

Australia: the socialist alternative in the New South Wales state election

Support the SEP campaign

10 February 2007

The Socialist Equality Party calls on working people, students, and youth to support and join our campaign for the 2007 New South Wales state election being held on March 24. The SEP is standing candidates to provide an independent political voice for the working class and to advance the socialist and internationalist program necessary to fight militarist violence, social inequality and the growing attacks on democratic rights.

The SEP is fielding a team of candidates led by national secretary and *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board member Nick Beams, a leading figure in the Australian and international socialist movement for more than three decades. Together with Terry Cook, Beams will head the SEP's slate for the Legislative Council. In the Legislative Assembly (lower house), the party's candidates are James Cogan in the eastern Sydney seat of Heffron, Patrick O'Connor in the inner-west seat of Marrickville, and Noel Holt in Newcastle.

This election is being held amid an escalating bloodbath in Iraq, with the Bush administration dispatching more than 20,000 additional troops to the devastated country. At the same time, the criminal cabal in the White House is stepping up a propaganda campaign of misinformation and lies, just as it did before the 2003 invasion of Iraq, in preparation for an even more deadly war against Iran, with the possible use of nuclear weapons for the first time since the incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

The SEP insists that the eruption of US militarism in Iraq and the wider region is the pre-eminent political issue facing working people in Australia and around the world. Humanity is witnessing a breakdown of the world order comparable to the 1930s, and facing the threat of a global catastrophe on a scale surpassing that wreaked upon the world's population in World War II.

That is why we are placing at the very centre of our NSW election campaign the struggle against militarism and war. The SEP opposes the illegal wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the Bush administration's plans to widen the conflict to include Iran, Syria, and other potential targets. Likewise, we oppose the Howard government's participation in the US-war drive, as well as its aggressive neo-colonial interventions in the South Pacific, which are similarly characterised by recklessness and contempt for international law. We completely reject the claim advanced by the media and political establishment—including the Labor Party, Greens, and Democrats—that Australian soldiers and police are engaged in "humanitarian" work. They have been deployed in order to secure the Australian ruling elite's domination of its own special "sphere of influence".

The SEP's program is the only one advancing the interests of the working class. Whereas the SEP seeks to clarify, and encourage the broadest discussion about, all the most vital issues confronting ordinary people, the official political establishment works to stifle debate,

restricting it to the most limited and parochial parameters. In the course of the election campaign, it will, in collaboration with a thoroughly compliant media, attempt to drown any mention of the Iraq war, the preparations against Iran, and the upsurge of Australian militarism, in a sea of empty "sound bites", mud-slinging, "law-and-order" bidding campaigns, and appeals to big business.

The suppression of information and genuine debate extends to the very conduct of elections themselves. In 1999 the NSW parliament passed deeply anti-democratic ballot access laws, with the backing of all the parliamentary parties—Labor, Liberal, Democrats and Greens. These laws were expressly designed to block any genuine challenge to the two-party system and to prevent dissenting political views from being publicly aired in election campaigns. Now, to win the "privilege" of having one's party affiliation printed on the ballot, parties without parliamentary representation must submit signed membership forms from 750 people in NSW, 12 months in advance of an election. That is why the Socialist Equality Party's candidates will appear on the ballot paper without their party affiliation listed alongside their names.

A new political movement of the working class—based upon an independent and internationalist perspective—must urgently be mobilised against the eruption of war. There is no shortage of popular concern and opposition. According to a recent BBC poll, 78 percent of Australians disapprove of the US handling of the Iraq war, along with similar numbers around the world. In February 2003, hundreds of thousands in Australia joined millions worldwide in protest against the impending invasion. As the violence in Iraq has escalated, hostility has intensified.

The revival of the global antiwar movement can only develop, however, out of a critical assessment of the experiences of 2003. The perspective that dominated the movement was that the invasion could be stopped through pressuring capitalist governments, by enlisting the support of opposition parties, or by appealing to the UN, or to France and Germany. But this proved a complete failure. Only by mobilising independently of, and in opposition to, all the parties and institutions that defend the capitalist order and by building a new international socialist movement can working people in Australia and around the world halt the descent into a new and terrifying era of imperialist barbarism.

Canberra's participation in the Iraq war and its sweeping attacks on democratic rights could not have proceeded without the full cooperation of the state Labor governments. They have fully embraced the bogus "war on terror"—the ongoing official pretext for the bloody occupation of Iraq—and lined up with the Howard government in implementing more than 40 different "anti-terror" bills.

Ever since it came to office in 1995, the NSW Labor government has led the way in whipping up anti-immigrant hysteria, with diversionary and racist campaigns against Arabs, Muslims, and other young immigrants. It has formed special "ethnic" police squads to target particular communities

and, at the same time, seized upon every possible opportunity to demonise and vilify working class youth. Every election campaign—1995, 1999, 2003, and now 2007—has been dominated by reactionary “law and order” proposals. Police numbers have steadily increased, along with exponential rises in the prison population.

Following Bob Carr’s resignation in August 2005, Premier Morris Iemma has maintained this right-wing course. Iemma has particularly stressed his support for Howard’s “Australian values” campaign, which aims at creating the climate for militarism by cultivating national chauvinism and anti-Muslim sentiment. The political logic of such campaigns was demonstrated in the ugly race riots that erupted on Cronulla beach in December 2005.

Iemma’s campaign promise to protect NSW workers from the federal government’s WorkChoices industrial legislation is a threadbare lie aimed at covering over the real agenda of the Labor government. For the past 12 years, NSW Labor has stressed its commitment to reducing taxes and maximising the profits of big business and the ultra-wealthy, while starving the education, health, and other social sectors of desperately needed funds.

New South Wales is the most socially polarised state in Australia. Central Sydney is the base of operations for much of the country’s super-rich, and the city’s international image—tirelessly promoted by the media and tourism officials—reflects the lifestyle enjoyed by this narrow social stratum. The majority of the city’s 3.5 million people live under enormous financial pressure, amid rapidly increasing costs of living, stagnating economic growth, and crumbling social infrastructure. People in rural NSW are suffering from a protracted economic crisis, compounded by severe drought.

The government’s only answer to mounting poverty and social inequality is state repression and police violence. In February 2004, police clashed with Aboriginal youth in the inner-city suburb of Redfern after 17-year-old T.J. Hickey died during a police chase in the area. In February 2005, the death of another two youth in a police pursuit sparked four days of violence in the impoverished western suburb of Macquarie Fields. Every eruption of social tensions and unrest is met with the same response—a massive police operation, accompanied by Labor government denials that there exist any underlying social causes and by new legislation granting the police even more powers.

Every aspect of life has been subordinated to the accumulation of private wealth and profit by a tiny minority. Sydney’s infrastructure is in crisis, with the water and electricity networks in disrepair, deteriorating roads, overcrowded and unreliable public transport, under-funded schools and hospitals, and a chronic shortage of affordable housing.

Neither the Labor government nor the opposition Liberals has any solution to the crisis. Both big business parties intend to press ahead with further privatisation and deregulation measures, including so-called Private Public Partnership schemes, which allow companies to reap massive windfalls by operating major roads, schools, hospitals, and water infrastructure on a for-profit basis. The cosy relationship between big business and the state government was demonstrated when Premier Carr quit parliament and immediately accepted a \$500,000 a year offer to become an “advisor” for Macquarie Bank, one of the primary beneficiaries of Private Public Partnership schemes.

None of the pressing problems facing ordinary people in NSW—the eruption of militarism, declining working and living conditions, increasing insecurity, deteriorating public services, and the erosion of basic rights—can be resolved on a state-wide or national basis. Working people around the world confront the same essential problems, wherever they happen to live. Addressing these problems requires a common strategy aimed at the fundamental reorganisation of society, so that the social needs of the majority take priority over the property rights of the few.

The SEP, and its sister parties in the US, Europe, and Asia, stand for the

international unity of the working class against all forms of nationalism, racism, and ethnic or religious chauvinism. Against the divisive and reactionary “Australian values” promoted by Howard and Iemma, we stand for universal values championing the rights and interests of humanity as a whole.

The objective basis for a democratically planned international socialist economy has been vastly strengthened in recent decades by the development of globalised production techniques. Advances in science and technology have enhanced the potential for globally integrated economic development aimed at the abolition of poverty and social inequality throughout the world.

Under capitalism, however, the socialised character of international production is stymied and contradicted by the anarchic “free-market” system based on private ownership. There is a similarly destructive contradiction between the division of the world into rival nation states on the one hand and the globally integrated nature of contemporary economic life on the other. As corporations scour the globe searching to extract the maximum profits from their investments, workers in every nation are pitted against one another and forced to sacrifice wages and working conditions won in previous periods through hard-fought industrial and political struggles.

Rivalry between the ruling elites of the major capitalist powers for resources, markets, and geo-strategic position is once again erupting into inter-imperialist conflict. The eruption of US militarism in the Middle East and the seemingly inexorable slide to war in Iran is driven by the US ruling elite’s desperate attempt to use military might as a means of consolidating its global hegemony, which is under increasing challenge from its rivals in Europe and Asia. The Bush administration’s plan is to seize Iraq’s vast oil reserves, construct permanent military bases throughout the country, and use its territory as a stepping stone for further interventions in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Bush, together with his international accomplices including prime ministers Blair and Howard, is already responsible for the devastation of Iraqi society. The war has cost the lives of an estimated 650,000 Iraqis, and turned 3.7 million people into refugees. The suffering is intensifying amid stepped up US military operations in Baghdad and a ferocious civil war provoked by Washington’s deliberate stoking of Iraq’s sectarian divisions as part of its “divide and rule” strategy. An attack on Iran would likely see the extension of sectarian conflict across the entire Middle East, leading to an unimaginable humanitarian catastrophe.

The SEP demands the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US, Australian, and other foreign troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. Billions of dollars must be paid to the peoples of both countries for compensation and reconstruction work. The architects of the war—in Washington, London, and Canberra—must be placed on trial for war crimes.

Likewise, the SEP demands the immediate withdrawal of all Australian soldiers and police from East Timor, Solomon Islands and the South Pacific. Canberra’s operations in the South Pacific are no less predatory than Washington’s in the Middle East. The Howard government has participated in US-led interventions in the Middle East in order to win Washington’s backing for its own imperialist ambitions in the Asia-Pacific region. Howard openly describes the South Pacific as Australia’s “special patch” and has acknowledged that his primary concern is to shut out rival powers, such as China. In a recent interview, he forecast Australian military operations in the region would last another 10 to 20 years.

The entire media and political establishment has backed the Howard government’s Pacific strategy, including Labor, the Greens, and Democrats. New Labor leader Kevin Rudd has also emphatically stressed his “rock solid” support for the US alliance. Like the Greens’ Bob Brown, he wants Australian troops on the ground in Iraq to be redeployed

to bolster operations in the South Pacific. Meanwhile, Labor fully supports the ongoing US occupation of Iraq.

To achieve these ends, Australian society is rapidly being militarised, with successive expansions in the size of the military, moves to encourage enlistment—such as the recently introduced military “gap year” for school leavers—and the constant promotion of nationalism. These developments pose grave dangers, particularly for young people, who face the prospect of being dragooned into the military. Demands for conscription will inevitably become more insistent, with Australian armed forces confronting an ongoing recruitment crisis.

The re-emergence of colonialism under the banner of the “war on terror” has led to an unprecedented assault on long established democratic and constitutional rights. The SEP demands the repeal of all the so-called anti-terror bills passed since 2001 and the release of David Hicks and every detainee in Guantánamo Bay and other secret US detention camps.

The SEP indefatigably defends civil liberties and democratic rights. All forms of discrimination must be outlawed and all immigration restrictions lifted. Workers throughout the world should have the right to live, study, or work wherever they choose with full political and social rights. All immigration detention centres must be closed immediately.

The SEP defends the right of workers to join a trade union and to control the union democratically. We defend the right of all women to have free access to abortion and full legal equality for gay people, including the right to same-sex marriage.

The disintegration of constitutional rights and democratic forms of rule, in Australia and around the world, ultimately derives from the ever-widening social divide between the wealthy elite and the working class. Democracy is fundamentally incompatible with a social system in which a tiny ultra-wealthy minority pursues an agenda which is diametrically opposed to the interests and sentiments of the vast majority of the population.

A financial aristocracy now dominates Australian political and economic life. According to *Business Review Weekly*'s 2006 survey, the wealthiest 200 individuals in the country have a combined wealth of \$101 billion, up an extraordinary 22 percent from 2005. The fortunes of this social stratum have become increasingly detached from any connection to the development of useful production and are instead bound up with speculation, government largesse, and other forms of parasitism. More than a quarter of those who made the 200 rich list amassed their wealth through property speculation.

At the other end of the scale, more than 3.5 million Australians live in households earning a combined income of less than \$400 a week. Poverty now afflicts broad layers of the working class, with a sustained assault on working conditions and wages over the past three decades producing a new and vast category of “working poor”.

The SEP advances a program whose aim is the reorganisation of the Australian and world economy in the interests of the working class.

* **Public ownership:** All large industrial, service, pharmaceutical, mining, and agricultural corporations, together with the banking and financial institutions, must be converted into publicly owned enterprises, with full compensation for small shareholders. This does not entail the nationalisation of everything, or the abolition of small or medium-sized businesses. Under a planned economy, such enterprises will receive government support, including ready access to credit and more stable market conditions so long as they provide decent wages and working conditions.

* **Jobs:** A massive public works program must be instituted to provide decent, well paying, and full-time jobs for all who need them. To create additional employment, and to allow all workers to fully participate in political and cultural life, the working week should be reduced to 30 hours, with no loss of pay. All workers should receive five weeks' annual paid leave.

* **Students and youth:** The SEP calls for a comprehensive program addressing the needs of the youth. Young workers should be guaranteed decent, well paid, and full-time employment. Job training and apprenticeship programs must be made available to all who require them. We call for the provision of higher education at no charge to all those who wish to pursue it, including overseas students. HECS debts must be abolished, along with the reservation of university places for full fee paying students. Tertiary students should automatically receive a living wage to enable them to study full-time without the need to work.

* **Housing:** Sydney's housing crisis must be met with an immediate program of emergency measures, including a ban on house repossessions. Rent and mortgage repayments everywhere should be capped at no more than 20 percent of residents' income. A massive social housing program must be initiated, providing comfortable, secure and affordable accommodation for students, workers, the unemployed, and pensioners throughout the country.

* **Social security:** Every working person must be guaranteed a sufficient income to live a decent and secure life. Equally, those unable to work—the disabled, elderly, and full-time parents and carers—must be provided with the equivalent of a living wage. All punitive and degrading welfare reviews and assessments must be abolished, as must all “mutual obligation” requirements, including “work for the dole” schemes, which have nothing to do with providing the unemployed with useful education and training.

* **Education, health, infrastructure:** Billions of dollars must be poured into the public school and university system to ensure every student has the capacity to fully develop his or her talents and capabilities. Public funding of private and religious schools should be abolished. The public health system similarly needs to be revived through an immediate injection of massive funding in order to slash waiting lists for medical procedures and provide adequate hospital staff, technology and equipment. Social infrastructure—including roads and transport, water and sewerage, power and electricity—must be publicly provided and properly funded.

* **Culture:** All working people must be granted the capacity to actively participate in cultural and artistic life. To achieve this, funds should be poured into libraries, museums, theatres, orchestras, public television and radio. The subordination of artistic expression to the accumulation of profit—which has been accompanied by every possible variety of nationalism, militarism, backwardness, and brutality—must be replaced by an environment conducive to the development of a new, humane, and international culture.

* **Environment:** The impact of the devastating drought which has directly hit more than 90 percent of NSW demonstrates the urgent necessity for a socialist solution to the environmental crisis. The development of adequate long-term water conservation plans and infrastructure development is impossible within the anarchic framework of the capitalist market system. Similarly, the global warming crisis can only be addressed on the basis of an internationally coordinated plan, placing the interests of the world's population ahead of the profit margins of the major corporations in the world's dominant capitalist powers.

None of these demands can be realised without making deep inroads into the vast reserves of private wealth accumulated in the hands of a few. The machinery of parliamentary democracy obscures the fact that the levers of economic power are controlled by a corporate elite whose decisions are made behind the backs of the majority. Genuine democracy can be achieved only through the political mobilisation of an informed and articulate working population in the struggle for socialism. The SEP advocates the establishment of a workers' government, which will represent the social and economic interests of the vast majority of the population and create the conditions in which working people can gain full democratic control over all the decisions which affect their lives.

In order to advance its interests, the working class must establish its political independence from the establishment parties. All these organisations, whatever their differences on tactical and secondary issues, serve to defend the existing social and political order. The SEP rejects the claim of the various middle class protest organisations such as Socialist Alliance that Labor represents a “lesser evil” to the Liberals.

Whereas Labor once promised to ameliorate some of capitalism’s worst “excesses” afflicting working people, now it seeks to outdo the Liberals in delivering the best returns to the ultra-wealthy. This lurch to the right is an international phenomenon affecting labour and social democratic parties all over the world. The globalisation of production has permanently shattered their old perspective of national reform and regulation. The role of the trade unions has been similarly transformed, with these moribund organisations no longer representing even the most immediate and short-term interests of the working class.

The Greens provide no genuine alternative for working people. They uphold the existing order and seek to prevent workers and youth from breaking with capitalist politics by promoting the illusion that the environmental and social crisis can be resolved by reforming aspects of the profit system. The Greens’ nominal opposition to the Iraq war is a fraud—they defend Australian imperialism and enthusiastically support the Howard government’s interventions in the Pacific.

The SEP advances the socialist and internationalist alternative to the entire official political set-up. Our movement embodies the critical lessons of the decades-long struggle by the most courageous and far-sighted representatives of the working class for socialism against all forms of political opportunism. These traditions were carried forward by Leon Trotsky, co-leader of the Russian Revolution, in an unyielding political struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy in the former Soviet Union, which abused and betrayed the great ideals of revolutionary socialism, and by the Fourth International, founded by Trotsky in 1938. The SEP in Australia and its sister parties in North America, Europe, and Asia constitute the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI)—the continuation of the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

The SEP’s election campaign in NSW forms part of an international campaign launched by the ICFI to dedicate 2007 to the development of a global movement against the Iraq war and US aggression against Iran. As the ICFI and *World Socialist Web Site* statement, “For an international mobilisation of workers and youth against the war in Iraq”, stated: “The struggle against war is today—as it was in World War I and World War II—an international class question. Calls for peace can achieve nothing unless they are directed toward the independent political mobilisation of working people, who have no interest in imperialist plunder. The fight against war must be waged on the basis of an international socialist strategy.”

We urge all workers and young people to support the SEP’s election campaign. We invite those who support the struggle for the socialist alternative to nominate to stand as SEP candidates on our Legislative Council slate, headed by Nick Beams and Terry Cook, to contact the SEP and the WSWS, and to make the decision to join and build our party.

We especially encourage all high school and university students to take up the fight for a decent future, free of militarism and war. The SEP urges all student youth to build branches of the International Students for Social Equality on university campuses and schools, become involved in the party’s election committees, campaign for its candidates, and help distribute copies of our election statement in their school, university and suburb.





To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact