

Vote 1 Socialist Equality Party

Support the socialist alternative to war, austerity and the drive to dictatorship

The Socialist Equality Party
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The Socialist Equality Party calls on workers and youth to support our campaign in the September 7 election and vote for our Senate candidates in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland. The SEP is the only party advancing a socialist and internationalist program to mobilise and unite the working class in Australia, Asia and around the world in the struggle against war, austerity and the destruction of democratic rights.

The official election campaign is a travesty of democracy. Whatever the make-up of the next government, its agenda has already been determined. Finance capital, big business and the major parties agree that working people must be made to pay for an ever-deepening economic crisis that is not of their making. At the same time, Labor, Liberal and the Greens all support Australian involvement in the US military build-up against China, which is placing the entire Australian population on the frontline of a potential regional and global conflagration, with catastrophic consequences.

One of the sharpest expressions of the lurch to the right by the political and media establishment is the reactionary bidding war, which has dominated the airwaves over the past several weeks, between Labor and the Liberals over which of the two parties can mete out the harshest and most punitive treatment to refugees. Labor's decision to permanently deport all asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boat to small, impoverished Pacific islands in flagrant breach of international law is without precedent. This inhumane and lawless treatment of the world's most vulnerable and oppressed people is a clear warning of the anti-democratic methods that will be used against the entire working class as social tensions rise and major class struggles erupt.

The Socialist Equality Party and its 10 Senate candidates are alone in speaking for the working class and fighting for its interests in the 2013 election campaign. We insist that the critical issue is not which capitalist party wins the election, or constitutes a "lesser evil", but that a new revolutionary leadership is built in the working class to fight for a workers' government and socialist policies.

Six years of Labor

Belying the official myth that Australia has been a global model of stability and economic success, the past six years of Labor government have been marked by unparalleled political instability and upheaval. The bitter feuding between Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard and their supporters has been driven, not by personal ambition, idiosyncrasies and leadership styles, but by political tensions and hostilities produced by the deepening global economic crisis and sharpening geo-political rivalries, increasingly focussed on the Indo-Pacific region. Every shift in leadership has been accompanied by a deepening assault on the living standards and democratic rights of the working class.

Rudd came to power in 2007 by presenting himself as a more

progressive alternative to the despised Howard Coalition government, but abandoned his election rhetoric almost immediately. His Labor government pulled troops out of Iraq, only to expand Australia's military involvement in Afghanistan. It abolished Howard's detested WorkChoices industrial legislation, only to implement, with the aid of the trade unions, the even more restrictive Fair Work Australia code that outlawed industrial action by workers. Rudd offered his much publicised apology to the Stolen Generations, only to expand the Howard government's military-police intervention against oppressed Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. At the same time he maintained the essential features of Howard's ruthless "border protection" regime, including the indefinite incarceration of refugees on Christmas Island.

Gillard was installed in the June 2010 coup against Rudd by a handful of Labor and union power-brokers closely aligned with the US embassy, in order to integrate Australia into the Obama administration's aggressive "pivot to Asia" against China. She also accelerated the turn from the stimulus measures, introduced by Rudd to bail out the banks and big business during the 2008/09 global financial crisis, to austerity—making the working class foot the bill. With the support of the Greens, the minority Gillard government implemented a series of "reforms," in education, health and disability, to open up profitable new avenues for business, not to improve the living standards of the working class. At the same time, Labor stepped up the transformation of the most vulnerable sections of the population—including single parents and the unemployed—into a vast pool of cheap casual labour by reducing their already poverty-level benefits. As prime minister, Gillard personally re-instituted and expanded the Howard government's notorious "Pacific Solution" for detaining refugees.

By 2013, the Labor government was staring electoral oblivion in the face. From the outset, Gillard and her supporters utterly failed to anticipate the extent of popular hostility to her role in the anti-democratic coup against Rudd. During the ensuing three years, animosity towards Gillard within the working class grew to unprecedented levels. Confronted with the collapse of the Labor Party itself—the principal instrument for subordinating the working class to the capitalist state for more than a century, and for maintaining the official two-party political set-up—the political and media establishment rallied behind the reinstallation of Rudd, the only politician with any semblance of popular support, due solely to his status as martyr of the 2010 coup.

Rudd's return, however, was not only aimed at preventing Labor's implosion. The sharp slowdown in China and other Asian economies has ended the minerals export boom on which the Australian economy has depended, producing a rapid downturn, a collapse of government revenue and increasingly insistent demands from big business for European-style austerity measures. Ford's decision to cease production in Australia and

GMH's savage assault on pay and conditions are a warning of what the working class will confront after the election.

One of Rudd's first acts as prime minister was to launch a new "national competitiveness agenda"—the relentless driving up of workplace productivity, in collaboration with the trade unions, at the direct expense of jobs and conditions—and a commitment to "budgetary discipline", both of which will be imposed by the next government, whether Labor or Liberal/National. In the knowledge that such measures cannot be implemented democratically, Rudd quickly moved to change the party's leadership rules in an attempt to immunise any future Labor prime minister from mass popular opposition to the party's policies.

The global crisis of capitalism

The sharp shift to the right by all the Australian parliamentary parties is part of an international process. Five years after the collapse of the US investment bank Lehman Brothers, the rescue measures enacted by US and European authorities on behalf of the banks and international finance have led to a renewed frenzy of speculation, compounding the most serious economic breakdown since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The ruling elites and their governments have only one solution: to foist the burden of the crisis onto their rivals abroad and the working class at home. That is the source of the accelerating and universal drive to war, austerity and dictatorship.

These processes find their sharpest expression in the epicentre of world capitalism—American imperialism. For two decades, the US has sought to offset its historic decline through military prowess. The eruption of American militarism and the criminal wars conducted by the Bush and Obama administrations in the Middle East and Central Asia have profoundly destabilised world politics. Since the eruption of the global financial crisis in 2008, US strategy has taken an even more dangerous turn, culminating in an escalating confrontation with China. The American financial oligarchy is determined to use all means, including war, to prevent its global domination being challenged by a rising rival.

In the past four years, Obama's "pivot" has dramatically raised tensions throughout Asia, and dangerously inflamed flashpoints such as the Korean Peninsula and the Sino-Indian border, and maritime disputes in the South China and East China Seas. There is no innocent explanation for the planned shift of 60 percent of US air force and naval assets to the Indo-Pacific or the new basing arrangements in Australia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and other countries in the region. Bases such as Pine Gap, in Alice Springs are an essential component of the Pentagon's war plans, ensuring Australia will automatically be involved in any regional conflict.

US militarism abroad is being accompanied by stepped up class war against the American working class. The declaration of bankruptcy, by an unelected financial dictator, of the city of Detroit, the former auto capital of the world, has set a new benchmark for the social counterrevolution in the US and internationally. Jobs, pension funds and health insurance schemes are to be sacrificed to meet the demands of the corporate and financial aristocracy, throwing tens of thousands of workers into hardship and poverty. Widespread joblessness, poverty-level wages and the systematic evisceration of social programs have become permanent features of American life.

The unprecedented chasm that now exists between rich and poor is incompatible with democracy. That is the significance of the vast and illegal spying operations exposed by whistleblower Edward Snowden. They reveal just how advanced the preparations are for police state rule. The real targets of this massive surveillance are not "terrorists", but the American people and the world's population. Snowden, Private Bradley Manning and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange are being persecuted for exposing the extent of US crimes and lawlessness at home and abroad.

In Europe, the austerity drive is now well into its third year, amid continuing economic stagnation and recession. What remains of the

British social security and health system introduced after World War II is being gutted. In Greece, European finance capital is enforcing the sacking of 150,000 public sector workers by 2015, under conditions where unemployment already exceeds 30 percent overall.

This onslaught on democratic and social rights has already led to strikes, protests and resistance by workers and youth and the emergence of revolutionary struggle, with Egypt in the forefront. These are harbingers of immense social upheaval around the world. Despite their determination and size, however, these class struggles have revealed the profound crisis of political perspective within the working class. In the absence of conscious revolutionary leadership, the working class has been pushed back, while the ruling classes and their political parties, aided by various pseudo-left organisations such as SYRIZA in Greece and the Revolutionary Socialists in Egypt, have been able to prevail and maintain their rule.

The SEP election campaign, part of a coordinated struggle being waged with our sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world party of socialist revolution, is aimed, above all, at advancing the socialist and internationalist program and perspective on which the new revolutionary leadership of the working class must be built.

A socialist program for the working class

The SEP stands for:

Jobs for all

More than 2.4 million people are either unemployed or underemployed. A well-paid, secure job is a basic social right. The SEP advocates a massive public works program, including the rebuilding and expansion of public and social infrastructure—roads, rail and public transport systems, housing, hospitals, schools and age-care facilities—to meet pressing social needs and make jobs available to all.

A guaranteed living wage

In 2010, more than two million people were living in poverty, including over one third of social security recipients. A decent living wage must be guaranteed to everyone as a basic right. This must be paid not only to all workers, but to all those who, due to disability, old age, illness or care responsibilities, are unable to work.

Free, high quality, universal health care

First-class health care, including access to the latest medical technologies and treatments, must be guaranteed to all, without fees or caps on treatment. This must cover all health requirements, from birth to death, including hospital, dental, psychiatric, rehabilitation, aged care, and the needs of the disabled.

Free, high quality education

Billions of dollars must be poured into education to ensure that free, well-staffed, quality public education, including child care and kindergarten, is available to all children and young people, regardless of where they live. All students, including overseas students, must have the right to access free tertiary education.

The right to decent, affordable housing

An emergency program of housing should be initiated to provide affordable housing, especially for young people. Free, high quality aged-care facilities must be made available to accommodate all elderly people who are unable to live independently. The right to decent housing can only be assured by placing the major construction firms and the finance industry under public ownership and democratic control.

Social ownership of the banks and major corporations

None of the essential needs of the working class can be met without ending the domination of the economy by the financial and corporate elite. The banks and major corporations must be expropriated, with full protection for small depositors and shareholders, and placed under social ownership and democratic control. Only then can the rational planning of the economy be undertaken on the basis of social need, not private profit.

A clean and safe environment

The scientific evidence makes clear the growing dangers posed by global climate change. But the measures advanced by the establishment parties provide no solution, because they are all based on maintaining the very profit system that is responsible for the crisis. Emissions trading systems, in whatever form, will not reduce greenhouse gases. They are aimed at opening up a lucrative carbon credit market for financial gain. For all their professions of concern about the environment, the Greens are the chief backers of such pro-market measures. Only the expropriation of the giant polluters on a global scale, bringing these industries into social ownership under democratic control, can open the way for rational planning to produce the energy and other necessities of life, while protecting the natural environment.

Full rights to immigrants and refugees

All people, whatever their place of birth, their ethnicity or religion, must have the unfettered right to live and work in the country of their choosing, with full citizenship rights. The SEP rejects the reactionary framework of “border protection” upheld by all the capitalist parties, including the Greens. All refugees in detention centres must be released immediately and immigration controls and restrictions lifted. Workers should reject with contempt the claims that refugees are responsible for the social crisis that has been produced by government policies and the anarchic profit system.

The defence of democratic rights

The “war on terror” has been the pretext for erecting the framework of a police state apparatus directed against the working class. All the anti-terror laws enacted since 2001 must be repealed. Workers everywhere must come to the defence of Edward Snowden, Julian Assange and Bradley Manning, who are being persecuted for exposing the crimes of US imperialism.

Laws against strikes and pickets must be overturned. Discrimination based on nationality, ethnic background, religion, gender or sexual preference must be outlawed. Women must have the right to abortion on demand, and homosexuals the right to marry and enjoy the same benefits as other married couples. The police-military interventions against the Aboriginal people must be ended.

Full and genuine democracy is impossible without the establishment of social equality, which can only be established through the independent political mobilisation of the working class, on the basis of a socialist program to abolish the profit system.

An end to militarism and war

Militarism and war cannot be ended through protests and appeals to the powers-that-be, but only through the abolition of its root cause—the capitalism system and its outmoded division of the world into competing nation states. Workers must oppose Australian imperialism’s military operations, which, whatever the pretext, are solely aimed at advancing its economic and strategic interests.

The US-Australia military alliance and the ANZUS Treaty must be repudiated and all US spy bases and military facilities shut down. Australian troops, as well as police and military personnel, must be immediately withdrawn from Afghanistan, the Middle East and Asia-Pacific countries. The entire Australian military apparatus must be disbanded, and the resources utilised for socially useful purposes, including the building of badly-needed infrastructure—in Australia and throughout the region.

The international unity of the working class

Globalised production has integrated the world economy and the international working class to an unprecedented degree, providing the basis for realising a decent standard of living for all humanity. Under capitalism, however, global economic integration has only intensified national rivalries and competition, and led to an endless downward spiral in the conditions of workers everywhere.

Workers must reject all forms of racism, nationalism and xenophobia, including the demonising of refugees. Only by linking the struggles of workers in Australia with their class brothers and sisters in Asia and the world can the global offensive of the banks and corporations, and the drive to war, be defeated.

The political independence of the working class

The working class cannot defend its independent class interests except through a complete political break with all the parties and organisations that defend the profit system—above all from the Labor Party and the trade unions.

The Labor Party has always been the chief mechanism for subordinating the working class to the interests of the corporate elite and to the parliamentary framework. In every major crisis—World War I, the Great Depression, World War II and the political upheavals of the 1970s—the ruling elite has relied on the Labor Party to implement their policies and maintain their rule.

With the rise of globalised production over the last three decades Labor’s relationship to the working class has transformed. Like its Social Democratic counterparts internationally, the Labor Party has abandoned its old program of limited national reform and become a vehicle for the relentless corporate drive for “international competitiveness.” Between 1983 and 1996, the Hawke-Keating Labor governments carried out a massive redistribution of wealth from wages to profits. The Labor Party is not a workers’ party in any sense of the word, but a corrupt, bureaucratic organisation at the service of the ruling elite.

Likewise, the Greens are not a “compassionate” alternative to Labor and the Liberals. Over the past three years, they have propped up the minority Labor government as it supported the US war drive, meted out its brutal treatment of refugees and legislated anti-democratic, “anti-terror laws.” Moreover, they have loyally voted for every round of Labor’s budget cuts, including to single parents’ benefits. As their record at the state and federal levels demonstrates, the Greens will do whatever is necessary to preserve the “stability” of government and the capitalist system.

The pseudo-left organisations, including Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance, play a particularly pernicious role in keeping workers and youth tied to the existing parliamentary framework. They are deeply contemptuous of the working class, and represent a tendency within bourgeois politics that speaks for affluent layers of the middle class. Internationally, the pseudo-lefts have lined up with the interests of Australian and US imperialism behind the illegal regime-change operations in Libya and Syria. At home, they seek to block any independent political struggle by the working class by promoting the illusion that Labor or the Greens represent a “the lesser evil” compared to the Liberals.

Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance peddle the lie that workers can only defend their interests through a “revival” of the trade unions. In reality, the unions are no longer workers’ organisations in any sense. Over the past three decades they have been transformed into an industrial police force for imposing the relentless drive of the major corporations and finance capital for ever greater productivity and profit onto the working class. Using the straitjacket of the Fair Work Australia industrial laws, for which they voted, the unions have suppressed any struggle by workers against plant closures, job destruction and the driving down of working conditions.

The working class can only secure its social rights and its future 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—fighting to defend jobs, wages and conditions. Committees of action in cities and towns throughout the country should be formed to develop a political struggle against austerity cuts to schools, universities, health facilities and other social services.

These independent organisations must become instruments for the revolutionary mobilisation of the working class to take political power in its own hands and establish a workers' government—a government of the working class, by the working class and for the working class—that will implement socialist policies.

Build the Socialist Equality Party

The SEP calls on all workers, students, youth, socialist-minded intellectuals and professional people to give our election campaign your maximum support. While we call for the largest possible vote for our 10 Senate candidates, our primary orientation is not to the ballot box. The working class cannot defend its interests within the stultifying framework of the capitalist two-party system and parliament. That is why the SEP will not be making “preference deals” with other parties or advocating any preferences.

The aim of our campaign is to develop a new political movement of the working class, imbued with socialist consciousness, and armed with the understanding that nothing less than the abolition of the capitalist profit system and the establishment of world socialism can provide a future for humanity as a whole; free of war, poverty and oppression.

Above all, this requires the building of a new revolutionary leadership of the working class in Australia and internationally. That is the perspective of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world party of socialist revolution founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938. The ICFI is the only party that bases its political work on the 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 in the lessons of the struggle waged by the ICFI to defend those principles over the past 60 years, against all forms of national opportunism.

We urge all those who agree with the necessity to fight for social equality, and an end to poverty, exploitation 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 party.

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