# At IYSSE (Australia) online lecture, Nick Beams exposes Socialist Alternative and the pseudo-left

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At an online lecture organised by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality last Tuesday, leading WSWS writer Nick Beams exposed the bankrupt politics of Socialist Alternative and the pseudo-left, documenting their role in seeking to subordinate the working class to the capitalist political establishment amid growing social opposition.

The event was the third in a series of online lectures delivered by Beams under the title "Capitalism's war on society: Why you need to fight for socialism." The speaker stressed that the differentiation from the pseudo-left was not separate from the struggle for socialism, but was at the cutting edge of defining the independent interests and tasks of the working class.

The lecture was well-received by an audience of over 190 people. Participants included workers, students and young people from most Australian states and territories, along with international attendees from Sri Lanka, New Zealand, the Philippines and a number of other countries.

Beams began by explaining that the coronavirus pandemic had triggered "the greatest crisis of the capitalist system seen in our lifetimes," opening up a period of political radicalisation and socialist revolution.

The decisive question, the speaker said, was arming the emerging movement of the international working class with the lessons of history and the socialist and internationalist program of the Trotskyist movement developed in a struggle against all forms of national-opportunism.

Beams explained that the "key issue is this: the working class cannot overthrow the bourgeoisie if it remains politically and ideologically subordinated to it." This required a political offensive against all those tendencies that sought to prevent the working class from striking out on an independent path, including the pseudo-left.

This had been demonstrated by the experience of the 1917 Russian Revolution. The fight waged by Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky and the Bolsheviks against the Mensheviks and other tendencies that supported the liberal Russian bourgeoisie played the decisive role in politically preparing the conquest of power by the working class.

The coming to office in Greece of Syriza, the "Coalition of the Radical Left," in 2015 was a confirmation of the same truth in the negative. Syriza won elections by appealing to mass hostility to the austerity measures that had led to the collapse in support for PASOK, the country's social democratic party.

Syriza immediately formed a coalition government with the Independent Greeks, an extreme right-wing nationalist formation. Within six weeks, it was imposing sweeping cuts to social services.

Socialist Alternative and the pseudo-left internationally had hailed Syriza as a model to be emulated. In May, 2015, Beams stated, Socialist Alternative had declared that "Syriza cannot be transformed into an austerity party," even as it was clear that the organisation was committed to carrying out the demands of European finance capital.

Syriza's betrayal, and Socialist Alternative's support for it, were a product of the class character of both organisations, Beams explained.

This was also evident in Socialist Alternative's support for US regime-change operations, including the CIA-instigated civil war in Syria. Leading Socialist Alternative member Corey Oakley had infamously declared in 2012 that it was necessary to end "knee-jerk anti-imperialism," i.e., to dispense with opposition to the predatory wars waged by the major powers.

Hand in hand with its pro-imperialist standpoint, Socialist Alternative had refused to defend Julian Assange, the WikiLeaks publisher who is currently imprisoned in Britain and faces extradition to the US, where he would be jailed for life for exposing American war crimes.

In 2012, Socialist Alternative had lent succor to the attempts to frame Assange on bogus allegations of sexual misconduct. The organisation declared that he should go to

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Sweden, where the allegations were concocted, "to answer the charges." It is now clear that the warnings of WikiLeaks and the WSWS that the attempt to extradite Assange to Sweden was a pretext to carry out his forced rendition to the US were entirely accurate. For years afterwards, the organisation had not mentioned the WikiLeaks founder.

Only last year, following his illegal expulsion from the Ecuadorian Embassy and arrest by British police, did Socialist Alternative publish a handful of articles condemning the attempt to railroad Assange to a US prison. However, the organisation did not repudiate its previous attack on him and boycotted all events held in his defence.

Beams explained that these positions were inextricably tied to Socialist Alternative's attempts to subordinate the working class to Labor, a party of big business, and the unions, which have suppressed every major social and industrial struggle of the past four decades.

Pointing to the relevance of these issues in the present coronavirus crisis, Beams noted that Socialist Alternative had enthusiastically welcomed the installation of Sally McManus as secretary of the Australian Council of Trade Unions in 2017. A year later, Socialist Alternative wrote that McManus' ascension had been greeted as a "breath of fresh air" by many unionists, declaring that she had struck a "defiant" tone in contrast to her "grey predecessors."

McManus is currently collaborating with the Liberal-National Coalition government on a daily basis, as it responds to the pandemic by providing billions of dollars to the major corporations that are laying off thousands of workers.

Beams explained: "It is necessary to deal not only with the McManuses of the world but even more importantly with tendencies within the pseudo-left that work to prop them up."

He concluded by declaring: "The immune system of the working class is developed above all through the theoretical political struggle conducted by the revolutionary party, basing itself on the great strategic lessons of struggle for socialism going back more than a century.

"There is only one party which conducts such a struggle, the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). I urge that you apply to join it tonight."

The lecture prompted a series of questions. One attendee asked the SEP to elaborate on its role in the events surrounding the coming to power of Syriza in Greece.

Beams explained that the WSWS and the ICFI had been alone in warning that Syriza would inevitably betray the working class, as a result of its history as an unprincipled amalgamation of various Stalinist and reformist tendencies, and its pro-capitalist program.

Others noted that Socialist Alternative occasionally criticises union officials. Did this, some asked, invalidate Beams' analysis. In reply, he said that the pseudo-left organisations would sometimes condemn the actions of particular union bureaucrats. But they insisted that workers had to remain trapped within these thoroughly corporatised organisations.

All of them rejected the position of the ICFI, which was that the globalisation of production had rendered the nationalist and reformist program of the unions completely bankrupt. The unions had been transformed into open instruments of big business, necessitating the creation of genuine organisations of struggle, including independent rank and file committees.

Some participants asked why it was that Socialist Alternative played the role that it did. Beams said that like other pseudo-left organisations, they were descended from groups that had broken from the Fourth International amid the post-World War Two boom of global capitalism, rejecting its insistence on the revolutionary role of the working class.

The pseudo-left, Beams stated, spoke for affluent sections of the upper middle-class in academia, the public sector and the union officialdom, whose wealth had increased as a result of soaring share values. They had a material stake in defending the status quo by preventing the working class from turning to a genuine socialist perspective, and sought to advance their own interests through various forms of identity politics based on gender, race and sexual orientation.

Throughout the meeting, a small group of individuals, clearly opposed to Beams' exposure of Socialist Alternative, sought to disrupt the event, playing music while he was speaking and shouting incoherently. The unsuccessful attempt to block the discussion underscored the pseudo-lefts' concern over the growing support won by the SEP, and its inability to respond with substantive political arguments.

Next Tuesday's lecture will be on the role of identity politics. The fifth meeting will feature an interview and discussion with SEP (US) Presidential candidate Joseph Kishore. The details will be posted on the WSWS and on social media over the coming days.

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