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زبانهای اروپایی

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)

11.10.2022

Build an international movement of the working class against imperialist war!

From September 24 to 27, the Socialist Equality Party in Australia held its Sixth National Congress. After extensive discussion, the following resolution and three others were unanimously adopted. The WSWS will publish the other resolutions over the coming weeks.

1. American imperialism, aided and abetted by all its allies, including Australian imperialism, is plunging the world headlong into a global conflict between nuclear-armed powers that threatens the very existence of humanity. The escalating military conflict in Ukraine instigated by the United States is neither isolated nor temporary. It is the opening front of a war, to not only fragment and subjugate Russia but achieve its longstanding ambition of dominion over the Eurasian landmass and its vast human and natural resources. Even as the US and NATO fuel the war in Europe by funnelling tens of billions in arms to their far-right Ukrainian allies, the Biden administration is deliberately stoking a second front on the other side of Eurasia against China by threatening to incorporate Taiwan into its web of alliances. Every country and every corner of the globe is being drawn into this geo-political maelstrom.

2. The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) joins with its sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in fighting to build a unified anti-war movement of the international working class as the only means for ending the conflict in Ukraine and preventing a nuclear holocaust. The war will not be stopped through moral and pacifist appeals because it is rooted in the immense economic, social and political

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crisis of capitalism, intensified by the global COVID-19 pandemic, that is wracking every country. The same crisis, however, is fuelling the class struggle as workers are driven to resist the efforts of the ruling class to make deeper and deeper inroads into living conditions, including to pay for the escalating arms race and the broader impact of the war. The SEP will strive to imbue the working class with the understanding that its immediate struggles to defend wages and conditions are inexorably bound up with a unified political fight against imperialist war and for the abolition of capitalism.



Ukrainian tanks move down a street in Irpin, on the outskirts of Kyiv, Ukraine, Monday, April 11, 2022. [AP Photo/Evgeniy Maloletka]

3. The SEP rejects with contempt the farrago of lies and misinformation spewing from Washington, its allies and the media to justify the proxy war with Russia. The US and NATO are not responding to unprovoked Russian aggression, nor are they defending Ukrainian “democracy.” Rather, US imperialism is using the neo-Nazi infested Ukrainian regime to weaken Russia and bring down Putin’s government, with utter indifference to the death and suffering inflicted on the Ukrainian and Russian peoples.

4. The war against Russia can be traced to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the consequent US drive to seize the “unipolar moment” to reverse its historic decline through military means and establish its untrammelled global dominance. The US-led invasion of Iraq in 1991 has been followed by one neo-colonial war after another, intensified through the “war on terror” after 2001, aimed in particular at monopolising the vast energy resources of the Middle East and Central Asia and thereby controlling supplies to rival powers. Three decades of war have produced a series of disasters for US

imperialism, including in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya. Far from pulling back, however, the United States is doubling down. The war on terror has been pushed into the background as the Pentagon openly prepares for “great power conflict.” In the first instance, this means weakening, breaking up and subordinating Russia, while simultaneously preparing for war against China.

5. The global COVID-19 pandemic, the criminal “let it rip” response of the ruling classes and the resultant worsening economic and financial crisis internationally has greatly intensified both geo-political and internal social tensions. At the heart of world imperialism, Washington is driven with utter recklessness to risk nuclear war, to not only to advance its predatory ambitions on the world stage, but to divert enormous social tensions at home outward and justify the suppression of the rapidly emerging struggles of the working class.

6. As Lenin explained in his works on imperialism, written amid the death and destruction of World War I, imperialism is not simply a policy that can be reversed. It is a definite stage in the evolution of capitalism—that of “monopoly capitalism; parasitic, or decaying capitalism; moribund capitalism” in which finance capital has asserted its domination of the world market. Any temporary agreement between imperialist powers for the peaceful sharing of the spoils inevitably gives way to imperialist conflicts and wars for the division and redivision of the world.

7. At the most fundamental level, the driving forces for war are rooted in the irresolvable contradictions of capitalism, between world economy and the reactionary division of the world into competing nation states, on the one hand, and socialised production and the private ownership of the means of production, on the other. These contradictions erupted in two catastrophic world wars in the 20th century, and now threaten a third global conflagration, with all the imperialist powers rapidly remilitarising. The globalisation of production over the past four decades has not lessened but exacerbated these contradictions. The world remains within the epoch of imperialism that led to the eruption of World War I, characterised by Trotsky as “the death agony of capitalism,” and is hurtling toward disaster unless the international working class puts an end to this outmoded and reactionary social order.

8. While the war in Europe has been instigated by US imperialism, the SEP unequivocally opposes the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Socialist Equality Party (US) explained in the resolution “Mobilise the working class against imperialist war!” adopted at its 2022 national congress, our opposition to Russia’s invasion is “from the socialist left, not the imperialist right.” It stated:

While rejecting claims that Russia is “imperialist”—a definition embraced by the pseudo-left agents of the Pentagon and NATO to legitimize their support for the proxy war—the SEP gives no support whatsoever to the “national defence” policies of the reactionary Russian ruling class that came to power through the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1990–91 and the systematic plundering of its assets. Putin himself stands atop a semi-Bonapartist autocratic regime that rules precariously over a country seething with social contradictions.

As the war waged by the US and NATO is a continuation of imperialist expansion, the invasion of Ukraine is a continuation of the reactionary policies of the Russian oligarchy and its repudiation of the entire progressive heritage of the Russian Revolution and of the democratic principles embodied in the original founding of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1922. The encirclement of Russia by imperialism is the disastrous outcome of the Stalinist regime’s final betrayal of the legacy of the October Revolution.

Australian imperialism: A frontline state in US-led wars

9. The Australian government—both previously under the Liberal-National Coalition and today under the Labor Party—has given its full support to the US-NATO war against Russia and has made the largest military contribution of any non-NATO ally to assisting and arming Ukrainian forces. At the same time, the Labor government of Anthony Albanese is accelerating Australian imperialism’s military build-up and integration into the decade-long US preparations for war against China.

10. Australia’s centrality to Pentagon strategy is underscored by its longstanding military alliance with the US and membership of the top-level “Five Eyes” intelligence network. It has been further strengthened more recently by the Biden administration’s revival and elevation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with India, Japan and Australia, and the establishment of the AUKUS pact between the US, Britain and Australia.

Moreover, Australia, along with New Zealand, plays an essential role in policing and countering Chinese influence in the tiny island states of the southwest Pacific, which have a strategic significance far outweighing their size. In the event of a US-led war with China and/or Russia, Australia would automatically be involved as it hosts key US bases, such as the Pine Gap satellite-tracking station, which are irreplaceable components of US global military operations and make the country a prime target for nuclear attack.



President Joe Biden, right, shakes hands with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese during the Quad leaders summit meeting at Kantei Palace, Tuesday, May 24, 2022, in Tokyo. [AP Photo/Evan Vucci]

11. Australian imperialism, however, is not simply a puppet of the United States and has its own independent strategic and economic interests. The latter include significant stakes in multi-billion-dollar energy and mineral reserves within the formerly colonised countries in Australia's immediate region—including gas in East Timor, oil and gas in Papua New Guinea, gold in Solomon Islands, and rare earth minerals across the region that are the target of the emerging deep sea mining industry. Australian governments have signed up to the US-led confrontation with China—the country's largest trading partner—despite the inevitable damage to the country's economy for definite reasons. Australian imperialism, due to its relative weakness, has always relied on the major power of the day—first Britain, then the US—for assistance in prosecuting its interests and defending its “patch” in the southwest Pacific, and thus has actively supported the predatory wars of its more powerful partners. Australia is not only dependent on the US strategically but also

economically. The United States remains the largest source of investment in Australia and access to Wall Street is essential for Australian finance capital. For the dominant sections of the ruling class, the commitment to the US military alliance and therefore to a US-led war with China is beyond question.

12. Moreover, as in the United States, the Australian political establishment increasingly views war as the means of diverting mounting domestic social tensions outward against a foreign enemy. The vilification of China is well underway with the continual outpouring of anti-Chinese propaganda. The unprecedented, anti-foreign interference legislation passed with bipartisan support in 2018 provides the anti-democratic legal framework to intimidate, arrest and potentially round up Chinese-born citizens and residents as well as anyone opposed to the US war preparations against Beijing.

13. As the US increased tensions with China, Australian governments initially attempted to balance between the two powers. But that came to an end in 2010 when Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was ousted in a US-orchestrated inner-party coup and replaced by Julia Gillard. Rudd was a staunch defender of the US-Australia military alliance, but he advocated a deal between the US and China, right at the point when Obama was ramping up a confrontation with China on every front. Obama announced the “pivot to Asia” in 2011 in an address to the Australian parliament, without a voice of opposition. The critics within the political establishment of Australia’s integration into US war plans who reflect powerful sectional interests, particularly those heavily reliant on mineral and agricultural exports to China, have increasingly been silenced or sidelined. The bipartisan support for the escalating US war drive against China is an expression, above all, of the dominant position of finance capital and its dependence on and integration into the US financial markets.

The looming US war with China

14. US imperialism regards China as the chief threat to its global hegemony. The Chinese economy is already larger than the American measured by purchasing parity power and is predicted to overtake it in absolute terms by the turn of the decade, if not sooner. Moreover, the US is fearful that China no longer simply functions as a vast cheap labour platform for American corporations but is challenging US predominance in multiple hi-tech areas, from 5G technology to green energy.



A US jet flies over the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan (Credit: US Navy)

15. The US has been preparing for conflict in the Indo-Pacific for the past decade. The Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” involved a comprehensive strategy aimed at aggressively isolating China, diplomatically and economically, while strengthening military alliances, strategic partnerships and basing arrangements throughout Asia. This was accompanied by a huge military restructuring and build-up throughout the region, focussed on enabling the US to mount a massive air and missile attack on the Chinese mainland, accompanied by a naval blockade aimed at strangling the Chinese economy. Trump heightened the confrontation with China by imposing massive trade sanctions that have been maintained by the Biden administration. At the same time, the Pentagon has mounted military provocations, with increasing frequency, in waters and airspace close to the Chinese mainland under the false banner of “freedom of navigation.”

16. Having provoked military conflict with Russia in Ukraine, the US has also turned to war with China. Biden, following Trump, had already deliberately inflamed tensions with China over Taiwan—potentially the most explosive flashpoint in Asia—by increasing arms sales to Taipei, sailing US warships through the narrow Taiwan Strait, and stationing American troops in Taiwan for the first time in decades. Under the guise of defending Taiwan, the US is turning the island into a military trap for China in order to weaken, destabilise and ultimately break up China.

17. The US has been priming the trigger for war over Taiwan, step by step, by eroding the “One China” policy that underpinned the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the US and China in 1979. The US de facto recognised Beijing as the legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan, broke diplomatic ties and ended its military alliance with Taipei, withdrawing all US military forces from the island. Now Biden, following Trump, has torn up longstanding diplomatic protocols, authorising official contact with Taipei at the highest levels. All of this is encouraging Taipei to declare formal independence from China—a step that the US knows will lead to war. Taiwan is not only vital to China strategically but also economically, given its dominant position in the global manufacture of semi-conductors. Just what is at stake was underlined by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s provocative visit to Taiwan in August, sparking the most dangerous confrontation in decades as Chinese and US warships and warplanes faced off in waters surrounding the island.

18. The SEP rejects the utterly cynical claims by the US and its allies, including the Australian government, that the preparations for war are to defend Taiwan’s “vibrant democracy” from Chinese aggression. Time and again, US imperialism has selectively exploited the banner of “democracy” and “human rights” to demonise political leaders and governments targeted for coups and military aggression, while turning a blind eye to the gross abuses of human rights of its allies.

19. The relentless vilification of China by the US and its allies proceeds across the board. Washington not only blames Beijing for the COVID-19 pandemic, based on the lie that the virus was manufactured in a Wuhan laboratory. The US accuses China of destabilising the global economy through its zero-COVID strategy, all of which is designed to obscure Washington’s own criminal “let it rip” policies. The entire Australian political and media establishment has joined this anti-China propaganda war aimed at poisoning public opinion and creating the political climate for military conflict—from the highly-paid pundits of commercial and state-owned media to the various strategic think tanks and academics linked to the intelligence and military apparatus, and establishment politicians of every stripe.

20. The US ambitions to break up Russia into weak statelets, referred to as “decolonising Russia,” finds its counterpart in the cynical championing of “human rights” in support of right-wing, separatist tendencies in Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong and Mongolia, aimed at

weakening and fragmenting China. The US remains silent on the chief target of the vast Chinese Communist Party (CCP) police apparatus: the Chinese working class, which is the source of huge profits for American corporations. The SEP opposes the CCP's anti-democratic methods but insists that democratic rights in China can be defended only through a unified movement of the working class, aimed at overturning the CCP regime and abolishing the capitalist system that it has spawned since 1978, on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program.

21. The role of the pseudo-left organisations, such as Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance, in backing US and thus Australian imperialism in the proxy war against Russia is mirrored by their alignment with the US-led preparations for war with China, which they characterise as “imperialist” and “expansionist.” The SEP rejects the designation of Russia and China as “imperialist.” Imperialism, as both Lenin and Trotsky explained, is the domination and expansion of finance capital. That domination is based on the supremacy of the US dollar, not the Russian rouble or the Chinese renminbi. Moreover, financial power is in the hands of the banks and financial conglomerates of the US, the UK, the Western European powers and Japan, as it has been since the emergence of imperialism at the beginning of the 20th century.

22. The designation of Russia and China as “imperialist” powers has no foundation in either economic or historical analysis. But it does serve a very definite political purpose. It is used, in one way or another, to minimise or cover up completely the central role of US imperialism in recklessly instigating a Third World War. It also serves to legitimise the US policy of “decolonising” Russia and China by promoting the “right to self-determination” for the so-called oppressed nations within their borders. No attempt is ever made to explain by what historical and economic processes these bureaucratically degenerated and deformed workers' states have been transformed into imperialist powers. Indeed, the weakness and vulnerability of China and Russia in the face of the imperialist thuggery is underscored by the devastating impact on the Russian economy of US-orchestrated sanctions that effectively excluded Russia from the international financial system. The position of the pseudo-lefts—who represent privileged layers of the upper-middle class in Australia and internationally—in favour of war against Russia and China, is the culmination of their backing for previous imperialist wars, including against Libya and Syria.

23. The CCP regime has no progressive response to the mounting US provocations that find their sharpest focus on Taiwan. Sections of the bureaucratic apparatus continue to appeal for a deal with US imperialism, even as it becomes ever plainer that Washington demands nothing less than its complete economic and strategic subservience. At the same time, Beijing is engaging in an arms race with Washington that can only end in disaster, not only for the Chinese people but for humanity as a whole. While it continues to maintain the fiction that it is building “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” the CCP has increasingly based itself on the promotion of Chinese nationalism and chauvinism, which only serves to divide the international working class—the only social force capable of preventing world war.

The tasks of the SEP

24. The same contradictions and crisis of world capitalism are also propelling the working class into struggle, providing the basis for the building of an international anti-war movement. As the 2016 ICFI statement entitled “Socialism and the Fight Against War” explained: “Imperialism seeks to save the capitalist order through war. The working class seeks to resolve the global crisis through social revolution. The strategy of the revolutionary party develops as the negation of imperialist nation-state geopolitics. The revolutionary party, as Trotsky explained, follows ‘not the war map but the map of the class struggle.’”

25. The war against Russia has already contributed to skyrocketing inflation and severe shortages of energy, grains and other essentials. This is fuelling mass protests and strikes in the advanced capitalist countries, including the United States, as well as in the less developed. The acute social crisis is being exacerbated by the response of the central banks, which have raised interest rates to induce recession and render millions jobless. Governments that have sacrificed the lives of millions to maintain corporate profits through their “let it rip” pandemic policy will not hesitate to sacrifice tens of millions more in an imperialist war for global domination. The SEP resolves to intervene aggressively in the struggles of the working class to build a powerful anti-war movement in unity with workers and youth around the world.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Australia will play a central role in building such an anti-war movement in collaboration with IYSSEs around

the world. A determined and persistent political fight must be waged on campuses, particularly against the pro-war pseudo-left organisations, to win students to the perspective of world socialist revolution and to turn them to the working class, the only social force capable over overturning capitalism and preventing a catastrophic third world war.

26. The 2016 ICFI statement set out the fundamental political principles that must guide the anti-war struggle:

- * The struggle against war must be based on the working class, the great revolutionary force in society, uniting behind it all progressive elements in the population.

- * The new anti-war movement must be anti-capitalist and socialist, since there can be no serious struggle against war except in the fight to end the dictatorship of finance capital and the economic system that is the fundamental cause of militarism and war.

- * The new anti-war movement must therefore, of necessity, be completely and unequivocally independent of, and hostile to, all political parties and organizations of the capitalist class.

- * The new anti-war movement must, above all, be international, mobilizing the vast power of the working class in a unified global struggle against imperialism. The permanent war of the bourgeoisie must be answered with the perspective of permanent revolution by the working class, the strategic goal of which is the abolition of the nation-state system and the establishment of a world socialist federation. This will make possible the rational, planned development of global resources and, on this basis, the eradication of poverty and the raising of human culture to new heights.

27. The SEP demands an immediate end to the US-NATO war against Russia, as well as US-led aggression and provocations against China, all of which are being carried out behind the backs of the population. We call for the immediate disbanding of all imperialist alliances, including NATO, AUKUS, the Quad and the ANZUS pact between the US, New Zealand and Australia. The SEP also calls for the liquidation of the entire military apparatus on which the Australian government has already committed to spending more than \$300 billion on armaments over the next decade, on top of the growing annual

defence budget. These massive funds will be extracted from the working class through further deep inroads into social spending and living standards.

28. The political struggle against war goes hand-in-hand with the defence of the democratic rights of working people, which will come under increasingly ferocious attack as popular opposition to war mounts. The persecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange by US administrations, in league with the Australian, British and Swedish governments, for exposing the war crimes and diplomatic intrigues of imperialism is a sharp warning that war will be accompanied by the shredding of basic democratic rights.

29. The broad anti-war sentiment among workers and youth has deep historic roots but lacks a political perspective, program and leadership. The task of the SEP is to develop within the working class the understanding that the root cause of war lies in the profit system, which is also the source of its class oppression. In the process, the SEP aims to build a revolutionary leadership within the working class based on the fight for a workers' government committed to the socialist reorganisation of society, as a component part of the world socialist revolution.

World Socialist 10.10.2022