

New Zealand: Socialist Equality Group holds public meeting on US election outcome

Our reporters

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Last Sunday, the Socialist Equality Group (New Zealand) (SEG) held a public meeting in Auckland, entitled “The political causes and international implications of Trump’s election: A Marxist assessment.” It attracted a diverse audience of young workers and students, supporters of the SEG and readers of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

In the lead up to the meeting, SEG campaign teams encountered widespread concern among New Zealand workers over the election victory of Donald Trump, a billionaire and semi-fascist demagogue, and the danger of war. Many were distrustful about the recent visit by a US navy ship, which served to underscore New Zealand’s close military alliance with the US. Trump’s policies threaten to escalate the Obama administration’s war drive against China.

SEG member Tom Peters, who chaired the meeting, explained that it was part of the fight to build a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement, in New Zealand. He noted the recent founding of a new section of the ICFI in France and the growing radicalization of workers and youth throughout the world and their attraction to socialism.

“The central issue for the working class in every country,” the speaker said, “is the need for a clear political perspective and leadership. All the other parties that once claimed to represent workers are defenders of capitalism and the super-rich; they promote nationalism to divide workers from each other and are driving the entire world towards catastrophic war.”

The main presentation, on the recent US presidential election, was delivered by James Cogan, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia). Cogan had recently participated in the SEP (US) conference in Detroit, “Socialism vs. Capitalism and War,” which was held prior to the election in order to advance

an independent socialist and internationalist political strategy for the working class, in opposition to both major US capitalist parties, the Republicans and Democrats.

Cogan discussed in detail the social and political processes that led to Trump’s victory. He outlined the vast growth in social inequality and poverty in the US, especially under the Obama administration. He spoke about the deep-seated hostility towards Obama’s wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria and stressed that Clinton’s campaign had centred on warmongering threats against Russia and unfounded allegations that Trump was a Russian agent.

The speaker debunked claims by the Democratic Party and its supporters in the media that Trump won because of widespread racism and sexism among white male workers. Such claims were, Cogan said, “based on an entirely false and self-serving narrative” of identity politics, which obscured the basic class divisions in society. Several states won by Trump had previously voted for Barack Obama, the first black president, who falsely portrayed himself as anti-war and the candidate of “hope and change.”

Cogan stated: “The greatest responsibility for Trump’s victory lies with all those who insisted on supporting Clinton despite the utterly right-wing, anti-working class, militarist program she advocated.” This included, first and foremost, Senator Bernie Sanders, who received support from millions of workers and youth for his opposition to Clinton during the Democratic primaries and his claim to be a “democratic socialist.” The warning made by the WSWS that Sanders’ “socialism” was a fraud, was confirmed when he told his supporters to vote for Clinton following his defeat in the primaries.

Since the election, Sanders and other leading Democrats and trade union bureaucrats in the US have pledged to work with Trump as he implements his nationalist program, which includes trade war against China.

Pointing to the parallels between America and New Zealand, including the promotion of nationalism and the collapse in support for the major parties, Cogan declared: “No serious worker or young person in New Zealand would propose that a struggle for social equality and against war should be, or could be, based on any wing of the NZ Labour Party or the trade unions.”

Noting that next year was the centenary of the 1917 Russian Revolution, Cogan urged those in attendance to study the program and revolutionary record of the ICFI, which “represents the historical continuity of Marxism, the struggle against the Stalinist betrayal of the Russian Revolution and the fight for world socialism.”

The report was followed by a number of questions. One audience member said Trump’s economic policies sounded like “utter nonsense” and asked what was behind them. In his reply Cogan compared Trump’s “America first” nationalism, including a proposed 45 percent tariff on Chinese imports, to the protectionist tariffs introduced in the 1930 Smoot Hawley Act, which precipitated trade war and the Great Depression that led to World War II. Now, in response to the breakdown of the global capitalist system that began in 2007-2008, sections of the US ruling class were again advocating drastic nationalist methods to shore up American capitalism at the expense of its rivals, heightening global economic turmoil and the danger of another world war.

A member of the pseudo-left Communist Workers Group asked what was the ICFI’s position “on the Syrian revolution.” Cogan stated that there was nothing progressive about the US-backed militias in the Free Syrian Army and Al Qaeda-linked groups that were fighting to overthrow the Assad regime. These were pro-capitalist Islamist groups, armed and funded by US imperialism and its allies, including Saudi Arabia.

Cogan denounced the pseudo-left groups, including those in New Zealand, which support the US proxy war in Syria and seek to “throw dust in people’s eyes” by calling it a “revolution.” He noted that a number of groups recently protested outside the Russian embassy in Wellington, in support of US intervention to assist the so-called “rebels” against the Russian-backed Assad regime.

Several people stayed behind to continue discussing the SEG’s perspective. Isabella, a high school student, said “I came to the meeting because I have recently developed an interest in socialism and its ideals, especially Marxism, because I see capitalism as failing for the majority of people. As a young person seeing the plight of students, graduating with mountains of debt, the situation of the

working class is one where conditions haven’t improved at all.” She mentioned growing child poverty and the housing affordability crisis in New Zealand.

Isabella said the meeting had given her a much better idea of what socialism is about. “I felt it was a very interesting account of how similar the two presidential candidates were. Rather than just saying it was a matter of ‘racism’ in America, it was clearly a product of the entire government system and the Democratic Party not presenting any alternative that would actually change anything for the working class,” she said.

“Those who voted for Trump did so because they’ve been cheated. He’s not going to create jobs, he’s not going to improve conditions for the working class. He will just isolate America from the global community,” Isabella said. She said the growing interest in politics among young people was “absolutely necessary” and she was keen to have further discussion with the Socialist Equality Group.

Diana and Mariano, who had moved to New Zealand from Argentina, travelled from South Auckland to attend the meeting. Diana said, “The presentation was good. It was easy to agree with what was being presented about Trump’s election. There is not a lot of good stuff to say about American imperialism, it is the leading imperialist country of the world. The rest of the countries were obliged to obey whatever the US actually wants.”

They described the widespread poverty in Argentina and throughout Latin America and the growth of protest and social unrest. Mariano commented that “people sometimes see history as a distant thing from reality” and agreed on the need for a political clarification of the historical struggles by the working class.

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