# Statement of Principles of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia)

The SEP Statement of Principles outlines the basic conceptions of the SEP and the foundation for membership in the party. The document was adopted unanimously at the party's founding congress in 2010.

## The World Tasks of the Socialist Equality Party

1. The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the World Party of Socialist Revolution founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938. The principles of the SEP incorporate the lessons of the strategic experiences of the international working class throughout the 20th century and of the struggle waged by Marxists for the program of world socialist revolution. The socialist revolution, which signifies the forcible entrance of the masses into conscious political struggle, portends the greatest and most progressive transformation of man's social organisation in world history—the ending of society based on classes and, therefore, of the exploitation of human beings by other human beings. A transformation so immense is the work of an entire historical epoch. The principles of the SEP reference the experiences of this epoch, which opened with the eruption of World War I in 1914, followed shortly after by the conquest of state power by the Russian working class in the October Revolution of 1917.

2. The Fourth International emerged out of the implacable struggle waged by Marxist internationalists, led by Leon Trotsky, against the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union and the betrayal of the program of world socialist revolution by the dictatorial regime headed by Joseph Stalin and his henchmen. The political source of that betrayal, which led ultimately, in 1991, to the dissolution of the USSR, was the Stalinist regime's substitution of nationalism for internationalism.

3. The socialist revolution is international in scope. As Trotsky wrote, "The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena. Thus, the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word; it attains completion only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet." This fundamental principle of the Fourth International, which was forged in the struggle against the Stalinist "theory" of "socialism in one country", defines the program and political identity of the SEP. The strategy of the working class, in Australia as in all countries, must proceed from an analysis of world conditions. The era of national programs ended with the outbreak of World War I. Nearly one hundred years later, following the colossal growth and integration of the global economy, world economic conditions and the exigencies of inter-imperialist and inter-capitalist rivalries are the principal determinants of national life. Thus, as Trotsky explained, "the national orientation of the proletariat must and can flow only from a world orientation and not vice versa." Whether revolutionary struggles of the working class first break out in an advanced or less-developed capitalist country—in North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia or Australasia—the social conflagration will inevitably assume global dimensions. The socialist revolution will not and cannot be completed within a national framework. It will, as foreseen by Trotsky in his Theory of Permanent Revolution, be completed on the world arena.

4. The program of the Socialist Equality Party expresses the interests of the working class, the leading and decisive international revolutionary social force in modern capitalist society. The central task of the SEP is to win the support of Australian workers for the program of international socialism. The SEP strives, on the basis of this program, to unify and mobilise the working class for the conquest of political power and the establishment of a workers' state in Australia. In doing so, it will create the objective preconditions for the development of a genuinely democratic, egalitarian and socialist society. These objectives can be realised only within the framework of an international strategy, the goal of which is the global unification of the workers of all countries and the creation of a United Socialist States of the World.

## The Crisis of Capitalism

5. Capitalism, and the imperialist system that has developed upon its economic foundations, is the fundamental cause of human poverty, exploitation, violence and suffering in the modern world. As a system of socio-economic organisation, it long ago exhausted its historically progressive role. The blood-drenched history of the 20th century—including two world wars, innumerable "local" conflicts, Nazism and other forms of military-police dictatorship, eruptions of genocide and communal pogroms—constitutes an unequivocal indictment of the capitalist system. The victims of capitalist-inspired violence number in the hundreds of millions. Added to these are the peoples of entire continents consigned to unrelenting poverty.

6. The gigantic scale of today's productive forces and the extraordinary advances in technology are more than sufficient not only to abolish poverty, but to guarantee every human being a high standard of living. Culture should be flowering amidst unprecedented material wealth. Instead, conditions of life for the working class are deteriorating and human culture, deprived of

perspective and hope for the future, is in deep crisis. The source of the contradiction between what *is* and what *should be* is a global economic system based on private ownership of the means of production, and the irrational division of the world into rival nation-states.

7. All efforts to raise the living standards of the working class and address serious social problems run up against the barrier of the private profit system and its economic imperatives, the anarchy of the capitalist market, and the insatiable greed of the ruling class. The claim that the capitalist market infallibly allocates resources and wisely arbitrates social needs stands discredited in the eyes of millions amid the speculative scandals and multi-billion dollar bankruptcies that have rocked the world economic system during the past decade. The boundary lines between "legitimate" financial transactions and criminal fraud have narrowed to the point of near invisibility. The separation of the process of personal wealth accumulation from the production and creation of real value is another expression of the putrefaction of the capitalist system.

8. The irreconcilable conflict between the profit system and the very survival of humanity finds further expression in the crisis of global warming and the natural environment. The cause of the crisis is not overpopulation or overconsumption. Nor does it result from the development of science, technology and mankind's productive forces—which is critical to the advance of civilisation—but from their misuse by an obsolete social and economic order that renders impossible any implementation of a rational solution. The scientific evidence indicates that nothing short of the socialist reorganisation of the world economy—in which the environment is no longer held hostage to the private profit motive or destructive national interests—can achieve the enormous reductions in greenhouse gases necessary to prevent disaster.

9. The solution to the global economic crisis and the deteriorating social position of the working class lies not in the reform of capitalism, for it is beyond reform. The crisis is of a *systemic* and *historical* character. As feudalism gave way to capitalism, capitalism must give way to socialism. The key industrial, financial, technological and natural resources must be taken out of the sphere of the capitalist market and private ownership, transferred to society and placed under the democratic supervision and control of the working class. The organisation of economic life on the basis of the capitalist law of value must be replaced with its socialist reorganisation on the basis of democratic economic planning, whose purpose is the fulfilment of social needs.

## Imperialism and War

10. While the economic system operates on a global scale, with industry and finance controlled by transnational corporations, capitalism remains rooted in the nation-state system. In the final analysis, the national state serves as a base of operations from which the ruling class of each country pursues its interests on the world stage. The uncontrollable drive of the main imperialist states for geo-political dominance, spheres of influence, markets, control of vital resources, and access to cheap labour, leads inevitably to war. The doctrine of "preventive war" unveiled by the Bush administration in 2002—in violation of legal precedents established at the Nuremberg war crimes trial of 1946—legitimises war as an instrument of policy and sets the stage for unending and escalating violence.

11. The Socialist Equality Party unequivocally condemns the "War on Terror" as a fraudulent pretext for the use of military violence and the destruction of democratic rights. The SEP denounces the government and media slander of those who resist the military occupation of their country as "terrorists". The SEP defends the basic right of people to defend themselves, their homes and their countries against neo-colonial invaders. This principled stand does not lessen the SEP's opposition to violent acts that target innocent civilians in either occupied countries or any other part of the world. Such acts, which can legitimately be defined as terrorist, are politically reactionary. The murder of innocent civilians enrages, disorients and confuses the public, and deepens sectarian and communal divisions within occupied countries. When practised internationally, terrorism undermines the struggle for the unity of the working class. It plays into the hands of those elements within the official establishment that seize on such events to justify and legitimise the resort to war.

12. The SEP demands the immediate withdrawal of all Australian and other foreign military forces from Iraq and Afghanistan, and calls for an end to threats against Iran and other countries regarded as obstacles to the global interests of US imperialism and its allies. The SEP opposes the participation of Australian military personnel in United Nations "peace-keeping" missions, which are nothing but a screen for the interests of one or another imperialist power, and advocates the abrogation of all imperialist military alliances and the closure of all foreign military bases. The SEP encourages and supports the widest mass protests against militarism and war. It makes clear, however, that the causes of war are embedded in the economic structure of capitalist society, and its political division into nation-states, and that, therefore, the struggle against imperialist militarism and war can be successful only to the extent that it mobilises the working class against the capitalist system, on the basis of an international revolutionary strategy and program.

13. Australia is an imperialist power, which prosecutes its predatory economic and geo-political interests internationally, and especially throughout the Pacific region. Even prior to federation in 1901, the Australian ruling elites sought to secure unfettered access to the Pacific region's natural wealth and cheap labour. As a secondary power, Australia has always operated under the aegis of a more powerful imperialist patron: before 1941 the British Empire, and since then, the United States. In exchange for British patronage, the bourgeoisie deployed troops to fight for British interests in the Anglo-Maori wars of the mid-19th century, Sudan, the Boer War, the Boxer Rebellion, World War I and World War II. After World War II, successive Liberal and Labor governments have dispatched troops to back imperialist wars in Korea, Malaya, Vietnam and the Middle East as down-payments to secure support for Australia's own neo-colonial ambitions. With great power competition intensifying, driven by China's growing regional influence, the Australian bourgeoisie has embarked upon neo-colonial police-military interventions and occupations in East Timor and Solomon Islands. These have been based not on "humanitarian" concerns for the local populations, but on looting the natural resources of these impoverished island states, and on shoring up the geo-strategic interests of Australia and the US against their regional rivals. The Socialist Equality Party unequivocally opposes Australia's imperialist interventions, and demands the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Australian police, soldiers, and intelligence personnel from the Pacific region.

## The Capitalist State and Parliamentarism

14. The essential precondition for the implementation of socialist policies is the conquest of political power by the working class and the establishment of a workers' state. While the working class must make use of all the democratic and legal rights available to it in the struggle for power, vast historical experience has demonstrated that it cannot carry out the socialist reorganisation of society within the framework of the existing institutions of bourgeois democracy and the capitalist state. There can be no parliamentary road to socialism. The classic Marxist definition of the state as an instrument of class rule, consisting "not merely of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons, and institutions of coercion of all kinds" (Engels), is even truer today than it was a century ago. Its very existence testifies to the fact that society is split into irreconcilably antagonistic classes. The bourgeois state is an instrument that upholds the political dictatorship of the capitalist class. Even as a matter of law, the bourgeoisie reserves the right to sweep aside basic constitutional norms and legal precedents to defend its rule—as took place in the 1975 Constitutional Coup, when the elected Whitlam Labor government was ousted by the Queen's representative, the governor-general.

15. Democratic rights secured in an earlier historical period have been eviscerated. The powerful repressive mechanisms at the state's disposal have been vastly extended and strengthened. Australia is in the top 15 global military spenders, ranking ahead of Israel, Iran, Brazil, and Turkey; the staff of the intelligence agency ASIO is forecast to be 300 percent larger in 2010 than in 2000; and the Australian Federal Police has been given unprecedented powers, with its own international paramilitary unit. The Australian people exercise no effective supervision or control over these repressive institutions. As in the US, the UK and elsewhere, the "War on Terror" has been utilised to undermine basic legal and democratic rights—including habeas corpus and freedom of speech. The ever-expanding "anti-terror" laws have already created the framework for a police state.

16. The right of Australian citizens to cast an informed vote in elections for the candidate of their choice has been dramatically eroded. Anti-democratic electoral laws impose severe restrictions on the ability of political parties, other than the major bourgeois parties, to have their name on the ballot paper. Combined with systematic media censorship of the election campaigns of parties opposed to the official political establishment, the electoral laws are aimed at buttressing the current corporate-backed parliamentary set-up. Moreover, "freedom of the press" means little when the major media outlets are controlled by a small number of corporate conglomerates, and where the government-owned ABC and SBS engage in strict self-censorship in the interests of the official establishment. There are many indications that the Internet, which has created the possibility for alternative opinions to be heard, will be subjected to increasingly heavy-handed regulation.

## Democracy and the Fight for Workers' Power

17. The defence of democratic rights is inseparably bound up with the struggle for socialism. Just as there can be no socialism without democracy, there will be no democracy without socialism.

Political equality is impossible without economic equality. Like the struggle against war, the fight to defend and expand democratic rights requires the independent political mobilisation of the working class, on the basis of a socialist program, to conquer state power.

18. The establishment of workers' power requires far more than the election of socialist candidates to the existing institutions of the bourgeois state. New forms and structures of genuine participatory democracy—arising in the course of revolutionary mass struggles and representative of the working-class majority of the population—must be developed as the foundations of a workers' government, that is, a government of, for, and by the workers. The policy of such a government, as it introduces those measures essential for the socialist transformation of economic life, will be to encourage and actively promote a vast expansion of democratic working-class participation in, and control over, decision-making processes. It will favour the abolition of existing institutions that either curtail democratic processes or serve as centres of conspiracy against the people (such as vice-regal representation, the standing army, the police, and the entire security-intelligence apparatus). These and other necessary changes of a profoundly democratic character, to be determined by the masses themselves, are possible only in the context of the mass mobilisation of the working class, imbued with socialist consciousness.

## The Political Independence of the Working Class

19. The struggle for power requires the unconditional political independence of the working class from the parties, political representatives, and agents of the capitalist class. First and foremost, this necessitates a conscious political break with the Australian Labor Party. The Labor Party was formed by the trade unions in 1891, drawing wide support from the working class, as a vehicle for ameliorating the excesses of capitalism. However, the Labor Party was, from its very origins, a bourgeois party, explicitly opposed to Marxism and committed to serving the deepest interests of the bourgeoisie. Its founding program—including support for national protectionism, White Australia racism, and the arbitration system—became the national ideology of the federated Australian nation state. Throughout its 120-year history Labor's defence of the profit system, promotion of nationalism, and hostility toward any independent movement of the working class has been unwavering—whether in or out of office. Under conditions where the bourgeoisie operated within a framework of national regulation and was able to grant certain limited concessions and reforms, the Labor Party advanced a national reformist program, which served to subordinate the working class to the capitalist state. With the shattering of those conditions by the advent of globalised production, the Labor Party, like its social democratic counterparts around the world, has ditched its reformist program and become the open advocate of the free market, international competitiveness and the destruction of past social reforms. It now openly functions as a ruthless representative of finance capital and big business. Among the paramount political responsibilities of the Socialist Equality Party is to advocate, encourage and promote a decisive and irrevocable break by the working class with the Australian Labor Party and the entire two-party system.

20. The SEP's opposition to Labor and the two-party system does not imply an obligation to support, regardless of program, any political opposition that might emerge to the two major parties. There are numerous examples in Australian political history of campaigns mounted by so-called "third parties" (the Australia Party, Australian Democrats, the Nuclear Disarmament Party, One Nation and the Greens), or by various "independents", which make certain appeals to political and social discontent without offering a genuine *programmatic* alternative, from the standpoint of the interests of the working class. In certain periods, such movements can be utilised by the ruling elite—including via the provision of financial resources and favourable media coverage—in order to engineer a political shift or to create a politically impotent safety valve for mounting social tensions.

21. The Greens are a case in point. Faced with growing disaffection toward Labor and the two-party system—especially among young people—the bourgeoisie has consciously promoted the Greens as a means of diverting political opposition into safe channels. Far from representing a genuine alternative to the major capitalist parties, the Greens are ardent defenders of the profit system and Australian imperialism. They call for a greater Australian military presence in the South Pacific, support the neo-colonial military interventions into East Timor and the Solomons and have backed, in the Senate, the strengthening of anti-democratic "anti-terror" legislation. Claiming to oppose environmental destruction, they defend the very private property and nation-state system responsible for the accelerating threat to the future existence of human civilisation. The Greens have become a valued component of the official political establishment, functioning in virtual coalition with the Labor Party. In Australia and other countries, Greens politicians have participated in coalition governments and rendered valuable service to the capitalist state. The various middle-class ex-left tendencies align themselves, to a greater or lesser extent, with the Greens, and through them, with the Labor Party. Bitterly hostile to the emergence of a politically independent movement of the working class, the ex-radicals promote the myth that Labor represents a "lesser evil" to the Liberal/National parties, at the same time as they junk any lingering associations with Marxist politics.

22. In evaluating political tendencies, the SEP considers the decisive criteria to be not their episodic position on one or another question, but, rather, their *history*, *program*, *perspective*, and *class* basis and orientation. History provides countless examples of the working class being led into a political blind alley through the formation of electoral alliances that required, for the sake of ephemeral gains at the ballot box, that workers sacrifice their most essential political, social and economic interests. The "Popular Front" alliances formed by the Stalinists and Social-Democratic parties in the 1930s provide the most tragic examples of the consequences of the short-sighted and treacherous sacrifice of historic interests in the pursuit of broad-based, multi-class and, therefore, debilitating coalitions of incompatible social interests.

## Against Opportunism

23. In its approach to all political questions and in its selection of the appropriate tactics, the Socialist Equality Party upholds the fundamental interests of the working class, based on a scientific understanding of the law-governed nature of the capitalist system, the political

dynamics of class society, and a systematic assimilation of the lessons of history. It is this approach that places the SEP in irreconcilable opposition to opportunist politics, which, in the pursuit of short-term tactical gains, sacrifices the long-term interests of the working class. Time and again opportunists have defended their betrayal of principles by claiming to be realistic politicians, not guided by "inflexible" dogmas and who understand how to adapt their practice to the requirements of any given situation. Opportunism is invariably an adaptation to the prevailing national milieu. Time and again, such "realistic" politics have led to disaster for the working class—precisely because they were based on superficial, impressionistic, non-Marxist and, consequently, unrealistic and false appraisals of objective conditions and the dynamics of the class struggle.

24. But opportunism is not merely the product of an intellectual and theoretical error. It has substantial socio-economic roots in capitalist society, and develops within the workers' movement as an expression of the pressure of hostile class forces. All significant manifestations of opportunism—from that of Bernstein, which arose within the German Social Democracy at the end of the 19th century, and that of Stalin, which grew inside the Bolshevik Party in the 1920s, to that of Pablo and Mandel, which developed in the early 1950s inside the Fourth International, and, finally, to the opportunism of the British Workers Revolutionary Party that led to its break from the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in the mid-1980s—can be traced to the influence exerted by bourgeois and petty-bourgeois social forces upon the working class. This is the underlying cause and significance of revisionism and opportunist politics. The struggle against such tendencies is not a distraction from party building, but, rather, the highest point at which the fight for Marxism in the working class is engaged.

## Socialist Consciousness and the Crisis of Leadership

25. The Socialist Equality Party, as a section of the ICFI, defends the classical conception—developed systematically by Lenin in the construction of the Bolshevik Party and carried forward by Trotsky in the struggle to found and build the Fourth International—that revolutionary socialist consciousness does not develop spontaneously in the working class. Socialist consciousness requires scientific insight into the laws of historical development and the capitalist mode of production. This knowledge and understanding must be introduced into the working class, and this is the principal task of the Marxist movement. This was precisely what Lenin was emphasising in *What Is To Be Done?* when he wrote, "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement." No matter how powerful the spontaneous movement of the working class, bourgeois ideology, far older, more widespread and with greater means of dissemination than socialist theory, spontaneously imposes itself. Therefore, without the efforts of the revolutionary party to introduce Marxist theory into the workers' movement, it remains under the ideological domination of the bourgeoisie. The greater the upsurge of the working class and the more widespread its development, Lenin insisted, the greater the need for consciousness in the theoretical, political and organisational work of the revolutionary party. Historically, the most widespread form of mass working-class consciousness has been trade unionism. But, as Lenin explained, and the experience of more than 100 years has demonstrated,

trade unionism is the "bourgeois consciousness" of the working class. Denigration of the struggle for revolutionary consciousness, which is usually combined with demagogic attacks on intellectual and Marxist "elitism", is the stock-in-trade of reactionary academics and political opportunists.

26. The victory of socialism—and, therefore, the survival and progressive development of human civilisation—requires the construction, on the foundations of Marxist theory, of the Fourth International, the World Party of Socialist Revolution. Socialism will not be realised merely as the inevitable outcome of an unconscious historical process. The entire history of the 20th century testifies against such fatalistic "inevitabilism," which is a caricature of historical materialist determinism and has nothing in common with the dynamic interaction of cognition, theory and practice exemplified in the work of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. Capitalism survived the 20th century not because objective conditions were insufficiently mature for socialism, but rather because the leadership of the mass working-class parties was "insufficient" for socialist revolution. The working class again and again entered into epic struggles. But these struggles, misled by the Stalinists, social democrats, centrist and reformist organisations, ended in defeats.

27. Capitalism exists today because of the betrayals of the working class by its own organisations—the Labor and Stalinist political parties and the trade unions. "The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat." These words, with which Leon Trotsky began the founding document of the Fourth International, remain supremely relevant as a definition of contemporary political reality. There is not a single mass organisation in the world today that presents itself as an opponent of the existing world capitalist order, let alone summons the working class to revolutionary struggle. This has created a surreal environment, in which the anger and discontent of the working class is suppressed by the old, politically sclerotic organisations. But as Trotsky also wrote in the founding document of the Fourth International, *The Transitional Program*: "The orientation of the masses is determined first by the objective conditions of decaying capitalism and second by the treacherous politics of the old workers' organisations. Of these factors, the first of course is the decisive one: the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus."

## Marxist Theory and the Working Class

28. The contradictions of the capitalist system will drive the working class into struggles that pose the revolutionary reorganisation of society. These struggles will assume an explicitly international character, arising objectively from the advanced level of the global integration of the productive forces. Therefore, the great strategic task of the modern epoch is the forging of the political unity of the workers of all countries as the decisive international revolutionary force.

29. The Socialist Equality Party bases its activity on an analysis of the objective laws of history and society, particularly as they are manifested in the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. Rooted in philosophical materialism, Marxism insists on the primacy of matter over consciousness. "The ideal is nothing else than the material world," wrote Marx, "reflected by the

human mind, and translated into forms of thought." The materialism of Marx is dialectical, in that it regards the material world and the forms of its reflection in thought not as an aggregate of fixed objects and concepts, internally undifferentiated, but, rather, as a complex of processes, in constant movement and interaction, with antagonistic and divergent tendencies.

30. The SEP seeks to develop, within the advanced sections of the working class, a scientific understanding of history, knowledge of the capitalist mode of production and the social relations to which it gives rise, and an insight into the real nature of the present crisis and its world-historical implications. The SEP strives to transform the material potential for social revolution created by an objective historical process into a class-conscious and self-confident political movement. Applying the method of historical materialist analysis to world events, the SEP anticipates and prepares for the consequences of the intensification of the world capitalist crisis, lays bare the logic of events, and formulates—strategically and tactically—the appropriate political response. The SEP insists that the progressive and socialist transformation of society can be achieved only through the *mass struggle* of the politically conscious working class. The actions of isolated individuals, resorting to violence, can never serve as a substitute for the collective struggle of the working class. As long political experience has shown, acts of individual violence are frequently instigated by provocateurs and play into the hands of the state.

31. The SEP upholds under all conditions the essential revolutionary socialist principle: *to tell the working class the truth*. The program of the party must be based on a scientific and objective assessment of political reality. The most insidious form of opportunism justifies itself on the grounds that the workers are not ready for the truth, that Marxists must take the prevailing level of mass consciousness—or, more precisely, what the opportunists imagine it to be—as their point of departure, and adapt their program to the prejudices and confusion existing among the masses. This cowardly approach is the antithesis of principled revolutionary politics. "The program," declared Trotsky in 1938, "must express the objective tasks of the working class rather than the backwardness of the workers. It must reflect society as it is, and not the backwardness of the working class. It is an instrument to overcome and vanquish the backwardness. That is why we must express in our program the whole acuteness of the social crisis of the capitalist society, including in the first line the United States." The first responsibility of the party, Trotsky continued, is to give "a clear, honest picture of the objective situation, of the historic tasks which flow from this situation, irrespective of whether or not the workers are today ripe for this. Our tasks don't depend on the mentality of the workers. The task is to develop the mentality of the workers. That is what the program should formulate and present before advanced workers." These words define precisely the approach taken by the SEP.

## The Trade Unions and Syndicalism

32. The opportunists' aversion to telling the workers the truth is virtually always connected to their efforts to provide political cover for, and preserve the authority of, the old reactionary, bureaucratised and thoroughly corporatist trade unions that, together with the Labor Party, maintain the subordination of the working class to the capitalist system. The SEP, in opposition to the opportunists, aims to develop within the working class an understanding of the nature of

all the old organisations that claim to represent working people. The ACTU and its affiliated unions are controlled by and serve the interests of a substantial stratum of middle-class functionaries whose personal income is derived from their active and conscious role as facilitators of the corporate exploitation of the working class.

33. During the past three decades, the unions have played a critical role in breaking up the resistance of workers to the offensive launched by both Labor and Liberal governments against jobs, wages, conditions and living standards. Through their Accords with the Hawke and Keating Labor governments, they collaborated with big business in destroying entire sections of industry, eliminating hundreds of thousands of full-time jobs and driving down wages and conditions in the name of "international competitiveness". While union membership has plummeted, the revenues of the trade unions and the salaries of their functionaries have continued to rise. The unions benefit financially from lucrative enterprises such as union-run industry superannuation funds and remuneration from numerous directorships in major corporate boardrooms. Insulated from and indifferent to the hardships suffered by their membership, and protected from rank-and-file protests by anti-democratic industrial laws, the unions are tied by a thousand threads to the corporations and the capitalist state.

34. Against the efforts of the opportunists to maintain the subordination of workers to the unions by promoting the syndicalist conception that they can somehow be reinvigorated through militant "rank and file-ism", the Socialist Equality Party calls for a rebellion against and break with these corrupt organisations, which in no way represent the working class. This does not mean that the SEP abstains from working inside the unions, to the extent that such activity is required to gain access to and assist the workers jointly oppressed by their employers and the union functionaries. But the SEP conducts such work on the basis of a revolutionary perspective, encouraging at every point the formation of new independent organisations—such as factory and workplace committees—that truly represent the interests of the rank-and-file workers and are subject to democratic control.

## Class Unity versus Identity Politics

35. Another form of opportunism, which has played a significant role in undermining the struggle for the unity of the working class and lowering class consciousness, is the promotion of innumerable forms of "identity" politics—based on the elevation of national, ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, gender, and sexual distinctions above class position. Particularly insidious has been the promotion of feminism and Aboriginal nationalism over the past four decades as a means of dividing and weakening the working class. This shift from class to identity has been at the expense of an understanding of the real causes, rooted in the capitalist system, of the hardships that confront all working people. From the 1970s onwards, "multiculturalism" has become the officially sanctioned and promoted form of identity politics in Australia. Developed in the wake of the collapse of the old "White Australia" program, as economic relations with Asia expanded, multiculturalism is nothing but a refashioned national ideology, reflecting the shifting needs of the bourgeoisie. It seeks to undermine the development of class consciousness in the working class by promoting cultural "identity" across class lines. The SEP demands full

equality for all people, and defends unequivocally their democratic rights. All forms of discrimination based on national, ethnic, racial, religious, or linguistic heritage, or on gender or sexual orientation, must be abolished. The SEP advances this essential democratic component of its program within the context of the fight for socialism, based on the political unification of all sections of the working class in Australia and throughout the world.

## For the Rights of Aborigines

36. An essential precondition for the forging of this unity is the unconditional defence of the democratic rights of Australia's indigenous population. The appalling living conditions endured by the majority of Aboriginal people stands as a damning indictment of Australian capitalism. Measured by numerous social indices—life expectancy, poverty, unemployment, education and literacy, housing, health, rate of incarceration, and access to basic social services and infrastructure—the social position of indigenous Australians is equivalent to that of the world's most impoverished peoples, a product of the violent dispossession and genocide that accompanied the introduction of capitalism throughout the continent in the 18th and 19th centuries. So-called native title land rights have done nothing to improve the lot of Aboriginal communities, serving only to benefit a narrow, privileged and hand-picked elite. Likewise, the Labor government's apologies for past crimes against the Aboriginal people are a sham, with one of their primary purposes being to prepare the way for new crimes, including the Northern Territory "intervention" and the quarantining of welfare. The SEP opposes all attempts, either directly or indirectly, to blame "white society" instead of the capitalist system for the oppression of Aborigines, including via proposals for a "Treaty" between Aborigines and "whites" or through the fraudulent perspective of "reconciliation". The only means of resolving the deplorable situation confronting Aboriginal workers and youth is through the mobilisation of the entire working class, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, to end the socio-economic order that has produced it.

## In Defence of Refugees and Immigrants

37. The SEP condemns and opposes the entire reactionary framework of "border protection" and immigration restrictions upheld by every parliamentary party, including the Greens. Labor and Liberal governments alike incite xenophobia, witch-hunting asylum seekers in order to divert attention from their own responsibility for economic and social crises. Refugees and immigrants are routinely denied fundamental democratic rights. The SEP rejects the classification of any human being as "illegal" and upholds the unconditional right of workers of every country to live and work wherever they choose, with full legal, democratic and citizenship rights.

## Socialist Policies Versus Protectionism and "Free Trade"

38. The claim made by national chauvinists, invariably endorsed by the trade unions, that the answer to the loss of jobs within Australia is to be found in protectionism, is false. As a practical matter, there can be no return, in the age of globalisation, to economic nationalism. At the same time, the invocation of "free trade" by the transnational monopolies is as fraudulent as all their

other tributes to "freedom." The SEP advocates neither protectionism nor "free trade," but fights instead for social ownership of the means of production, the elimination of national borders, and the creation of a planned, rationally-integrated global economy.

## Democratic Centralism

39. The revolutionary struggle of the working class requires organisation, and organisation is impossible without discipline. But the discipline required for revolutionary struggle cannot be imposed bureaucratically from above. It must develop on the basis of agreement, freely arrived at, on principles and program. This conviction finds expression in the organisational structure of the Socialist Equality Party, which is based on the principles of *democratic centralism*. In the formulation of policy and the appropriate tactics, the fullest democracy must prevail within the party. No restraints, other than those indicated by the party's constitution, are placed on internal discussion of the SEP's policies and activities. Leaders are democratically elected by the membership, and are subject to criticism and control. But if the formulation of policy requires the broadest discussion, and open and honest criticism, its implementation demands the strictest discipline. The decisions arrived at democratically within the party are binding on all members. Those who object to this essential element of centralism in the implementation of decisions, who see in the demand for discipline a violation of their personal freedom, are not revolutionary socialists but anarchistic individualists, who fail to understand the implications and demands of the class struggle.

## Class Consciousness, Culture and the *World Socialist Web Site*

40. The fight for socialism demands an enormous growth in the political, intellectual, and cultural stature of the workers' movement, in Australia and internationally. In contrast to the practitioners of pragmatic and opportunist politics, the SEP is convinced that only a movement working at the highest theoretical level will prove capable of attracting the working class to its banner, preparing it for the struggle against capitalism, and, beyond that, for the construction of a socialist society. While bourgeois politicians and the media seek to drag the working class down to their own intellectually debased level, the SEP strives to raise the working class up to the level required by its historic tasks. Not only politics but also science, history, philosophy, literature, movies, music, the fine arts, and all areas of culture fall within the domain of socialist education. The SEP's most important instrument for the development of socialist consciousness within the working class is the *World Socialist Web Site*, *published by the International Committee of the Fourth International*. With its daily analyses of world political and economic developments, exposure of the social realities of capitalism, coverage of workers' struggles, commentary on vital questions of culture and science, discussion of historical and philosophical themes, and examination of critical issues of revolutionary strategy, tactics and practice, the WSWS plays a decisive role in forging the contemporary world Marxist movement.

## Revolutionary Strategy and Transitional Demands

41. The strategic aim of the Socialist Equality Party is to educate and prepare the working class for the revolutionary struggle against capitalism, the establishment of workers' power and the creation of a socialist society. Our aim is not the reform of capitalism, but its overthrow. The attainment of this goal, however, requires the most careful and detailed attention to the conditions of life of the broad mass of workers, and the formulation of demands that address their needs. The SEP recognises the necessity of establishing, in practice, a link between the perspective of socialist revolution and the concrete struggles in which the working class is engaged. In this effort, the work of the SEP is guided by the approach advocated by Leon Trotsky in the *Transitional Program*. "It is necessary," he wrote, "to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find a bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today's conditions and today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."

42. Such demands include universal employment, automatic adjustment of wages in line with inflation, reduction of working hours with no loss of pay, unrestricted access to quality medical care and education, decent housing and the cancellation of home repossessions and evictions. They also include democratisation of the workplace, unrestricted inspection by the public of the financial records of corporations and financial institutions, establishment of restraints on executive salaries, imposition of a genuinely progressive income tax and significant restrictions on the transfer of massive personal wealth via inheritance. The SEP will advance other critical transitional demands such as nationalisation and the establishment of democratic workers' control of large corporations vital to the national and global economy, dismantling of the army and the transfer of authority to popular militias with elected officers controlled by the working class and other policies of a democratic and socially beneficial character.

43. Transitional demands will play an important role in the political mobilisation of the working class to the extent that they form part of a broader campaign to develop socialist consciousness. The *Transitional Program* is not an *á la carte* menu, from which demands are arbitrarily selected, without the appropriate political context or reference to broader political goals. If the *Transitional Program* is to serve as a bridge to socialism, the destination cannot be kept a secret from the working class.

## The Working Class and the Socialist Revolution

44. The work of the SEP is imbued with an unwavering confidence, grounded in advanced scientific theory and rich historical experience, in the revolutionary role and destiny of the working class. But the victory of the socialist revolution depends upon the conscious struggles of workers. The emancipation of the working class is, in the final analysis, the task of the working class itself. As Engels put it so well, "Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organisation, the masses themselves must also be in on it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are fighting for, body and soul." When the Australian workers make the decision, beneath the blows of crisis-stricken capitalism, that they "must be in on it", nothing will prevent them from taking their rightful place in the world socialist revolution.

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