

# SEP election meetings discuss Labor Party leadership crisis

**Our reporters****1 July 2013**

The Socialist Equality Party held two well-attended public meetings yesterday to discuss the political significance of last week's removal of Julia Gillard as prime minister and reinstallation of Kevin Rudd. The meetings, held in the Melbourne suburb of Clayton and Tuggerah on the New South Wales Central Coast, were convened as part of the SEP's 2013 election campaign.

The audience represented a cross-section of workers and youth, including retail employees, road and council workers, teachers, retirees, housewives and university students, from a range of countries including India, Malaysia, Singapore and China. They followed the speakers intently.

The first reports to both meetings explained the importance of the recent revelations about the US National Security Agency's illegal global surveillance regime, and called on workers and young people to take up the defence of whistleblower Edward Snowden, now under attack from the Obama administration. International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) member Will Morrow spoke on these issues in Melbourne, while SEP Senate candidate for New South Wales Zac Hambides addressed the Tuggerah meeting.

Utilising a series of projected graphs detailing the enormous escalation of social inequality within the US in the last three decades, Hambides explained that the disintegration of democratic forms of rule was a reflection of the historic decline of American capitalism, itself driven by two interconnected processes. "First, the staggering growth in social inequality and concentration of wealth in the hands of a tiny financial oligarchy," he stated, "and second, the campaign of virtually endless war by the US. The maintenance of democratic norms is incompatible with these processes."

Hambides continued: "It is thus from a position of

extreme weakness and nervousness that the Obama administration has responded with such fury to the revelations made by Snowden. Aware that its policies are immensely unpopular, the corporate and financial elite looks upon the American and world's population itself as the enemy. The ruling elite fears the eruption of mass opposition, particularly among young people, as took place during the Egyptian Revolution in 2011 and what is now taking place in Brazil and Turkey. Any issue, in any country, can serve as the spark for broader social tensions."

This was no less true for Australia, the speaker explained, detailing the Labor government's complicity in the NSA spying operations. Hambides concluded by outlining the socialist perspective upon which the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International defended Edward Snowden and fought for the defence of democratic rights.

The main reports on the Labor government's political crisis were delivered in Melbourne by Patrick O'Connor, Senate candidate for Victoria, and in Tuggerah by Peter Symonds, SEP WSWS national editor and Senate candidate for Western Australia.

"The events of the past week, which are the culmination of three years of bitter infighting inside the Labor Party, are a key strategic experience of the working class in Australia and internationally," O'Connor explained. "The political lessons of this experience have to be thoroughly understood in order to guide the class struggles that inevitably lie ahead."

The speaker noted that the SEP had been alone in 2010 in providing an analysis of the "profound international shifts in the world economy and international geo-strategic situation" that lay behind the Labor Party coup that had removed Rudd. O'Connor detailed the global shift towards austerity measures

aimed against the working class, following the initial implementation of bank bailouts and stimulus spending measures after the 2008 financial crash, and also explained in detail Gillard's alignment with the Obama administration's "pivot" to the Asia-Pacific, which is aimed at strategically encircling China and maintaining US imperialism's regional and global domination.

"The immediate aim of returning Rudd to office has been to prevent the outright collapse of the Labor Party," O'Connor stated, "which has been the central lynchpin of the two-party system and parliamentary set up in this country for more than a century."

He continued: "What the coup plotters of 2010 did not count on was that their anti-democratic ousting of Rudd provoked immense hostility among wide layers of working people. It was carried out behind the backs of the population ... Gillard was never able to stem the outrage over the thoroughly anti-democratic way she came to power. That sentiment has only been compounded by her anti-working class policies. She has become the most reviled Labor leader in history—above all, among the party's former social base, the working class."

O'Connor explained the calculations behind the desperate reinstallation of Rudd as prime minister: "The ruling class is well aware that it is heading into an unparalleled period of economic crisis and war. The parliamentary set-up upon which they have relied for more than a century to suppress class conflict is coming apart at the seams ... The prospect of Labor being reduced to a parliamentary rump, as has already happened in Queensland and NSW, provoked panic in ruling circles. It threatened to deprive the ruling class of its most critical mechanism for containing the class struggle, under conditions where it has deep concerns about the ability of an Abbott government to implement the austerity agenda being demanded by the major banks and corporations."

The Melbourne and Tuggerah meetings each concluded with the main speakers explaining the necessity for the working class to itself intervene into the political crisis and fight for its own independent interests, and appealing to those present to join the SEP and participate in its election campaign.

The public meetings featured lively discussions after the reports were delivered. Audience members asked about Washington's response to Rudd's return,

Rudd's position on the new US Marine base in Darwin, established during Gillard's term in office, on the mining companies' campaign against Rudd in 2010, the possibility of fascistic forces, like the Greek Golden Dawn, emerging in Australia, and on how working people could understand political developments that were changing far more rapidly than they had done previously. Other questions were raised about the SEP's perspective, including on whether socialism could be achieved through parliament and about what a socialist society would look like. Informal discussions continued well after the meetings ended.

At the conclusion of the meetings, generous donations totalling more than \$1,200 were made to the SEP's special election fund, and several people signed up to become involved in the party's election campaign.

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