

SEP (Australia) holds successful fifth national congress

By our correspondent
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The Socialist Equality Party (Australia) held a successful three-day national congress on August 14-16. Delegates from across the country discussed and unanimously adopted a major resolution outlining the deepening crisis of Australian and world capitalism and the tasks of the party, and elected a new national leadership. The SEP holds its national congresses every two years.

The event, held online due to the coronavirus pandemic, was marked by significant international participation. It was held in the wake of the SEP (US) congress last month. Representatives of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement, from the US, Britain, France, Sri Lanka, New Zealand and Canada delivered greetings and participated in the deliberations.

David North, chairman of the WSWS international editorial board and the SEP (US), gave a contribution reviewing the significance of the COVID-19 crisis as a turning point in world history. North placed the work of the ICFI in the context of the 80th anniversary of the assassination of Leon Trotsky and the protracted struggle of the Fourth International for socialist internationalism.

Cheryl Crisp presented a detailed report examining the different stages of the pandemic. Crisp exposed the fraudulent character of official claims that Australia was exempt from the global crisis. She stressed that the response of the Australian ruling elite and the political establishment to the pandemic, like its counterparts internationally, had been dictated solely by the interests of the corporate and financial elite.

Crisp's report made clear that the same processes leading to an escalation of class struggle globally are present in Australia. She stressed the need for the SEP to deepen its intervention into the working class and to build the party in preparation for major social and political struggles.

Other reports were delivered on different aspects of the SEP's analysis and work. These included the fight by the Committee for Public Education, a rank-and-file organisation of teachers initiated by SEP members to defend

the social rights of educators in opposition to the corporatised trade unions; the struggle to build the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, the SEP's youth wing, among students and working class youth; the party's participation in the international campaign to free WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange and defend all whistleblowers, including Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, and the fight for an international anti-war movement of the working class against the drive to imperialist war, in particular the escalating US confrontation with China.

The main congress resolution, published on the WSWS today, is entitled "The coronavirus pandemic, the crisis of capitalism and the tasks of the SEP."

Based on the analysis developed by the WSWS since the beginning of the year, and the major statements of the ICFI over the past decades, it identifies the pandemic as a "trigger event" accelerating the growth of social inequality, the turn to militarism and authoritarianism by governments around the world, and the resurgence of the class struggle.

The resolution explains that the prognosis of the January 3 WSWS perspective, which identified the 2020s as a decade of revolutionary struggle, has been confirmed within months. It states:

"The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a monumental breakdown of the capitalist system and laid bare the chasm between the ruling classes and the mass of the population internationally. Governments around the world stand exposed for their criminal indifference and negligence. Their lack of preparation, despite repeated warnings of the danger of such a public health disaster, and their failure to immediately implement the necessary counter-measures, are responsible for the rapid spread of COVID-19 and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people."

The resolution reviews how these developments have found expression in Australia. It documents the criminally-negligent official response to the pandemic, including a pro-business "reopening of the economy" that has resulted in a resurgence of coronavirus infections and

deaths. It states:

“The rapid spread and global nature of the pandemic and its devastating economic and social impact demonstrate the impossibility of walling off any country or continent, including Australia, from the resulting crisis. National borders cannot protect the world’s population because of the vast interconnectedness of contemporary economic and social life. A global answer is necessary. The threat posed to millions more lives and livelihoods can only be countered through the mobilisation of the international working class—the only social force that can overturn the capitalist profit system, which is a barrier to the international coordination of economic, scientific, industrial and information resources needed to combat the virus. That task requires the building of the ICFI, the world party of socialist revolution, to provide the essential worldwide strategy and leadership.”

The resolution outlines Australia’s central role in the stepped-up US confrontation with China, which threatens nuclear war. It reviews an intensifying assault on democratic rights, including the establishment of an extra-constitutional “national cabinet,” that has ruled by decree through much of the pandemic, and the expansion of police and military powers.

It also draws particular attention to the central role of Labor and the trade unions in enforcing an assault on the social position of the working class which has dramatically intensified over the past sixth months. The document anticipates a deepening of the political radicalisation revealed in June’s mass protests against police violence, and the emergence of social and political opposition from the working class.

The document details the party’s development of transitional demands, aimed at establishing a bridge between the initial struggles that workers are engaged in and the perspective of socialist revolution. This includes the fight for a rebellion against the unions and the establishment of independent rank-and-file committees in workplaces and neighbourhoods.

Summing up the tasks of the SEP, point 30 of the resolution states: “The strategic lessons of the 20th century—the victory of the Russian Revolution in October 1917, as well as the bitter defeats of the working class in revolutionary struggles—all demonstrate that without a revolutionary party to provide political education and leadership a mass movement of the working class, no matter how militant, is incapable of seizing power from the bourgeoisie. The basic task of the SEP is to build its political influence in key sections of the working class, by intervening aggressively in struggles as they emerge, to recruit workers and youth to the party and train them as

revolutionary fighters.”

The resolution was unanimously adopted by the Congress along with two supplementary resolutions: “Free Julian Assange! Defend Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden!” and “Build the IYSSE!” They will be published on the WSWs over the coming days.

The Congress elected a new National Committee, to lead the work of the party for the next two years. Reflecting the growth of the SEP over the recent period, it includes a significant layer of students, young people and workers won to Trotskyism over the past five years, along with senior members whose involvement in the party spans decades.

As the party’s national-secretary, the National Committee elected Cheryl Crisp, who has been a leading member of the SEP and its predecessor organisation since 1972 and was elected as assistant national-secretary in 2015. The outgoing national-secretary James Cogan retired from the position due to ill-health.

Max Boddy, who has led the party’s work in the Newcastle area and has played a prominent role in its interventions elsewhere, was elected as the new assistant national-secretary. Peter Symonds was elected as WSWs national editor.

In concluding the Congress, Crisp stressed that its success was based on the close international collaboration of the ICFI and the immense political and theoretical preparation of the world Trotskyist movement. She emphasised that the Congress was held amid a turning point in the world situation that creates the conditions for the intersection of the revolutionary program of the SEP with the emerging mass movement of the working class and youth.

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