

SEP holds election meetings in Geelong, Perth and Brisbane

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party held meetings on Sunday in working class areas in three states across Australia, as part of its 2013 election campaign. The events were addressed by the SEP's candidates for the Senate in each state.

In Western Australia, Joe Lopez and WSWs national editor Peter Symonds addressed a meeting in the working class Perth suburb of Mirrabooka. In Victoria, Tania Baptist and Patrick O'Connor, along with Will Morrow from the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) spoke at a meeting in the regional city of Geelong, where the Ford car plant is being closed in 2016, at the cost of hundreds of jobs. In Queensland, candidates Gabriela Zabala and Mike Head spoke in South Brisbane.

In each area, the SEP candidates, party members and supporters had campaigned for the meetings among sections of workers, at university and technical training campuses, in major shopping centres and outside cinemas.

The meetings were attended by a cross section of workers, students, and youth. Some had encountered the SEP through the limited coverage accorded to its campaign by the mainstream media. In Brisbane, the SEP's candidate Mike Head was interviewed on Brisbane radio station 4BC last week about the assault on workers' wages and conditions. In Geelong, Patrick O'Connor gave a radio interview to 94.7 "The Pulse", outlining the SEP's opposition to the destruction of jobs, and its international socialist strategy for car workers.

The reports presented to the meetings focused on the need for a new socialist and internationalist perspective and leadership in the working class. They reviewed the Labor government's alignment with the US preparations for war against China, the persecution of

American whistleblower Edward Snowden and its implications for democratic rights, the reinstallation of Kevin Rudd as prime minister, and his government's punitive refugee policy and preparations for major austerity measures after the election.

At the meeting in Perth, Joe Lopez outlined the scope of Operation Talisman Saber, a military exercise involving 22,000 American and 10,000 Australian military personnel that is taking place in Northern Australia. He explained that the exercise was a rehearsal for a US attack on China and was part of a broader military buildup being carried out by US imperialism in the Asia-Pacific region. Lopez explained that the turn to militarism and war was inextricably linked to the assault on democratic rights, exemplified by the persecution of Edward Snowden.

Peter Symonds, the main speaker in Perth, began his report by warning that the anti-democratic character of the Rudd government's new refugee policy, which consigns all asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boat to poverty-stricken Papua New Guinea, portends major attacks on the democratic and social rights of the working class as a whole.

Symonds explained that the reinstallation of Rudd was not only a desperate attempt to save the Labor Party, the chief political prop of Australian capitalism, but was being used as the vehicle to elaborate the austerity agenda that will be imposed by whichever party forms the next government. These policies could not be imposed democratically, he said, explaining that last week's Labor party rule changes were designed to ensure a Labor prime minister could not be removed and thus could ignore public opposition. The speaker said that underlying the political turmoil in Australia was the deepening global breakdown of capitalism.

Symonds explained that the mass opposition to war,

social inequality and attacks on democratic rights could only find political expression through the socialist program advanced by the SEP. He exposed the argument advanced by the pseudo-left organisations, including Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative, that Labor is a “lesser evil” to the Liberals. The program of these organisations, which represent the interests of an affluent layer of the upper middle class, was aimed, he said, at “blocking any independent movement of the working class and keeping it politically shackled to the old bankrupt organisations—the Labor Party and the trade unions.”

Symonds concluded by urging all in attendance to study the history and program of the SEP and to join its ranks.

At all of the meetings, the reports were followed by lively discussion, with attendees raising questions about various aspects of the SEP’s analysis and perspective.

In Brisbane, questions were raised about the SEP’s attitude towards drugs, the climate change crisis, and the role of the unions at the Teys/Cargill meat processing company in Beenleigh, where employers are demanding workers take a 20 percent pay cut.

In Geelong, questions were asked about the character of the Obama administration and its program of drone warfare, why the Australian government was supporting the US war drive given the close economic relations with China, the SEP’s attitude to the WikiLeaks Party formed by Julian Assange, and the role of the IMF, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation in global politics.

A refugee from Sudan, who spent 20 years in a camp in Kenya, asked about the SEP’s policy on asylum seekers. In reply, Patrick O’Connor explained: “We defend the right of every person to live and work in any country of their choice, with full rights. We oppose the entire framework of so-called border protection which is responsible for the disasters at sea—and this is defended by the entire political establishment, including the Greens.” He explained that an international socialist society would abolish the outmoded division of society into nation-states, and create a “world without borders”, which would allow people to live wherever they wished, without hindrance.

At the meeting in Perth, questions were asked about the uncertain future facing Edward Snowden, how a

socialist revolution would come about, and the SEP’s program for students, the disabled and the elderly.

One questioner asked when a war between China and the US would break out. In reply, Symonds explained that the SEP’s warnings about the threat of war were based on an analysis of objective historical processes, including the decline of American imperialism, and the breakdown of the global capitalist system. The US war drive against China had inflamed a number of flashpoints in the Asia-Pacific region. Any one of these could provide the spark for a far broader conflagration.

Symonds denounced the involvement of the Labor government and the entire political establishment in the US war drive, explaining that behind their backs, workers and young people were being placed on the frontline of any war. He concluded by stressing that war was not inevitable. Central to the SEP’s campaign was to develop a unified anti-war movement of the working class in Australia, throughout the Asia-Pacific region, and internationally, to abolish capitalism and its outmoded nation-state system that was the root cause of war.

Workers and youth attending the three meetings donated over \$1,100 to support the SEP’s campaign and purchased several hundred dollars of Marxist literature. Following the meetings, attendees stayed back for informal discussion with the candidates, and several expressed interest in assisting the campaign and joining the SEP.

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