

Australian and New Zealand students speak after lecture on 70th anniversary of Chinese Revolution

Our reporters
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) recently concluded a successful series of lectures at university campuses across Australia and in New Zealand, on the 70th anniversary of the Chinese Revolution.

The text of the lecture by Peter Symonds, a member of the WSWs International Editorial Board, has been published on the WSWs. A video of his remarks has also been posted today.

In a wide-ranging presentation, Symonds stressed that the 1949 revolution could not be understood without an examination of the international betrayals of Stalinism, including of the 1925-27 Chinese Revolution. He explained that the state established in 1949, while enabling major social and industrial advances, was deformed from the outset by the Stalinist program of “socialism in one country.”

The speaker reviewed the restoration of capitalism by the CCP regime, beginning in the 1970s, and stressed that workers and youth in China and internationally could only advance their interests in the struggle against war and for social equality on the basis of the socialist and internationalist perspective of the Trotskyist movement.

David, a barista, attended the meeting at Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand. He said he had recently been reading about Lenin. “Communism and Marxism have always fascinated me. It has such a profound history, so I was interested to hear about the idea of China’s revolution being deformed from the beginning. I’d always had my suspicions that something wasn’t quite authentic about it.”

He was interested to learn about the Stalinist “two-stage theory” of revolution and the CCP’s attempts to form a coalition with the bourgeois Kuomintang. “I’ve always liked Trotsky as the opposition to Stalin; he seems to have

been the voice of reason,” David said.

He had been interested in revolutions since high school. “I think it was the images of people taking their lives into their own hands that really appealed to me, seeing the Chinese and the Russian people saying: ‘Right, we’re going to do something about our lives.’”

He noted the denunciations of socialism by right-wing politicians, saying “this growing fear and aggression” was a response to “legitimate and sincere dissatisfaction. I’ve travelled around and worked in orchards and apple-picking factories, so I’ve seen the way workers are being treated and the anger they feel. People working 12 hours a day, six days a week for the minimum wage.”

Markus, a biology student, came to the meeting after following the WSWs over recent months and signing up to the IYSSE club at VUW. He thought the lecture was “very accessible.”

“I was very interested to hear Peter acknowledge the demonizing of China and the conditioning of the New Zealand and Australian populations to establish the social environment that will endorse the military taking up arms against China. Obviously no one wants to see a war,” he said. “It’s awful and is encouraging a lot of racism.” Anti-Chinese propaganda in New Zealand “goes right back to the gold rush, which is as long as anyone who is not Maori has been in New Zealand.”

Markus agreed that Labour and the trade unions played a major role in this. He was totally opposed to blaming “foreigners” for escalating land and house prices which demonises people who are deemed to be “the other.” He said the growing anti-foreigner propaganda was “horrible for them.” “In my limited experience, it is not foreigners but the systemic inequities of capitalism which is responsible for all those things,” Markus said. “If any fingers need pointing it is at the capitalist system.”

Pervez, a law-student at Western Sydney University (WSU), said: “It was a very good lecture, because the issues it raised not only related to China, but to what is taking place globally. It addressed the question of what a real socialist perspective is, and how, after the revolutions of last century, we still have a capitalist world today.

“The real root ideas of socialism were not implemented in China from the bottom-up. I learnt that Trotskyism is internationalism, but Mao did not agree with that perspective. He followed Stalin. Both of them viewed things nationally and worked for the benefit of their own national bureaucracies.

“Now we see that today, China has become a big market for all of the imperialist countries. They go there to get the cheap labour. This shows that we still need to learn the real ideas of socialism today. If this happens, it would be beneficial for the whole working class.

“Nationalism is rising around the world. You just need to read any newspaper to see that nationalist slogans are being promoted in most of the countries of the world. Instead we should be looking at assisting the people who need help. In the name of nationalism, people are being shown greener pastures, but none of the real problems are being resolved.”

Patrick, a first-year student at WSU, said: “Despite my political leanings, I’ve never been to a political meeting before. The main thing I’m concerned about is democracy and I support socialism as being the best way of ensuring that democracy continues to be the primary method of rule.

“I like the idea that everyone should be socially equal and have equal safety. I don’t like the idea of abolishing welfare, or of places where a single individual has 1,000 times more wealth than an average worker because they happen to own a company or because they inherited a lot of money. I prefer all people having an equal opportunity.”

A student at the University of New South Wales said: “I had no idea about the Chinese Revolution. I was just curious. I didn’t really know there was one and I certainly didn’t know the links between the Russian revolution and the Chinese revolution.”

When asked why she thought it was important to study the revolution, the student responded: “To understand the world today. Things are shaped by history. There’s always a background.”

Asked about the difference between Trotsky and Stalin, the student said: “They were totally different. They were two completely different people, and wanted completely

different things. Stalin was a nationalist type of person and Trotsky more of an international type of person. This was the basis of his political action.”

Sid, an energy analyst, attended the UNSW meeting. He said that he was interested in how the history presented in the lecture could be “applied to the current political scenario, how we can project into the future to anticipate what’s going to happen. That would put us in the best position to build a movement today.

“From the lecture, I learnt that the Chinese Communist Party were fake in that they said they represented the working class but they really didn’t. They created a regime that represented the interests of their own bureaucracy.”

Asked about the current situation, Sid stated: “There’s only two options going forward and it’s going to be within our lifetime. There’s going to be universal basic income rolled out, or there’s going to be a revolution. Whether this revolution is going to be constructive or destructive I don’t know. It could be maybe honed by this party, to give it direction, and to prepare for what happens, to have a scaffold in place.

“There’s going to be a tipping point where 1 in 2 people aren’t employed, or 1 out of 5 people don’t go to work. You want to eat, so that’s when you have all these social tensions building up and snowballing into something else. Capitalism is a sure way of all of us dying. It incentivises non-compassion. Socialism on the other hand incentivises working together.

“I think it’s great that a movement like this exists, and it looks like it’s growing. It’s good that we get more people discussing this issue and waking people up to what’s happening in the background as they go about their day to day life. The main problem is capitalism, and what we do about that.”



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