

Capitalist breakdown, the fight against war and the tasks of the Socialist Equality Party

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)

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The Socialist Equality Party in Australia held a successful Seventh National Congress from October 3-6. The event involved intensive discussion and contributions from leading members of many sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International. The Congress adopted the following resolution.

1. Global capitalism is in an unprecedented crisis. The only response of the ruling elites is war abroad, a war against the working class and a turn to fascism and dictatorship. The imperialist powers are normalising genocide and preparing world war as they preside over ecological catastrophe, mass death in the COVID-19 pandemic and inflict the deepest cuts to living standards since the 1930s.

2. The crisis is of a historic, not conjunctural character. It is driven by the irresolvable contradictions of the capitalist system which have reached a new peak of intensity, between the global economy and the nation-state system and between socialised production and the private appropriation of profit.

3. In the midst of World War I, the revolutionary Marxists explained that these contradictions posed the alternatives of socialism or barbarism. In 1938, Leon Trotsky defined this epoch as the “death agony of capitalism.” These characterisations apply with full force. However, capitalism’s death agony cannot and will not last forever. Today, the alternatives are the socialist reorganisation of the world by the international working class, or the annihilation of human civilisation by an outmoded capitalist order.

4. The same contradictions of capitalism that drive the ruling class to war create the conditions for its overthrow. The revolutionary struggle of the working class can only go forward as a unified global movement. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), as its Australian section, are being built as the conscious expression of this process. To the capitalist program of nationalism, xenophobia and war, we counterpose the unification of the working class globally in the fight for world socialist revolution. All of the initiatives of the party are subordinated to and directed at achieving this strategic task.

5. The political activities of the SEP are part of an international offensive by the world Trotskyist movement to build the revolutionary leadership that the working class requires. We support the election campaign of the SEP in the United States, as well as the critical initiatives of our comrades in the ICFI internationally. In the centre of world imperialism, amid the deepest political crisis in American history, the SEP (US) is the only party fighting to mobilise the immense power of the American working class on a socialist program against the fascist Donald Trump and the warmonger Kamala Harris. This campaign has a global significance and will resonate with workers and youth around the world.

6. The SEP endorses the 2024 New Year statement of the *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board, “The working class, the fight against capitalist barbarism and the building of the World Party of Socialist Revolution,” which outlines the fundamental features of the

global crisis and the tasks facing our movement.

7. As that statement warned, the threat of a global conflict is more imminent today than at any point since the end of World War II in 1945. For more than two years, American imperialism and its NATO allies have been in a de facto war with Russia in Ukraine. The US government and the European powers have repeatedly crossed “red lines” that they previously acknowledged could lead to world war, including the provision of offensive weaponry to Ukraine and permission for it to be used against targets inside Russia. These policies, openly risking catastrophe, have coincided with increasing discussion in ruling-class circles of the possibility or even desirability of utilising nuclear weapons.

8. This normalisation of nuclear war has gone hand-in-hand with the normalisation of genocide in Israel’s imperialist-sponsored and supported mass murder of Palestinians in Gaza. The scale of imperialist barbarism can only be understood as a component of the developing global war. Through their slaughter of the Palestinians, the major powers are signalling there are no “red lines” they will not cross.

9. The contours of such a war are already emerging on three interconnected fronts. The genocide is part of one front, directed towards a region-wide war in the Middle East, particularly targeting Iran. The war in Ukraine, aimed at inflicting a decisive US-NATO defeat over Russia, including regime change and the theft of its vast natural resources, is another. Even as these wars are taking place, Washington and its allies are preparing a third front against China, which is viewed by the strategists of American imperialism as the chief threat to its global hegemony. Already, the US is engaged in a deepening economic war against Beijing, involving the imposition of sweeping tariffs and bans, particularly targeting the high-tech sector.

10. While the desperate attempts of US imperialism to offset its long-term economic decline through the use of its military might are at the centre of the war drive, all of the major powers are taking the war path. For their part, the nationalist regimes in Russia and China, representing the interests of oligarchs spawned by the Stalinist restoration of capitalism, have no progressive response, alternating between sabre-rattling and bankrupt appeals for a *modus vivendi* with imperialism.

11. War abroad is accompanied by a war against the working class domestically. Together with the massive fortunes of the corporations and billionaires, the ever-greater diversion of resources to the military means a continuous drive to intensify the exploitation of the working class and to destroy what remains of public healthcare, education and other vital necessities. The COVID-19 pandemic, in which governments have adopted homicidal “let it rip” policies claiming up to 30 million lives, is only the sharpest expression of the war by capitalism against society.

12. War and social counter-revolution are incompatible with even a fig leaf of democracy. The ruling elites are turning to fascistic forces, such as Trump in the US, the AfD in Germany and National Rally in France, to try to crush the massive resistance from the working class they know their policies will provoke.

13. The fight for democracy, which is of existential significance for the working class, can only be advanced through, and is inseparable from, the active struggle for socialism and the overthrow of the capitalist system and its ruling class. Just as there can be no socialism without democracy, there can be no democracy without socialism.

14. The nostrums of Australian “exceptionalism,” historically the dominant form of bourgeois ideology in this country, were always a sham, but their fraudulent character is more exposed today than ever before. Far from being distant from the emerging geopolitical storms, Australia, under a Labor government, is actively involved in every front of the war drive.

15. The lies about a “lucky country” are refuted by the growth of massive social inequality and the imposition of the deepest cuts to living standards in decades. The political establishment, widely despised and in an ever-deeper crisis, is hurtling to the right, including through a venomous anti-immigrant campaign and an onslaught on democratic rights.

16. This agenda is and will provoke mounting opposition. Through its active intervention, the SEP has revealed a growing constituency for its revolutionary and socialist perspective. That is the significance of our successful campaign to win 1,500 electoral members this year to regain registered party status. That campaign was a blow to the attempts of Labor and the Coalition to suppress a socialist alternative, including through their 2021 bipartisan legislation tripling the electoral membership requirement, under which the SEP was previously deregistered.

17. The next stage of the party’s work is a campaign to increase its full membership. That is a component of the fight to bridge the gap between the very advanced capitalist crisis, and the consciousness of the working class, which lags behind.

18. The party must systematically explain that the working class cannot take forward its struggles by supporting one or another party within the decrepit framework of the capitalist parliamentary set-up or through militant trade unionism and protest alone. If the working class does not advance its own socialist solution to the crisis, the ruling-class solution of war and dictatorship will be imposed upon it. The intensity of the capitalist crisis and the ever-more intolerable conditions of life for masses of people mean that major struggles will emerge. But the success of such struggles, whether they result in the seizure of power by the working class or counter-revolutionary disasters, will be determined, in large part, by the perspective that advanced workers and young people take up and fight for now. What is required is the development of an expanding cadre firmly rooted in the working class, fighting for socialist internationalism and educated in the history and lessons of the Trotskyist movement.

Australian imperialism’s increasingly central role in global war

19. Alongside the growth of militarism globally, the past two years have witnessed a growing involvement of Australian imperialism in the war drive. This has been the signature policy of the Labor government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, and has been aided and abetted by every other political party, including the Coalition, the Greens and the pseudo-left. The SEP alone has fought to mobilise the working class against the military build-up, as part of the ICFI’s call, extending over more than a decade, for the development of an international anti-war movement of the working class, based on a socialist perspective, to prevent world war.

20. The Labor government and the entire political establishment have aggressively supported Israel’s mass murder of Palestinians. Throughout the mass bombardment, they have insisted on Israel’s “right to defend itself,” while providing direct aid to the genocide, including through

ongoing defence export permits and the likely provision of targeting data, used to facilitate the Israeli strikes, from the US-Australian Pine Gap spy base. Labor has continuously vilified opposition to Israel’s war crimes, fraudulently conflating it with antisemitism.

21. Australian imperialism’s active involvement in the worst war crimes since the Holocaust has again demonstrated that it is as ruthless and criminal as any in the world. Its backing for the Gaza genocide, moreover, is inseparable from its support for and involvement in the war drive globally. That includes complete backing for the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. The Labor government has taken Australian aid to the US puppet-regime in Kiev to more than \$1.3 billion, one of the largest contributions of a non-NATO power. Most of that is in military aid, including offensive weaponry, such as air-to-ground munitions, which could help spark World War III.

22. It is in the US-led war drive against China that Australia is playing a decisive role. Over the recent period it has been described by leading representatives of the American state as both the “southern anchor” and the “central base” of US activities directed against Beijing throughout the Indo-Pacific. Amid the increasing isolation of American imperialism, Australia, particularly under the Labor government, has emerged as the key attack dog of this offensive. That has included a continuous campaign by Labor leaders to pressure and bully states across the Indo-Pacific into alignment with the US aggression, as well as increasing involvement with other pillars of the anti-China push, such as Japan and South Korea. Australia is a member of all the key US-led regional alliances, including AUKUS, the Quad and NATO’s newly established Indo-Pacific group, the creation of which links even more directly the war against Russia with the planned conflict with China. Labor has backed each of Washington’s provocations against China and its stoking of potential flashpoints, such as Taiwan and the South China Sea.

23. Australia’s acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines under the AUKUS pact, as well as hypersonic missiles and other advanced weaponry, is only one expression of the transformation of the country into a launching pad for war. Bases across the country, especially in the north and west, are being expanded, with the US given access across all military domains. US nuclear-capable strike assets, including nuclear submarines and B-52 bombers, are being “rotated” through Australia, with preparations for their semi-permanent basing. Over the past four years, Pine Gap has grown by a third, with analysts describing it as one of the key US bases in the world for planning nuclear war with China.

24. Every branch of the Australian military is being expanded, above all through the acquisition of strike capabilities, such as missiles. The Defence Strategic Review (DSR) of 2023 and the National Defence Strategy of 2024 which incorporated its recommendations both declared that the aim must be “impactful projection” throughout the Indo-Pacific and beyond, in an open declaration of plans for an offensive war against China. Behind closed doors, even more drastic measures are no doubt being discussed. They were hinted at in the warmongering “Red Alert” series by Nine Media in 2023, which called for the stationing of US nuclear weapons in northern Australia and the introduction of mass conscription.

25. The role of the Albanese Labor government in completing Australia’s transformation into a frontline state for such a war is not accidental. It again exposes Labor’s character as the central instrument of Australian imperialism. Historically, Labor has either been brought to office during major wars or has played the linchpin role in assisting their prosecution. That is bound up with its character as a national party, advancing the interests of Australian capitalism as a whole, as opposed to the conservative parties which have often been closely identified with the sectional interests of one or another wing of big business. Labor’s connection to the trade unions has enabled it to collaborate closely with the nationalist and pro-war union bureaucracies to try to suppress

opposition to militarism in the working class.

26. Labor was brought to office in September, 1914, to oversee Australian involvement in World War I, the opening shot of the present epoch of imperialist war and socialist revolution. Labor was again installed in 1941, amid the opening of the Pacific theatre of World War II. It was the Labor government of John Curtin that presided over the transfer of Australia's primary allegiance from a declining British Empire to an ascendent American imperialism amid the war. That shift was consolidated by the post-war Labor administration of Ben Chifley, which integrated Australia into the US Cold War, aimed at establishing untrammelled US hegemony. From opposition, Labor would support all the ensuing crimes of American imperialism, including its wars in Korea and Vietnam.

27. It was the Labor government of Bob Hawke that in 1991 joined the opening shot of the current eruption of US imperialism amid the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with participation in the first Gulf War. Labor, again in opposition, supported the criminal 2001 and 2003 invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, deepening Australian participation upon assuming office in 2007. In 2011, the Labor government of Julia Gillard signed on to the US "pivot to Asia," a vast military build-up directed against China, which has been extended by each government since, and is being completed under the Albanese Labor government.

28. Australia's involvement in the major wars has historically produced mass opposition and a state crackdown, including the vicious persecution of socialists in World War I, and the Curtin Labor government's deployment of troops to break dockworker and other strikes in World War II.

29. The ruling elite is again turning to these traditions. The assault on opposition to the Gaza genocide, led by Labor and involving threats to ban anti-war demonstrations, the vilification of protesting students and a witch-hunt of prominent individuals who have spoken out, goes beyond the immediate war crimes in the Middle East. It is a precedent for the suppression of broader hostility to war. That is clear from the jailing this year of whistleblower David McBride, the first and only individual imprisoned over Australia's documented war crimes in Afghanistan, not for having committed them, but for having exposed them. The attack on McBride follows the complicity of successive governments, Labor and Coalition alike, in the 14-year persecution of courageous Australian journalist Julian Assange, hounded by the US and its allies for WikiLeaks' exposures of historic war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. The bipartisan 2017 "foreign interference" legislation, in addition to justifying a continuous atmosphere of anti-China hysteria and racism, potentially criminalises internationally coordinated anti-war activity.

30. Labor's placement of the construction division of the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) under administration cannot be understood outside this context. The administration, a form of de facto government dictatorship over the union, is an attack, not primarily on the CFMEU bureaucracy but on the working class, aimed at placing it under even more direct state control in the new period of war.

31. The repressive measures express a recognition in the ruling class that the program of war will produce mass opposition. That has found an initial manifestation in the demonstrations against the Gaza genocide—part of a global outpouring of opposition to the war crimes—which are the largest and most sustained anti-war mobilisations since at least the Vietnam War. But the emergence of opposition poses only more sharply the questions of political perspective and the need to defeat political traps for the growing anger, aimed at diverting workers and youth back behind the capitalist political establishment.

32. The "anti-AUKUS" movement, bringing together the Greens, pseudo-left groups such as Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance, ex-Stalinists and parts of the trade union bureaucracy is one such trap. It presents the AUKUS pact for Australia to acquire nuclear submarines as a

mistaken program that could be remedied through pressure and appeals to government. The anti-AUKUS movement thus tears the submarine policy from the whole context of Australia's alignment with US imperialist war, including the 13-year integration of the country into the preparations for conflict with China.

33. It is no accident that this movement has selected as its figureheads former Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating and Foreign Minister Bob Carr. Right-wing militarists, who fully supported the US alliance and wars when they were in office, they speak for a minority wing of the ruling elite, fearful of the economic consequences for Australian capitalism of complete commitment to a war with China, its largest trading partner. This wing appeals for a more tactical approach to militarism, focussed on securing Australian imperialism's predatory interests, particularly in the South Pacific and South East Asia. But the anti-AUKUS movement itself acknowledges that its calls for a purportedly more "independent" foreign policy would also entail a major military build-up. The forces assembled in such a build-up would inevitably be deployed in support of the developing world war, including against China. Politically, the anti-AUKUS formation serves to promote reactionary Australian nationalism, aimed at subordinating workers and youth to the state and dividing them from workers throughout the region and internationally.

34. The same role is played by the leaderships of the anti-genocide protests. For the past year, they have insisted that all opposition must be based on moral appeals to the Labor government to end its alignment with Israel. This line decouples Labor's support for the genocide from its active involvement in war globally, including against China in this region. It presents the barbarism in Gaza as an unfortunate policy choice, rather than a manifestation of what imperialism, in its death agony, has in store for the world. The promotion of Labor in the anti-genocide movement has gone hand-in-hand with the glorification of its aligned trade union bureaucracy, even as the unions have not called a single industrial action to halt the mass slaughter.

35. These positions are not a mistake, but a deliberate attempt by definite political forces to neuter opposition and direct it back into safe channels. The Greens are centrally involved. While they posture over the genocide, the Greens collaborate with the Labor government and support capitalism, imperialism and the US-Australia alliance. The Greens are a pro-war party, having backed US interventions in the Middle East and North Africa and now serving as the most aggressive proponents in the Australian parliament of the US war against Russia. The Greens criticise elements of AUKUS, but they were in an alliance with the minority Gillard Labor government, which helped to set the war drive against China in motion. In countries such as Germany, where they hold the foreign ministry, the Greens do not bother to posture over Gaza, instead banning pro-Palestinian demonstrations and boosting the military budget for war with Russia.

36. The same is true of the pseudo-left groups. They are the political representatives of an affluent upper middle-class that forms a constituency for imperialist war. The Australian pseudo-left groups have been prominent in the turn by this rotten milieu internationally into the open camp of imperialist militarism. They demanded and campaigned for Australian intervention into East Timor in 1999 on the basis of "humanitarian" lies, legitimising a grab for oil and neo-colonial control. From 2011, they supported US regime-change operations targeting Libya and Syria, along with the NATO-instigated coup in Ukraine. They openly support the US war against Russia, calling for even greater imperialist armament of the US puppet regime in Kiev.

37. The insistence of these tendencies that opposition to the Gaza genocide be restricted to single-issue protests oriented to the government is simply another application of this pro-imperialist line, serving to prevent a genuine struggle against the mass slaughter and its source, the eruption of imperialist militarism globally. The real position of the pseudo-

left is clear in their intense hostility to the SEP's fight for a socialist anti-war perspective, including by blocking its representatives from speaking at meetings and rallies, and defending union bureaucrats who have facilitated the genocide from the SEP's exposures.

38. The fight to build a genuine anti-war movement requires a political offensive against this entire line-up. The SEP reaffirms its commitment to the essential political bases of such a movement outlined in the ICFI's 2016 statement, *Socialism and the Fight against War*:

- The struggle against war must be based on the working class, the great revolutionary force in society, uniting behind it all progressive elements in the population.
- The new anti-war movement must be anti-capitalist and socialist, since there can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.
- The new anti-war movement must therefore, of necessity, be completely and unequivocally independent of, and hostile to, all political parties and organisations of the capitalist class.
- The new anti-war movement must, above all, be international, mobilising the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle against imperialism.

The war against the working class and the political crisis of Australian capitalism

39. As is the case internationally, the militarisation of Australia is further transforming class relations. Military spending has reached record levels of more than \$50 billion a year, with further massive increases inevitable given the vast commitments that have not yet been budgeted, including \$368 billion for nuclear-powered submarines. That will be paid for by the working class. Public healthcare and education, together with NDIS disability services, are being slashed when they are already in meltdown, the COVID-19 pandemic is raging unchecked, and the working class has been hit with the biggest reduction in its living standards in more than fifty years.

40. This program of austerity and reaction has been overseen by the Albanese Labor government, since it scraped into office in the May 2022 election on the basis of phoney promises of a "better future." Labor formed government after nine years of Coalition administrations. Albanese's Coalition predecessor Scott Morrison was a widely reviled figure, having done nothing as much of the country burned in the disastrous 2019–20 bushfires and then implemented the first stages of the "let it rip" COVID-19 policy. The claims of the Greens, the pseudo-left and the various middle-class protest groups that Labor would represent a "lesser evil" have proven to be an utter fraud.

41. Along with its program of war, Labor has governed for the rich with all of its social policies, including repackaged Coalition tax cuts and incentives for property developers, aimed at boosting the profits of the corporations and the ultra-wealthy. Labor rejected calls for any genuine cost-of-living relief and has backed 13 interest rate hikes by the Reserve Bank of Australia in a program aimed at suppressing wages. Rates of mortgage and rental stress are at record levels, while poverty, hunger and other indices of social distress have risen. A vast social divide exists. The 200 wealthiest Australians now control a total of \$625 billion, an increase of 11 percent since last year. In 1983, the total was \$4.6 billion, or less than \$20 billion in today's dollars. Nearly half of all wealth is now held by the top 10 percent of households. Their average wealth of \$5.2 million is 15 times the average wealth of households in the lowest 60 percent.

42. In the COVID-19 pandemic, Labor has gone further than Morrison

was able to, abolishing all safety measures, including the most basic such as mandatory masking in hospital settings. This homicidal program has claimed over 17,000 lives under the Albanese government, more than double the 8,000 who perished under the Morrison government. Labor's homicidal program has been supported by the entire establishment, including the Greens and the pseudo-left, who now pretend that COVID-19 does not exist. The ICFI and SEP alone have advanced a scientifically grounded program of elimination, because it opposes the capitalist system and the subordination of public health to the profit dictates of the corporate elite.

43. The same fundamental incompatibility of capitalism with the needs of humanity is glaringly evident in the environmental crisis. Under conditions where climate scientists are warning that immediate action must be taken to halt global warming, the Labor government is opening new coal mines, promoting fossil fuels and increasing emissions. Its various emissions reduction targets are a sham that would be completely inadequate, even if met. For their part, the Greens, representing corporate layers cashing in on the "green" economy, defend the whole framework of the capitalist market responsible for the crisis. The only way that global warming can be halted is through the abolition of the profit system and its division of the world into antagonistic nation-states, and their replacement with an international socialist order based on the planned and rational allocation of resources and technologies.

44. The Labor government is in a major political crisis, with widespread anger over the cost-of-living and social crisis intersecting with hostility to AUKUS and the Gaza genocide. The crisis was intensified by the October 2023 defeat of Labor's referendum to enshrine an Indigenous Voice to parliament in the Constitution. This was supposed to put a progressive gloss on the government's reactionary and inherently unpopular program of war and austerity.

45. In reality, the Voice was a component of this program of reaction. Its aim was to further elevate an Indigenous elite into the structures of capitalist government, so that this grasping layer could more easily facilitate mining projects and play a greater role in the war drive, including the transformation of areas in the north and west of the country with large Aboriginal populations into hubs of militarism. The referendum served to present the horrendous oppression of the majority of Indigenous people as a racial question, covering over the fact that Aborigines are the most exploited section of the working class, their plight the responsibility of capitalism. As is the case in all capitalist societies, there exists a wide gap between the Aboriginal elite—comprising CEOs of land and sea councils, academics, politicians and businesspeople—and the majority of the Aboriginal population.

46. The SEP alone advanced an independent perspective for the working class, based on the fight for the unity of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers. We explained that the horrendous social conditions afflicting oppressed Indigenous people could only be addressed through the fight for socialism. The SEP called for an Active Boycott of the referendum, based on a recognition that the official "Yes" campaign, headed by Labor, and the "No" camp, led by the Coalition, represented different wings of the corporate elite whose differences were only tactical. The SEP's campaign was directed against the promotion of divisive racial identity politics by the whole panoply of Labor and trade union bureaucrats, the Greens and the pseudo-left, as well as the racist dog-whistling of the official "No" camp. The defeat of the Voice did not signal mass racist sentiment, but a correct recognition, particularly in working-class areas, that the Labor government, as well as the Indigenous elite, would do nothing to improve the social plight of ordinary Indigenous people. This sentiment was strengthened in the final week of the campaign, as the government promoted the Voice and simultaneously supported the beginning of Israel's genocidal rampage in Gaza.

47. The events of the past two years have only intensified a protracted

breakdown of the official political establishment, centred on a collapse in support for the major parties that have presided over Australian capitalist rule for most of its existence. The Liberal Party's disastrous 2022 federal election result, its worst since 1946, followed longstanding indications of an internal fracturing, amid the hollowing out of its traditional middle-class base. The Labor Party's vote, less than a third of all primary ballots cast, was the lowest since the early 1930s, continuing a decades-long pattern of decline.

48. The fall in Labor's support is not a conjunctural development, but expresses a historic rupture between the party and its former mass working-class base of support. The globalisation of production in the 1980s obliterated any basis for Labor's earlier program of national economic regulation and limited concessions to the working class to preserve the stability of the capitalist system. Instead, Labor became transformed into the unalloyed instrument of finance capital, with the Hawke and Keating governments implementing the measures of economic deregulation and mass job destruction associated with Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in the US. The same transformation has occurred in the social-democratic parties internationally, which have become indistinguishable from their conservative counterparts.

49. The political establishment is responding to its crisis with intensifying reaction. Labor and the Coalition are continuously whipping up nationalism and xenophobia, particularly targeted against immigrants, refugees and international students. The decades-long role of Australian governments in attacking asylum-seekers, including locking them up in concentration camps in the Pacific, is hailed as an inspiration by the far-right and fascist movements in Europe and the US. In turn, the current campaign by the Labor government, backed by Coalition leader Peter Dutton, to blame immigrants for all aspects of the social crisis, slash migration by hundreds of thousands and bar migration altogether from "designated" countries, is virtually identical to measures promoted by outright fascist forces.

50. The fight against nationalism and the defence of immigrants is a strategic task of the revolutionary party. The onslaught against immigrants is at the centre of the ruling elite's attempts to whip up a wartime atmosphere of jingoism and to divide the working class to prevent any resistance to war and social attacks. For genuine internationalists, the defence of immigrants is not a question of vague moral solidarity, but of fighting for the international unity of the working class.

51. In opposition to the Greens and various middle-class protest tendencies, which posture as sympathetic to refugees, but defend the whole framework of border restrictions and immigration quotas, the SEP demands an opening of the borders, with working people permitted to live and work wherever they choose with full citizenship rights. Any support for the repressive border measures against immigrants weakens all workers because it strengthens the capitalist state, the very institution that the working class must overturn in the socialist revolution. Similarly, support for citizenship controls means accepting the division of the working class along national lines, in direct opposition to the fight for its unity in the global struggle for world socialism.

52. While there is not a mass fascist party in Australia, it would be naive and politically light-minded to discount the danger amid the promotion of such forces globally, the fracturing of the political establishment and the increasingly far-right agitation of the major parties themselves.

53. Over the past decades, the ruling class has deliberately cultivated a far-right milieu, which has been given succour by the major parties and the corporate media. These outfits, including those with parliamentary representation, such as One Nation, have based their campaigning on the anti-Muslim xenophobia whipped up in the fraudulent "war on terror," the official glorification of Australian militarism, media and government campaigns targeting minority youth, such as phoney hysteria over "African gangs," and more recently the promotion of an anti-lockdown

and anti-vaccine movement that was used by the corporate elite as a battering ram against successful COVID-19 safety measures.

54. The greatest danger stems from the subordination of the working class to Labor and the parliamentary set-up. The suppression of any independent political movement of the working class creates the conditions for far-right and fascistic movements to exploit popular discontent over the social crisis. The claim of the Greens and various independents that social conditions can be improved through changing the make-up of parliament and increasing the power of crossbenchers is a fraud. It should be recalled that from 2010 to 2013, the Gillard Labor government implemented a reactionary program, including aligning Australia with the "pivot to Asia," persecuting refugees and slashing public healthcare and education. Labor was in a minority and depended on a formal alliance with the Greens, along with the support of various independents, to enact these measures.

55. The entire parliamentary set-up has increasingly been reduced to a moth-eaten fig leaf, which has done nothing to oppose, much less obstruct, the whole gamut of war, budget austerity and authoritarianism. Parliament is increasingly exposed as a vehicle for enforcing and justifying the dictates of the corporate and financial elite. The critical issue is building an independent political movement of the working class, directed against the entire parliamentary framework. The perspective must be the establishment of a workers' government—a government of, for, and by the workers. Such a government would abolish the repressive agencies of the capitalist state, place the banks and the corporations under public ownership and democratic workers' control, and encourage the transformation of economic and social life to meet the needs of the majority, not the profit interests of the financial elite.

The growth of the class struggle and the fight to build the IWA-RFC

56. The SEP supports and participates in the fight to build the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) as a critical component of the development of a genuine movement of the working class. The IWA-RFC is a practical application of the ICFI's fight to unify and organise the working class on a global scale. This is based on the understanding outlined in its 1988 world perspectives document that, "given the new features of capitalist development" associated with globalisation, "even the form of the class struggle must assume an international character."

57. The fight for the mobilisation of the working class can only take place through a rebellion against the old nationalist organisations, including the trade union bureaucracies. Along with the social-democratic parties, they responded to globalisation by dispensing with their earlier program of seeking to win limited gains for the working class by pressuring nationally based governments and corporations to make concessions. Taking their nationalist and pro-capitalist program to its logical conclusion, the unions became the chief advocates of ensuring the globally competitive position of their "own" national industry, pressuring workers to make concessions in the form of continuous cuts to jobs and wages.

58. The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and its affiliates played the critical role in enforcing the assault associated with this transformation that began in the 1980s. Signing a series of tripartite Accords with the Hawke and Keating Labor governments and big business, the ACTU enforced the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs and whole sections of industry, as well as the smashing up of fighting organisations of the working class, such as shop stewards' committees. The Stalinist leaders of some of the largest unions were centrally

involved, helping to draft the Accords and then impose their pro-business measures against workers.

59. In that period, and again under the Rudd and Gillard Labor governments, the unions helped to draft and entrench a draconian industrial relations framework, illegalising most industrial action, dividing workers through enterprise bargaining at individual workplaces and providing for a corporate offensive that has extended over four decades.

60. Amid the deepening global crisis, the unions have stepped up their integration into the capitalist state. The ACTU was central to the formulation and implementation of the former Coalition governments' JobKeeper program, which funnelled vast sums of public money to the corporations in the first two years of the pandemic. At the same time, the ACTU and its affiliates presided over a series of wage freezes and the suspension of working conditions and rights to ensure business profits.

61. The union-enforced offensive in the pandemic and during soaring inflation helped to inflict an average real pay cut of 4.8 percent on workers since 2019, one of the largest reversals among developed Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

62. There has been a growth of the class struggle in Australia, in line with the upsurge internationally, and increasing signs of a crisis of the mechanisms of suppression put in place by the bureaucracy. In mid-2022, tens of thousands of nurses and educators took strike action, demanding real wage increases and protesting the dire conditions in their industries, already in crisis as a result of decades of underfunding and then placed on the frontlines of the "let it rip" COVID-19 policies. While those struggles were ultimately betrayed, repeated disputes in both sectors have threatened to escape the control of the bureaucracy.

63. In November 2022, for instance, 4,000 Western Australian nurses held a one-day strike, after denouncing attempts by the Australian Nursing Federation to force through a wage-cutting sellout. The state Labor government, acting through its industrial tribunal, responded with a fine of \$350,000 against the union, which the bureaucracy accepted. In other disputes, substantial minorities of workers have voted against union-promoted sell-out offers, with "no" votes in some cases recorded by more than 40 percent of balloted workers.

64. The federal Labor government's placement of the construction division of the CFMEU under administration in August highlights the fears in the ruling elite that the class struggle will erupt outside of its control. Claims that the administration was implemented due to untested allegations of corruption are a sham. Nor was the measure primarily directed against the CFMEU bureaucracy itself. Instead, it is an assault on a militant section of the working class, driven by anger over the limited pay increases won by these workers, amid indications of a slowdown in construction and a broader economic slump.

65. The administration was aided and promoted by the ACTU and the vast majority of the union bureaucracy, openly functioning as agents of the big-business Labor government. The CFMEU construction leadership itself subordinated workers' opposition to its own backroom manoeuvres with the government, creating the conditions for administration to be imposed. It only called isolated protests of its members once administration was implemented, and then the leadership's sole preoccupation was to seek the restoration of its own bureaucratic positions and prerogatives.

66. The CFMEU administration and all the major disputes of the recent period underscore the urgent necessity of workers establishing rank-and-file committees. These are an essential mechanism through which workers break the isolation imposed by the unions, democratically discuss a plan of action and embark upon a political and industrial struggle based on their needs, not the profit imperatives of governments and the corporations.

67. Rank-and-file committees are not a substitute for the revolutionary

party, but they are more than just an instrument of struggle against the union bureaucracy. They provide the vehicle for unleashing and demonstrating the independent strength of the working class, which is itself an important factor in the development of workers' consciousness. The fight to establish rank-and-file committees extends beyond workplaces, including to working-class neighbourhoods, where they can serve as the organising hub of struggles over housing, utilities and other aspects of the social crisis.

68. Rank-and-file committees must be open to all workers, regardless of political opinion, who want to fight for their social interests, independently of the pro-company union bureaucrats. Within the rank-and-file committees, the SEP fights for an understanding that the objective logic of the struggles in which workers are engaged poses the necessity for a political fight directed against the whole capitalist order, including Labor, all the official parties, the draconian industrial relations framework, the courts and the entire union bureaucracy. Such struggles inevitably raise the fundamental political question of which class rules society, and in whose interests production is organised, pointing to the need for a socialist perspective.

69. The SEP has accumulated important experience, assisting in the formation of rank-and-file committees in the postal, education and health sectors. These have helped to bring forward workers seeking an alternative to the endless sellouts of the bureaucracy and have established a principled record of struggle and political exposures. The next stage is to expand the committees, including into individual workplaces, to establish new ones, such as in construction, and to take forward the development of an interlinked network of such committees, which will form a bedrock for a new independent movement of the working class.

Build the SEP!

70. The rapidly accelerating crisis poses major tasks before the SEP, including a bold intervention into the next federal election. The SEP's campaign will raise the critical international political issues suppressed by all others, above all the necessity to mobilise the working class on a socialist program against the war drive. It will outline the need for a break with Labor and the establishment of the political independence of the working class, through the building of the revolutionary party.

71. The election campaign is a component of the global initiatives of the ICFI. The SEP will integrate its work in the election with its ongoing participation in the daily publication of the *World Socialist Web Site*, which elaborates an independent perspective for the working class on the major political developments, while featuring polemics, historical analyses and cultural reviews, all of which are critical to the development of socialist consciousness in the working class. The SEP will continue its active participation in other key international initiatives of our movement, including the fight to free the courageous young Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk, imprisoned in Ukraine for his principled, socialist opposition to the US-NATO Russian war.

72. In the work of the party and the fight to build its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IY SSE), the struggle against the various anti-Marxist nostrums that have been promoted especially by bourgeois academia, is critical. That includes the continuous exposure of postmodernism, a form of subjective idealism, whose central purpose is to deny the revolutionary role of the working class. It means a fight against the associated ideologies of identity politics, which, in various forms, assert that race, gender and sexuality, as opposed to class, are the primary divisions in society. These positions, which have played such a destructive role in political and cultural life, aim to divide

the working class, through the promotion of fratricidal conflict, while justifying the advancement of privileged layers within the framework of the profit system and its institutions.

73. The continued exposure of the pseudo-left is decisive in charting an independent perspective for the working class and establishing its political independence. The pseudo-left organisations do not represent misguided or confused social layers, but a political tendency that is organically hostile to the interests of the working class and the fight for its independence. Tracing their origins to tendencies that broke from Trotskyism in the post-World War II period, capitulating to Stalinism, bourgeois-nationalism and social-democracy, these outfits now serve as the last line of defence of capitalism. On every front, whether in the Gaza protest movement or in industrial disputes, their function is to subordinate workers and youth to Labor, the union bureaucracy and the capitalist system itself. The pseudo-left speaks not for the working class but for an affluent and grasping layer of the upper middle-class, whose aim is to advance its own privileges in academia, the top echelons of the public sector and the union bureaucracy. Those privileges are in turn dependent on the suppression of the class struggle.

74. Accordingly, the pseudo-left plays a decisive role in the rapid shift to the right of the entire capitalist political establishment. Denouncing the struggle for the political independence of the working class as “sectarianism,” the pseudo-left actively oppose and fight against the development of and crystallisation within the working class of a revolutionary tendency fighting for socialism. In that way, they assist the extreme right-wing forces which seek to exploit the deepening social, economic and political crisis for the development of a fascist movement.

75. The growth of the party means not only a numerical accumulation of members, but the training and development of cadres, capable of withstanding the pressures generated by a period of crisis and of providing leadership to the working class as it is propelled into struggle. “The growth of the mass movement of the working class imposes ever greater demands on members of the party,” David North explained in his introduction to the 2023 SEP Summer School. “Meeting these challenges requires greater attention to the education of the party membership. The most important element of this education is raising the cadres’ knowledge and understanding of the history of the Trotskyist movement.”

76. That history is the concentrated record of the fight for socialist internationalism, extending over more than a century to the 1923 founding of the Left Opposition by Leon Trotsky to initiate the struggle against the emerging Stalinist bureaucracy’s betrayal of the 1917 October Revolution. It encompasses all of the subsequent strategic experiences of the working class, including the lessons of the major revolutionary upheavals, defeats and betrayals of the 20th century. Through the protracted fight against Pabloism and other national-opportunist tendencies that sought to liquidate the Trotskyist movement into the camp of Stalinism and other hostile political forces, culminating in the 1985–86 split with the renegades of the Workers Revolutionary Party, the ICFI has defended the genuine socialist and internationalist perspective of Trotskyism. That is the only basis on which the working class can advance its interests against war, fascism and dictatorship.

77. At its 2019 Summer School, the ICFI defined the present period as the fifth stage in the history of the Trotskyist movement. Based on the immense political struggles waged in the earlier phases and decades of preparatory work, this new period would be characterised by an ever-greater intersection of the revolutionary perspective of the ICFI with the development of objective events and of the class struggle itself. David North explained:

“This is the stage that will witness a vast growth of the ICFI as the World Party of Socialist Revolution. The objective processes of economic globalization, identified by the International Committee more than 30

years ago, have undergone a further colossal development. Combined with the emergence of new technologies that have revolutionized communications, these processes have internationalized the class struggle to a degree that would have been hard to imagine even 25 years ago. The revolutionary struggle of the working class will develop as an interconnected and unified world movement. The International Committee of the Fourth International will be built as the conscious political leadership of this objective socioeconomic process. It will counterpose to the capitalist politics of imperialist war the class-based strategy of world socialist revolution. This is the essential historical task of the new stage in the history of the Fourth International.”

78. This poses the necessity for a continuous political struggle by the SEP and its membership on every front, with the perspective of winning the leadership of the working class to carry out the socialist revolution.



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