

SEP (Australia) holds successful Seventh National Congress

Our reporters
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From October 3 to 6, the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) held a four-day National Congress, which adopted two resolutions to guide its work over the next two years and elected the party leadership.

The event was characterised by a high level of intensive discussion, spanning from the newest members who joined since the last Congress two years ago, including some politicised over the past 12 months by the Gaza genocide, to those who have been active in the SEP for decades.

It was a thoroughly international Congress, both in the political perspective that was outlined and in the participation. Leading members of virtually every section and supporting group of the International Committee of the Fourth International delivered greetings, drawing out the commonality of the issues facing the working class everywhere and making palpable the unified struggle for a socialist, revolutionary and international program by the world Trotskyist movement.

In an extensive opening report, SEP (Australia) National Secretary Cheryl Crisp emphasised that the deliberations of the Congress and the tasks facing the party could only be understood in their international and historical context.

The Congress was being held amid an explosive international situation, Crisp stated, characterised by the greatest eruption of imperialist militarism since 1945. As the Congress was convening, the imperialist powers were taking two of the theatres of the developing global war to the brink of a massive conflagration, threatening World War III.

Crisp stated: “As the Congress meets, the ground invasion of Lebanon by Israel has begun and is being carried out with a level of barbarity akin to the transformation of Gaza into a wasteland with an estimated 200,000 dead and its 2 million population displaced multiple times.”

In the days and weeks preceding, the actions of the Zionist regime, acting in coordination with the US and the other major powers, included a series of pager terrorist attacks in Lebanon, the bombardment of its densely-populated capital and the murder of Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of the Hezbollah political party. These war crimes, Crisp warned, showed the genocide of Palestinians was one component of a wider war drive, targeting not only Lebanon but also Iran.

More broadly, they were a demonstration that “there are no restraints by imperialism, there are no red lines that aren’t and won’t be crossed. There are no impediments in terms of international law or the consequences of provoking nuclear war and the possible annihilation of mankind.”

That was evident in another theatre of the developing conflict, the

US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.

In 2022, Washington and its allies had goaded the Russian regime into its reactionary and nationalist invasion of Ukraine, to enact longstanding plans for conflict with Russia. Now, Crisp warned, they were goading Putin into potentially using nuclear weapons, including by crossing “red lines” that US President Joe Biden and other imperialist leaders previously admitted could lead to a world war, including permission for the use of NATO weapons to strike inside Russia.

The war drive, Crisp emphasised, expressed the historic breakdown of global capitalism, which was also provoking a political radicalisation and the entrance of the working class into struggle. The ICFI and its sections were alone in fighting to arm the developing movement with a revolutionary and socialist perspective, which was the only means of halting the threat to the very existence of humanity now posed by capitalism.

In that context, Crisp spoke on the significance of the protracted struggle for Trotskyism represented by the ICFI. This had now come under attack, including with the recent release of a slanderous biography of Gerry Healy, a former leader of the Fourth International who played a critical role in the 1950s and 1960s, and two British academic books denouncing Trotskyism as “irrelevant.”

The academic attacks, Crisp stated, had been carried out on behalf of an upper middle-class pseudo-left milieu. Tied to such bourgeois outfits as the Democratic Party in the US and the Labour Party in Britain, these works included desperate attempts to promote reformist solutions, under conditions of a massive global crisis that directly posed the alternatives of socialism or barbarism.

The books were a tacit admission, on the part of the political opponents of the ICFI, that its historically grounded perspective and fight for revolutionary leadership was intersecting with the experiences of growing numbers of workers and young people.

Crisp’s introduction framed the entire discussion. Party members spoke on the major international developments and their implications for the work of the SEP. WSWS International Editorial Board member Nick Beams delivered an extended contribution on the deepening slump in the global economy and the signs of a new financial crisis, which he explained were key to the eruption of war.

Many of the contributions took up the significance of the history of the ICFI. Members spoke on the importance of working through the lectures delivered to the 2023 Summer School of the US SEP. Outlining the struggle for Trotskyism over the course of a century, these had strengthened comrades’ understanding of the strategic experiences of the working class in the 20th century, which is decisive to developing socialist consciousness today.

The outgoing National Committee of the party presented a draft resolution to the Congress, entitled “Capitalist breakdown, the fight against war and the tasks of the Socialist Equality Party.” The document, which will be published on the WSWs, had been the subject of extensive discussion in the party branches preceding the Congress.

Introducing the resolution, SEP National Committee member Oscar Grenfell elaborated on some of the document’s themes. These included Australia’s increasingly pivotal role in the global war drive, including active support for the genocide in Gaza and backing for the US-NATO war against Russia. Above all, the country was being transformed into a central base of operations for US-led preparations for a conflict with China, which is viewed as the central threat to American imperialist dominance.

Grenfell spoke on the significance of this militarisation being completed by the Labor government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. This was in line with Labor’s role as the preeminent party of imperialist war and repression throughout its history.

The speaker stressed that the SEP’s fight to mobilise the working class against war on a socialist program required a continuous struggle against every other political tendency, above all the pseudo-left. Their position in the Gaza protest movement, of continuously promoting bankrupt appeals to Labor, was an attempt to head off a genuine anti-war movement. It went hand in hand with the full support of these tendencies for other planks of the imperialist war drive, including the war against Russia.

Amid a deepening political crisis, the resolution warned of a lurch towards authoritarianism, expressed in the vilification of anti-genocide protesters and particularly in the bipartisan promotion of anti-immigrant xenophobia. In opposition to the entire parliamentary establishment, which was lurching to the right, the SEP was fighting for the political independence of the working class and the development of a new mass socialist movement.

The central importance of the SEP’s active intervention was stressed in a report by the party’s assistant national secretary, Max Boddy. He spoke on the recently concluded fight by the SEP to win 1,500 electoral members (EMs) so that it could regain its status as a federally registered political party. The EM campaign had demonstrated the existence of a growing constituency for the SEP’s revolutionary and socialist perspective, Boddy said, explaining that it was part of a series of critical interventions by sections of the ICFI around the world.

Boddy placed the EM campaign within the context of the developing political radicalisation and the growth of the class struggle over the previous two years. This had included significant struggles by nurses, healthcare workers and other sections of workers, in which the SEP had intervened. He also explained the significance of the federal Labor government’s placement of the construction wing of the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) under administration, a form of de facto state dictatorship, in July. This was a preemptive move to head off major struggles by the working class.

Boddy said all of the struggles that had developed had posed the necessity of a rebellion against the corporatised trade union bureaucracy, which had helped Labor enforce the biggest reversal to working-class living standards in decades. The SEP had accumulated important experiences in the fight to assist workers in building rank-and-file committees over the previous two years, which needed to be deepened and expanded.

National Committee member Mike Head spoke on the fight to free Bogdan Syrotiuk, a Trotskyist jailed by the fascistic Ukrainian regime. Head explained that Syrotiuk was being victimised for advancing the socialist and internationalist perspective of uniting Ukrainian and Russian workers against the US-NATO war and all of the regimes in the region.

Greetings from leaders of the ICFI were integral to the Congress, highlighting its international character. ICFI representatives spanning from the US, Britain, Germany, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Canada, New Zealand and Turkey addressed the event, detailing the impact of the developing crisis in those regions and outlining the ICFI’s active interventions.

SEP (US) Presidential candidate Joe Kishore addressed the Congress, speaking on the war drive of American imperialism and the intervention of the SEP, amid the unprecedented political crisis in the US. Vice-presidential candidate Jerry White outlined the experiences of the SEP in a series of key industrial disputes.

SEP (Sri Lanka) General Secretary Deepal Jayasekera spoke on the political crisis in that country, expressed in the election of the right-wing populist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in last month’s presidential election. The surprise result underscored that the political crisis, which resulted in a mass upheaval in 2022, had deepened. The JVP government, Jayasekera warned, would impose the austerity dictates of the IMF and repress opposition. The SEP was the only party fighting to mobilise the working class and the rural poor on a socialist program, amid an enormous social crisis.

The Congress unanimously adopted the main resolution presented to it, as well as a resolution pledging to deepen the fight for Syrotiuk’s freedom.

It elected a new National Committee, which includes a broad range of generations and experiences within the party, extending from younger members now playing an important political role, to those who have been in the leadership of the Trotskyist movement for decades.

The National Committee re-elected Cheryl Crisp as national secretary, Max Boddy as assistant national secretary and Peter Symonds as the national editor of the WSWs.

In her concluding remarks to the Congress, Crisp stressed that the coming period would be one of social and political upheaval. The party had to continuously ground its activities on the historical experiences of the world Trotskyist movement. It had to intervene boldly and actively in the fight to resolve the crisis of revolutionary leadership in the working class, as part of the struggle of the ICFI for the perspective of World Socialist Revolution.



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