

SEP campaigns in Sydney seat of Parramatta

Our reporters
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Over the past week, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) has campaigned throughout the Parramatta electorate, letterboxing thousands of homes with the party's election statement and speaking to workers and young people at local railway stations, shopping centres, universities and TAFE colleges.

The electorate is part of Sydney's west. Once regarded as an electoral stronghold for Labor, the working class suburbs that stretch from Parramatta westward to Penrith at the foot of the Blue Mountains, have become a by-word for political volatility and widespread disgust toward Labor.

Underpinning these sentiments is the growth of social inequality over the past two decades as both Labor and Liberal governments, state and federal, have championed free-market policies, gutting social services, public health and education, and suppressing real wages in the face of massive hikes in the cost of living.

Chris Gordon, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate in Parramatta, was interviewed on Sydney radio station 2SWR on Saturday. Gordon urged listeners to support the SEP's election campaign and answered questions about socialism by DJs Paul Wilesmith and Tim Williams. 2SWR is a community radio station broadcasting across western Sydney, with a weekly audience of 250,000 people.

After Gordon explained that the SEP was advancing a socialist alternative to Liberal, Labor and Greens, Wilesmith asked whether people wanted to hear about socialism, given its negative association with the past.

Gordon explained that the SEP traced its origins to the struggle of Leon Trotsky against the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. The bureaucracy headed by Joseph Stalin betrayed the Russian Revolution, usurped political power from the working class and murdered an entire generation of socialist-minded workers, youth and intellectuals—above all the Trotskyists—who were associated with the genuine ideals of the revolution: socialist internationalism.

Gordon pointed to a survey last year in the United States, “despite decades of anti-communism, it found that 30 percent of respondents said they would prefer socialism to

capitalism”. Millions of people around the world were feeling the effects of the global financial crisis that erupted in 2008, and this was creating a receptive climate for socialist ideas.

In discussing the election, Gordon pointed to the widespread public disgust toward the entire official election campaign, as “people are rightly turned off because they are not being represented”. He said that masses of people viewed the ousting of Kevin Rudd as prime minister with deep suspicion and anger.

“The coup was organised by the mining companies and carried out by factional power-brokers to realign Labor Party policy to better suit big business,” Gordon explained. It was no accident, he said, that Gillard was installed as prime minister, because “she has a track record of attacking the working class both as education minister and as minister for industrial relations”. Gordon also warned that Gillard's first act as prime minister was to declare her unwavering support for the US-led war in Afghanistan.

Gordon concluded the interview by inviting listeners to attend the public meeting being convened by the Socialist Equality Party in Sydney on August 19 to mark the 70th anniversary of the assassination of Leon Trotsky.

The previous night, Gordon spoke at a candidates' forum organised by Falun Gong. The Falun Gong is a quasi-religious sect based in China. After initially supporting it as a means of containing political opposition, the Chinese Stalinist regime turned on Falun Gong and subjected its members to severe repression when it grew rapidly in the 1990s.

The Greens, Socialist Alliance and the Christian Democratic Party candidates also spoke at the forum. Neither the Liberal nor the Labor Party attended, however, revealing their extreme sensitivity to participating in any event that might offend the Chinese regime. China is now Australia's largest trade partner and huge mineral exports to China underpin the Australian economy.

Gordon began by explaining that the Socialist Equality Party is the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International and that the Trotskyist movement opposed the Maoist regime in China

from its inception. Gordon explained that the 1949 Chinese revolution was not a socialist revolution and that Mao's peasant-based movement was deeply hostile to the interests of the working class.

"The market reforms introduced in 1978 were the inevitable outcome of the nationalist outlook of the Stalinist bureaucracy," he said. The reintroduction of capitalism, that had transformed China into a cheap labour platform for the major imperialist powers, was a graphic refutation of Maoism's socialist pretensions. "China now has the second highest number of billionaires in the world, behind only the United States," he added.

Gordon's remarks, translated into Mandarin by an interpreter, were listened to intently by the predominantly Chinese audience. By contrast, the presentations made by Greens candidate Phil Bradley and Socialist Alliance candidate Duncan Roden focussed on their defence of "human rights" in China. This non-class term, that deliberately conceals both the political origins and class content of state repression in China, lines up with the hypocritical campaign waged by the US government and its allies, including Australia, over China's "human rights" record.

Last Sunday, Gordon prepared to speak at a candidates' forum organised by an umbrella group called Make Poverty History (MPH), but was prevented from doing so. The group, a coalition of non-government organisations working in international aid and development, enjoys a close relationship with the Australian government.

According to local organiser Greg Wood, the forum would be limited "to those parties with formal federal parliamentary party status". Immediately prior to the forum, an MPH spokesperson advised Gordon that neither he nor any audience members could speak or ask questions from the floor. These anti-democratic edicts were not challenged by the candidates for the Greens or Labor, who spoke from the platform, or the Socialist Alliance, who was also prevented from speaking.

The forum's organisers were intent on preventing any discussion that cut across their own perspective of pressuring the government to increase its paltry foreign aid budget—all of which is used to advance Australian economic and strategic interests, not to "make poverty history". Gordon's prepared remarks clearly exposed this orientation as the excerpt below makes clear.

Gordon explained that protesting to governments would not end the appalling levels of global poverty, which were a product of the profit system itself.

"The impact of finance capital on poverty is all too easily revealed. The debt repayments paid by the so-called Third World far exceed the money paid in aid. Take the Sub-

Sahara, where the aid money is enough to cover 5 percent of the debt repayments. And, as everyone here is no doubt aware, aid invariably comes with strings attached, such as the privatisation of a country's infrastructure.

"Much is made of influencing governments to provide aid at 0.7 percent of GNI [Gross National Income]. This falls short on at least two counts. First of all, it is totally inadequate for the purpose of raising the standard of living of humanity to a level of having first-rate education, health, and culture. In fact the UN's MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) are a travesty—they refer in the first instance only to eliminating 'extreme' poverty.

"Secondly, this money serves the interest of the ruling class. The official Australian aid agency, AusAID, explicitly says that aid is given 'in line with Australia's national interest'. That is, all Australian foreign aid is driven by the determination of the country's ruling elite to maintain and extend its strategic influence, and open up critical markets and natural resources for exploitation by Australian corporations.

"The truth of this is seen by where aid money goes. In 2008-9, nearly \$600 million went to Australian government departments, including the Australian Federal Police and the Department of Immigration... A 2007 AIDWatch report revealed that \$155 million of aid went to fund the detention of refugees in the 'Pacific Solution'. AusAID also pays substantial sums to private companies, as part of the Australian-led occupation of Solomon Islands.

"What is needed is an entirely different approach. It is impossible to address poverty without challenging the economic system, capitalism, that creates poverty. A reorganisation of society is needed, where production is based on human need."

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