

Australia: Socialist Equality Party holds successful meetings on Russian Revolution

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (Australia) held well-attended meetings in Melbourne, Newcastle and Brisbane during the past fortnight to commemorate the centenary of the 1917 Russian Revolution and explain its contemporary relevance.

The meetings are part of centenary events being organised in North America, Europe, Sri Lanka, India and New Zealand organised by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement, and publisher of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Entitled “100 years on: The significance of the 1917 Russian Revolution for today,” the Australian meetings, which involved extended reports by leading party members accompanied by audio visual presentations, provoked a range of thoughtful questions from the workers, students and youth in attendance. These included numerous questions on the revolution itself, the danger of nuclear war and the SEP’s anti-war program. Intense discussions continued on these and other issues after the meetings ended.

Over 50 people attended the Melbourne meeting on November 26, including university and high school students, teachers, health workers, artists and retirees. It was addressed by Will Morrow, a member of SEP national committee, and SEP national secretary James Cogan.

Cogan told the meeting that the Russian Revolution was the most progressive social and political event of the 20th century. It had powerfully demonstrated that “the working class, providing it has been consciously prepared and is politically guided by a genuine Marxist leadership, can be transformed into an immense material force capable of achieving revolutionary change.”

Cogan pointed out that the revolution was not the outcome of national factors:

“World War I and the Russian Revolution represented the responses of antagonistic classes—the capitalist class and the working class—to the epoch of imperialism... This epoch is defined by the inability of capitalism to resolve the contradictions between world economy and national-state divisions, and between private ownership and socialised production by the working class.

“The contradictions that propel the ruling classes toward war among themselves, and to suppress the working class of their own countries, also generate the impulses that propel workers in all countries into struggle against their own capitalists.”

The speaker warned that all the factors that had produced WWI and WWII—the private ownership of the means of production, the struggle between rival capitalist powers for control of markets, resources, colonies, profits and strategic interests—were present in the contemporary situation and leading to another world war.

Such a catastrophe, he continued, could only be prevented and humanity taken forward by ending capitalism and establishing a world planned socialist economy, under the democratic control of the working class.

Cogan explained that this perspective required the construction of a unified international revolutionary Bolshevik-type party and a detailed study of the Russian Revolution and the political program, developed by Lenin and Trotsky, upon which it was based. It also demanded the ongoing political exposure of those who falsely claimed that the Bolsheviks lacked popular support and that the Stalinist bureaucracy, which emerged in the Soviet Union after the October Revolution, was not an aberration but an “inevitable” product of the revolution.

The ICFI categorically rejected these historical lies, Cogan said, explaining the mass working-class character of the Russian Revolution, the defeat of working class revolutions in Europe and the economic isolation of the workers’ state that had produced Stalinism and its nationalist repudiation of Marxist internationalism.

“In all its policies, both in regard to the international situation and within the Soviet Union, the Trotskyist opposition advanced a clear, unambiguous alternative to Stalinism, Cogan said.

The speaker told the meeting that the only political movement that today advanced the Marxist program that had led the Russian Revolution, was the ICFI and urged all those in attendance to study its revolutionary perspective and join

and build it as the leadership of the international working class.

The Newcastle and Brisbane meetings were held on December 3. Nick Beams, former SEP national secretary and leader of the Trotskyist movement for more than 40 years, was the key speaker at Newcastle, preceded by Max Newman, a member of the SEP national committee, while SEP member Gary Alvernia spoke in Brisbane, followed by the main speaker, Linda Tenenbaum, former SEP assistant national secretary.

Beams began by raising the possibility that the majority of the audience likely knew little or nothing about the Russian Revolution and its significance, and asked, rhetorically, “Why is this?” He replied, “It is not your fault, but the outcome of a systematic campaign by the ruling class and their ideologists in the mass media and universities to either suppress any knowledge of the revolution, or ... to bury it beneath a mountain of lies, slanders and falsifications.”

Beams went on to expose some of these lies and slanders by detailing the actual role of the Bolshevik Party in educating and mobilising the working class, the nature of the complex political problems and issues that it faced, and the role of Lenin and Trotsky in providing the necessary leadership to overthrow the capitalist regime.

Beams stressed the critical role of the revolutionary party in the historical process. “Without a prepared cadre, the working class cannot take political power. This is the significance of the work of the SEP in building that leadership.”

In answer to a question likening revolutions to biological mutations, Beams explained, “Just as Charles Darwin discovered the laws of evolution in the natural world, so Marx uncovered the laws of the development of society... and it is made up of living, conscious, human beings, who make decisions,” unlike rats. Revolutions, he continued, resulted from conflicts between the growth of the productive forces and the social relations within which they have developed.

In Brisbane, Linda Tenenbaum provided a detailed overview of the Russian revolution—from February to October 1917—and the strategic significance of the intense political struggles waged by Lenin inside the Bolshevik party that were critical in preparing the working class for the seizure of power.

She reviewed Lenin’s intransigent insistence on demarcating the independent internationalist political orientation of the working class from every form of nationalism and opportunism, and the unique contribution made by Trotsky, in his theory of permanent revolution, to the perspective that guided the socialist revolution in October—regarded by Lenin and Trotsky as the opening chapter in the world revolution.

A range of questions was discussed in Brisbane. These included how socialist ideas were developed in Russia and circulated amongst Russian workers in the years prior to the revolution, the relationship between the working class and the peasantry, and why art is such an important component in the development of social consciousness and human empathy.

A lively discussion also developed over the political agenda behind the media’s sexual witch-hunt against prominent artists, and its recent extension to the publication of unidentified and unsubstantiated allegations against acclaimed Australian actor Geoffrey Rush.

While it is not possible to detail all the important issues raised and discussed at the SEP meetings, the audiences at all three were deeply engaged throughout.

One indication of the serious and appreciative response was reflected in donations of more than \$2,600 to the SEP and the purchase of more than \$300 of Marxist literature, including several copies of *Why Study the Russian Revolution?*

The final “100 years on: The significance of the 1917 Russian Revolution for today,” meetings in Australia and New Zealand will be held in Wellington, the New Zealand capital, and in Sydney on December 14 and 17 respectively.

All those looking for a serious discussion on the Russian Revolution and the key political tasks facing the international class today are encouraged to attend.

Wellington

Thursday, December 14, 6.00 p.m.

Russell Keown House
Corner of Laings Road and Queens Drive
Lower Hutt
\$5/\$3

Sydney

Sunday, December 17, 2.00 p.m.

Petersham Town Hall
107 Crystal St
Petersham
\$7/\$5



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