

Resolution for the Eighth Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia)

The intensification of the class struggle in Australia and the building of the IWA-RFC

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
19 October 2026

We are publishing here the third of five resolutions adopted unanimously by the Eighth National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia), held September 26–29, 2026. The first is published here, and the second here.

1. The international working class is entering a new period of struggle. General strikes have swept across Europe, Argentina and Africa. In the United States, the centre of world imperialism, tens of thousands of healthcare workers, educators, auto-parts workers and meatpackers have gone on strike, accompanied by mass political demonstrations involving millions. The entry of the American working class into struggle is of world-historical significance. It strikes at the centre of the imperialist system. This process vindicates the perspective the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) set out in January 2020, which declared the opening of “a decade of intensifying class struggle and world socialist revolution.” As the ICFI assessed in 2025, the first half of the decade was dominated by the response of the ruling class to the crisis; the second half will be dominated by an explosive eruption of the class struggle.

2. The same crisis of world capitalism is intensifying the class struggle in Australia. Over the 12 months ending in March 2026, industrial action reached its highest level since 2013. 153,700 workers were involved in 257 strikes or lockouts, resulting in 200,300 working days lost. Among those striking over the past year were 40,000 educators, 24,000 health workers and thousands of council workers in Victoria, as well as 40,000 public sector workers and 10,000 nurses in South Australia. The movement’s growing breadth is significant. Sections of workers who have not taken action for decades, from mining workers in the Pilbara to public hospital doctors and psychiatrists, are now entering the class struggle for the first time in a generation.

3. A key factor driving this process has been the ongoing and savage assault on the wages, conditions and living standards of Australian workers. Real wages are now 6.4 percent lower than in June 2020 and have been driven back to the level of September 2011, wiping out more than a decade of gains. This has been spearheaded by federal and state Labor governments and enforced directly by the trade union apparatus through the suppression of struggle and the imposition of sell-out enterprise agreements.

4. The unions enforcing the onslaught on living standards are also integrating workers into the imperialist war machine, promoting the

expansion of weapons and military production under the phoney pretext that it will create jobs. The Australian Workers Union (AWU) has declared that it is “proud to be the AUKUS union.” The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) has made the demand for a “maritime strategic fleet” a central campaign, declaring the need for such a fleet “has never been more urgent” amid the war against Iran. The unions’ increasingly open embrace of imperialism is the logical extension of their role as defenders of the so-called “national interest”—that is, the profits of Australian capitalism.

5. As is the case globally, the increasing militancy of the working class is colliding with the trade union apparatus. However, without new organisations and an alternative perspective, even the most militant struggles will ultimately be isolated, suppressed and defeated by the bureaucracies. In every dispute, the SEP explains to workers, including through the use of transitional demands, that their struggle poses the need for a broader movement of the working class aimed at the overturn of capitalism and the socialist reorganisation of society. This perspective—the program of world socialist revolution—must be introduced into the class struggle through the intervention of the party.

6. The necessity of such a perspective was demonstrated in the Victorian educators’ struggle. In an unprecedented act of rebellion, teachers and school support staff twice rejected the Labor government-Australian Education Union (AEU) bureaucracy’s sellout deals—the first time in 40 years an AEU agreement had been voted down. The involvement of tens of thousands of educators in two statewide strikes, their first in 13 years, underscored a growing determination to fight across the working class. After this rejection, the AEU repackaged the same sellout and rushed it to a ballot within days, censoring and blocking opponents on its social media and running a count with no rank-and-file oversight. Union leaders, the Labor government and the corporate press combined to pressure teachers to accept the deal. Without a political alternative to the bureaucracy, such nascent rebellions are inevitably worn down and sold out.

7. This poses the urgent need to build rank-and-file committees, independent of the trade union apparatus, through which workers can fight for their own interests and through which their own political consciousness can be developed. These committees must encompass all workers, union and non-union alike. Rank-and-File Committees must be extended to every section of the working class including the most super-exploited. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), initiated by the International

Committee of the Fourth International in 2021, provides the international framework for uniting these committees. The formation of the Victorian Educators Rank-and-File Committee during the educators' struggle was an important step in this direction, which must be deepened and extended across all sections of the working class.

8. This Congress proceeds from the strategy set out in the resolution of the Ninth Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (US), "On the international class struggle and the building of the IWA-RFC," adopted in August 2026: "The development of the class struggle creates the conditions for the growth of socialist consciousness, the building of revolutionary leadership and the conquest of power. There is no revolution without the entry of the working class into struggle." In building these committees, as David North stated in his opening report to the Ninth Congress, "the working class does not merely resist the existing order; it begins to constitute itself as the future ruling class, developing in embryo the organs through which it will reorganize social and economic life."

9. The SEP's strategy of rank-and-file committees is counterposed to the dead end of reforming the trade union bureaucracy. This fraudulent conception is promoted by the pseudo-left as the capability of the unions and Labor to suppress the class struggle comes under mounting pressure. These organisations—Socialist Alternative, Socialist Alliance and Solidarity—function as the last line of defence for the union apparatus, using radical posturing to cover for every sellout and channel opposition back into the unions and the Labor Party. They represent an upper-middle-class layer that seeks to advance its own privileges within the existing setup, including through their integration into the union bureaucracy. The fight to build rank-and-file committees is inseparable from the political fight against these tendencies and the labour aristocracy they defend.

10. This must especially take the form of a political fight against the draconian industrial relations framework—above all the Fair Work Act, imposed by Labor in collaboration with the trade union apparatus—which outlaws strikes except during narrow negotiating windows, divides workers through enterprise bargaining and provides the legal machinery through which the bureaucracy functions as an industrial police force. This framework, a straitjacket supported by the trade union apparatus as the means to suppress the struggles of workers, has been strengthened and employed with increasing ruthlessness as opposition to the role of the union leaders intensifies.

11. The federal Labor government's placement of the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) under administration in 2024 was an unprecedented attack on the democratic rights of 80,000 building workers and a warning to the rest of the working class. The aim was to discipline a militant section of the working class and drive down wages and conditions, as a precedent for a broader assault. This could not have been done without the full-throated support of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the vast majority of the union apparatus. Tens of thousands of building workers protested, in defiance of threats, censorship and denunciation in the media. With no perspective put forward other than restoring the ousted CFMEU bureaucracy whose sole interest was its own privileges, the struggle was contained.

12. Almost two years after the CFMEU was put under administration the Victorian Labor government moved in August to effectively outlaw independent workers' organisations by empowering the state to wind up or prevent the incorporation of any association formed for an "industrial relations purpose"—that is, any

organisation through which workers seek to organise outside the official union apparatus. Similar measures were endorsed at the 2026 ALP national conference, underscoring that this attack has the complete support of the union bureaucracy, its direct beneficiaries. The real target is independent rank-and-file committees that the ruling class fears could give workers' struggles a political and organisational form outside the control of the bureaucracy and Labor. This deepening attack on workplace democratic rights highlights the urgency of building the IWA-RFC.

13. In the United States, the campaign of Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union, is the sharpest expression internationally of the breakdown of the old mechanism of class suppression and the party's intervention into this crisis. This Congress gives its full support to this campaign and to the defence of Lehman against the gangster methods of the UAW apparatus, which has responded to his candidacy with death threats.

14. This Congress resolves to build rank-and-file committees in every workplace, school and neighbourhood in which the party is active; to deepen and significantly expand the work of the Industrial Workers Rank-and-File Committee, the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee and the Committee for Public Education; to extend the IWA-RFC into sections of the working class in which we do not currently have a presence; to defend science, medicine and culture as social rights, linking the struggles of educators, scientists and artists against censorship and the subordination of intellectual work to profit with the broader struggles of the working class and fight to make the cultural and intellectual achievements of humanity freely available to all; to develop our international coordination with the other sections of the ICFI in the fight against the global assault on jobs and against war and dictatorship; and to recruit the most class-conscious workers into the Socialist Equality Party.

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