

SEP campaigns in Adelaide, South Australia

Our correspondents
10 July 2013

Over the past four days, James Cogan, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) Senate candidate for South Australia, and party members and supporters have campaigned in Adelaide, the state capital, for a SEP public meeting on July 13.

On Monday, Cogan spoke with workers, students and young people outside the city's central museum and art gallery, in Rundle Street and at the University of Adelaide. Students, including overseas students from the United States, France, Hong Kong and China, expressed support for American intelligence whistleblower Edward Snowden and purchased tickets for the meeting.

Yesterday, Cogan and SEP members campaigned in the working class suburb of Elizabeth, 30 kilometres north of the city centre. Elizabeth is the location of the main General Motors Holden (GMH) assembly plant. Wave after wave of layoffs and cuts to conditions, backed by the federal and state Labor governments and enforced by the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), have resulted in the number of jobs being slashed from more than 3,000 in 2007 to just 1,600. Four hundred workers are currently being retrenched through union-organised redundancy packages.

Last month, GMH issued an ultimatum, demanding that workers accept a 20 percent wage cut, of more than \$5.60 per hour, or face the plant's imminent closure. The demand marks a new stage in the deepening assault on jobs and conditions under the Labor government, which will intensify after the federal election, regardless of which party wins. The AMWU is now in negotiations with the company. Workers will be forced to vote by August 9 on whether to accept the reduced wages and conditions.

An SEP campaign team distributed several hundred copies of an article on the wage and job cuts, written by Cogan, to workers coming off the day shift at the

Elizabeth plant.

While a number of workers expressed a sense of resignation that the plant closure was inevitable, several indicated that the main reason for this attitude was that they had no confidence in the AMWU. One worker explained: "The union is owned by the company. You can't trust them after what they've pulled on us the last few times. Like when they agreed [in 2009] to the one week on-one week off roster. I lost my house and one of my cars because of that. They don't care. They're only thinking about themselves." He added: "It doesn't matter what they offer in exchange for the wage cuts. Either way, I'm voting 'no.' I just can't afford it."

Another worker explained that the company was demanding the reduction of the enterprise bargaining agreement document from 130 pages to 40, tearing up previously-won conditions.

Cogan and SEP campaigners also spoke with workers and youth at the nearby Elizabeth shopping complex and train station. As a result of the destruction of manufacturing jobs, the suburbs of northern Adelaide have the second highest official level of youth unemployment in Australia—42.6 percent.

Troy and Jackie, 17 and 18 respectively, are both studying in order to finish high school before Jackie has their child in September. Troy is also trying to work as much as possible to save money.

Troy explained: "Jobs are hard to find. I went through the entire Elizabeth shops and handed out 50 applications and only got one call-back. It's been nearly impossible because they judge you based on your appearance. I had a McDonald's interview and I didn't even get a trial because a manager said I didn't have 'customer service skills'... The only place I got a job was at a café. I'm paid \$11.97 an hour and \$14.37 per hour on weekends and I'm getting only five hours a week."

After a discussion on the decade-long wars in

Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and now Syria, Troy said: “Most of it is just for oil. America is trying to control the land. They say that there are terrorists. But I know that Osama Bin Laden was taught by the CIA to start terrorist organisations to get the Russians out of Afghanistan. That’s basically why 9/11 happened. The reasons they give for the wars are lies.”

Angelina, a carer in a nursing home, told the campaign team: “The job and wage cuts at Holden are not fair. Already it’s hard to get work here. I’m a casual and we get just \$19 per hour for the day shift. The rent is \$500 a week! I get just enough work to keep me going.”

Angelina commented on the political turmoil wracking the Labor government in Canberra, with the sudden re-installation of Kevin Rudd as prime minister, replacing Julia Gillard. “We’ve got no say. How they got rid of Rudd [in 2010], and even the way they did it this time with Gillard is wrong. There should have been another election. We voted for them and they thought, ‘we’ll change because the Australian people won’t mind.’ Well, some of us do mind. We should decide.”

Milta, whose son has worked at the GMH plant for 18 years, told the team. “He’s waiting to see if they’re cutting the wages and then he’ll see what he can do. It’s terrible for a young family with two children. Luckily, his wife is also working. I think the plant is going to completely close. That’s what happened to Mitsubishi and Bridgestone, and now it’s happening to Holden. I have family members who worked in all of these companies.

“Things are getting worse and worse. Wages are going down and prices are going up. It’s not only Australia. It’s all over the world.”

Laura, a mother of four teenage boys, said: “I’ve been here for four years, and it’s gone from being OK to really bad. A lot of people are depressed because of the work situation. I lost my home. I had to walk away from it and rent. I bought a home in Elizabeth North, and you’d think that would be OK, because I was working full-time. Then they cut back my hours.

“I refuse to vote. I haven’t voted in 10 years because I haven’t found anyone that I think is worth voting for. They don’t care about the working class people. My eldest son is 19 and he won’t vote as well.”

Elle, a young retail worker who recently moved to Adelaide from the regional town of Whyalla, had a long

discussion with Cogan about the situation facing young people and the SEP’s socialist program.

Elle explained: “I have two part-time jobs. I go back and forth but you just put up with it. It’s not only Holden. I used to get shifts at least three times a week. Now I’m lucky to get one. Retail is really struggling. I’m doing a TAFE [Technical and Further Education] course but I’m going to go to uni because all employers want are degrees, degrees. It doesn’t matter how good you are sometimes—all they want is a piece of paper. It is about \$800 for my course, so lucky I have some work.”

Asked about the return of Rudd, Elle’s response reflected the way in which vague sympathies for Rudd, due to his backroom ousting in 2010, are being exploited to try to salvage the Labor government. “Thank god Gillard got removed because I love Kevin Rudd,” she said. “When he got thrown out I was really mad. I thought—and it’s not anything against women because I’m a girl—Gillard shouldn’t be running the country, because Rudd got elected.”

Elle added: “I am not sure what party I support, though. I’m undecided because they are all the same for me. I’m not a fan of what’s going on with the wars everywhere either. I don’t believe wars are right.” She said she would read the SEP election statement and think about the party’s socialist perspective.

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



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact