

World at the Crossroads Conference

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A 'World at the Crossroads Conference' was organized by the Democratic Socialist Perspective (DSP), Resistance and Green Left Weekly at Sydney on 10-13 April. Kavita Krishnan, who represented CPI(ML) at the Conference, reports.

As the world reels from a severe recession, as wars, occupation and repression scar the entire globe, and as climate change threatens the very future of humanity, it is widely acknowledged that the world is in a crisis. But the nearly 500 people from six continents gathered at Sydney on 10-12 April weren't there for a mere academic discussion of the crisis. They were there to say the world has a choice. The same choice that Rosa Luxemburg spoke of so long ago: a choice between socialism and barbarism - one could say today, socialism and devastation. The theme of the Conference - "World at a Crossroads" - expressed this choice, and its slogan - "fighting for socialism in the 21st century" - declared the determination to struggle to make the world turn left at the crossroads!

At the Conference, more than 70 activists representing a range of countries, movements and revolutionary parties, addressed 42 workshops and several plenary sessions, sharing experiences and strategies, and engaging in debates on issues ranging from climate change and meltdown to nationality struggles, cultural resistance and struggles and revolutions taking place across the world.

The Conference opened with an 'Acknowledgement of Aboriginal Land' by Aboriginal activist Jenny Munro, who reminded a packed hall that the conference was being held on land stolen from the indigenous Gadigal people of the Eora nation.

Capitalism's Crises and Our Solutions

The opening session was on 'Capitalism's Crises and Our Solutions' - addressed by Reihana Mohideen, leader of the newly formed Party of Labouring Masses in the Philippines, David Spratt, co-author of Climate Code Red, and Michael Lebowitz, renowned Marxist economist, now at the Centro Internacional Miranda, Venezuela, and author of Build it now: Socialism For the 21st Century.

Speaking at the session, Michael Lebowitz, said that the crisis notwithstanding, capitalism would not collapse by itself; it could restructure itself to ride over the crisis. To prevent this, it was important to educate people regarding the crisis. Struggles of the working class and the people in themselves were not enough - but these struggles are important because people change in the course of struggles. The task for revolutionaries is "to make the crisis in capitalism become a crisis of capitalism", he said.

US Imperialism and the "War on Terror"

The next session featured a discussion on the "war on terror" in Iraq, Afghanistan and other parts of the world, assessing the situation after the election of US President Obama and his promises of 'change'. Speaking at this session, DSP leader Pip Hinman confronted the lie peddled by US and Australian governments that the war in Afghanistan is the "good war". Pointing out that Obama had

intensified the US offensive in Afghanistan, she called for “all Australian troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan now.” Salim Vally, spokesperson for Palestine Solidarity Committee (South Africa), spoke of how there were photographs of Obama, as Illinois Senator, attending Arab fund-raising dinners with Palestinian academic Edward Said. This is marked contrast to his silence on Israel’s genocide in Gaza, and his declaration that “Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel and must remain undivided.” He reminded of the racist remark that the father of Rahm Emanuel had made on his son’s appointment as Obama’s new Chief of Staff: “Obviously he will influence the president to be pro-Israel. Why wouldn’t he be? What is he, an Arab? He’s not going to clean the floors of the White House.” Vally concluded that “Martin Luther King spoke the truth to power, Obama spoke lies to get into power.”

Two young medical doctors from the Australian Tamil community, Arun Murali and Pramod Devendra, held the hall captive with a quietly moving talk on the Sri Lankan government’s war on Tamils. Sri Lanka spends 45% of its gross domestic product on the war against the Tamils, they said. They said that after the Holocaust, the world said ‘Never again’ - and yet, at Palestine, at the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka, the genocide continues, and “the world continues not just to ignore it but continues to fund it.”

“Change the System, not the Climate”

Addressing another major session on ‘Confronting the climate change crisis: an eco-socialist perspective,’ Ian Angus, founder of the Eco-socialist International Network and editor of *Climate and Capitalism*, said that the ‘worst-case scenarios’ painted by the IPCC on climate change had proved too optimistic. ‘Green’ capitalists, he said, could offer nothing more than ‘greenwash.’ Now, increasingly, even those like James Gustave Speth, called the “ultimate insider” within the environmental movement, once part of the Carter and Clinton administrations, has penned a searing critique of capitalism. In his 2008 book *Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability*, he concluded that thanks to capitalism’s built-in tendency to unbridled growth, “Capitalism as we know it today is incapable of sustaining the environment.”

Angus fervently advocated the espousal of ‘eco-socialism’ as a kind of socialism that embraced and expanded the legacy of ecological views embedded in socialism. Stressing that only such a socialism could save the planet, he quoted Walter Benjamin’s remark (in the context of Marx’s description of revolutions as the locomotives of history) that “Perhaps revolutions are not the train ride, but the human race grabbing for the emergency brake.”

Socialism: For a Full Development Human Potential

In a lucid and energetic talk that provoked much discussion and debate, Michael Lebowitz outlined the contours of what socialism really was. It’s easy to say what socialism is not, he said; but socialism is much more than the mere opposite of capitalism. Socialism is nothing less than society that creates conditions for the “fullest possible development of human beings.” In this context, he discussed the experience of building the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela.

Revolt and Revolutions in Latin America

One of the sessions which generated the maximum enthusiasm was the one discussing the tumultuous developments in Cuba, Venezuela, and Bolivia. Representing Cuba here was Abelardo Curbelo, no ordinary Cuban ambassador to Australia, because he is also a veteran of the Cuban revolution and central committee member of the Cuban Communist Party. He asked his audience to closely watch the developments at the impending Summit of the Americas at Port of Spain on April

17-19, from which Cuba was excluded, warning that Obama might be confronted by a remarkable display of solidarity for Cuba from the very countries which the US had taken to be pliant pawns. For decades, he said, the USA had isolated Cuba in Latin America - but now, among all the nations of the Americas and the world, the only country to have no relations with Cuba is the USA!

Nelson Davila, founding member of Chavez's Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement (MBR-200), and head of Venezuela's diplomatic mission to Australia reiterated that 'US hegemony in the region is finished!'

Luis Bilbao, Argentinean Marxist and participant in the construction of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, comprehensively analysed the spectre of Latin American solidarity that haunted US imperialism. The revolutionary assertion of indigenous nationalism in Bolivia was also discussed.

The conference celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Cuban revolution, the 10th anniversary of the Venezuelan revolution, and the electoral victory of the FMLN at El Salvador. Slogans of 'Uh! Ah! Chavez No Se Va' (Chavez isn't going anywhere) rent the air, and toasts were raised to the revolutions. Representatives of the Communist Party of Vietnam also addressed the Conference and were greeted enthusiastically.

Resistance to Neo-liberalism in the Global South

Another session, on the growing resistance to neoliberalism in the global South was addressed by representatives from East Timor, Zimbabwe and India. Addressing the session, Kavita Krishnan, of the CPI(ML) spoke of movements in India against the economic and foreign policies imposed by the Indian ruling class committed to remaining in the US' strategic embrace. Challenging the myth of India's 'neoliberal success story,' she spoke of the reality of farmers' suicides - but also of peasants' resistance to corporate land grab, and the struggles of agricultural labourers and unorganized workers led by CPI(ML) for employment and food security. Condemning the denial of visa to the comrade of Labour Party Pakistan who was to attend the Conference, she hailed the victory of Pakistani people on the street as an assertion of democratic spirit, and said CPI(ML) had mobilized students and youth against the anti-Pakistan hysteria whipped up by India's ruling class. She also expressed solidarity with the aspirations of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka for self-determination, and condemned India's ruling class for its support to the Sri Lankan war on Tamil people.

At the final session of the conference, Canadian socialist Ian Angus, M. Saraswathy, deputy chairperson of the Socialist Party of Malaysia, Daphne Lawless, central committee member of Socialist Worker (New Zealand), and Peter Boyle, DSP national secretary, spoke of the future of socialist struggles and stressed the need for unity among socialist forces.

Throughout the Conference, a series of workshops took place, with lively discussions. A sample: 'Why be a Marxist today', the French Left and the remarkable people's struggles and workers' strikes in France, cultural resistance, and detailed discussions of the struggles and debates on the left in a range of countries. Kavita Krishnan addressed two such workshops: one on 'Sexism and the System,' along with Reihana Moideen (Philippines) and Jay Fletcher (Green Left Weekly), and another on 'Young socialists' fighting back' - where she discussed AISA's experience along with a Resistance activist Jess Moore. And last but not least was the music, poetry and performances by cultural groups which made the Conference a celebration of the spirit of resistance.

The final session of the Conference passed two resolutions - demanding that the US Government immediately and unconditionally release the five Cubans imprisoned in the US since 1998 as alleged spies, but whose only 'crime' was to dare to resist the denial of the rights of Cuban people to determine their own social system and future; and expressing solidarity with the people and President of Bolivia (who was on hunger strike at the time of the Conference) in the struggle to have

their democratic will respected and to advance the process of changing Bolivia in the interests of its majority.

P.S.

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