

SEP (Australia) holds successful Sixth National Congress

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From September 24 to 27, the Socialist Equality Party in Australia held a four-day National Congress that outlined the party's perspective and elected its leadership. The event involved intensive discussion and participation from across Australia and throughout the globe from representatives of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement.

The Congress began with a tribute and a minute of silence for Wije Dias, the decades-long leader of the Sri Lankan SEP, who passed away in July.

In a wide-ranging opening report to the event, SEP (Australia) national secretary Cheryl Crisp placed the deliberations of the Congress within the context of the unprecedented economic, social and geopolitical crisis of the global capitalist system.

Crisp emphasised the ICFI's analysis of the pandemic as a trigger event. It had exposed the fundamental conflict between the social rights and needs of working people and the dominance of society by a tiny corporate and financial elite. And the pandemic had brought to a new peak of intensity all the underlying contradictions of capitalism.

With the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the "trigger" had been pulled. Crisp explained that the conflict, which was a proxy US-NATO war against Russia, marked a far-reaching turning point in world politics, which raised the imminent danger of a global nuclear conflagration.

While the ruling elite was responding to the deepening global crisis with austerity, war and a turn to dictatorship, the working class was entering into major social struggles. These were developing on a global scale, including in Australia, and were taking the form of a rebellion against the old organisations, above all the trade unions, which had suppressed the class struggle for the previous 40 years.

The re-entry of the working class into struggle heralded a new era of revolutionary upheavals, Crisp stated. They confirmed the assessment of the ICFI that the 2020s would be the decade of socialist revolution.

Within this framework, Crisp stressed the decisive role of the subjective factor, the active intervention of the party. She

reiterated the assessment, made by WSWs International Editorial Board chairman David North, that the Trotskyist movement had entered the fifth stage of its history, characterised by the intersection of its political line and activities with a movement of the working class.

"We are not approaching the present situation as remote spectators," Crisp said. "We enter into the global crisis having established that there is no other revolutionary tendency that can credibly claim to represent the heritage of Marxism, let alone Trotskyism. There has been a process of political selection." The conditions had emerged for the Trotskyist movement to take the leadership of major class struggles, in the fight for socialist revolution.

Discussion over the ensuing days of the Congress was shaped by this assessment.

A critical component was the broad international participation of representatives of the ICFI. The Congress received greetings from leaders of the Socialist Equality Parties in the US, Britain, Germany, Canada, Sri Lanka and France.

Greetings from a leader of the newly-established Turkish section of the ICFI underscored the global expansion of the Trotskyist movement, as did the remarks of representatives of sympathising Socialist Equality Groups in New Zealand and Brazil.

The international participation was far from ceremonial. The contributions pointed to the commonalities of the situation facing workers around the world, amid the ongoing COVID disaster, skyrocketing inflation and war. Everywhere, the ICFI was making important experiences in intervening in the struggles of the working class.

The Congress discussed, amended and unanimously adopted four resolutions, which will be published on the WSWs over the coming weeks.

The first resolution was entitled "Build an international movement of the working class against imperialist war!" It warned that the war in Ukraine was the opening shot of a global conflict, with the imperialist powers seeking the redivision of the world. Australia was at the forefront of this

program, including through its complete integration into the aggressive US confrontation with China.

The resolution elaborated the driving forces of war, in the underlying contradictions of the capitalist system, above all between the integrated character of the world economy and the division of the globe into antagonistic capitalist nation-states. As in the 20th century, these contradictions had reached a breaking point, posing the threat of a nuclear catastrophe.

The only alternative, the resolution stressed, was the creation of an international anti-war movement of the working class directed against the source of conflict, the profit system itself.

The second resolution was entitled “The COVID disaster and the political crisis of Australian capitalism.” It drew out the far-reaching impact of the global pandemic on Australia.

Last December, the country’s governments had abandoned successful mitigation policies and inflicted the “let it rip” program on the population. This had resulted in more than ten million infections, the collapse of the hospital system and some 13,000 official deaths. As the Congress met, the new federal Labor government was plotting the removal of the handful of restrictions that remained in place.

The resolution also dwelt on the turn by the ruling elite to extra-parliamentary and authoritarian forms of rule from the earliest stages of the pandemic. These measures, including former Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s secret assumption of ministerial powers and the formation of the bipartisan National Cabinet, had been undertaken to prevent an explosion of working-class unrest.

The SEP had been the sole party to fight for a program of elimination, the only scientifically-grounded strategy for ending the pandemic. The resolution committed to deepening this struggle, including through the formation of rank-and-file committees, in opposition to the trade unions, which were enforcing the profit-driven “herd immunity” policies.

Another resolution, “Build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC)!” outlined the party’s perspective of aggressively intervening into the struggles of the working class. It elaborated the role of the IWA-RFC, launched by the WSWS and the ICFI, in creating the organisation and political framework for a global movement of the working class against war, austerity and the pandemic. The initiative was aimed at providing political direction to the developing rebellion of the working class against the union bureaucracies.

The resolution stressed the growth of the class struggle in Australia, expressed in a six-fold increase in industrial action so far this year. These struggles were emerging in opposition to the attempts of the unions to suppress them.

The SEP resolved to deepen its interventions, especially in the crucial areas of logistics, healthcare and education, with the aim of assisting workers in the formation of rank-and-file committees.

A final resolution called for the immediate and unconditional freedom of Julian Assange, the Australian journalist and WikiLeaks publisher, who is incarcerated in Britain and faces extradition to the US and life imprisonment for exposing US war crimes.

The resolution noted that the attack on Assange was a spearhead of the broader turn to authoritarianism, directed against mounting social and political opposition. The Australian Labor government was at the forefront of this assault, rejecting calls that it secure Assange’s freedom, in line with its support for US militarism and for attacks on democratic rights domestically. This underscored the fact that Assange’s freedom required the independent mobilisation of the working class.

In addition to adopting the four resolutions, the Congress elected the SEP’s leadership for the next two years. The party’s incoming National Committee includes a broad cross-section of the party membership, including decades-long leaders, workers who have fought for the party’s perspective and younger layers who have been won to the party over the past 15 years.

The National Committee re-elected Cheryl Crisp as national secretary, Max Boddy as assistant national secretary and Peter Symonds as the national editor of the WSWS.

In her concluding remarks, Crisp reemphasised the crucial role of the party in the present period. The conditions had emerged for the SEP to recruit widely within the working class, and to play the leading role in its developing struggles, as part of the ICFI. This perspective, however, would not be realised automatically but would have to be fought for.



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