

More workers and youth speak on the life and political legacy of Australian Trotskyist Barry Jobson

Our reporters
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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 socialist internationalism in the working class.

SEP National Secretary Cheryl Crisp chaired the meeting. It was addressed by Nick Beams, Terry Cook and Max Boddy, who reviewed different aspects of Jobson's political contribution and their relevance for today.

The more than two-hour event, which included photographs from the party's archives and an extended Q&A session, was attended by over 150 people. Participants logged into the meeting 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](#).

After the meeting, participants spoke about the impact and contemporary significance of Jobson's political work. A summary of the meeting and other comments by audience members can be found [here](#).

Sneha, a Macquarie University student in Sydney, said: "The political life of Barry Jobson rings with exceptional importance in this renewed period of class struggle that has seen further horrific assaults on the social position of the toiling masses..."

"Young people must politically orient to the working class to fend off the counter-revolutionary political currents of a nationalist and opportunist nature, including social democracy, Stalinism and trade unionism. Equally they must shed the post-modern conceptions of the Frankfurt School milieu that has festered in universities and its mutilation of class consciousness and denial of the objective revolutionary role of the working class. These political dead-ends must be countered with working class consciousness; that is, a conscious struggle for workers' power.

"We, like Barry, must consciously intervene to change the trajectory of history—a trajectory which has us hurtling towards

nuclear and climate annihilation. The success of this immense responsibility is only possible through the tireless study of Marxism. It is only possible through the arming of the working class with a Marxist perspective."

Lewis, a university student and former construction worker from Wellington, New Zealand, said: "Reflecting on Barry's life during his memorial, shone a light on the struggles he fought for as well as showing us all that no matter what, any member of the working class can take up the struggle in the fight for international socialism.

"Barry's work for the SEP, and his efforts in building the membership of the IYSSE in Australia, was exceptional. As his memorial was being held, I learned of various prior conflicts that Barry and his fellow workers and comrades fought hard against. Having never met Barry, I felt a great admiration towards him as the story of his work was being told. Rest in peace, My condolences to all his family and friends."

Julia, who joined the SEP in 2018, commented: "The meeting conveyed how decisive it is to have workers who are trained as Marxists in the factories and other workplaces. The fight waged by Barry along with Terry Cook in the Elcar [Electric Car] railway workshop for socialist internationalism, against the nationalist program and betrayals of the Stalinists and the trade union bureaucracy, was done under conditions where these organisations dominated the workers' movement.

"The support and leadership that the Trotskyists gained in the Elcar shop committee is a powerful demonstration of the support that a socialist program and perspective can win when it's fought for in the working class.

"It was significant that members from other sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, as well as members of the Socialist Labour League in Australia, were invited to give lunchtime addresses to the workers at Elcar. Barry's life shows the necessity for students and youth wanting to fight for socialism to turn out to the working class."

Phoebe, a new party member from Melbourne, said the meeting "highlighted the importance of a worker-Marxist like Barry Jobson and his work in raising the consciousness and introducing Marxist theory to workers..."

“His determination to learn to read and write as an adult was extremely inspirational. He knew how important it was to study and really learn to read Marxist literature and develop himself. His determination to introduce Trotskyism to younger people and students at Newcastle University inspired a new generation of Marxists.”

Mark, a media worker in Sydney, said: “It was wonderful to learn more about Barry’s life and tireless fight to win the working class to the program of Trotskyism. I had no idea that Barry took himself to night school to improve his reading and writing skills, to enable him to study and educate himself properly as a revolutionist.

“Barry holds a special place in my heart because it was he who persuaded me to attend my first ever meeting of the Socialist Equality Party.

“At the time—it was during the second Gulf War in Iraq—I was desperately clinging to illusions in the Labor Party, hoping that it might take Australia out of the war. Barry, with great patience, was able to make me think, for the very first time, outside of the dead-end framework of parliamentary politics.

“It’s no exaggeration to say that, had I not spoken to Barry, I might still be stumbling around in the dark.”

Heath, an unemployed worker from northern New South Wales (NSW), said: “This meeting paid tribute to the life and times of inspirational comrade Barry Jobson. It showed that even during the final years of bourgeois reformism, during Whitlam’s Labor Party government, an ordinary (exceptional) worker like Barry was compelled to turn from Laborism and trade unionism to a revolutionary dedication to working class independence. That is a testament to the vitality of the Trotskyist perspective embodied in the Socialist Equality Party.

“Barry knew that no other force in society, except us workers. From the railways in Sydney to the coal mines in Britain to the ‘gig economy’ workers in Washington D.C., we are the only social force powerful enough to defeat capital. In order to realise this historic task, workers like me need a party to lead it. Barry fought to build that party and his success is the transmission of the unstained banner of Lenin and Trotsky onto a new generation.

“Barry distinguished himself during years of political reaction by fighting tirelessly for an internationalist and Marxist perspective against all forms of nationalism, opportunism, and petty-bourgeois class pressure.

“Through his whole life, Barry Jobson gave living expression to principles of courage, discipline and political fortitude. His life is an example to every fighter for socialism. I salute him.”

Jenny, a carer from Brisbane, said: “Listening to the speakers talk about Barry Jobson’s life, his contribution to political clarity within the Australian working class, and his lifelong dedication to this historical task, made very clear the loss that has been incurred in the revolutionary movement by his death.

“But he leaves behind a potent example for current and future revolutionaries—people who have serious minds, an

uncompromising focus on objective truth and determination to understand and lead the struggle for the emancipation of humanity from this decayed system.

“That such principled people exist in the world is a blow to pessimism, cynicism and opportunism of all stripes. That the Fourth International, populated by extraordinary people like Barry, has survived the political turmoil since 1938 and continues its vital work within the working class means that humanity has a future.”

Rebecca, a community bus driver from Townsville in northern Queensland, said: “I found the accounts of Barry in the 1970s interesting and am impressed that he never let the flame waver. Barry it seems was a keen scholar of socialism and recognised the importance of reading history and learning from it.

“I didn’t know all the names mentioned by Nick Beams, but understood that some left groups were, in fact, pseudo-left, such as the union leaders who signed up to the Accords.

“I am always impressed with people who maintain their principles throughout life. It’s easy to be a young lefty, but being an unwavering old lefty requires principles many don’t have because it’s more convenient to fit it in with a mendicant society.”

Michael, a musician from Sydney, who joined the SEP in 2018, said: “The meeting was an extremely interesting look at a pivotal period in the history of the working class in this country. I’m sure that, like me, most Australians, especially younger ones, would have no idea about most of these events.

“The importance of an international perspective was at the forefront throughout. It’s one thing to speak of the international character of the working class in an abstract, theoretical sense. The meeting spelled out in concrete terms how Barry and his comrades fought to bring that perspective into Australia’s industrial workplaces, inviting international guest speakers and engaging workers here in the struggles of their overseas counterparts.

“The speakers made clear that Barry thoroughly personified the role of a worker-Bolshevik. Coming into the movement with minimal formal education, he recognised the vital importance of undertaking a serious study of history and Marxist theory, not only to raise his own political consciousness, but that of all those around him—a truly inspiring figure.”



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