

Australian SEP candidates campaign against war drive

Our reporters
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Socialist Equality Party candidates for the New South Wales state election and supporters campaigned last weekend against the US-led war in Iraq and Syria and the Abbott government's decision to send 300 additional soldiers to join the renewed military intervention.

SEP national secretary James Cogan, the party's candidate for Summer Hill, led a campaign team of SEP members and supporters in the inner-western Sydney suburb of Ashfield on Saturday. They distributed the SEP's election statement as well as copies of Cogan's statement No Australian troops to Iraq! Oppose the US war drive!

In his statement, Cogan explained: "The working class must take the sharpest warning from the escalating Australian military involvement in Iraq. Behind the backs of the population, the government, supported by the [Labor Party] opposition, is deepening its commitment to US imperialism's wars, military operations and provocative intrigues in every part of the world."

Cogan and the SEP campaigners held discussions with a wide range of people, including public sector workers, immigrants from many countries and retirees, about the threat of a wider war produced by the Australian ruling elite's frontline participation in the aggressive US military operations and war preparations, not just in the Middle East but also against Russia and China.

The SEP is the only party fighting against the drive to war, austerity and attacks on basic democratic rights, advancing a socialist program in opposition to the major parties, Labor, Liberal-National and the Greens, as well as the myriad single-issue parties.

Robiaul, a government worker who has lived in Australia for 13 years, spoke to SEP campaigners about

the link between the drive to war and growing social inequality.

"They invaded Iraq, over one million civilians were killed and what for? The government and living standards are now even worse than under Saddam Hussein. Australia is sending troops again but there are lots of issues here that we need to deal with, like health and education. They are cutting that funding and yet they are financing war in a faraway country that doesn't pose any threat to Australia, just to make the US happy..."

"America created the Taliban, everyone knows this, and I believe there is a strong case that the US built ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] by supporting some people to go against a legitimate government in those countries. ISIS became out of control and now America is using them as a smokescreen to buy into war and draw in other countries like Australia. It's not to help the Middle Eastern people and bring democracy... It's about oil and controlling the world."

Robiaul was very concerned about soaring rents and house prices. "My dream of buying a house has completely gone," he said. "I don't even think of it anymore. Even buying an apartment is becoming out of reach. The unit prices are skyrocketing. It's simply not affordable for people like myself." He added: "I feel terrible when I see homeless people on the street, especially in the city. Why does a country like Australia have to have homeless people?"

Robiaul concluded: "You have to think: is the social and political system designed for a fair society or just to maintain the 1 percent control of 99 percent of the wealth?"

Jack, a 19-year-old musician, condemned the troop deployment to Iraq. "The seed of injustice fueling extreme religious sentiments like ISIS is just going to

grow stronger when troops are thrown at it, so it's the opposite of what we should be doing... The real aims of Washington and Canberra are to get the resources in that area and to increase the ever-expanding area the US has claimed for its own."

Jack was worried about the potential for this "kind of imperialism" to trigger another world war. "It's been 70 years since the end of World War II and everyone can see it happening again... International relations and tensions aren't great, especially with the [Obama administration's] 'pivot to Asia' and Washington backing the Ukrainian regime against Russia.

"When you think about who is making all these decisions; it's the ruling elite both in the US and Australia. The more they conquer, the more that is in their best interests. But if the working class unified internationally and took over the power and abolished privatised wealth, then you've got power in the hands of the actual people."

Alison, an IT consultant, explained why she joined the SEP's campaign in Ashfield. "The SEP has been the only party in Australia that seems to be addressing the underlying causes of the wars that Australia has become embroiled in and the austerity measures that the current Australian politicians are implementing."

On the danger of war, she commented: "I see threats of war in Europe with Russia over Ukraine which the world leaders seem unable to resolve. The many conflicts around the world highlight the drive for profit rather than the drive for fulfilment of human needs. According to Oxfam, 1 percent of the world's population controls as much wealth as the other 99 percent."

In the electorate of Penrith, in Sydney's outer-west, the SEP's candidate Carolyn Kennett and supporters spoke to workers, young and old, who voiced concerns about war, living conditions and the putrid state of official politics.

Maddy, an apprentice butcher, who commutes to work every day from Penrith to Bondi, 65 kilometres away in Sydney's east, was disgusted by the campaigns being conducted by both the state Liberal-National government and the Labor opposition. "Last night I was watching TV, and there was so much propaganda. Don't vote for this, don't vote for that! You can't get a straight answer about what each person is pitching."

Maddy said the issue of war was being "skimmed

over" in the election campaign. "You don't hear about world issues and what is actually going on." She was concerned about the whipping up of anti-Muslim sentiment in the area by groups opposing the building of a local mosque. "I worked with a guy from Pakistan, and he has been through hell. He is trying to get his wife over here, and it's not going to happen because of everything that is going on."

Phillip, 62, from an outlying country area, said he had long ago lost faith in the major political parties. "I don't see any difference between Liberal and Labor when they come into power," he said. "For a country that is so wealthy, we also have some of the poorest conditions in the world. I see a lot of people who battle from week to week."

Phillip opposed the sending of troops to Iraq. "You don't have to stick your nose in, as a country. I wonder who the terrorists really are—whether it is the government or the people the government calls terrorists... It's all about a power structure, fuel and energy. The petro companies are keeping the system going the way they want it to go."

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