

Socialist Equality Party holds election meeting in Adelaide

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party held an election meeting on July 13 in the South Australian capital of Adelaide, the party's first such meeting in the city for some years.

Over the previous week, the SEP's two Senate candidates for South Australia, assistant national secretary James Cogan and longstanding member Peter Byrne, campaigned with party members and supporters throughout the city. They focused in particular on the working class suburb of Elizabeth, where 1,600 General Motors Holden (GMH) workers are being blackmailed by the company to accept 20 percent wage cuts and attacks on their conditions, or the plant will be shut down.

The meeting was attended by workers and students, including a mining industry worker, a graphic designer, a computer programmer, engineering and computer science students and local artists.

The meeting was chaired by Will Morrow, a leading member of the SEP's youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE). Introducing Cogan and Byrne, Morrow stressed that the SEP's election campaign was part of the world-wide struggle by the International Committee of the Fourth International to win the working class to a scientific socialist perspective. Morrow also highlighted the ICFI's defence of American whistleblower Edward Snowden and briefly reviewed the critical information he had revealed. Included in Snowden's revelations, Morrow declared, were those exposing the fact that Australian telecommunications giant, Telstra, had been handing over the internet communications of millions of Australian, Asian and Pacific Island citizens to US intelligence agencies since at least 2001. This demonstrated the intimate involvement of successive Australian governments in the illegal US spying operations, aimed against the populations of America and the world.

Speaking first, Peter Byrne focussed on the international and political character of the corporate assault on the

GMH workers. He explained that General Motors was fully backed by the Labor government of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, and the company was relying on the unions to prevent any genuine struggle against its wage-cutting demands.

Byrne cited Rudd's comments to the National Press Club last week, in which the prime minister called for "boosting national competitiveness". Byrne explained: "GMH is viewed by both the Labor government and the Liberal Opposition as a test case—to see how far the companies can go in slashing working class living standards and thereby achieving 'competitiveness'."

Byrne reviewed the global context of the offensive against General Motors workers: "The benchmark GM is seeking to impose everywhere is the 27 percent cut in labour costs that the auto companies achieved in the United States as a result of the plant closings, layoffs and concessions agreed to by the United Auto Workers union, as part of President Obama's 2008 restructuring of the auto industry."

The candidate drew attention to the attacks taking place on workers at the GM-Opel plant in Bochum, Germany, which faces closure, as well as on GM workers in Canada, Britain, Belgium, Spain and Brazil.

Byrne concluded: "The working class can only meet the corporate offensive with its own international and socialist strategy. There is no national solution for workers anywhere, and no way forward through the trade unions." He explained the necessity for an independent political movement of the working class, fighting for the establishment of a workers' government to implement socialist policies.

In his remarks, James Cogan began by reviewing the renewed mass upheavals in Egypt. "These events have particular significance," he stated. "They signal that a new period of world revolution has opened up." He also spoke on the revelations of American whistleblower

Edward Snowden and the need for the working class to defend him. “Snowden’s courageous actions,” Cogan said, “have exposed the police-state measures that have been implemented by the American ruling elite, out of their fear of similar revolutionary struggles as are taking place in Egypt erupting in the United States.”

Cogan explained that the unprecedented turmoil in official Australian politics, with the ousting of Prime Minister Julia Gillard last month and the reinstallation of Kevin Rudd, could only be understood within the context of the global breakdown of the capitalist system and the revolutionary conditions developing worldwide. Rudd had been returned to try to stem the total collapse of the Labor Party, which historically has been the most critical defender of Australian capitalism.

The next government, however, whether formed by Labor or the Liberal opposition, would impose savage austerity and corporate restructuring, attacks on democratic rights and continued support for US preparations for a military confrontation with China.

Cogan told the audience: “Unless workers and youth begin to fight for their own independent class interests, then the course of events will continue to be determined by the ruling class and its political parties. The purpose of the SEP campaign is to educate workers and youth, and prepare a powerful movement against war, austerity and the drive to dictatorship, on the basis of an internationalist and socialist program.”

Cogan concluded by urging the audience to study the history of the International Committee of the Fourth International and the SEP, contained in the party’s historical and international foundations document, and to seriously consider joining the party.

A mining engineer asked what socialism would mean for ordinary workers. Cogan explained that socialism was not a utopian scheme, but an objective necessity that arose out of the contradictions within the capitalist mode of production itself. Only socialism could ensure fundamental social rights, such as a well-paid job with safe working conditions, safe and affordable housing, quality health care, and high quality education at every level.

Cogan continued: “Socialism means the emancipation of the working class from exploitation, and the development of a higher form of social organisation. Time and time again, we hear the claim that there is not enough money, or not enough resources. This is not the case. Humanity’s productive capacity and resources are sufficient, if organised globally on the basis of rational,

scientific socialist planning, rather the pursuit of corporate profit, to ensure that the social rights of every man, woman and child are met. What socialism means, as the name of our party indicates, is genuine social equality.”

An older worker asked why the SEP was not involved in unity talks with the “broader left”, including the Communist Party of Australia, Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative. Cogan replied that these Stalinist and pseudo-left organisations were not “left” or “socialist”.

“In the case of all these tendencies,” Cogan said, “their origins, history and political positions establish that they are nationalist organisations that defend capitalist property relations. In Australia, their central preoccupation has been to seek to prevent the working class making a break with the Labor Party and the trade unions, and taking up a socialist and internationalist program. Under the impact of capitalist breakdown, such organisations have shifted even further to right, with Socialist Alternative openly supporting the imperialist intervention taking place in Syria.”

Cogan also reviewed the counterrevolutionary role of the pseudo-left tendency in Egypt, the Revolutionary Socialists, which maintains close relations with Australia’s Socialist Alternative.

The meeting concluded with a collection of \$345 for the SEP’s election fund and close to \$100 worth of Marxist literature was sold. All those present remained behind for informal discussion with Cogan, Byrne and other SEP members, and several gave interviews to WSWs reporters.

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