

Victorian election: Vote for Will Marshall and the SEP in Broadmeadows

The Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
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Workers in Victoria go to the polls on Saturday having endured an official election campaign in which all the fundamental issues—war, attacks on democratic rights and deteriorating living standards—have been buried.

The campaign, which was deliberately limited to just three weeks, was designed to ensure the least possible public debate and discussion. With the corporate and media establishment lined up behind the Labor government of Premier Steve Bracks, the efforts of the opposition Liberal Party took on an element of farce. Its party leader Ted Baillieu resorted to singing and even attempting an Elvis impersonation in a desperate effort to raise his media profile.

All the parties, including the Greens and Democrats, confined themselves to the narrowest of so-called “local issues,” cynically aimed at swinging the vote in marginal electorates. In many electorates, such as the working class seat of Broadmeadows, there was no campaign to speak of. Sitting member and state Treasurer John Brumby made virtually no appearances, contemptuously assuming that working people saw no alternative but to return him to office. The Liberals and the Greens concentrated their efforts where their parliamentary prospects were more promising.

The entire campaign exposes the immense chasm between all the major parties and broad masses of working people. While the media has interpreted the popular alienation and disgust with official politics as a sign of lack of interest, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in its campaign for Broadmeadows found quite the opposite: an eagerness to discuss the complex political issues of the day, particularly the war in Iraq, and a readiness to consider far-reaching policies for the socialist reorganisation of society.

The SEP calls for the largest possible vote for our candidate Will Marshall to register rejection of the big business agenda of the entire political establishment and conscious support for a genuine socialist alternative to the existing economic and social order.

Every vote cast for the SEP will strengthen the struggle to develop a mass socialist movement of the working class. The SEP fights to unite workers in Victoria with those throughout Australia and internationally against the capitalist profit system, which is responsible for militarism, repression, poverty, social

inequality and environmental destruction.

In the course of our campaign we had to overcome many obstacles, including a deliberate media blackout, harassment of SEP campaigners by police, and restrictive, anti-democratic electoral laws designed to maintain the political monopoly of the establishment parties. It is because of these laws that the SEP will not appear on the ballot paper alongside Marshall’s name.

The gulf between working people and the political elite is nowhere clearer than on the issue of war. According to opinion polls, 6 out of 10 people now believe troops should be withdrawn from Iraq. But neither Labor nor any of the other parties has said anything about the issue in the course of the campaign. The US congressional elections took place three days after Bracks set a date for the election, but not even a sweeping Republican defeat, driven by bitter antiwar and anti-Bush sentiment, was permitted to disturb the conspiracy of silence.

Similarly, there has been no discussion of Australia’s neo-colonial interventions in East Timor, the Solomons and now Tonga, the “war on terror,” the ongoing destruction of democratic rights, the growing social polarisation and workers’ worsening living standards. This silence speaks volumes. It highlights the de facto coalition that has been in operation between Labor, Liberal the Democrats and Greens over all the fundamental issues confronting the working class. Whatever their tactical differences, they are all complicit in Australia’s criminal foreign policy operations and they all defend the interests of the major corporations over the needs and aspirations of the vast majority of working people.

Bracks made very few election promises beyond the announcement of utterly inadequate spending increases on school refurbishments and hospital upgrades. His central pitch to voters has been to claim that a vote for the Liberals will mean a return to the “Kennett era”. Between 1992 and 1999, Jeff Kennett’s Liberal government mounted a sustained offensive against the working class, with severe social spending cuts, school closures and public sector job sackings. But Bracks’s appeal to the “lesser evil” argument is completely bogus.

Since taking power, Labor has advanced the same corporate agenda pursued by Kennett. In the present campaign, Bracks

appealed to big business to back his Labor government as a “safe pair of hands” for managing the economy. He promised the financial markets that he would maintain the state’s triple-A credit rating and deliver large budget surpluses. This promise will inevitably mean a further erosion of vital public services such as education and health.

In the past period, Bracks has postured as an opponent of the Howard government’s WorkChoices industrial legislation. In the campaign, he claimed his government would “shield Victorian working families from these unfair laws which undermine job security and work conditions” and encouraged voters to view the state election as a referendum on the legislation. But the Labor government has done nothing to reverse Kennett’s handover of industrial powers to the Howard government. Along with the unions, it has deliberately blocked any genuine campaign against the hated WorkChoices laws.

The Victorian Police Association’s endorsement of Bracks speaks volumes about Labor’s right-wing orientation. Bracks has been at the forefront of Howard’s efforts to exploit the “war on terrorism” to introduce a battery of draconian laws that destroy basic democratic rights. He has bolstered police powers to match Canberra’s legislation, increased police numbers and expanded the police armoury. In the course of the campaign itself, a major police operation was mounted to crack down on anti-globalisation protesters outside the G20 meeting of economic ministers in Melbourne last weekend.

Labor is widely expected to easily secure another term in office, despite its track record and general unpopularity. Every media outlet has endorsed a Labor win, while at the same time demanding the government accelerate its pro-business reform agenda. An editorial in Murdoch’s *Australian* today pushed for a bigger vote for the Liberals, but only so “the Bracks government will be under pressure to maintain its economic and managerial credibility as a consequence of tougher economic conditions”. The message from corporate Australia is clear: the next Labor government will have to make further inroads into the social position of the working class.

A recent opinion poll pointed to the widespread alienation among voters: less than one-third believed the Liberals deserved to win the election, while less than half believed Labor deserved to win. The Greens are expected to make significant gains as a result, and they may, for the first time in Victoria, win one or more lower house seats and hold the balance of power in the upper house. Young people are particularly inclined to vote Green, with one survey showing that between 16 and 18 percent of those aged 18 to 34 intend to vote for the party.

While the Greens’ rise is a significant expression of the growing fragility of the two-party system, they do not represent any alternative to the Labor and Liberal agenda. The Greens defend both the profit system and the existing political set-up. Their critical function is to divert oppositional sentiment into safe channels, and above all, to block working people and

youth from turning toward a socialist alternative. The Greens oriented their election campaign to assuring the political and media establishment that they would pose no threat to their interests. This was underscored by their agreement with the Liberal party to swap preferences in those electorates where the Greens have a chance of unseating Labor. Together with all the major parties, their campaign was exclusively focussed on so-called “local” issues.

Insofar as there is an attempt to portray health, educational or environmental questions as confined to particular areas or suburbs, they are inevitably exploited to pit one community against another. Moreover, “local issues” are inextricably bound up with national and global issues. Drought, the crisis in water supply, the lack of funding for a local library, the pollution of a nearby creek or the latest sackings at Ford Broadmeadows are all products of a social order that subordinates every aspect of social life to the drive for corporate profit. Similar problems and concerns, as well as far broader fears about war, confront working people internationally. A genuine and progressive solution depends on uniting working people in every country and developing an independent struggle against the profit system.

The SEP insist that the interests of the working class—that is, the overwhelming majority of the population—take precedence over those of the ultra-wealthy minority. We call for the reorganisation of social, political, and economic life on a genuinely democratic and egalitarian basis through the establishment of a democratically and rationally planned world economy.

This requires the development of a new mass political party of the working class, based on a socialist and internationalist program. While we strongly urge a vote for Will Marshall, the SEP’s campaign in Broadmeadows is primarily about ideas, not votes. We aim to restore the great traditions of Marxism to the centre of the struggles of the working class, and stress the historic necessity for working people to fight for a new political perspective. We urge workers and youth in Victoria and throughout Australia to study our program and give serious consideration to joining the SEP.



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