

An assessment of the SEP's vote and campaign in the 2007 Australian election

The Socialist Equality Party
29 November 2007

With around 80 percent of votes counted so far in the November 24, 2007 Australian federal election, the Socialist Equality Party has received a total of 3,451 votes in the House of Representatives and 3,231 votes in the Senate.

For the House of Representatives, the following votes have been recorded: in Sydney, Alex Safari, Kingsford-Smith, 914; Patrick O'Connor, Grayndler, 269; Chris Gordon, Parramatta, 195; James Cogan, Chifley, 850; in the NSW Hunter Valley, Noel Holt, Newcastle, 269; Terry Cook, Charlton, 347; in Melbourne, Will Marshall, Melbourne 289; Frank Gaglioti, Calwell, 211; in Perth, Joe Lopez, 141. Safari and Cogan were positioned at the top of the ballot paper, and thus benefited from the "donkey vote" (where voters place "1" beside the first candidate, and then number their preferences in order down the ticket, regardless of party affiliation).

In the Senate, the SEP received a total of 3,231 votes. In NSW SEP candidates, Nick Beams and Carol Divjak, won a total of 1,677, while in Victoria, Peter Byrne and Tania Baptist received 1,554. In all, a total of 6,682 votes were cast in the election in support of the SEP's socialist and internationalist program.

There are a number of interesting and significant features of the SEP's vote.

Firstly, the Socialist Equality Party was the only party standing candidates in open opposition to all the other parties. Unlike the myriad protest and single issue groups, the SEP refused to allocate preferences to Labor and the Greens and to adapt itself to the immense pressures exerted on the working class to vote Labor as the "lesser evil". We insisted, throughout the course of the campaign, that the primary task was not to "get rid of the Howard government". The only way the working class could fight the eruption of militarism and war, the assault on democratic rights, escalating social inequality and looming environmental disaster was to strike out on its own independent political path. The working class, we said repeatedly, had to build its own mass socialist party.

This necessitated a complete political break from Labor and the trade unions and their nationalist, pro-market perspective. It also required a conscious rejection of the Greens, which, despite their "left" rhetoric, were nothing but a political trap, aimed at deflecting mass antiwar and anti-capitalist sentiment

into the safe channels of the capitalist, two-party, parliamentary system.

Every voter, in the House of Representatives, and in the Senate, had many choices. In the Senate in NSW, for example, there were 25 separate groups and 4 ungrouped candidates, making a total of 29 to choose from. In Victoria, there were 23 groups and 4 ungrouped, making a total of 27. The SEP stood as a group under the party name in both states, and received votes from electors in every electorate—inner city, outer suburban, regional and rural—49 seats in NSW and 37 seats in Victoria. In NSW our Senate (state-wide) vote ranged from 77 in Kingsford-Smith and 69 in Grayndler—both large, Labor, working class areas where the SEP fielded House of Representatives candidates—to 30 in Mackellar and 15 in North Sydney, two well-heeled, Liberal seats on Sydney's north shore, to 21 in Riverina, a National party rural electorate, covering 42,000 square kilometres in the state's far south-west.

In Victoria, our Senate vote ranged from 91 in Melbourne (a heterogenous, inner city seat) and 89 in Calwell (a sprawling, industrial working class electorate), where the SEP stood House of Representatives candidates, to 50 in Bendigo and 44 in Gippsland, both covering regional areas, to 46 in the northern Victorian rural seat of Mallee and 65 in the coastal towns and villages of Flinders, an electorate covering nearly 2,000 square kilometres in the state's south west.

If all those who voted for our House of Representatives candidates in NSW and Victoria also voted SEP in the Senate, then the total number of individuals around Australia who cast their votes for the party was 6,136. While this is a relatively small number, it nevertheless indicates that an important layer of workers, housewives, students and professional people is reading, and agreeing with, the SEP's political analysis. In this election, every one of these people decided to take a stand, not only against the Howard government, but against Labor and the Greens as well, and vote for the international revolutionary alternative to the present setup.

The vast majority of these people would not have met an SEP member, attended our meetings or received our election manifesto. Nor could they have found out about the party through the mainstream media, which universally suppressed any mention of the SEP's candidates or campaign. Most will

have become acquainted with the SEP through the *World Socialist Web Site* (at www.wsws.org), the SEP's election website (at www.sep.org.au) or the SEP's recently launched YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/user/SEPElectionSite07>. The video broadcast, outlining the key elements of the SEP's program, made by SEP national secretary, and Senate candidate in NSW, Nick Beams, received over 3,500 hits. Other broadcasts by Beams and SEP candidates James Cogan, Tania Baptist, Terry Cook and Patrick O'Connor received a total of nearly 4,000 hits.

The party's campaign, however, was not primarily focussed on votes. The SEP utilised the opportunity posed by the election to circulate our material as broadly as possible, to discuss the most critical political issues confronting ordinary working people, and to differentiate the party's perspective from those of every other. Our candidates participated in numerous election forums and debates, challenging and exposing the policies and agendas of all the other candidates. They also analysed every aspect of the election campaign in more than 70 articles posted on our website in the six weeks leading up to the poll.

The SEP's website experienced a steady growth in traffic during the campaign, rising from an average of 200 visitors per day in the first week, to nearly 1,000 per day in the final week. The site featured the SEP's election statement; profiles of the SEP candidates and forms for people to submit questions; daily commentary on major political issues; PDF versions of many of the comments for downloading and distribution; and links to the SEP's YouTube videos.

The most visited pages after the front page were the SEP election statement and the pages featuring the profiles and statements of the SEP candidates. Visitors came to the site from the *World Socialist Web Site*, from searches on Google and other search engines, and from two major sites that provided links to Australian election candidates: federalelection.com.au and howshouldivote.com.au.

While the majority of visitors were from Australia, traffic came to the site from around the world, especially the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Britain, Germany, France, Russia, China, Japan, Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong.

Critical to the success of the SEP's 2007 federal election campaign was the active engagement and participation of our membership and supporters, including new contacts made in the course of the campaign itself. More than 135 supporters distributed 260,000 four-page tabloid newspaper SEP election statements in letterboxes, shopping centres, railway stations and other locations across the nine lower house electorates in NSW, Victoria and Western Australia. Election statements featuring the SEP's Senate teams were also distributed in regional NSW and Victoria, including: Bendigo, the Blue Mountains, Wollongong, Horsham, Goulburn, Queanbeyan and Byron Bay.

Every day, as new suburbs were letterboxed, the SEP's

national office received phone calls and emails requesting further information about the SEP's history, program and policies. Dozens of questions and comments were also submitted to the SEP's website, along with applications to join—including one from Bangladesh!

The SEP also published an attractive 32-page pamphlet of the four-part series written by Nick Beams in the course of the campaign, entitled: *Industrial relations and the trade unions under Labor: from Whitlam to Rudd*. On polling day alone, when SEP members were joined by nearly 90 supporters at the polling booths in the different electorates, more than 200 of the pamphlets were sold to electors after they had cast their votes.

In a striking contrast to the campaigns of other parties, the SEP conducted several public meetings. Public meetings launched the SEP's campaign in each electorate; Question and Answer sessions were convened in Sydney, Newcastle, Melbourne and Perth, where local residents were invited to ask questions of the SEP's candidates and make comments about their own experiences; and final election meetings were held in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth on the "90th anniversary of the Russian Revolution: prospects for socialism in the 21st century". The meetings discussed the contemporary significance of the Russian Revolution and the program fought for by Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks and emphasised the necessity for working people to draw the political lessons of the complex and bitter experiences of the twentieth century. At the same time, election committees, which served as discussion and organising centres in each of the electorates, met every week, enabling new contacts and supporters to learn more about the SEP's policies and perspective, and to participate in the campaign.

Taken as a whole, the campaign represents an important development for the Socialist Equality Party. More fundamentally, it constitutes a powerful expression of the political shift that is now underway within the working class in Australia and around the world, a shift that will pose crucial challenges and opportunities to the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Socialist Equality Party in the coming period.

We extend our warmest thanks to all our members, to all our contacts and supporters who participated in the SEP's election campaign, and to all those who voted for the SEP in the 2007 election. Above all, we invite all those who agree with our program and perspective to apply to join the Socialist Equality Party and help build it as the new political party of the working class.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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