

SEP 2010 Australian election campaign wins powerful response

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24 August 2010

The socialist and internationalist program advanced by the SEP in the 2010 Australian federal election has won a powerful response from significant layers of workers and young people throughout the country. Emails, inquiries, expressions of support and applications to join the party have come not only from the three states where the SEP stood candidates—New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia—but from others as well.

The election revealed unprecedented levels of disgust with the major parties and the parliamentary set-up as a whole. Throughout the campaign workers emphasised to the SEP's candidates their shock and outrage at the Labor Party's coup against Kevin Rudd, and their opposition to the war in Afghanistan. They also spoke angrily about the incompatibility of the policies, program and performance of the major parties on health, education, child and aged care and climate change, with their own needs, interests and concerns.

This palpable shift in popular consciousness found important expression in the votes won by the SEP's 10 House of Representatives candidates and by our Senate tickets in NSW and Victoria.

Compared to the SEP's vote in the 2007 election, when Rudd Labor defeated the Howard government after 11 years of conservative Coalition rule, and there was widespread hope that Labor would be a "lesser evil" to the Liberals, the SEP's 2010 result represented a significant increase in support. With around 75 percent of the vote counted so far, the SEP's total vote in the 10 lower house electorates was 8,907, compared with a total of 3,451 in 9 electorates in 2007. Likewise in the Senate, the parliament's upper house, the party's 2010 vote in NSW and Victoria combined was 9,594, compared with 3,231 in 2007.

In Sydney's working class western suburbs, where the swing against Labor was highest, Mike Head received 2,148 votes in Fowler, or 3.34 percent of the vote, Richard Phillips scored 1,647 votes, or 2.66 percent, in Blaxland, and Chris Gordon received 923, or 1.43 percent, in Parramatta. In all three seats, the SEP candidates appeared at the top of the ballot, therefore benefiting, to some extent, from the "donkey vote" (where voters simply number the candidates consecutively from top to bottom). It appears, however, that most voters who wished to register an informal vote in these electorates did so by turning in a blank ballot paper, or one directing a short sharp written message to the major parties.

In Reid, a working class electorate containing many immigrants and refugees, first-time SEP candidate and university maths lecturer Carolyn Kennett, who was listed at the bottom of the ballot, won 719 votes, or 1.07 percent of the vote. In Sydney's inner-west, James Cogan, who was interviewed on local radio and appeared in a well-attended debate against candidates from Labor, the Greens and other minor parties, won 842 votes or 1.22 percent, while 22-year old university student Zac Hambides received 478 votes in Kingsford-Smith. In the large working class electorate of Newcastle, where he also stood in 2007, retired Telstra worker Noel Holt received 545 votes, as compared with the 269 he won in 2007.

In the northern Melbourne working-class seat of Calwell, covering the suburbs of Broadmeadows and Craigieburn, among others, and containing one of the few remaining car plants in the country, architect Peter Byrne won 926 votes—a major increase on the 211 votes the SEP received in 2007. Car components workers were among those who attended SEP meetings, distributed the party's

election manifesto, and campaigned for the party on polling day.

Tania Baptist, the SEP's candidate for Gellibrand, in Melbourne's west, won 369 votes. This was the first time the party had fielded a candidate in the electorate in decades.

In Western Australia, health worker Joe Lopez received 303 votes in Swan, up from the 141 votes he won in the same seat in 2007.

In the Senate, SEP national secretary and national spokesman, Nick Beams, teamed up with UNSW post-graduate student Gabriela Zabala on the SEP's NSW ticket, and won 2,708 votes, compared with the SEP's total of 1,677 in 2007. In Victoria, the SEP's Senate ticket of Patrick O'Connor and Keo Vongvixay received 6,886 votes, compared with a total of 1,554 in 2007. The Victorian Senate vote was partly inflated by the SEP's listing as the first Group on a ballot paper of 29. But it also reflected the fact that O'Connor was the only SEP candidate to be interviewed on a mainstream radio program.

As in previous elections, the entire corporate media—daily newspapers, radio and television—imposed blanket censorship on the SEP's campaign. Had the party and its candidates been accorded equal access to the myriad talk shows, candidate profiles and interviews as the candidates from other—both major and minor—parties, thus allowing workers and young people everywhere to hear its independent, revolutionary socialist program, its vote would undoubtedly have been higher. That is, of course, precisely why the blackout takes place.

In the course of its five-week campaign, hundreds of SEP members and supporters delivered around a quarter of a million SEP manifestos into the letterboxes of residents in the 10 SEP electorates, as well as at shopping centres, railway stations and factories. Many of those workers, students and professional people who voted for the SEP's candidates had read the SEP's election statement, which made clear the need for the working class to turn to a new internationalist perspective and program. It explained that this required a conscious break with the nationalist politics of Labor and the trade unions, and the building of a new independent political movement of the working class aimed at abolishing the capitalist

profit system, establishing a workers' government and, in unity with workers throughout the world, a rationally planned, global economy.

The party's statement made clear that the SEP would not allocate voting preferences to other parties, or engage in the electoral horse-trading, in either the upper or lower house, that characterised every other political tendency, including the pseudo-lefts and the Greens.

While the SEP's 2010 vote was important, the main focus of the party's campaign was the fight to bring its analysis, program and ideas to the broadest layers of workers and young people around the country, in order to prepare them for the political and social upheavals ahead. More than 70 articles were posted on the WSWS and the SEP's election website, assessing every major aspect of the 2010 election campaign and reporting on the political interventions of the SEP candidates. By the end of the campaign, the SEP's website was receiving more than 2,000 separate hosts per day, double the number in 2007.

In response to its campaign, hundreds of people attended SEP public meetings in the 10 electorates where the party stood, including many for the first time. More than \$32,000 has been raised so far for the party's \$40,000 election fund, and several people have applied to join. One, who submitted an application through the SEP's website, articulated the sentiments of many others when he wrote: "After the slaying of Kevin Rudd, I've found myself looking more and more for an alternative to the horrible way in which capitalism is plaguing the world. Having read through your website I found myself agreeing with everything I read. I want in!"

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