

Resolutions of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) Fourth National Congress

The SEP and the Political Independence of the Working Class

20 April 2018

The following text is the first of four resolutions passed at the Fourth National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) held in Sydney from March 30 to April 2, 2018 (see: Resolutions 2, 3, 4). Greetings to the congress were delivered by delegates from Socialist Equality Parties in the US, Europe and Sri Lanka and the Socialist Equality Group in New Zealand. The incoming national committee re-elected James Cogan SEP national secretary, Cheryl Crisp assistant national secretary and Peter Symonds World Socialist Web Site national editor.

1. The decades-long struggle by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) to defend the perspective of world socialist revolution, against all forms of nationalism and opportunism, is intersecting with the development of an international revolutionary movement of the working class. The same contradictions that led to the global economic breakdown in 2008, and which are driving the ruling elites into great power conflict, have generated the impulses that are propelling masses of workers and youth into struggle against intolerable living conditions, the escalating assault on their democratic rights and the threat of a third world war.

2. The ICFI upholds the historic revolutionary role of the working class, against all forms of anti-Marxism and pseudo-left politics. It also upholds the theoretical understanding, which was developed to its highest level by the Bolshevik Party in Russia, that internationalist and socialist consciousness must be brought into the working class by the revolutionary Marxist movement.

3. Without the perspective and leadership provided by the ICFI and its sections, the working class cannot establish its political independence from the capitalist class, take political power, and undertake the necessary socialist reorganisation of world economy to meet human need, not private profit. The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is responsible for forging the political independence of the working class, through a continuous fight to expose and demarcate it from every political tendency that seeks to subordinate it to the continuation of outmoded capitalist property relations and nation-state divisions.

4. The situation in Australia is marked by extreme political volatility and growing class conflict. The hollowed-out and debt-laden Australian economy, which relies on exports to China, financial speculation and foreign investment inflows, is among the most vulnerable to the global impact of trade war and geostrategic tensions. For 35 years, successive Labor and Liberal-National Party Coalition governments, aided and abetted by the trade unions, have presided over the shattering of the past social reforms won by the working class. In pursuit of “international competitiveness” and profitability, the financial and corporate elite and its defenders have destroyed entire sectors of manufacturing industry and

employment, and inflicted levels of social inequality, deprivation and poverty not seen since the 1930s. The alignment of Australian imperialism with its US ally directly threatens to embroil the country in a war on the Korean Peninsula and, ultimately, a military confrontation with China.

5. The SEP must prepare for the eruption of working-class resistance to the danger of war and the consequences of ongoing economic, political and social upheaval. This is already indicated by developments in the United States, where the mass politicisation of young people has emerged simultaneously with an expanding wave of working-class struggle, which is bringing workers into open conflict with the political establishment and the trade unions.

6. The framework of parliamentary democracy in Australia is breaking down under the weight of immense external pressures and internal social antagonisms. Since at least the 2007 election, official politics has been wracked by shocks and instability, including the unprecedented ousting of three elected prime ministers by their own governments, and the no less unprecedented use of the High Court to carry out a nationalist purge of members of parliament entitled to dual citizenship. The current Coalition government of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, which clings to office with a one-seat majority, is beset by factional divisions that threaten to bring about its collapse. Whatever party or coalition forms the next government, it will continue the austerity agenda of the ruling class. At the same time, there are escalating tendencies toward authoritarian forms of rule.

7. The SEP will respond by intensifying its fight to build the party as the new leadership of the working class. This will include increased initiatives in the struggle against war and Internet censorship, political interventions in industrial and social struggles, the expansion of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) on university campuses, in high schools and, above all, in working class areas, as well as aggressive campaigns by SEP candidates in forthcoming state and federal elections.

8. The experiences of the ICFI and its sections over recent years demonstrate the potential for the rapid expansion of its political influence and the readership of the *World Socialist Web Site*. In Australia, consistent political and practical work to win teachers to a socialist perspective, against the collaboration of the trade unions in the ongoing destruction of public education and teachers’ conditions, led to the establishment in October 2017 of the Committee For Public Education (CFPE). In the coming period, the party will make a conscious political orientation, along similar lines, to health, transport and warehouse distribution workers, as well as to other decisive sections of the working class, such as mining, steel, energy, postal and telecommunications workers.

9. In every intervention, the SEP will reveal the commonality of the conditions facing workers in Australia with those of workers around the

world. The ability of the ruling class to contain the working class, by granting limited reforms within the framework of capitalism and the nation-state system, has been shattered by the globalisation of production. The party will bring into all the struggles of the working class the necessity for their unification across national borders, on the basis of a socialist and internationalist perspective.

10. The fight for the international unity of the working class and opposition to all manifestations of anti-immigrant sentiment are paramount. The political and media establishment is consciously stoking racism and xenophobia against refugees and immigrant communities from the Middle East, Africa and China. This is part of the ideological justification for Australian involvement in imperialist intrigues and wars. At the same time, it is aimed at dividing the working class and diverting it from the real cause of the social crisis, the capitalist system.

11. The SEP unequivocally defends the right of all workers to live and work in whatever part of the world they choose, with full citizenship rights. All border controls and immigration restrictions must be abolished. The issues that face workers stem from the global failure of capitalism and can only be resolved through the unified action of the international working class.

12. The SEP rejects the positions of the pro-capitalist environmental movement that “over-population” and “over-consumption” are the causes of climate change. The degradation of the environment is the outcome of the subordination of economic and social life to the irrational pursuit of profit by the financial and corporate oligarchy. The solution to global warming is the rational, socialist planning of the world’s productive forces, especially energy generation and transport, under the democratic control of the working class.

13. The fight for their social and democratic rights will compel workers to establish new, independent organisations of political and industrial struggle. Globalised production has transformed all the old reformist parties and trade unions from organisations that once fought for limited gains within capitalism, into open enforcers of the corporate demands for “productivity” and “international competitiveness.” In the 1980s, the Labor Party repudiated any perspective of social reform, while the trade unions function as an industrial police force for the capitalist state and the employers.

14. In the workplaces, the SEP advocates the formation of democratically-elected, rank-and-file committees, in direct opposition to the trade unions, to fight for control over all decisions relating to jobs, wages and working conditions. In every working-class area, Action Committees are urgently needed to launch a political offensive for the social rights of the working class, ranging from education, health and aged care, to affordable housing and a healthy and safe environment. The struggles waged by such committees can only be sustained to the extent that they are guided by the socialist and internationalist perspective advanced by the SEP.

15. The genuinely democratic, mass organisations established by the working class in its revolutionary struggle against capitalism will become the foundation of a workers’ government, which will expropriate the banks and major corporations from private hands and carry out a far-reaching redistribution of wealth, as part of the perspective of world socialist revolution.

16. The SEP will intensify its political exposure of all the pseudo-left tendencies. Representing the interests of a privileged upper middle class layer that is organically hostile to the working class, they promote a mixture of identity politics and claims that reforms can still be won by pressuring the unions to “fight,” or through the parliamentary system. The populist rhetoric of British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn is portrayed by organisations such as Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative as proof that a Labor government in Australia can be pressured to the “left.” The class role of pseudo-left politics is to

subordinate the working class to the existing capitalist order and political establishment.

17. The SEP will pay particular attention to overcoming the separation, created by the proponents of identity politics, between the fight against the horrifying legacy of oppression suffered by Australia’s Aboriginal population and the struggles of the working class as a whole. For decades, indigenous communities have been told that “white society,” not capitalism, is responsible for their conditions, and that solutions can be found through protests and moral appeals to the capitalist state. The outcome for Aboriginal workers and youth speaks for itself. Land rights, the establishment of state-funded lands’ councils, and cynical official expressions of “reconciliation” and “apology” have done nothing to address the plight of the majority, which has continued to worsen. Rather, the central effect of identity politics has been to elevate a privileged indigenous minority and entrench its selfish interests. The social and democratic rights of the Aboriginal working class can only be achieved as part of a unified struggle of the entire working class, to establish a workers’ government and socialism.

18. At the very centre of the commemorations undertaken by the ICFI in 2017, to mark the centenary of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia, was the necessity for a Marxist political party, based on an international revolutionary perspective. The nine online lectures presented by the ICFI brought to bear and enriched all the strategic lessons drawn by the Trotskyist movement from the Bolshevik Party’s leadership of the first, and still only, successful socialist revolution by the working class.

19. The SEP will continue to educate its membership in these critical lessons and the entire heritage of the ICFI. It will commemorate the bicentenary of the birth of Karl Marx in 2018 in order to clarify, among the working class and youth, the essential analysis of scientific socialism. A central responsibility of the party is to make an increased contribution to the *World Socialist Web Site*, which, as the site stressed on February 14, 2018, marking the 20th anniversary of its publication, “has laid down firm political foundations for the renewal of the struggle for socialism in the 21st century.”

20. Significant recruitment into the SEP, on the basis of its revolutionary socialist and internationalist program, is essential for the growth of its political influence across the country and the expansion of the fight to build new sections of the ICFI in the Asia-Pacific region. The party will continue to work closely with the Socialist Equality Group in New Zealand, as it prepares theoretically and practically to seek affiliation to the ICFI.



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