Socialist Equality Party to contest Australian federal election: A socialist program to fight the drive to war

The Socialist Equality Party
26 April 2013

The Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), will be fielding a team of Senate candidates in five states in the federal elections scheduled for September 14.

The SEP's election intervention will be part of a coordinated campaign by the ICFI and its sections throughout the world aimed at uniting the working class in Australia, the Asia-Pacific region, Africa, the Middle East, the United States and internationally in the struggle against the growing danger of war. In the midst of the most serious economic breakdown of world capitalism since the Great Depression, the seeds of World War III have not only been sown, they have already sprouted and are rapidly growing, in the form of the US war drive against China.

The central objective of our campaign is to develop a broad, international anti-war movement among workers and young people on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program.

Having launched a continuous series of aggressive wars over the past two decades—in the Balkans, Afghanistan, the Middle East and Africa—in order to try to offset its historic economic decline, US imperialism is concentrating its military might in the Asia-Pacific region, based on the assessment that China's growing economic power is a threat that must be contained. The inexorable logic of Washington's agenda is a war that would rapidly assume nuclear dimensions and threaten the very future of civilisation. A study released in April 2013 by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) into the US military's new AirSea Battle plans bluntly concluded: "The Pentagon has started to 'think about the unthinkable': a military strategy for fighting and winning a potential war against China."

The Gillard Labor government, with the complicity of the Greens and the full backing of the Liberal and National parties, has placed Australia on the very frontline of these war preparations. Behind the backs of the Australian people, Gillard has extended unconditional support to the Obama administration's anti-China "pivot" to Asia, signing military agreements while concealing, in tandem with the corporate-controlled media, their extent and implications.

The upcoming election is being conducted on an utterly fraudulent basis. None of the real issues are being, or will be, raised in the "official" media-backed campaign. The SEP is intervening to tell the working class and youth the truth, and to raise the life-and-death questions they confront. First and foremost, we will expose the accelerating drive to war and insist that all secret deals and agreements be made public. Twice in the course of the twentieth century, the capitalist ruling classes plunged mankind into world war, with devastating consequences. They must not be allowed to do so again!

The working class must demand and receive answers to vital questions. What secret agreements has Gillard made? What commitments has the Australian military given to its US counterparts? What is the real purpose of the bases that have already been established? What new bases and military deployments are planned? How advanced are the war preparations against China?

The Labor government's defence minister Stephen Smith has claimed "there are no US bases in Australia." He is lying. The bases at Pine Gap and North-West Cape, set up during the Cold War, have played a key role in the US-led wars in the Middle East. They are fully integrated into US military planning for war against China.

The Darwin US marine base, announced during Obama's address to the Australian parliament in November 2011, underscores the militarist aims of the anti-China pivot. When fully operational it will house naval, ground and air units for deployment to the immediate north of Australia, in order to blockade the vital sea lanes on which China depends for the supply of its energy and raw materials from the Middle East and Africa.

Plans are also being developed to establish a base on the Cocos Islands for the use of drones and other military aircraft and for turning the Stirling naval base in Western Australia into a home port for US nuclear-armed warships and submarines.

Already, the Obama administration has created a series of flashpoints throughout the Asia-Pacific region, any one of which could lead to a military conflict and immediately draw Australia into war.

*Escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula have been fuelled by US provocations against the North Korean regime, which China has historically viewed as a strategic buffer.

*The US has guaranteed military support for Japan in its conflict with China over claims to a series of disputed islands.

*Vietnam and the Philippines have been encouraged to pursue territorial claims against Beijing.

*Closer links are being forged with India as a counter-weight to China, while Burma and Mongolia are both being brought into the US fold because of their strategic position in relation to China.

The growing network of US alliances, and military and diplomatic relations in the region, is a noose being steadily tightened around the Chinese mainland.

The situation in Asia, where regional conflicts intersect with the interests of great powers, increasingly resembles the pre-1914 Balkans, which provided the spark for the eruption of World War I. The fuel for such a conflagration is being supplied by the deepening hostility of the US to China's economic expansion. China is not an imperialist power seeking global dominance—it occupies a subordinate position within the geo-political framework established by the major imperialist powers. But its emergence as the cheap labour and manufacturing platform of world capitalism has placed it in conflict with the determination of the US to maintain its grip over key resources, raw materials and markets, in Africa

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and wherever they are located.

There is deep opposition to war in the working class and among broad layers of the population, especially the youth. This was expressed in 2003, in the largest demonstrations in Australia's history, held as part of the historic global anti-war movement that spontaneously erupted against the launching of the Iraq war. That anti-war sentiment has not disappeared. But it can find no outlet within the official parliamentary framework. The SEP's election campaign will give the widespread opposition to militarism a powerful voice and the means for its conscious political expression. It will provide decisive leadership to the working masses of Australia, China and throughout Asia in the struggle against war.

Not only do all the parliamentary parties support Obama's military preparations, they maintain a conspiracy of silence over US policy and Australia's involvement in it. Indeed, the present Labor government was founded on conspiracy. Gillard has never explained the circumstances that led to the ousting of Kevin Rudd as prime minister in the coup of June 23–24, 2010.

Rudd was removed not because of his "management style" or opinion poll ratings, but because the Obama administration refused to countenance even the slightest deviation from its anti-China pivot. While remaining a firm supporter of Australia's alliance with the US, Rudd sought to broker a rapprochement between the US and China. This conflicted with Washington's confrontational agenda, and he was ousted in an inner-party coup orchestrated by Washington's Labor "assets", without the knowledge of the parliamentary Labor Party, let alone the Australian population. From the day Gillard became prime minister, when she pointedly appeared in public with the American ambassador to Australia, she has made crystal clear that her government will march in lockstep with the Obama administration.

The SEP bases itself on all the vital strategic lessons of the international workers' movement and specifically draws attention to the strategic experiences of the past 10 years. The inability of the anti-war demonstrations a decade ago to stop the invasion of Iraq demonstrates that the pressure of public opinion, in and of itself, is powerless to stop the imperialist juggernaut. The movement failed not because it lacked support, but because its leaderships subordinated it to the existing political framework, insisting that the United Nations, or placing pressure on one or another wing of the political establishment, could compel the US to change course.

Since then, the political forces that dominated the anti-war movement have shifted even further to the right. All of them have now directly aligned themselves with US militarism. This shift is marked, above all, by the various pseudo-left tendencies which, having supported the criminal US-NATO intervention in Libya in 2011, have now lined up behind the US-led operation to carry out "regime change" in Syria.

The position of the pseudo-left is summed up particularly graphically in the insistence of the misnamed Socialist Alternative that it is now necessary to dispense with "knee jerk anti-imperialism." These anti-war protestors of yesterday have become the most ardent advocates for imperialism today. Their support for the US and other imperialist powers in the Middle East, and their silence on US war preparations in the Asia-Pacific, signify that they are already aligning themselves to back an attack on China.

The evolution of these tendencies is rooted in deep-going social and economic processes. They speak not for the working class but for affluent layers of the upper middle class, whose material interests are bound up with the rampant financial parasitism that has been the source of the vast wealth accumulated in the upper echelons of society over the past period, and with the drive by imperialism to secure for itself control over vital sources of raw materials and cheap labour, on which that wealth ultimately depends.

The crucial lesson of the past century is that the struggle against imperialist war can only go forward to the extent that it mobilises the working class, on the basis of a revolutionary socialist perspective, to take political power and overthrow the capitalist profit system, the source of war.

The development of a genuine anti-war movement requires the unification of the struggles of the working class across national borders. That is why the SEP will place at the very centre of its campaign the struggle against all forms of nationalism, chauvinism and racism. Led by the Gillard Labor government, the entire political establishment is stoking up anti-refugee hysteria while, at the same time, Gillard, her ministers and backers in the trade union bureaucracy denounce "foreign workers" and call for "Aussie jobs." This rekindling of the foul traditions of Labor's White Australia policy serves the most reactionary political purpose—to divide the Australian working class, which is comprised of immigrants from around the world, from its counterparts in the Asia-Pacific and internationally.

On the eve of the outbreak of World War II, Leon Trotsky wrote: "Before exhausting or drowning mankind in blood, capitalism befouls the world atmosphere with the poisonous vapours of national and race hatred." His warning has lost none of its relevance. The clarion call of the socialist movement, "Workers of the World, Unite!", is the only basis on which the fight against war can be successfully mounted. Imperialism is a mighty and terrible force that threatens a global catastrophe. It can only be defeated by an even greater force—a united revolutionary movement of the international working class.

A social counter-revolution

Imperialist war abroad is inevitably accompanied by class war against the working class at home. Since the global financial crisis of 2008, the savage austerity measures introduced in country after country amount to a social counter-revolution against all the social gains won by the working class in the aftermath of World War II. In Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Italy and other European countries the working class is being driven back to the conditions of the 1930s. In Britain, what little remains of the post-war social welfare state is being systematically dismantled, while American workers confront the worst social and economic conditions since the Great Depression. Having handed out trillions of dollars to the parasites of finance capital, the ruling elites have only one policy: to make the working class pay for the historic crisis of the capitalist profit system.

The claim that Australia was somehow exempted because of its much vaunted "mining boom" has been torn to shreds.

The rise in value of the Australian dollar—a product of high mineral export prices and global currency gyrations, caused by the printing of trillions of dollars by the world's major central banks—has been utilised by the ruling elite to unleash a new round of attacks on the working class. Each day brings news of another factory closure or a new round of layoffs or an economic "restructuring" aimed at slashing jobs and conditions.

The insistent demand from all sections of the ruling elite and their media mouthpieces is that productivity—intensifying the exploitation of the working class—must be increased to ensure that Australian capitalism remains "internationally competitive." Entire industries are threatened with extinction as finance capital searches for ever more profitable investments.

As social inequality deepens, social conditions for the vast majority of ordinary working people are rapidly deteriorating. For many, housing costs have already reached intolerable levels, while household debt has jumped from 94 percent of income in 2000 to 150 percent today. The major banks have been the beneficiaries, amassing profits totalling $25

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billion in 2012.

While finance capital rakes in record profits, social services, health and education are being gutted. The public health system has been stretched to the limit, with waiting lists for so-called elective surgery soaring in every state, and staff numbers being slashed. Gillard's "education revolution," aimed at forcing parents to move their children out of under-resourced, "underperforming" public schools and into the private system, is placing more and more teachers in temporary, contract positions. University students face overcrowded lectures and classes, while they work ever longer hours to scrape together enough to live.

The SEP warns that the assault unleashed so far will pale into relative insignificance compared to the onslaught that will be implemented by whichever government comes to power after September 14. In April 2012, in a speech delivered in London, the Liberal opposition's treasury spokesman, Joe Hockey, spelt out the agenda being demanded by the corporate elite: transforming the budget deficit into a surplus by ending the "age of entitlement"—i.e., scrapping what remains of the welfare state and essential social services upon which millions of ordinary working people depend.

The threat of dictatorship

There is no popular support for such measures, and there is unprecedented hostility and anger towards the official political set-up. The parliamentary parties—Labor, Liberal-National and Greens—are all in a state of terminal crisis. Increasingly the ruling elite, frustrated at its inability to achieve its agenda, will resort to extra-parliamentary, dictatorial measures to impose it, involving fundamental attacks on democratic rights.

The willingness of the Australian bourgeoisie to dispense with the trappings of parliamentary democracy was demonstrated in the November 11, 1975 Canberra coup. The significance of the sacking of the democratically-elected Whitlam Labor government by forces including the CIA, and of Whitlam's own craven capitulation to his dismissal, was revealed in the subsequent transformation of the Labor Party. The next Labor government of Hawke and Keating abandoned any commitment to social reform, implementing instead a major "restructuring" of Australian capitalism in the interests of the corporate elite, and an unparalleled assault on the working class.

As only the SEP has warned, the anti-democratic removal of Rudd in the coup of June 23–24, 2010 was an early warning sign that, as social, economic and political tensions rise, the ruling class will once again resort to authoritarian measures to prosecute its class interests. Preparations have already been made. Since 2007, the Labor government, building on the framework established by its predecessor, the Howard Liberal government, and under the banner of the bogus "war on terrorism," has entrenched and augmented the scaffolding of a police-state, based on the abrogation of fundamental legal and democratic rights.

The SEP's election campaign will fight to develop an independent political movement of the working class to advance its own solution to the program of war, social counter-revolution and dictatorship through the fight for a workers' government and the socialist reorganisation of society.

The primary task of such a movement will be to establish its political independence from the capitalist two-party parliamentary system, and its Greens and pseudo-left apologists. The pseudo-lefts fraudulently claim that Labor must be supported as a "lesser evil" to the Liberals. Like all lies, this serves a definite political purpose—to paralyse the working class and prevent its struggles from breaking out of the stranglehold of the Labor and union bureaucracies.

Equally pernicious is the pseudo-lefts' claim that workers can only fight for their interests through the auspices of the trade unions. The reality is that the unions are in no sense workers' organisations. Over the past three decades, the globalisation of production has completely shattered their old, limited, reformist programs, based on national regulation, and transformed them into nothing but an industrial police force for imposing the dictates of the major corporations, banks and finance capital. Both Labor and the unions directly serve the interests of Australian and US imperialism.

The working class can only secure its independent class interests through mass social and political struggle. In the factories and workplaces, the SEP calls for the formation of new rank-and-file organisations—independent of, and opposed to the trade unions—which will fight to defend jobs, wages and conditions. We call, as well, for the formation of committees of action in neighbourhoods throughout the country, to develop mass social and political struggles against the austerity cuts being made by the parties of big business to schools, universities, health facilities and other social services.

The SEP urges all workers, students, youth, socialist-minded intellectuals and professional people to give our election campaign your maximum support. While calling for the largest possible vote, our primary aim is not winning at the ballot box. Rather, it is to develop a new political movement of the working class and to imbue that movement with scientific socialist consciousness—the understanding that nothing less than the overthrow of the capitalist profit system and the establishment of world socialism is required to end the threat of world war, social devastation and dictatorship.

This necessitates, above all, the building of a new revolutionary leadership of the working class, in Australia and on an international scale. That is the perspective of the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution, founded in 1938 by Leon Trotsky. The ICFI is the only party that consciously bases its political work on the great principles and program of revolutionary Marxism, embodied most powerfully in the struggle waged by Trotsky, co-leader with Lenin of the Russian Revolution, against Stalinism and all forms of national opportunism. We urge all those who agree with the necessity for socialism—for social equality and for an end to poverty, exploitation, oppression and war—to participate in the SEP's election campaign, become regular readers of the *World Socialist Web Site*, the internet organ of the ICFI, study our history, program and principles, and apply to join our ranks.

Authorised by Nick Beams, 113/55 Flemington Rd, North Melbourne 3051

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