

Australia: The socialist alternative in the Broadmeadows by-election

Statement Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
31 January 2011

The Socialist Equality Party calls on working people and youth to support our candidate Peter Byrne in the Victorian state by-election being held in Broadmeadows on February 19. The SEP provides the only genuine alternative for the working class—a socialist and internationalist program to defend its independent class interests, in opposition to the entire political establishment—Labor, Liberal, and Greens.

The by-election is taking place with the world economy in its deepest crisis since the 1930s. Bitter rivalries between the major capitalist powers—fuelled by the intractable decline of US capitalism and the rise of China and other Asian powers—now wrack every part of the world, while the ruling elite escalates its attacks on workers' jobs, wages, and conditions. Struggles by workers against these measures have already erupted in Greece, France, Spain and the UK, and in Tunisia and Egypt, heralding a new period of revolutionary upheaval.

The same processes are underway in Australia, expressed in the yawning chasm between ordinary people and the official political establishment, and unprecedented levels of social inequality. The social crisis in the northern Melbourne suburb of Broadmeadows is a microcosm of the situation confronting working class communities throughout Australia. Official unemployment is 15.9 percent, with the youth jobless rate many times higher. Factory closures and mass layoffs have been imposed at Pacific Brands, South Pacific Tyres, Ford, and many car component companies, with the collaboration of the trade unions. The conditions facing working people constitute an indictment of Labor's record in office at the federal and state level.

Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Liberal state Premier Ted Baillieu are preparing further savage cuts in healthcare, education, welfare, pensions, social infrastructure, and public sector jobs and wages. Dictated by the same ultra-wealthy stratum that determines the policies of both major parties, they form part of the global austerity drive being enforced in Europe, the US, and elsewhere, aimed at making the working class pay for the multi-trillion dollar bank bailouts implemented during the financial crash.

Like its counterparts internationally, the Australian Labor Party is the instrument of the financial and big business oligarchy in imposing this program. The Broadmeadows by-election itself demonstrates Labor's contempt for working people. Local representative, former premier John Brumby, quit after leading his party to defeat in last November's state election.

Brumby had pledged to serve another full term, but changed his mind—no doubt after canvassing his prospects for highly paid positions in the private sector, as a reward for services rendered. The path from senior Labor parliamentarian to corporate boardrooms is well established.

Brumby's predecessor, Steve Bracks, has done particularly well since quitting in 2007, joining numerous boards. Accounting giant KPMG reportedly paid him \$100,000 for advising just one day a week on how to secure multi-million dollar government contracts.

The Bracks-Brumby government was thrown out in last November's election after 11 years in office, despite overwhelming support from the media and corporate lobby groups.

Brumby's departure was followed by an immediate scramble, among Labor's apparatchiks, for the "safe" Broadmeadows seat. An alliance of the so-called Socialist Left and part of the party's Right faction has installed property developer Frank McGuire, whose main claim to fame is that he is the brother of millionaire media personality, Eddie McGuire. He is not even a Labor Party member. No ballot of local party members was permitted. The affair provides another example of the party's moribund, worm-eaten character. It is no longer a political party in any real sense, but an apparatus maintained by enormous flows of money from corporations, the trade unions, and the state. The party's factions are nothing but rival cliques of careerists, functioning as the bought-and-paid-for transmission belts for the interests of different business interests.

Last June's unprecedented political coup against former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, carried out by a handful of party and trade union officials behind the backs of the Australian people, revealed the antidemocratic measures being prepared by the ruling elite. Gillard was installed at the behest of key sections of big business, including the mining giants, and through the intervention of the US government, which had become increasingly critical of Rudd.

Leaked diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks confirm that 1) Washington was opposed to Rudd's reluctance to deploy more Australian troops to Afghanistan, and his failure to squarely line up behind its aggressive push to maintain its domination of the Asia-Pacific region in the face of China's increased economic, diplomatic, and military influence, and 2) all of the key coup plotters secretly worked with US personnel in Australia, with several officials identified as "protected" informants by embassy officials in Canberra. Since being installed, Gillard has orchestrated a shift even further to the right, including a commitment to the criminal war in Afghanistan for at least the next ten years.

Rudd's ousting exposed the fraud of parliamentary democracy. Political decisions are made, not on the basis of elections and the "will" of the majority, but in behind-the-scenes manoeuvres. Parliamentary elections are highly stage-managed and manipulated affairs dominated by diversions, misinformation, cover-ups and empty slogans. None of the real issues confronting ordinary working people is raised—by politicians or the media. This by-election is no less of a fraud.

Against the entire official establishment, the Socialist Equality Party is seeking to develop an independent mass political movement of the working class aimed at the complete reorganisation of society in the interests of the majority, not the wealthy few. We fight for the formation of a workers' government—a government of, for and by the workers on the basis of the following program:

*** For the expropriation of the banks and giant financial institutions. For the public ownership of major corporations**

The accumulated wealth created by the working class must be directed to the satisfaction of pressing social needs. The banks and giant financial institutions must be expropriated, with full protection to small depositors, and placed under public ownership, democratically controlled by the working class. Likewise the major, multi-billion dollar corporations—including telecommunications, energy, mining and agriculture—must be taken out of private hands, with full compensation to small shareholders, and subjected to public ownership and democratic control.

*** For a massive public works program. For free and high quality public services**

An emergency public works program must be launched immediately to raise living standards and provide full-time employment for all, at a decent, living wage. This must include massive investments in social infrastructure—roads, rail and other public transport systems, adequate water storage capacity and renewable energy supplies, sewerage systems, public housing, aged and child-care facilities, schools, universities and TAFEs, hospitals and other medical facilities. The recent Australian floods, like the Victorian bushfires, have demonstrated the devastating consequences of underinvestment in vital social infrastructure, lack of planning, and subordination of urban planning to the profit interests of property developers and the banks.

*** Against militarism, war, and attacks on democratic rights**

All Australian troops must be withdrawn from Afghanistan, Iraq, East Timor, Solomon Islands and wherever else they are stationed. Compensation must be paid to the victims of Australian imperialism, and all those responsible for war crimes prosecuted. Federal and state “anti-terror” legislation, enacted since 2001 in the fraudulent “war on terror”, must be repealed.

*** For the international unity of the working class**

The program of the SEP is grounded on the common interests of the international working class. The global integration of the world economy provides the material basis for meeting the needs of the entire world population. Workers must reject all forms of nationalism and racism, including the targeting of immigrants and refugees, and uphold the right of all workers to live wherever they wish, with full citizenship rights.

None of the above measures can be realised without a direct challenge to the capitalist private profit system. This is a political task, possible only through the working class establishing its political independence from all the old parties and organisations—above all Labor and the unions, that seek to subordinate it to the capitalist state and the profit requirements of the corporate and financial elite.

A reckoning must also be made with all those political tendencies that

function as apologists for Labor. This includes the Greens, who have allied themselves with Gillard Labor in Canberra. The Greens represent the interests of a privileged section of the middle class and function as a parliamentary safety valve for mounting opposition to the major parties. They oppose any challenge to the profit system, which is responsible for the climate change crisis, and local environmental problems such as the carcinogenic toxic dump at Tullamarine. The various middle class pseudo-“socialist” organisations serve as nothing more than adjuncts of Labor and the Greens. Like the unions, they fraudulently promote illusions that these parties can be pressured to the left. Similarly, so-called “independent” candidates seek to appeal to anti-Labor sentiment in the working class, only to channel it into the dead-end of parliament and elections.

The working class must begin to develop its own independent organisations to defend its class interests, including workplace and community action committees. But, the decisive question is the development of a new political perspective and leadership. While disaffection, anger and alienation are escalating, both in Australia and throughout the world, they are not sufficient. A new political leadership must be built, grounded on the strategic lessons of the twentieth century and the theoretical and historical heritage of Marxism. This is the perspective of the Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement.

We urge all those electors in Broadmeadows who agree with our socialist program to vote for Peter Byrne. On the ballot paper he will not be identified as a candidate of the SEP because of anti-democratic state electoral laws, designed to prop up the two-party system. Byrne is a longstanding SEP member, an architect and the son of a car worker. He stood in the August federal election for the seat of Calwell, which includes Broadmeadows, and again in the Victorian election last November for the seat of Broadmeadows.

Above all, we call on all workers and youth to support and participate in our campaign, study our history and program, and make the decision to join and build the Socialist Equality Party as the new mass revolutionary party of the working class.

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