

SEP meeting honours the life and political legacy of Australian Trotskyist Barry Jobson

Our reporters**20 January 2021**

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Australia held a powerful online meeting last Sunday to commemorate the life of Barry Jobson, a former railway worker and veteran socialist, who died aged 78 on December 11.

Jobson joined the Trotskyist movement in 1974 and dedicated his adult life to the struggle for Trotskyism and socialist internationalism in the working class..

SEP national secretary Cheryl Crisp chaired the meeting, which was addressed by Nick Beams, Terry Cook and Max Boddy, who reviewed different aspects of Jobson's political contribution and their relevance for today. Crisp, Beams and Cook are all founding members of the Socialist Labour League, the SEP's predecessor, established in 1972.

The two-hour event, which displayed photographs from the party's archives and featured an extended Q&A session, was attended by over 150 people. Participants logged in from across Australia. Others attended from Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Germany, India, Korea, New Zealand, Romania, Sri Lanka, the UK and the US.

The full video of the meeting is available [here](#).

Opening the event, Crisp outlined the deepening crisis of global capitalism, intensified by the devastating impact of the COVID-19 on millions of people while a small wealthy elite continued to further enrich itself. Pointing to US President Donald Trump's attempted January 6 fascist coup in Washington, she warned that the turn toward dictatorial forms of rule in the US was a global process and posed extreme dangers to the working class.

New generations of young people and workers were being radicalised by these developments and would enter revolutionary struggles against capitalism, she said. They would turn to the International Committee of the Fourth International, she added, and be inspired by working-class comrades, such as Barry Jobson, who "committed his energy, his talents, his patience" to the fight for its perspective.

SEP national committee member and former national secretary Nick Beams reviewed the key national and

international political events that underpinned Jobson's political development. Barry Jobson understood, Beams said, "the critical importance of studying and assimilating the writing of the Marxist movement and grasping the strategical historical lessons of the 20th century."

Terry Cook worked with Jobson over two decades at the Electric Car (Elcar) rail workshops in Chullora, western Sydney. He reviewed the support they won from railway workers in the fight against the Stalinist and trade union leaderships and the regressive prices and incomes Accords imposed by the Hawke and Keating Labor governments of 1983 to 1996 and enforced by the unions. He outlined their determined work to establish a socialist and anti-war culture in the railway workshops, organising meetings inside Elcar addressed by visiting international Trotskyists, such as Fred Mazelis and Helen Halyard.

Barry Jobson was not attracted to the party because it had a large membership, substantial material resources or a pathway to a lucrative trade union or political career, Cook said. He joined "because of his agreement with its revolutionary socialist principles, program and perspective and he was prepared to swim against the stream—a quality essential for a revolutionary fighter."

The final speaker, SEP assistant national secretary Max Boddy, explained that he first met Jobson after attending an IYSSE meeting at the University of Newcastle. By then, Jobson had retired but regularly campaigned at the campus, discussing the fight for Marxism with students.

Like millions of other young people around the world, Boddy said, he had opposed the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. But it was through the struggle to build the IYSSE on campus and working in collaboration with Barry Jobson, that he came to understand the critical importance of studying the writings of the Marxist movement, particularly those of Leon Trotsky.

"The intervention of worker revolutionaries like Barry, who fought against the numerous petty-bourgeois ideologies vigorously promoted at universities, was critical in the establishment of the party's presence on campus... It is now

the responsibility of a new generation of revolutionaries to continue and deepen our turn to the working class,” Boddy said.

Audience members raised questions or made comments in the chat field. Over \$3,100 was collected for the SEP’s Monthly Fund.

After the meeting several participants spoke about the impact and contemporary significance of Jobson’s political work.

Brenton, a cleaner from Warrnambool in southwestern Victoria, said the meeting was a “really valuable experience.” He particularly appreciated Nick Beams’ “overview of the past century and the context in which Barry Jobson joined the revolutionary socialist movement.”

“My main takeaway about the political issues surrounding Barry’s life was the complete abandonment by the reformist organisations, whether the unions or the Labor Party, of even having a reformist agenda. They went completely over to being agents of imperialism. In the context of Barry’s life that was the most important development—an understanding that the Labor Party is dead for even reforms...

“What is remarkable about Barry’s life is that the socialist movement provided him with the opportunity and encouragement to raise his level of education and consequently his social, political and economic consciousness.

“For those coming into contact with the Socialist Equality Party—it doesn’t matter where they’re at personally, what their level of understanding is, what level of confidence they have. Barry demonstrates that anyone with the determination personally and with the encouragement of the party can rise to a much higher level of consciousness and have an impact of thousands and thousands of people.

“The current period we’ve entered is one of rapidly increasing social inequality and the drive to war and dictatorship. The only force that can challenge and overcome this is the working class, acting on the highest political and theoretical level... This is the tool that will collectively enable us to raise society to the socialist overturn.”

James, an Australia Post worker in Sydney, said: “It was very interesting to hear about Barry’s involvement in the railways and on campuses. I also heard a lot of other names [of party members] mentioned in different industries, including Australia Post.

“This is intriguing because I’ve never heard of all these little struggles and the involvement of SEP members who participated. It’s almost like a hidden history. I never met Barry but I did like the comment someone else made that he was the prime example of an individual’s efforts to build a greater movement.”

John, a young worker from regional New South Wales

(NSW), said he appreciated the meeting’s analysis of the Labor Party. “The Labor Party was not as popular back then as historical documents paint them. There was an underswelling of workers developing against them... When the Gulf war was launched [1990-91] Bob Hawke didn’t wait for the US to call, he offered to help right away.

“Now there is a rebellion underway against the trade unions. Hundreds of train drivers in Melbourne quit the Rail Tram and Bus Union because they were being forced to drive on the same tracks multiple times a day which could lead to complacency, lack of attention and possible fatalities.

“The rebellion is similar to that being undertaken against the United Auto Workers in the US. There is a very good window of opportunity to build a socialist movement today as an alternative to the major parties.”

David, a regional NSW high school science teacher, said: “I never knew Barry personally but I joined the IYSSE and have enjoyed the benefits of the work that he had done. He really cemented the position of the club at Newcastle campus.

“Barry’s life really shows you what needs to be done. Genuine opposition to the ruling elite won’t happen spontaneously—we need to fight to develop it. They’ve got the apparatus of the state, which will squash spontaneous struggles of workers. The police and the unions will fight to suppress these struggles.

“The struggles that he undertook at Elcar and developing the IYSSE, among many other things that he accomplished, points to the amount of work that is required and the impact that a person within the party can have in the workplace. The perspective he fought for changes the way that I view my position. Once you are aware of the historical importance of the working class it changes your entire perspective of the world.”

Further interviews with meeting participants will be published by the WSWS.



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