

SEP holds election campaign meeting

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party held its first public meeting yesterday as part of its Melbourne by-election campaign. The meeting provided an opportunity for the SEP and its candidate in the election, Patrick O'Connor, to explain the party's socialist policies to an audience of workers and young people, including a number of international students.

The opening report was given by Will Marshall, campaign manager for the by-election. He emphasised the necessity for the working class to make a fundamental break with the entire parliamentary framework and strike out on a new political road.

Marshall outlined the deteriorating conditions of life for working people, including job destruction, ongoing demands for productivity concessions, and declining wages. "The claims made by the Gillard Labor government that Australia is somehow immune from the global crisis are to pull the wool over the eyes of workers and students and leave them unprepared for what they confront," he explained.

With two major universities in the electorate, RMIT and the University of Melbourne, the speaker pointed to the terrible conditions confronting students, especially international students. "Nationally, nearly one in four tertiary students comes from overseas. These students are charged exorbitant tuition fees—often \$20,000 to \$40,000 a year, forcing them to work for long hours in low paid jobs. As far as Liberal and Labor are concerned, overseas students are nothing but a source of revenue and cheap labour."

Marshall also exposed the bogus character of the Labor Party and Greens election campaigns in

Melbourne. Both parties falsely posture as opponents of the state Liberal government's public sector sackings and cuts to the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector. He said that the only way to defend fundamental social rights such as the right to a job, affordable housing, and free access to healthcare and education was the independent mobilisation of the working class in the fight for a workers' government and socialist policies.

SEP candidate Patrick O'Connor delivered the main report. He began by emphasising the extraordinary pace of political developments internationally. "We are living through a genuinely historic period... We have seen a military coup in Egypt, followed by the orchestrated election that installed a Muslim Brotherhood leader as president; in the US the Democrats lost the recall election against Wisconsin governor Scott Walker that was used to derail a mass working class struggle against attacks on public sector wages, pensions, and jobs in the mid-west state; in Canada, mass protests continued in Quebec against student tuition fee hikes and against antidemocratic repressive laws introduced to try to crush the student strike; in Europe, the Spanish banks received a €100 million bailout, a desperate move that plunged the world financial markets into further turmoil, while elections in Greece saw a pro-austerity coalition government installed to impose further savage cuts against the working class."

O'Connor explained that the global economic crisis marked a systematic breakdown of the capitalist order and that the response of the ruling elites internationally has been to unleash a savage assault on the social position of the working class. The speaker detailed the social and economic crisis in the US, reviewing recent figures showing a 40 percent decline in the average

household's wealth between 2007 and 2010, as well as the recent bankruptcy of Stockton city in California. O'Connor then examined the situation in Europe, concluding, "Greece has become a laboratory for the European ruling elite to experiment in just how far it can devastate an entire population."

The SEP candidate emphasised that there was a developing global revolt of the working class. "Yet in Egypt, across the Middle East and North Africa, in Greece and throughout Europe, and within the United States itself, the initial struggles of workers and young people have been contained, dissipated, and beaten back," he explained. "What this underscores above all is the continued crisis of perspective and leadership."

O'Connor focussed on the counterrevolutionary role played pseudo-radical outfits such as the Revolutionary Socialists in Egypt and SYRIZA in Greece. "These organisations, like their counterparts in Australia and internationally, are resolutely hostile to the working class and to every one of the basic premises of Marxism," he said. "They represent the interests of a privileged middle class layer, particularly represented within the trade union bureaucracy and the universities. These organisations are preoccupied with the politics of personal identity, sexuality, gender, and race, and anything else they can use to block a discussion of the fundamental questions of class, property, and the distribution of wealth."

In concluding, O'Connor said that in the next period the SEP anticipated unprecedented social upheavals and political shocks in Australia. "But this anticipation has nothing to do with waiting on events," the speaker explained. He urged those in attendance to join the SEP and help build it as the new revolutionary party of the working class. The reports were followed by questions and answers and a collection for the SEP's Monthly Fund.

After the meeting, an international student, Mary, spoke about the meeting. "I thought the speech given by Patrick was very good," she said. "It tied up international issues together and linked this with Australia... I think in Greece the 'left' is supporting the EU system. If you support this then it's not a real

solution. This cannot support the working class. The working class there isn't educated. They don't realise that what they're being told is not a solution. Eventually they will find the right solution—who is really standing on their side. I think at the moment they are confused and filled with fear for the future. They don't know what alternative can help them."

Another student, Parvinder, said: "I thought the meeting was interesting. Right now we are in very historical times. There are only a few periods that have been so pivotal, like the end of World War II and the time of the French Revolution. This is a worldwide crisis and the SEP is right to prepare for the future instead of being preoccupied with just getting votes."

Kevin, a TAFE teacher, said: "One of the things that struck me today with Patrick's speech was the personal tragedies he described of people in Greece—their plight is terrible. You tend not to hear about these issues in the mass media and it is easy to lose sight of events when you are so far away. In the examples you can see the crisis is expressed tragically through people's personal lives—the story of the son and his elderly mother committing suicide together, because they could not survive on her pension is horrific."

See the SEP website for further information

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