

Australia: Intense discussions about Trump victory at SEP meetings

Our reporters

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The Socialist Equality Party last week held successful public meetings in three Australian state capitals on the significance of the US presidential elections. Entitled “The political causes and international implications of Trump’s election: A Marxist assessment,” the events attracted important layers of people seeking an objective analysis of the US elections and the political issues now facing the international working class. For many it was their first SEP meeting. (see: “Workers and youth speak about US election and SEP program”)

SEP national secretary James Cogan addressed the Melbourne and Sydney events, which were held on December 4 and December 11, respectively. SEP national committee member Linda Tenenbaum spoke at the Brisbane meeting on December 10.

Comprehensive reports by the speakers, which included graphs and charts on US voting patterns, and their relationship to dramatically falling living standards within the working class, were followed by lengthy question and answer sessions. The serious response from the young people, high school and university students, workers, professionals and retirees in attendance indicates that broad sections of the population are being politicised by Trump’s election and are seeking a perspective to oppose social reaction, war and militarism.

Chairing the Sydney meeting, SEP assistant national secretary Cheryl Crisp welcomed the more than 100 people in attendance and explained that others were participating online from the Philippines, Japan and various Australian cities, including Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane.

SEP national secretary James Cogan told the meeting that Trump’s election was a “dangerous and transformative development” in US and international politics. “Before he even takes office, Trump has signalled a major escalation in military tensions with China, posing even more starkly the warnings our world party, the ICFI, has made about the danger of a third world war,” he said.

After reviewing the socially regressive record and fascistic outlook of some of the individuals Trump has selected for his incoming administration, Cogan debunked mass media and pseudo-left claims that Trump’s victory reflected a rightward turn by the American working class.

The essential factor in the election outcome, the speaker

emphasised, was social inequality, not race, gender or other secondary issues. “The truth behind Trump’s victory is not that millions of American workers are racists but that they were so alienated from the Democratic Party, hostile to the policies of the Obama administration and sick of war that they either didn’t vote at all or, in some cases, chose Trump as the ‘lesser evil.’”

Cogan explained that the principal responsibility for Trump winning the presidency lay with the Democratic Party. Its right-wing, anti-working class and militarist program had produced a virtual collapse in working class support for the organisation after eight years of the Obama administration, he said.

The speaker also reviewed the pernicious role played by Bernie Sanders. He pointed out that Sanders—having declared himself a socialist and an opponent of Wall Street and the ultra-rich—won some 13 million votes in the primaries but then endorsed Clinton.

“The real motive behind his campaign,” Cogan said, “was not to oppose the agenda imposed under Obama, but to try to prevent a break by millions of ordinary people from the Democratic Party.”

Cogan explained that Trump, who postured as “anti-establishment” and offered demagogic promises about improving the conditions of workers, was able to benefit from the mass disaffection with the Democratic Party.

This was a global phenomenon, Cogan continued, reflected in the mass repudiation of long-established parties and political structures by millions of ordinary people in country after country. He pointed to the Brexit vote in Britain, the collapse in electoral support for the Labor and Liberal-National Coalition parties in the Australian elections last July, and the overwhelming “no” vote in the recent Italian referendum.

“Masses of people are hostile to the attacks on their living standards, jobs and basic rights,” Cogan said, “but do not yet understand that the source of the social crisis they confront is the failure of the capitalist system.” The rise of Trump and his socially-retrogressive and militarist “America First” program was not an aberration, he insisted, but part of increasingly reckless attempts by the US ruling elite to overcome its economic decline through trade war threats and military force. In order to understand this process, he continued, it was

necessary to study the historic nature of the crisis of the capitalist profit system and its impact on the US and around the world, particularly since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991.

“After 25 years of war and 15 years of the ‘war on terror,’ Trump’s election marks the definitive end of the post-World War II order; the final repudiation by the US ruling class of the international mechanisms through which it both dominated the globe and sought to regulate economic and political relations,” the speaker said.

Cogan concluded his report by citing Leon Trotsky’s assessment of the political and economic contradictions that faced US imperialism in 1928, just before the Wall Street crash and the Great Depression.

“The United States,” Trotsky wrote, “will seek to overcome and extricate herself from her difficulties and maladies primarily at the expense of Europe, regardless of whether this occurs in Asia, Canada, South America, Australia or Europe itself, or whether this takes place peacefully or through war ... A major crisis in the US will strike the tocsin for new wars and revolutions.”

The Trump administration, Cogan said, would rapidly intensify the class struggle in the US and internationally and elevate the danger of a catastrophic world war. He emphasised that there was no national solution to economic devastation and war.

“The essential question is the expansion and development of a revolutionary international movement based on the working class and fighting to end capitalism and establish world socialism,” Cogan concluded, making a strong appeal for those in attendance to join the SEP.

Cogan’s report provoked a range of questions on whether the Trump administration was a fascist regime; the danger of military dictatorship in the US; and whether increases in US military spending, paid for by cuts in social programs, would deepen the political crisis there. There were also questions about the role of the pseudo-left and identity politics.

Commenting on the reactionary and divisive nature of identity politics, Cogan said, “The SEP fights for the rights of all sections of the working class—the right to a decent job and living standards, housing, healthcare and education—irrespective of a worker’s gender, racial background or sexual preference. Identity politics splits working people along multiple lines, preventing them from fighting the source of their oppression, the capitalist system, as a unified political force.”

Speaking about the character of a Trump administration, Cogan explained that, in contrast to Germany in the 1930s, Trump did not rest on a mass fascist movement, but warned about the political dangers of such a movement developing. He said the Trump administration would intensify social and anti-democratic attacks on American workers as it introduced trade war measures against its international rivals and moved to militarily confront Russia and China.

In Melbourne there were questions about the SEP’s attitude

to the anti-Trump protests following the presidential vote; America’s Electoral College system; and Trump’s position on Taiwan and the threat of war in Asia. In Brisbane audience members raised the importance of the Chinese working class and the necessity to unite with them in the fight against war.

Significantly, at all three meetings, audience members asked questions about the prospects and necessity for socialist revolution. In Sydney, one asked: “How likely is socialist revolution in the US and how important is that in the struggle for world socialism?”

Cogan responded: “The revolutionary overthrow of capitalism in the US is essential to the prospect of world socialism and is essential to the prevention of another world war ...

“Our party does not offer any guarantees or an easy political road—the working class faces monumental struggles against a formidable military and intelligence apparatus. But the working class, armed with a socialist and internationalist program, is the most powerful class in society.

“The eruption of a revolutionary crisis in the US is inevitable,” he continued, “but so is the explosion of mass struggles in countries all around the world, including in Australia. The critical issue is the building of our party to lead the working class to power.”

Concluding the discussion in Sydney, the chair, Cheryl Crisp, emphasised that it was necessary to “approach all phenomena from a historical standpoint” and quoted from the preface to *A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony 1990–2016*, David North’s latest collection of essays, articles and lectures.

“[T]he Marxist method of analysis examines events not as a sequence of isolated episodes, but as moments in the unfolding of a broader historical process. This historically oriented approach serves as a safeguard against an impressionistic response to the latest political developments. It recognizes that the *essential* cause of an event is rarely apparent at the moment of its occurrence.”

The seriousness of the questions raised at the SEP meetings points to a growing recognition that workers in every country will confront tumultuous political events, that there is a growing danger of world war and that a new international political perspective is needed. Significant layers of students and youth are beginning to grapple with the Socialist Equality Party’s revolutionary socialist program. This was also reflected in the generous response to collections for the SEP’s monthly fund at the meetings, which totalled more than \$3,600, and in the sales of Marxist literature.



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