

Australia: SEP meetings discuss international socialist program required to prevent war

Our reporters
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During the past two weekends, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held public meetings in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, Australia's largest cities, to discuss the growing danger of nuclear war.

Entitled, "Stop the drive to world war! For peace, equality and socialism!" the meetings were attended by workers, professionals, youth, university students and retirees.

SEP and IYSSE speakers explained the economic and political background to the Trump administration's recent reckless military provocations—in Syria, Afghanistan and against North Korea; the escalating drive towards global military conflict, and the escalating attacks on jobs, living standards and social rights in every country.

On May 14, SEP national secretary James Cogan and University of Melbourne IYSSE president Evrim Ekin spoke at the Melbourne meeting while SEP assistant national secretary Cheryl Crisp addressed the Brisbane event. Nick Beams, a member of the WSWs international editorial board, and IYSSE spokesperson, Oscar Grenfell, spoke at the Sydney meeting on May 7.

James Cogan began his address by pointing to the possibility of military conflict, including the use of nuclear weapons, between North Korea and the US. He warned that US President Trump, now embroiled in bitter conflicts with powerful sections of the American establishment and the military intelligence state apparatus, could attempt to cling to power by plunging North Asia into war. "This is the daily reality in which we now live," he said.

Cogan detailed the background to the increasingly complex geopolitical tensions around the world—the 25 years of US-led interventions in the Balkans, Middle East, Central Asia, North Africa and the military build-up against China.

"War is not the outcome of evil intentions or any other subjective motivation, but the outcome of the contradictions of capitalist society itself," the speaker said. The rise of war and militarism, he continued, was in stark contrast to growing antiwar sentiment. Referring to a recent European survey, he said that young people were not consumed with militarism and nationalist hatreds, or committed to the continuation of capitalism.

The problem, however, the speaker said, was that a genuine socialist and revolutionary perspective and leadership had not yet been taken up by significant sections of the working class. All the political work of our world movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International, he explained, was directed towards overcoming that political contradiction.

"We have to educate the working class by patiently explaining what the real causes of war are, and therefore why it cannot be prevented by the methods of protest and appeals to reason. It can only be prevented, in the final analysis, by socialist revolution.

Cogan reviewed the political lessons of the 1917 Russian Revolution. Under the leadership of Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks, the Russian working class had taken political power, demonstrating to the international working class that the barbarism of World War I, and the capitalist system itself, could be ended and the conditions created for a new stage in mankind's historical progress.

At the Sydney meeting, Oscar Grenfell detailed the growing government attacks on students, youth and welfare recipients along with the promotion of militarism. This campaign involved "rewriting history," he said, a process well underway in all the imperialist powers, especially in Germany and Japan.

Grenfell attacked the Australian political establishment's ongoing multi-million-dollar celebration of the country's involvement in WWI, and noted the government and media silence about the mass opposition to conscription and war that had developed throughout the country during that catastrophic war.

"The anti-war movement intersected with an upsurge of the working class, culminating in a six-week strike, in August, 1917, involving more than 100,000 workers in New South Wales and Victoria. The capitalist press responded by warning darkly of foreign agitators and the dangers of revolution," Grenfell explained.

Nick Beams told the Sydney meeting that the immense dangers facing humanity could not be resolved by "quick-fix methods." The global protests in 2003 against the Iraq War, he said, were diverted into appeals to one or another set of capitalist politicians.

"It is not possible to pressure capitalist politicians to stop military conflict, because war is a product of the capitalist profit and nation-state system over which they preside. The insanity of the bourgeois politicians is the political expression of something more fundamental: the objective insanity of an outlived socio-economic order."

Beams detailed the historical emergence of the capitalist nation-state system, the growth of the world economy and the seizure by the great powers of colonies, spheres of influence and resources on a global scale. "Each of the capitalist great powers sought to establish itself as the preeminent global world power. But in doing so, they came into conflict with each other, and world war was the

outcome.”

In 1914, the working class had to develop its own solution to this historical problem,” Beams said, “by fighting for, as an immediate practical program of the day, the perspective of world socialist revolution—the overthrow of the capitalist profit and nation-state system.” This was the perspective that guided the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution in 1917, and, the speaker insisted, it is the same task that is posed before the international working class today.

Commenting on the current rapid slide towards imperialist war, Beams pointed out that sections of Australia’s political elite had raised concerns about the political dangers of involvement in a US-led war against China. South Australian senator Nick Xenophon and others, had “stepped forward to try to head off an anti-war movement and to ensure that, if it does develop, then it remains firmly within the confines of bourgeois politics.”

Xenophon had called for a more “independent” foreign policy, Beams said. That a political manoeuvre within the existing capitalist framework could avert war, however, was a dangerous illusion.

The integration of Australia into the US war machine, Beams continued, was not a matter of a parliamentary vote but an established fact, with interoperability between the US and Australian military already underway and military facilities in Australia involved in minute-by-minute operations of the US military forces.

“A break from the US war drive,” Beams said, could not be achieved through a change of foreign policy orientation but only through the complete overturn of the existing social and economic relations, and the state structures which rested upon them—in short by means of socialist revolution, not only in Australia but on an international scale.”

The decisive political question, Beams concluded, was the building of the revolutionary party. He appealed to all those in attendance to join the SEP

Extended discussions followed the reports at all three meetings and over \$2,300 was donated to the SEP’s monthly fund. Questions were asked about the deepening conflict between the Trump administration on the one hand, and the Democratic Party and military-intelligence apparatus on the other; about the details of North Korean missile testing; and about the French elections.

In Brisbane, questions included the betrayal of the Spanish revolution by Stalinism in 1936-39; the emergence of “left” political candidates—such as Bernie Sanders in the US and Jeremy Corbyn in Britain, who both claimed to be socialist; and the role of the IYSSE internationally following its victories at Humboldt University in Berlin, in exposing Professor Jorg Baberowski and other advocates of German militarism.

WSWS reporters spoke to participants after the meetings. **Tegan**, an unemployed design studies graduate, attended the Melbourne meeting. It was her first SEP event.

“The drive toward war is alarming,” she said. “The meeting today gave me a broad political and socialist perspective that I was looking for—a deeper understanding that I was hoping to get out of this meeting. It has inspired me to understand more and keep reading. I guess I understand that I don’t know enough and

therefore I need to keep reading.

“When Trump was elected as president I didn’t think it was going to be as bad as it is. A lot of what he said he was going to do he is actually now doing, which is quite frightening.

“I thought the figures that were given by the speaker, on the opinions of young people whether they think banks rule the world, or are politicians corrupt and so on, were great, and a positive surprise. It shows young people want change.

“I think revolution is necessary and I don’t understand why there isn’t more people involved at the meeting. There is so much social inequality. Probably a while ago I wouldn’t have been interested, but now I am trying to make sense of the world and I do want to see change.”

Babak, a young engineering student from Iran attended the Sydney meeting. “I came to the meeting to be familiar with this discussion and the options we have, and what we can do to prevent war,” he said.

“Much of the information we are given by the media might be a lie. For example, the [SEP] presenter told us that George Bush told a lot of lies to start a war. So why should we believe them?”

The meeting, he continued, “opened my eyes to the realities—not to just trust the political statements but to do some research on history and know the purpose behind the official statements. War comes out of capitalism itself ... If we can change the whole system, definitely we should do it. I totally agree it is not a good system. It is against humanity and all the values that we have and is just based on the profits of the wealthy people.”

Referring to the US-led attacks in the Middle East, he said: “We have been victims of these incorrect decisions by the prime ministers and presidents. They invaded Iraq and started a big war just because of their own profits.

“Even now, they have come into Syria on the pretext of protecting the Syrian people. They have brought their planes and everything, but they are actually fighting against the legal government of Syria, not the terrorists ...

“Iran is also on the target list. I don’t know what is going to happen to my friends and family there. It seems to depend on the decisions of one mad person, a multi-billionaire who knows nothing about any of the problems, but only thinks about making more money. But it is the whole system that made him president, with the support of the Pentagon and Wall Street ... It is not a correct system.”



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