

Youth, students and workers discuss SEP's socialist perspective

Our correspondents
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Workers, youth, students and retirees who attended the Socialist Equality Party's final New South Wales state election rally last Sunday in Sydney spoke to the WSWs about the issues raised at the meeting. For some, it was their first SEP event.

Josh, 17, and **Elke**, 15, came from Faulconbridge in the lower Blue Mountains, west of Sydney. Asked about his impressions of the meeting, Josh said: "In our education system a lot of people would be indoctrinated to see socialism in a negative way. Socialism and communism are presented as bad, but as James Cogan was saying, Stalinism is used as a scapegoat.

"I've come to the meeting because these issues affect young people. There is a large amount of apathy among young people, because they don't see any alternative to the current system. They might not even know what socialism is about."

Josh had just begun a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) course. He condemned the rising fees for university and TAFE courses. "If you can't afford a good education, you can't get a good job. How do you get the education in the first place? There's a whole generation growing up who want to be able to go somewhere, instead of being stuck in these menial jobs."

Asked for her response to the meeting, Elke said: "I have a lot to talk about because this is my first time experiencing socialism ... In school, we don't learn about the history that was discussed today. People are told there is only Labor and Liberal, and they don't vote because they don't know anything about politics."

Elke opposed the Abbott government's cuts to education and welfare. "Being 15, my life has not revolved around politics. But the specialist school I was attending was shut down because of budget cuts from [prime minister] Tony Abbott ... I said, 'whoa, what are

you doing shutting down my school?"

"Then I heard he was cutting pensions ... There are people out there who need that kind of stuff ... Some of my friends are homeless, at this young age. We have to do something about this. They need support from the government ... Governments are slowly taking away everything that society needs."

Elke added: "How can you afford to pay thousands of dollars for a TAFE course if your 17 or 18 and you're not working, or you're on KFC or McDonald's kind of wages? A lot of these people are living at home, or their parents are supporting them, so how are you supposed to pay for that?"

Connie, a University of Western Sydney student said: "The main issue I learnt from today's meeting is that people have to be informed about the situation they face. Once they know what the real situation is, rather than what the government is telling them, then they will act."

"It was also important that plenty of time was spent explaining the differences between socialism and Stalinism. There has been a lot of confusion created by the official propaganda, which claims that Stalinism represented socialism and communism.

"Until I met the SEP, I didn't understand that there was a difference or what was the real history of Stalinism. I thought that the problem was just people like Stalin who had made it bad. It was eye-opening to me when I learnt from the SEP some of the real history and the political differences."

Connie commented: "People know that things are bad but they don't understand why or how this has happened. Many don't even know the basics of why the Australian government is involved in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"It's criminal that we are being led into these

situations. There's been no democratic vote on this, although people are suspicious of what is being done in their name. They need to know more than this. They have to know the reasons ...

"There should be government by the working class—I agree with the SEP on this. Everything is made by the working class, which is the majority, and we live in a global economy. There has to be an international movement of workers, because the working class is an international class. I haven't thought about this question before but it makes a lot of sense to me."

Sue, a shop assistant, said: "An important issue that came out of the meeting was how workers will be empowered by socialism. Speakers explained very well how bureaucracy and corruption would be avoided. Once workers have finally begun to control their own lives they will become more aware of what they had lost under the present system. The consciousness they gained in the course of fighting to change the system will stay with them."

Commenting on the SEP's insistence that workers study history, Sue said: "Workers have to learn from history. We can look at what happened in a particular circumstance to avoid making the same mistakes again. The more you work over the historical issues, the more solid you become in understanding and tackling the problems today ... It's clear that the [Stalinist] regime [in the Soviet Union] did not represent communism and socialism and was opposed to the revolution ...

"Workers do not have to be told that they are becoming more and more exploited. Capitalism is doing that very well. They have to understand socialism. I agreed with what is in the SEP's election statement and I will be assisting the campaign."

Rod, a boilermaker from Tacoma on the Central Coast, to the north of Sydney, said: "The Australian government's commitment to war is in line with the interests of the United States. Governments here listen more closely to what the US requires than they do to the wishes of people in Australia. We are on the edge of war and that's a terrible fact."

Commenting on the gutting of essential services, he said: "Our hospitals and education systems are terrible despite ordinary people forking money out of their pockets every day in tax so our children can be educated in a government-based system. Where is that money going?"

Rod said he had always been "a firm believer in Labor" because he came from the working class. "But ever since the Hawke-Keating period it [Labor] is no different from the Liberals—they are all the same. I believe that the socialist system that has been discussed here today is what workers need."

Authorised by James Cogan, 12-13 Bankstown City Plaza, Bankstown, NSW 2200



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