasingly reckless attempts of US imperialism to maintain its fading global hegemony by establishing its dominance over the Middle East as well as the states that emerged from the Stalinist restoration of capitalism in Russia and China. He pointed out that the turn by both Germany in Europe, and Japan in Asia, to re-militarise was heightening the danger of war.

Cogan said political institutions and mechanisms of the capitalist establishment were breaking apart in Australia and internationally as a result of immense anger by masses of people over social inequality and the conditions of life.

The Turnbull government hoped to win a majority in both houses of parliament but faced the prospect of a hung parliament or losing office altogether. “Unprecedented numbers of people will vote for so-called third parties,” the speaker said.

“The critical issue everywhere is the fight to win the working class to a genuine socialist, internationalist and revolutionary perspective and the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement, and this means exposing the pseudo-left tendencies which attempt to confine the working class to the capitalist establishment.

“The essential task facing workers and young people is to study the lessons of history, in particular the political program and perspective of the 1917 Russian Revolution and the struggle by the Trotskyist movement against Stalinism and national opportunism ... The Socialist Equality Party is confident that we can and will cut a path to the working class in the period ahead,” Cogan said.

The candidates’ reports were followed by extended question-and-answer sessions. At the Melbourne rally, which was attended by over 40 people, audience members asked about Brexit, negative interest rates and the global economic crisis, and how to expose Labor politicians.

The question-and-answer session in Sydney continued for almost an hour, covering a range of historical and programmatic questions. One audience member asked why young people were not “in the streets” protesting the attacks on the social conditions.

John Davis and Oscar Grenfell answered this question. Davis pointed to failure of protest politics, in particular, the mass international demonstrations in opposition to the US-led 2003 invasion of Iraq, which were diverted into appeals to the United Nations.

Grenfell said past generations of workers looked to Labor and the trade unions to defend workers hard-won social gains. These formations, beginning with the Hawke-Keating government of 1983 to 1996, initiated the social attacks imposed by Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in the US, he said.

“People of my age, who were born during or after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, have been subjected to 25

years of propaganda claiming that socialism was dead and that the Stalinist dictatorship represented socialism. Information on Trotsky and the Fourth International was suppressed.”

Grenfell was applauded when he said: “The big issue is we have to educate young people in the great political lessons of the 20th century, the Russian Revolution—the first time the working class took political power—and above all the significance of the struggle of Leon Trotsky and our movement in defence of socialist and internationalist principles.”

James Cogan responded to a question on why pseudo-left organisations claimed the Brexit vote represented a victory for the working class. He made clear that the outcome was no victory for workers. The pseudo-left’s claims sought to conceal their own responsibility for the political disaster.

“The prime beneficiaries of this campaign are the anti-immigrant UKIP [United Kingdom Independence Party] and other extreme right-wing forces who called for a leave vote on the grounds of keeping out immigrants and protecting British borders.... The National Front in France, Golden Dawn in Greece and other fascistic forces are now gloating over the result.”

Cogan said the only progressive policy was the British SEP’s campaign for an active boycott, which fought to mobilise workers and youth on a socialist and internationalist program against the reactionary nationalist policies of both the “leave” and “remain” camps in the referendum.

The thoughtful responses to the reports and serious questions about the strategic international issues facing the working class, as well as the overall donations of \$5,800 for the party’s election fund, are indications that important sections of workers and youth are responding to the SEP’s socialist and internationalist perspective.

To contact the SEP and get involved, visit our web site or Facebook page.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:
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