

Workers and youth discuss the Russian Revolution at SEP meetings

By our reporters
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A broad cross-section of workers, retirees, university and high school students and young people attended the recent Socialist Equality Party centenary meetings on the Russian Revolution. Several voiced their appreciation, explaining what they learnt about the 1917 Russian Revolution and the political lessons of this historic event.

Mitchell, a 21-year-old hospitality worker from Melbourne, said: “I thought the meeting was really good. I came because I thought it would be interesting—I did history in Year 12 and thought the Russian Revolution was fascinating. I basically agree with most socialist policies. I think it’s definitely better than the current system...”

“The degree to which the consciousness of people my age, the working class, is being suppressed by diversions on social media, with your news feed filled with trash, is quite troubling.

“There’s a sense of hopelessness among some young people, who might think, what can you do? But the revolution shows an example of the truth—you are the masses, you hold the power. They might have all the wealth, but they need you to run the McDonald’s, in other workplaces. They require us.

“There’s also a sense that you’re not important, that you don’t fit into this world, you might just be a cog in some mass machine... You can inspire a fair bit of hope with it [the revolution]; it says there is significance, you as an individual, the more you can fight the stronger you’ll be.”

Asked about the danger of war, Mitchell said, “It’s terrifying. Even if the US doesn’t use nukes initially in an attack on North Korea, there’s going to be retaliation with nuclear weapons. You can’t conquer an entire country just with ground forces.

“Trump is basically saying ‘we’re going to nuke them’, which is honestly terrifying. It’s a dress rehearsal for China, as James explained, which I hadn’t thought about before. But it’s true, a war won’t stop with Korea.”

Cameron, a University of Melbourne biology and mathematics student, said: “I had never studied much about history but I was really pleased by how accessible the meeting was. Lots of the questions from the audience seemed fundamental, but they were treated really seriously. The Russian Revolution is really important and I have to learn more about it.

“One thing I was really pleased to hear about was the working class necessarily being international. There was a question from the audience about whether nations should continue to divide the world today.

“The danger of war would be on the list of major issues today especially because of the link that the speaker drew between the actions of the US today and previous actions in history. They are almost following the same script in the threats against North Korea as the other wars in the last 15 years.”

Morgan, a University of Melbourne English Literature student who was attending his first SEP meeting, said: “I found everything that was said was really convincing. It just seemed right. It’s definitely now more apparent to me that there is a possibility of world war.

“Although I was previously a bit dismissive of the comparisons made between today and Tsarist Russia. It seemed to me [that] the Tsarist oppression before the Russian Revolution was something far from what Australia is like today but now I’m starting to see the reasons for a revolution, and the threat of war is definitely there.”

Leanne, a social worker, said: “The Russian Revolution showed that the workers of the world can unite and take the power, and that is clearly the only way this planet, and all its inhabitants, can survive. I’d been seduced in the past by movements such as feminism... It’s quite shocking to think now, looking back, I’ve been sucked in and distracted from the main game.

“I have a son who is 25, who goes to work and talks to other people about the *World Socialist Web Site*, and has been quite amazed at the response of other people. Particularly because they work for a big multi-national company, with lots of overseas workers, and they’ve come back and said, ‘That’s an amazing web site. We’ve learnt so much from it, and it’s got fantastic articles.’

Referring to Google’s censorship of the WSWS, she said: “I refuse to watch or read anything that isn’t WSWS-based. Clearly the WSWS is a threat for [Google], and will continue to be, I hope, a growing threat. It goes to show their level of fear, and the weakness of their position.”

Nicholas, 22, who is studying Physics Honours at the University of Newcastle, said: “What stood out most for me

was the emphasis on a revolutionary party to lead the working class as a whole. The meeting gave us an overview of a previous attempt at a revolution and the building of a socialist society.

“If we ever want to replicate this and initiate a world-wide revolution, we need to look at the most significant previous attempt of a revolution of this kind in history, a socialist revolution. Obviously the context has changed—we no longer live in the early 20th century—but the underlying forces, the class structure, still remains more or less the same...

“In my field today, the major problem is mostly funding; it is seen as an extravagance. Physics requires a lot of research and its applications may not be apparent for many years to come. You can point to numerous examples where it has been useful and necessary in the real world throughout history.

“It’s ultimately that conception, the ‘need’ to make ‘cuts’ to funding has the most profound impact on the field. It’s a fundamental issue and requires a fundamental change. Capitalism would not be able to resolve that; there have been attempts before but they only got so far. All attempts have dissolved backwards. It slows down the development of technology.”

Maz, an IT Business Analyst from Newcastle, said the meeting was “very informative, it covered important aspects of the revolution. I wasn’t clear on whether the revolution was a coup or not, but today I found out that it wasn’t the case. This conception is something that is widely misunderstood, or intentionally portrayed as such ... Even though [the revolution] was 100 years ago, the impact is still there, and there is much more to learn from it, which I would like to pursue.

“Capitalism today is wearing a different mask, but there is still inequality and wage slavery. On the other side there are still those genuine socialists who will take up the fight for equality, sharing and fairness. It is just a matter of raising awareness and making the public aware.

“People can’t afford to live in today’s world, and this is something that needs to be changed. It’s like someone fighting to breathe; fighting for socialism is not a lifestyle, it’s a fight for survival. The next thing would be how are we going to sustain the gains of our revolution. This would be a question I will ask for next time.”

Robert, a local retiree, said that he came to the meeting “to hear a socialist perspective of history and present-day events, because the current information from the education system and the mainstream media is distorted, particularly with regards to this fake news rubbish.

“Censorship worries me more than anything. I don’t fully agree with your perspective yet, but you should have a right to be heard. Censorship is the thin end of the wedge and it has to be fought against.

“The ruling class only want workers to be smart enough to use machines, to do the paperwork for the system. They don’t want them to think freely. They don’t want them questioning

society; that’s their worst nightmare!”

At the Brisbane meeting, **Michael**, a performing arts worker, asked about the role of art and artists in society, including in the Russian Revolution and today.

“I appreciate the way our questions were clarified in the meeting. I studied art for two years, so I am interested in how art has influenced people. The answers given were good. Artists can express things in a way that other people can relate to, because it’s a kind of universal language,” he said.

“Except for World War I, which I knew something about, all the other information was new. I learnt a lot about history, the past and what’s been going on. I had not really known much about the prominent figures back then, so it was good to get their backgrounds, what they did, and what their influences were.”

“Definitely, the Russian Revolution offers a way forward,” he said. “There needs to be something that changes things. The present system is not really suited for the past or the future.

Wendy and **Harry**, both currently unemployed, said they came to the meeting to find out more about the Russian Revolution and what they could do to help the movement. Wendy said: “Looking around the world, there might not be much hope of change, but there might be in the future.”

Harry commented: “Historical context is very important. You can’t just ignore the past. I liked the way you talk about the reasons behind things, and try to get down to the reasons first. It’s always important to keep clarifying the reasons. I understand the class structure and the class battle we are talking about.

“It was good that you opened up the floor [to questions]. It’s good that we had different people talking. That was handy. We’d love to explore the ideas you have ... We need to talk more. We have to do this again!”

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