

SEP's final election meetings oppose US war drive against Syria

By our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party held a series of successful public meetings over the past six days in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland—the states in which the party is running a total of 10 candidates for the Senate. The meetings, the last in the party's federal election intervention, were attended by a broad range of workers and youth, many attending their first SEP event.

SEP candidates reviewed the party's socialist alternative to war, austerity and assault on democratic rights, focusing in particular on the imminent US military assault against Syria.

Nick Beams, SEP national secretary and Senate candidate for NSW, and Jerry White, the US SEP's presidential candidate in 2012, addressed meetings in Melbourne and Sydney. White, who also spoke in Brisbane, pointed out that the SEP's election intervention was part of a unified campaign by the International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections in Germany, Sri Lanka and the US.

Referring to Washington's escalating military threats against Syria, he said US President Barak Obama was peddling the same sort of lies about "weapons of mass destruction" used by the Bush administration to justify another criminal war.

"It is as if the world is being subjected to a rerun of some old, third-rate Hollywood movie," he said. "One must say, however, the last cast of characters—George Bush, Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell—had better fictional scriptwriters ... One could sum up the Obama administration's supposed evidence with two words: 'trust us.'"

White explained there was no popular support in America for war against Syria, with recent polls showing only 9 percent backing a US attack. "After more than ten years of endless, bloody wars—at the cost of thousands of lives and some \$4-6 trillion later—the American people, are fed up with the lies, and the claims about short wars with surgical strikes," he said.

The British parliament's opposition to joining a US war against Syria was a blow to Washington, he said, warning, however, that the decision to delay an immediate attack on Syria and seek Congressional approval would not prevent the US military assault. It was not the time to watch and wait, he said. The international working class had to mobilise against imperialist war and militarism, as part of a political struggle against the profit system.

US military aggression was driven by the historic decline of American capitalism, White said. He drew out the deep-going connection between the eruption of militarism, the launching of a

social counter-revolution against the jobs and conditions of the working class, and the moves toward dictatorship in the US revealed by the exposures made by Edward Snowden of massive surveillance.

The social assault, White said, was sharpest in Detroit—the former auto capital of the world—where emergency financial manager Kevyn Orr had thrown the city into the largest municipal bankruptcy in US history.

Orr was a hatchet man for the Wall Street banks, which hold the bulk of Detroit's debt, and had virtual dictatorial powers to override the state constitution, the locally elected government, labour agreements and workers' pension plans. "The city is being used as a test case to eliminate the pensions and medical benefits of nearly 20 million federal, state and municipal employees" throughout the country, White said.

Along with drastic cuts to firefighting, education and other crucial social services, Orr was moving to sell the art works from the Detroit Institute of Art, including priceless masterpieces of Van Gogh, Matisse, Rembrandt, Brueghel and others. This cultural vandalism was comparable to the Nazi plunder of European art during World War II, White added.

White reviewed the part played by the United Auto Workers union apparatus, which had enriched itself while assisting the car companies to destroy tens of thousands of jobs and slash wages and conditions. He also said Obama's role had exposed the fraud of racial politics long promoted by the political establishment and its pseudo-left adjuncts. These bitter political experiences, the speaker said, demonstrated that the American and international working class had to join and build a revolutionary leadership, the Socialist Equality Party, and fight for a workers' government based on socialist policies.

Nick Beams said the SEP's decision to centre its election intervention on the necessity for an international antiwar movement based on a socialist program had been verified by the US preparations for war against Syria.

"The US and its fellow imperialist gangsters have declared that the military operations against Syria will be of a limited character. No one should be deceived by this lie." The attack on Syria was only one component of a much broader strategy. "The next target in line is Iran, to be followed by Russia and China. The real agenda of US imperialism cannot be assessed from the declarations of the Obama White House—these are all aimed at creating a fog of confusion—but only from an examination and

assessment of US actions over the past two decades.”

Beams detailed these developments, referring to the US military strategy following the collapse of the USSR and imperialist interventions from the Balkans to Afghanistan and Iraq. The purpose of the Obama’s “pivot” to Asia, Beams explained, was encircling China through military, political and economic means, to counter its economic expansion and prepare for war against it.

In the 1930s, Adolf Hitler and German imperialism wanted to organise and dominate Europe, Beams said. “The objective of the United States is to control and dominate the world.”

Beams reviewed the political role played by the various pseudo-left parties, such as the Socialist Workers Party in Britain, the New Anticapitalist Party in France, the Left Party in Germany, the International Socialist Organization in the United States and their associates in Australia—Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative—who backed the US-funded and supported “rebels” in Syria.

Ten years ago these organisations, Beams continued, had politically sabotaged the mass antiwar protests that erupted against the US-led invasion of Iraq, by promoting illusions that one or another imperialist power or the election of a Democratic president in the US could prevent war. The same “left” forces had responded to the revolutionary eruption of the masses in Egypt by promoting the Egyptian army or the election of the Muslim Brotherhood as guardians of the revolution.

This response, Beams noted, was “not the result of a mistake or some kind of misreading of the situation” but the expression of the class position of the social layers—privileged sections of the upper middle classes, including the trade union bureaucracy—whose interests the pseudo-left groups articulate.

“Such forces are willing to support the oppressed ... just as long as they remain oppressed. But once the working class begins to demonstrate its revolutionary capacities, as the Egyptian working class has done, then it is a different story. Fearful of this independent movement, they rush into the camp of the ruling order,” he said.

Likewise, the pseudo-left in Australia promoted the Labor Party as a “lesser evil,” while claiming that the Greens represented some kind of alternative within the parliamentary system, Beams said.

The SEP national secretary said the political evolution of the pseudo-lefts revealed, “the so-called middle ground has been cut away, not only on war, but on every question—on the defence of jobs, wages, social conditions and basic democratic rights. There is the program of the SEP—the fight for the program of socialist internationalism—on one side and, on the other, the program of all the other, bourgeois, parties, including the self-styled ‘lefts,’ which work for the subordination of the working class in one way or another to the dictates of the corporate and financial elites.”

The SEP’s election campaign, the speaker concluded “is part of a broader and ongoing initiative—the preparation of the working class for the struggles in which it is going to be engulfed, whatever the outcome of election next Saturday. The critical issue is not which capitalist party wins the election, or is the ‘lesser evil,’ but the building of a new revolutionary leadership in the working class.”

In Brisbane, several university and TAFE students and a young

building worker attended the SEP meeting, particularly in response to the party’s fight against the US-led plans for war against Syria. Reports by Jerry White and SEP Senate candidate Mike Head were followed by many questions.

Last night SEP candidates Peter Symonds and Joe Lopez addressed a meeting in central Perth, which attracted an important layer of young people, all of whom were concerned about war against Syria. A discussion ensued about the role of the pseudo-lefts and how to wage a struggle against war.

The SEP’s final South Australian election meeting was also held yesterday, in Elizabeth, a major working-class Adelaide outer suburb. GM Holden’s plant is located in Elizabeth where the unions, working in close collaboration with the company and the Rudd Labor government, have imposed a three-year wage freeze—a real cut—on car workers and torn up land-standing working conditions. The meeting was addressed by the SEP’s South Australian Senate candidates James Cogan and Peter Byrne.

Lengthy discussion followed reports at all the SEP meetings and about \$6,000 was donated for the party’s election fund.

In Melbourne, there were questions on the US military’s use of chemical and biological weapons; why the US had faced difficulties with its regime change operations in Syria; and what was real democracy. There was also discussion on the class nature of the Occupy Wall Street movement and why the working class needed a revolutionary party.

Sydney audience members asked about Australia’s preferential voting system; Russia’s response to the planned US military assault on Syria; how and why Islamic jihadism had emerged; the role of the Murdoch press in the Australian election; Obama’s pivot to Asia; revolutionary democratic traditions in the US; and the political significance of Bradley Manning and Edward Snowden’s exposures of US war crimes. Many audience members remained behind after the meeting for further discussion with SEP speakers.

In Brisbane, questions included whether the scale of the war being prepared would require the return of military conscription; how optimistic the SEP was for the future of the planet, given the threat of a devastating world war; and how far the US and Australian governments would go in defiance of public opposition in the wake of the “no” vote in the British parliament.

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