

Australian Senate formally denounces commemorations of the Russian Revolution

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At the beginning of this year, on January 3, a statement published on the WSWS noted: “A specter is haunting world capitalism: the specter of the Russian revolution.”

Confirmation of that assessment came in the Australian Senate on October 18, when Senator Cory Bernardi, head of the Australian Conservatives since he split from the governing Liberal Party earlier in the year, and one of the most extreme right-wingers in the parliament, rose to his feet to move a resolution rejecting any celebration of the Russian Revolution.

It read:

That the Senate

(a) takes note of an event scheduled to occur on 26 October 2017 at the Australian National University entitled “Celebrating the 1917 Russian Revolution,” organised by Socialist Alternative;

(b) observes that this year marks 100 years since that revolution, which led to a litany of human rights abuses and approximately 10 million deaths;

(c) notes that the 1917 revolution promoted Leninist and Marxist teaching to a broader world; and

(d) rejects any assertion that the teachings of Lenin or Marx should be celebrated in a liberal democracy.

The motion was not debated; it was immediately put to the vote. It was carried 28-26, with a number of absent senators failing to take part. Government members supported it, together with Nick Xenophon, a right-wing nationalist senator on the cross benches. Labor and the Greens, clearly keen to disassociate themselves from Bernardi, voted in opposition.

As a man steeped in some of the most reactionary dogmas of so-called religious “teachings,” perhaps Bernardi thought that an incantation in the Senate might help exorcise the spectre of the world-shattering events of 100 years ago: in vain.

Material forces, far more powerful than the doctrines of Bernardi and his ilk, are motivating the disgust and hatred felt by millions towards the political establishment and the growing interest in socialism, history and revolution, especially among young people.

Bernardi is not unaware of this. Last year he spent three months in the United States, during the US presidential election campaign, where he was clearly invigorated by Trump’s victory. However, speaking to the *Sydney Morning Herald* upon his return last December, Bernardi made special mention of the support received by the self-proclaimed “socialist” Bernie Sanders. He recounted that he had been shown polling indicating that “50 percent of young Americans believe socialism or communism is a preferable system to capitalism.”

Recognition that such beliefs can rapidly transform into a powerful socialist movement is what preoccupies Senator Bernardi. That is why he feels the need to elevate the Big Lie about the Russian Revolution to the level of a motion in the Australian parliament. This is the conception that the revolution inexorably passed from the conquest of political power by the working class to the gulags of Stalinism. And it is not only promulgated by frothing right-wingers, such as Bernardi himself, but has become the dominant theme of liberal and “left” historians as well.

Without the slightest concern for historical truth, these historical falsifiers simply pass over the actual nature of the revolution—the greatest mass movement of the working class and oppressed masses in history—and the subsequent intransigent struggle waged by genuine Marxists, under the leadership of Leon Trotsky, against its Stalinist degeneration.

A rather different attitude prevailed in 1967, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the revolution. Then, it was widely acknowledged, at least beyond virulent anti-communist circles, that, whatever one’s attitude towards it, the revolution was an important chapter in world history, with significant and continuing contemporary relevance.

Today, the positions espoused by Bernardi have become all-pervasive, above all, among “left” academic and political circles. What is to account for this shift?

Its source is the growing fear of a rebellion from below, produced by the putrefaction and decay of so-called “liberal democracy,” and the emergence, once again, of the objective material conditions that gave rise to October 1917 in Russia.

A quarter-century ago, the Stalinist apparatus, which had usurped political power from the working class and betrayed the revolution, carried out its last great service to world

imperialism when it liquidated the Soviet Union and restored capitalism.

This was greeted with a wave of triumphalism and celebration throughout the bourgeois world, summed up in the claim by the American academic Francis Fukuyama that the dissolution of the USSR represented the “end of history.”

By this, Fukuyama did not mean that historical events would no longer occur, or that no further conflicts would arise. Rather, he meant that history had demonstrated that no existential or inherent challenge any longer existed to capitalism, the “free market” and liberal democracy.

The so-called Marxist “meta-narrative,” which saw the Russian revolution as arising out of the contradictions of the capitalist system, signifying the beginning of the transition to socialism on a global scale, was declared dead and buried. Now, freed from its nemesis, capitalism would lead mankind to a new era of peace, democracy and social progress.

A quarter-century on, what has been the result? Continuous bloody wars, initiated by the United States, the so-called leader of the “free world,” as it seeks to maintain its global dominance. These conflagrations threaten to culminate in another world war, which could be triggered in any one of a number of flashpoints, including the Middle East, North Korea, Russia or China. The possible nuclear consequences would see the destruction of human civilisation itself.

At the same time, the operations of the “free market” have set off a chain of economic and financial disasters, each one more serious than the last. The world capitalist economy, dominated by giant finance houses and corporations, and presided over by an ultra-rich oligarchy, functions as a giant vacuum cleaner, sucking up all available resources for the exclusive benefit of huge corporations and billionaire oligarchs.

Social inequality has reached historically unprecedented proportions. Eight billionaires now own more wealth than half of the world’s seven billion people.

Such deepening social and class polarisation is incompatible with democratic rights. That is why, in every country, the political landscape is dominated by the emergence of ever more authoritarian forms of rule—the arming of the forces of the state with new and sweeping draconian powers, the increased militarisation of society, and ever more pervasive censorship.

In short, all the conditions that led to the revolution of 1917, and drove the working class to take political power, have returned with a vengeance on a global scale.

Herein lies the reason for Senator Bernardi’s denunciation of the Russian revolution. It represents an attempt to bury the only genuine and historically viable perspective—world socialist revolution, initiated in 1917—under lies and falsifications.

But there is an obvious contradiction in Bernardi’s motion. If liberal democracy were in such a strong position, instead of disintegrating, why would he feel compelled to take to the floor of parliament to try to defend it?

Moreover, within his motion lies an implicit recognition that

words alone may not prove sufficient. His rejection of “any assertion that the teachings of Lenin or Marx should be celebrated in a liberal democracy” contains the veiled threat that they should not be tolerated either, and should, therefore, be expunged, censored and criminalised.

The senator has not arrived at that position yet, but it is the next logical step.

In the meantime, he carefully seeks to deflect attention away from the only tendency on the planet that bases itself on the political and theoretical foundations of the Russian Revolution, seeking to advance the struggle for world socialism in the international working class: the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Throughout 2017, the ICFI and its Australian section, the Socialist Equality Party, have placed the celebration and commemoration of the October revolution at the very centre of our political work, with lectures, articles and analyses produced on a daily basis. Bernardi, however, chose to hang his motion on an event called by Socialist Alternative, a component of the pseudo-left milieu that works to tie workers and young people to the pro-capitalist Labor and trade union apparatuses. The ICFI and the *World Socialist Web Site*, the only representatives of genuine Marxism, are the great unmentionables in Australian and world politics, for fear that the scientific socialist perspective we advance is becoming increasingly attractive.

The WSWS concluded its statement on the Russian revolution last January by explaining that in “confronting the great problems of this epoch it is necessary to study that historical event and assimilate its lessons” and that the most appropriate way to celebrate the centenary was to join and build the ICFI as the world party of socialist revolution.

This is the only way to transform the specter haunting the ruling classes, and their parliamentary representatives, into a material force, capable of overthrowing the old order and completing the task, on a world scale, that was begun, in Russia, one hundred years ago.



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