

Australia: Socialist Equality Party holds successful election meeting in Broadmeadows

Our reporters

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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held a well-attended public meeting on Tuesday in Broadmeadows as part of its campaign for the November 25 state election in Victoria.

The audience comprised a cross-section of workers, young people, pensioners and housewives from the working class electorate as well as other parts of Melbourne, many of whom had come across the SEP for the first time during the campaign. In attendance were immigrant workers from New Zealand, Chile, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Turkey and the former Yugoslavia.

Neither the Labor Party—which has always regarded Broadmeadows as a stronghold—nor any of the other major parties have held a public meeting in the electorate. Media coverage has focussed on the “disinterest” among voters. But the SEP’s meeting, and more broadly its campaign, has revealed a keen interest among workers and youth in discussing major political issues, in particular the war in Iraq, as well as widespread contempt for the establishment parties.

In opening the meeting, Sue Phillips, the SEP’s campaign manager, noted that none of the other political parties was raising the big political issues confronting working people in Broadmeadows, Australia and around the world—the Iraq war, the attacks on democratic rights, the destruction of jobs and growing poverty.

The first speaker, SEP candidate Will Marshall, reviewed some of the experiences of the SEP’s campaign, noting the warmth with which it had been received by a wide range of people in the electorate, including Ford workers now confronted with the axing of hundreds of jobs. He explained that the hostility to Labor was evident at a candidates’ meeting organised by the local Progress Association. Labor MP and current state treasurer John Brumby appeared briefly, announced a new railway station then left after declaring that nothing could be done about the Ford jobs.

Marshall told the audience that the SEP was the only party directly addressing the most crucial questions facing the working class and young people. He said there was broad agreement in Broadmeadows with the SEP’s demands for the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, reflecting the sentiments of working people everywhere. Yet all the candidates and the media were refusing to mention the issue.

“In defending the so-called war on terror,” he said, “Labor fully supports the occupation of Iraq, Afghanistan and Australia’s neo-colonial interventions in the Pacific. State premier [Steve] Bracks has left the running to federal Labor leader Kim Beazley, who backs the US occupation of Iraq. Purely for tactical reasons, he now wants Australian troops redeployed to Afghanistan and the Pacific region.”

Marshall also took aim at the Greens party, which expects to capitalise on the widespread disaffection with the two major parties.

He explained that while the Greens postured as opponents of Liberal and Labor, they were not a genuine antiwar party. Their record in government in Tasmania and internationally, he said, demonstrated that they defended the profit system and its assault on the social position of the working class.

The SEP candidate outlined the party’s socialist policies and encouraged those present to actively participate in the final few days of the campaign. “The SEP is the only party defending the working class. In opposition to all other parties, we start from human need, not the dictates of the capitalist market and private profit,” he said.

SEP national secretary and member of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, Nick Beams, focussed his remarks on the crucial political lessons that had to be drawn by all those opposed to the war in Iraq. He drew attention to the fact that while the recent US Congressional elections had been a vote against the continued US occupation of Iraq, the Democrats, who now controlled both houses of Congress, were collaborating ever more closely with the Bush administration.

Beams warned that the US administration was not only preparing to increase US troop numbers in Iraq, but planning for an attack, if not an invasion, on neighbouring Iran. He pointed out that militarism was not simply the product of Bush and other individuals, but arose from the explosive implications of the declining position of American capitalism within the world capitalist order.

“How is the fight against war to be waged?” Beams asked. “It can only be undertaken on the basis of a program that strikes at the very cause of war itself—the international capitalist system. A global economy organised on the basis of private profit and rival nation-states means that the struggle for markets, for profits, for raw materials, for spheres of influence, will inevitably, at a certain point, give rise to military conflict with the most disastrous consequences for humanity.”

Beams also addressed the related question of how to combat the escalating environmental disaster and the unrelenting assault on jobs and living standards confronting working people around the world.

After an online demonstration of the *World Socialist Web Site* and a collection of more than \$1,000 for the SEP’s election fund, there was no shortage of questions and comments. Audience members spoke about their own varied and often bitter experiences of war, of the treachery of various organisations in their countries of origin and of the steadily worsening conditions facing workers around the world.

Marshall explained that while millions protested in 2003, the demonstrations were directed towards pressuring the UN and the powers that be. “We are fighting,” he said, “to ensure that the next mass movement of the working class will be guided by an

international socialist perspective, that workers will understand that this war arises not just because Bush is a war criminal, but because US imperialism is in crisis and is attempting to resolve that crisis by establishing its hegemony over the world and its resources.

“To put an end to militarism, workers must consciously participate in the development of an international movement aimed at ending capitalism, the system that produces this barbarity.”

Nick Beams told the audience that behind the simple demand for the withdrawal of troops were bigger questions. “How can it be done? It won’t happen through protests or the electoral system—this was shown in the mass protests in 2003 and the recent elections in the US,” he said.

“The fact that millions want the withdrawal of troops and yet these demands are ignored means that there is something fundamentally rotten with the whole political system. To get the troops out and end the war poses the necessity of changing the entire economic and political order, which is based on the division of the world into rival nation states.”

A Turkish worker asked how the SEP would deal with the Howard government’s terror scares and its racist campaigns against Muslims.

Beams explained that governments around the world were using these methods to divide working people and to divert attention from rising militarism and growing social inequality. He referred to last year’s race riot in Cronulla, Sydney, and explained that a recent report revealed that this had been deliberately whipped up by sections of the media.

“We will shortly be publishing a detailed analysis of the race riot that took place in Sydney at Cronulla. And interestingly this will be based on the document produced by the police themselves. They have made some interesting admissions in it and that is probably why there has been such a furore about publishing it.

“One thing that is established—and this is true of all pogroms, which this was—is that the riots did not arise spontaneously. The police said there was not any particular racial tension in Cronulla until it was fanned by the shock jocks—Allan Jones in particular. The police report includes hundreds of pages of what was said to create the situation.

“We counter this type of filth by explaining that the working class has no fatherland. It is one international class. Racism is going to be cleared away by opposing all forms of nationalism and racism, and that has to be imbued in the working class. If women want to wear veils then let them do so. Claims that this is a threat to the social order are nonsense. What is also interesting is the language used by those forces who stoked up the tensions, like ‘cleaning the suburbs’, ‘cleaning the streets’. They use the same language that Hitler used against the Jews. They simply replace ‘Jew’ with ‘Moslem.’” Beams said.

The discussion extended long after the meeting formally ended. Some of those in attendance had already offered their assistance by distributing the SEP’s election manifestos and leaflets in the area. Others decided to join the campaign after coming to the meeting. Several participants spoke to the WSW.

Andrej Pejic, 15, a secondary student at University High School had contacted the WSW after discovering that Marshall was standing for Broadmeadows.

“The meeting raised important issues—the war in Iraq, the inequality in society, and attacks on democratic rights—and suggested the way to combat these problems is through building the socialist party. It was very clear. I understood what was being discussed because the talks were good and interactive.

“The meeting also explained the future for young people as their country goes to war and what it means for them. This is important,” he said.

Pejic immigrated to Australia with his mother following the NATO military assault on Yugoslavia.

“I started reading the WSW last year, when I was searching a lot about history, particularly the history of socialism and communism. I was also thinking about questions raised by my mother about the war on the Balkans,” he said.

Gihan Perera, who is studying commerce at Deakin University, had only just found out about the SEP and the WSW.

“It was a very interesting discussion. As Nick and Will correctly said, globalisation and capitalism, especially the US, have forced all these wars. These wars are for oil and for resources. According to the SEP, it’s necessary to educate the working class. This is what is needed to forge a force against capitalism.

“Nick Beams discussed Milton Friedman. This is important because the free market is based on profit and because of that, the capitalists always try to increase their profits. They are not out for the workers’ benefit. They might not be able to smash up conditions in one country so they go to another country and smash up workers’ conditions there. They also need military force to do this, as they did in Chile.

“The same thing is happening with Iraq. They claim they went there because of weapons of mass destruction but there were none of those. They wanted to treat Iraq like a colony and get its resources. This shows where the so-called free market policies end up. The SEP says, we don’t need capitalist globalism but a social globalism—not privately-owned companies but social ownership. This is important.”

Moetu Orangi, a New Zealand worker now living in Broadmeadows said that although “much work” had to be done to build a movement like the SEP, “we have to start.”

“I learnt from the meeting tonight,” she said, “that workers have to think in a different frame. We should not ask what this or that politician is going to do for us or to change the situation. Instead, workers have to think; what are we going to do to change things?

“It took me some time to figure that out but nothing is going to change until we begin to do things ourselves and develop a big movement. It’s all about what workers are going to do as a whole. Workers everywhere must stand together and this is what the SEP is about.”

Orangi said she agreed with the SEP’s demand for all foreign troops to be withdrawn from Iraq. “The US is not in Iraq for the people there, it’s there for oil. America never goes to war unless it is for its own benefit, whether it is oil or territory or something else. A lot of people are dying there for this.

“I agree that it’s no use trying to put pressure on the government to stop this. We have to build a big movement to oppose war and I also think that we have to talk to the soldiers themselves. Many don’t know why they are there. The government doesn’t tell them the real reasons—oil and profits—that they’re being sent to fight for. I know what it’s like because I was a soldier myself once.”



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