

SEP (Australia) holds election meeting in Broadmeadows

Our reporters

15 November 2010

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held a successful public meeting yesterday in the Broadmeadows electorate as part of its campaign for the November 27 state election in Victoria.

The audience was made up of a range of workers, young people, and pensioners from the working class electorate as well as other parts of Melbourne. Several met the SEP for the first time during the campaign. The meeting was the only one to be held in the electorate by any of the parties standing candidates, including Labor and the Greens.

Broadmeadows is at the heart of the manufacturing crisis in Victoria—with an official unemployment rate of 15.9 percent. It is, however, regarded as a “safe” Labor seat and so the parliamentary parties make little pretence of concern. The SEP alone has mounted an active campaign, distributing election material and speaking with working people in shopping centres, outside factories and workplaces, and in suburban streets.

Peter Byrne, the SEP’s candidate, began by emphasising that the SEP was the only party contesting the election to address the central issues confronting the working class and young people.

Byrne noted that Labor Premier John Brumby had recently boasted that Melbourne was “the best city in the world”—while in Broadmeadows, his own seat, an enormous social crisis continues to unfold. “Almost one in six of people registered to work are unemployed, while many more have given up looking due to the absence of any opportunities,” the speaker said. “This unemployment rate is the highest of anywhere in the state. A reported 37 percent of families here have weekly incomes lower than \$650. That, again, is the highest percentage in the state. That Brumby can nevertheless boast about how things are supposedly so good shows the utter contempt that he and the Labor Party have for the working class.”

The SEP candidate continued: “Just last Wednesday the Caterpillar factory in Tullamarine announced that 100 jobs would be cut. The assembly of mining trucks will now take place in Mexico instead. The onslaught against manufacturing

jobs in this area continues. South Pacific Tyres, Yakka, Kraft, Ericsson, and Kayser Hosiery / Pacific Brands are among many plants to have been shut down at the expense of thousands of jobs. The Ford factory is a shadow of its former self, while car seat belt manufacturer Autoliv is indicative of the crisis in the car component industry. It employed 1,000 workers a decade ago and now has just a skeleton warehouse staff of 35. Across the state, 40,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost since the eruption of the global economic crisis in mid-2008.”

Byrne detailed the mounting social crisis across the state, in areas including public housing and homelessness, the hospital and ambulance systems, and public education. He also described the environmental crisis, and the Tullamarine toxic waste dump, as another example of the complete indifference of the political establishment towards the lives of working people.

“There is an element of deep crisis in this election campaign,” Byrne explained. “As we also experienced during the federal election campaign in August, there is a simmering hostility among voters towards the entire political system. We are seeing a real rupture between masses of people and the political establishment. No one has confidence in any of the major parties and no one has any illusions that whoever wins government will make anything in their lives better.”

The SEP candidate outlined the party’s socialist policies and encouraged those present to actively participate in the final fortnight of the campaign. “I want to stress that this election will resolve nothing for the working class,” Byrne concluded. “I am standing as a candidate in this election to make an appeal to the working class to adopt a program that reflects its historical interests. That is a socialist program and I urge everyone here today to think seriously about joining the Socialist Equality Party.”

SEP national committee member, Patrick O’Connor, focussed his remarks on the international context within which the Victorian election was unfolding. He noted that the G20 summit had concluded in South Korea two days earlier without

having resolved a single one of the myriad points of conflict between US imperialism and its rivals in Europe and Asia. The reckless trade war measures being implemented by the Obama administration against China and other trade competitors underscored the fact that the system of global economic relations established in the post-World War II period was rapidly breaking down.

“The strategic counterpoint to the Obama administration’s trade and currency wars with China is a highly provocative military and diplomatic encirclement,” O’Connor explained. “In the last fortnight President Obama has toured India, Indonesia, Japan and South Korea, while secretary of state Hillary Clinton visited Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand. The common thread of each visit was Washington’s attempt to shore up relations with various East Asian governments to ensure they remained within the US sphere of influence... Here, the Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard has committed Australian imperialism to functioning as an important component in the American anti-China regional front.”

The speaker then outlined the escalating class tensions within every advanced capitalist country. In Britain, Ireland, Greece, and throughout Europe, governments were implementing unprecedented austerity measures aimed at permanently lowering the living standards of the population. O’Connor pointed out that similar measures were being prepared in Australia, after the Gillard government had been presented with instructions by the treasury and finance departments.

The turn to austerity was already underway at the state level, with Labor governments across the country beginning to cut public sector jobs and target key social services. “In South Australia, the Labor government of Mike Rann recently announced cuts including 4,000 public sector sackings,” O’Connor said. “In Tasmania, business groups this week discovered a so-called \$300 million budget ‘black hole’ and have demanded the Labor-Green coalition government make equivalent cuts. ‘Tasmanians will need to suffer cuts to services such as health and education,’ a Chamber of Commerce and Industry spokesman told the ABC. In neither Tasmania nor South Australia were any of these measures publicly floated during both states’ election campaigns held earlier this year. The situation is no different in the Victorian election campaign.”

The speaker referred to the failure of recent strike and protest movements in Europe to halt the ruling class offensive. “The most critical task confronting the working class is to take up a socialist and internationalist perspective and consciously organise itself on a global level, fighting on the basis of an international strategy,” he said. “No national strategy or tactic,

and certainly no national organisation, is capable of successfully combating the globally coordinated forces of capital in conditions of unprecedented international economic integration. It is on the basis of this understanding that the SEP—the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution—is campaigning in the Victorian state election and standing Peter Byrne in the seat of Broadmeadows.”

A lively discussion followed. Questions were raised about the media’s response to the Gillard government’s failure to announce new spending cuts in the mid-year budget review, on Chinese mining investment in Papua New Guinea and the environmental consequences, about the SEP’s strategy to bring about change and the capacity of the working class to assimilate the party’s perspective and historical analysis.

Attending the meeting was a resident of Gladstone Park, near the Tullamarine toxic dump. He thanked the SEP for its work in exposing the Labor government’s attempted cover up of cancer cluster reports and congratulated Peter Byrne for his campaign video on the issue (see “SEP candidate speaks with residents in toxic dump area”).

The discussion extended long after the meeting’s formal conclusion. Several people agreed to assist the SEP’s campaign, including by distributing the party’s election statements to residents’ homes in the electorate.

Peter Byrne will be appearing at a “meet the candidate” forum next Sunday. All are welcome.

Sunday, November 21, 2.30 p.m.
Broadmeadows Leisure Centre Meeting Room
Cnr Pearcedale Pde & Dimboola Rd
Broadmeadows

Click here for the coverage of the SEP Victorian election campaign.

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