

Australia: Important response to first IYSSE lectures on the 1949 Chinese Revolution

Our reporters
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth organisation of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), have held successful lectures in Brisbane, Newcastle, and Melbourne, titled, “Seventy years after the Chinese Revolution: How the struggle for socialism was betrayed.”

Delivered by Peter Symonds, national editor of the *World Socialist Web Site*, the lectures have been met with an important response from university students in the three cities. Students from Australia and around the world have attended, including groups of young Chinese people.

In his wide-ranging lecture, Symonds reviewed the historical and political lessons to be drawn from the Chinese Revolution. He explained that while the upheavals, which culminated in the 1949 declaration of the People’s Republic of China, united the country and ended its long subordination to the imperialist powers, it was not the working class that seized power, as had occurred in Russia in 1917. Instead, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) bureaucratic apparatus’s rule rested on peasant armies.

Deeply hostile to any movement of the proletariat, the regime’s reactionary Stalinist perspective of “socialism in one country” deformed the newly-created state from the outset. Symonds reviewed the significant history of struggle waged by the Trotskyist movement in China, and outlined the socialist and internationalist perspective for the working class today, in China and around the world.

The final lectures will be held at Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand) later today, and at Western Sydney University on October 9, University of New South Wales on October 16, and Macquarie University on October 17. We encourage *World Socialist Web Site* readers to attend. The event details are here.

After each of the initial lectures—at Griffith University in Brisbane, the University of Newcastle, University of Melbourne, and Victoria University—there were lively discussions and questions. Students asked for further detail on what had happened in China in 1949 and subsequently, on the history and legacy of the Trotskyist movement in China, on contemporary developments in Hong Kong, and on the internationalist and revolutionary perspective of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist party.

After the University of Melbourne lecture, where more than 60 people attended, nearly \$300 of Marxist literature was purchased, including multiple copies of Trotsky’s writings on China, the

pamphlet “Deng Xiaoping and the fate of the Chinese Revolution,” and the book *Why Study the Russian Revolution?*

Students and workers attending this first round of lectures spoke with WSWs reporters after each event.

A Chinese student, at Griffith University, told the WSWs: “The lecture about the Chinese Revolution and Chinese society was very precious. As a Chinese student, it also gave me a new perspective, although I am familiar with Chinese history. The Trotskyists’ work in the Chinese Revolution was deliberately ignored. Just as it was under Stalin in the Soviet Union, the Chinese Stalinist-Maoists erased the work done by the Chinese Trotskyists from history—as if they never existed.

“The filth toward the Trotskyists has not stopped. The Stalinists described the Trotskyists as ‘traitors of the nation,’ as Stalin did in the Soviet Union, and even suppressed the Trotskyist movement in the same way as the counter-revolutionaries. Therefore, we must stop the Stalinist lies! The history of the Stalinists’ betrayal of the revolution is a shameful page. Their lies have brought a deformed revolution to China. After the bureaucrats brought terrible disasters to the Chinese people, they turned China into a capitalist authoritarian state.”

The student concluded: “Today, the workers’ movement has once again ushered in the dawn. The mass struggle in Hong Kong has already lasted three months. Workers’ struggles are everywhere in mainland China. We must unite and turn to the real socialist revolution. We must break the lie of Stalinism, especially for the young Maoists who have begun to struggle. They are still full of the enthusiasm of the revolutionaries, but blinded by past lies. Therefore, we must understand how the revolution was betrayed by the Stalinist-Maoists.”

Theresa is a former University of Melbourne student with Chinese immigrant parents. “The Chinese Revolution is definitely a point of interest for me, both because of my background as well as for my interest in socialism,” she explained. “I have been meaning to study the history of revolutions, and the lecture has definitely provided an impetus to do that now.”

Theresa explained what she had learned from the lecture. “I wasn’t aware of the division between the nationalists versus the internationalists, so that was definitely an important point. I was not aware at all that there were Trotskyists in China. What was explained about what happened in 1949 and afterwards was definitely a huge shock to me. People talk more about how the [1917] Russian revolution failed, or was betrayed, but I’d never

heard about the betrayal of the Chinese Revolution. It is good to know that there was opposition from the Trotskyists. It gets you thinking—what path gets you towards international socialism, given the state of capitalism in China right now?”

Tom, a Chinese student at Monash University, attended the University of Melbourne lecture with a group of his friends, also from China.

“I think the lecture was very good,” he explained. “I heard information that I hadn’t learned about the working class. ‘Working class’ is a term that the CCP uses to control people in China—they sometimes claim that the working class is the leader of the Chinese people, and that the CCP is the representative of the working class. Now I know it is not like this. After this lecture, I have a new idea about this term working class—the working class has its role in the progress of society, in advancing political rights, legal and democratic rights.”

Mitchell, a chiropractor, attended the lecture in Newcastle after previously meeting the IYSSE at a climate change rally. “This lecture definitely answered questions for me,” he said. “You hear a lot about socialism failing all over the world, but it is a misconception because there is a difference between Stalinism and Trotskyism, which is basically the difference between nationalism and internationalism. If you look at our future, we have climate change and also the possibility of world war, and wealth inequality all over the world. For those of us who look at socialism as the solution, the historical clarification needs to be there so that we can meet some of these criticisms and refute them. We have to learn from the past, otherwise we will be doomed to make the same mistakes.”

Tony, a first year Arts student at Victoria University in Melbourne, also spoke of the importance of history.

“I am interested in history, but I don’t know too much about the politics or history of China,” he explained. “There was a lot in the lecture I am trying to put things together in my mind... I know a little about Trotsky and his role—I studied the Russian Revolution in high school. Marx always based his perspective on internationalism, and Stalin said no, we will worry just about Russia. I would like to become a historian. I think history is important. How history is studied in schools now is to put history in with social studies and the environment—teaching all these things under the umbrella of one subject. This is insane, what they don’t want is students developing critical thinking.”

James, a first year arts student at the University of Melbourne, said: “A lot of discussion about what is happening internationally is focused on what the United States is doing, which dwarfs everything else. Whenever China is raised, it is referred to as a ‘communist state’ and, therefore, used as a counterpoint against any ideas and action. This lecture was fantastic as it looked at the issue of China from a different angle—pointing out that it is not socialist, or a socialism that we want to strive for.”

Sylvia is from China and studies finance at the University of Melbourne. She told the WWS: “I found the lecture very interesting, but difficult as I don’t know this history even though I come from China. For me I don’t know these historical events very well. I know about the revolution in 1949; we have just had the military parade on the 70th anniversary in Beijing. At high

school we are given limited resources and knowledge about the Cultural Revolution. We have not discussed the Tiananmen Square [the 1989 massacre], I’m not sure why. Maybe there are benefits for the bureaucrats.”

Sylvia continued: “In China now, as discussed in the lecture, the gap between the rich and others is so great. In some of the poor regions people live in terrible poverty, in very bad conditions, they don’t have health care. This is really sad; I really empathise with them. The billionaires are kind of promoted as the icons in China, they are like celebrities.”

Yanmin is also a student from China at the University of Melbourne. He said: “The lecturer was very insightful and knowledgeable, and was very capable of explaining a whole bunch of complex events and affairs in an objective manner without any bias. Although some of the content was fundamental—as a Chinese person myself, I am familiar with a lot of it—what I am interested in is the perspective that was put forward. He analysed how socialism evolved and how it was betrayed in China, and how it is going to affect today’s world—for example, with the escalating tensions between China and the US. He also explained how the revolution in China was different to the revolution in Russia. I think that is a very important point. We know about the objective truths and facts in history, but what was different in the lecture was drawing lessons and seeing how different events interconnect.”

Yanmin also responded to information at the IYSSE literature table on persecuted publisher and journalist Julian Assange, now imprisoned in Britain and facing life imprisonment in the US for exposing war crimes. He stated that Assange “should be freed” and that “he is the main target of US imperialism because he exposed what was really going on in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places.”

Mujtaba, a business analytics student at Victoria University, is originally from Pakistan. “I found this lecture very informative,” he said. “It has given me new insights to think about, in particular the lessons of the Chinese Revolution. I will study more about it in future... I think socialist revolution should be fought for in Pakistan right now—the inequality there is very bad. There are so many poor people, on the one hand, but then there are fewer people who have power and are ruling over labour.”

Antony, a 21-year-old engineering student at the University of Melbourne, told the WWS: “I found the lecture very intense and informative; I learned a lot of things that I previously hadn’t even thought about at all. Hopefully it can help guide my opinions towards the future. I’m looking forward to seeing if Peter can speak again. I aligned with Peter’s opinion that if socialism could be attained through reformist measures this would have happened already—it seems to me like revolution is the only real remedy for the current situation.”



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