

Australian election: SEP candidates campaign against war

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) candidates for the July 2 Australian federal elections campaigned in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne last weekend in opposition to the US-led preparations for war against China.

In each area, workers, students and young people voiced hostility to the billions allocated to the military and expressed interest in the SEP's fight to build a global anti-war movement of the working class.

In Melbourne, Will Fulgenzi, the SEP's candidate for the seat of Wills, which spans the city's inner northwest, spoke with **Alex**, a university student majoring in writing and editing. Alex condemned the commitment of \$195 billion by the Liberal-National government, backed by Labor, for new military acquisitions over the next decade. "They keep on complaining about budget deficits," he commented. "They say, 'No, we can't afford schools, we can't afford infrastructure.' But we can afford to pay for a military? It doesn't make sense."

Alex was concerned about mounting tensions between China and the US. "I think it's getting really close to something in the South China Sea," he said. "It can't hold out for much longer... Things will come to a head. It really worries me because I don't know what it would be like after a war."

"What is the future for young people? I don't feel like I have a voice anymore. Many of my friends are leaving Australia. We've been shut out of housing, we've been shut out of education. Most of us are incredibly dissatisfied and depressed. I feel like we're being set up to be exploited even more than we currently are."

Stephan, a 16-year-old high school student, told Fulgenzi: "If we go to war with China it would be World War III. What we're seeing with the production of war materials, and sending them overseas, is encouraging war. There should be an internationally unified world."

Stephan said the massive military spending was "completely stupid. The education system is falling apart. More kids are failing. It's really hard to get a part-time job for a young person. But instead of building schools, they

want to build rockets and nuclear weapons."

In Sydney, the SEP's candidate for Grayndler in the city's inner west, Oscar Grenfell, campaigned against the drive to war at a rally called to protest various decisions by the New South Wales (NSW) state Liberal-National government.

Several thousand people participated, voicing their opposition to the social consequences of the WestConnex motorway development, new police powers, the oppression of Aborigines and coal seam gas exploration. The aim of the organisers, however, was to promote the lie that Labor and the Greens offer an alternative and that complex social issues can be resolved through limited protest actions.

Jennifer, a retired public sector worker, told Grenfell the military spending was "outrageous." She added: "They are privatising everything. Most kids can't spell or read now because they are bringing in private companies who are rorting the system. They are closing women's shelters and spending money on war. We need to look after our own citizens and not be helping other powers fight their wars."

Jennifer denounced so-called anti-terrorism laws, including recent legislation in NSW directed against protests and industrial action. "It started in the US with the Patriot law. As soon as they introduced it, the police could take anyone for any amount of time. Now they've sneaked in these laws here... I think the revolution has started. New Zealand has stood up, with 35,000 people protesting against the TPP [Trans Pacific Partnership], and there have been mass protests in France, Peru, Malaysia, and Japan."

Jennifer hoped that Bernie Sanders would be elected US president and then close the Pine Gap military base in Central Australia. When Grenfell pointed out that Sanders supported the Pentagon's drone strikes in Pakistan and the Middle East, which are coordinated through Pine Gap, Jennifer said she would read the *World Socialist Web Site* and find out more.

Phil, a 20-year-old studying teaching, said the military spending was "really quite scary. Why are they doing that? They are not investing in infrastructure, for example in renewable energy. It's like they're preparing for the future,

where there is going to be conflict over resources, instead of an attempt to salvage what we already have. I hear more and more about how America is sending troops to this region to create a ring around China.”

Phil told Grenfell the SEP’s campaign is “very important because it is giving voice to people who don’t have one. The major parties just talk about a handful of issues that they have brought into the mainstream to cover up more important things.”

His friend, **Zak**, a 17-year-old of Muslim background, completing his secondary education in Newcastle, spoke out against the demonisation of Muslim youth. “The media has created a stereotype. Muslims are doing it hard. I’ve heard that there’s a law that you can get locked-up for life on suspicion of terrorism and I know people who are doing time just on suspicion. It’s very sad.” Asked about the wars in the Middle East, Zak declared he was “anti-war.”

Gabriela Zabala, the SEP’s candidate for Blaxland in Sydney’s southwest, campaigned in Fairfield and Bankstown, working-class suburbs with large Middle Eastern populations that have been targeted for dubious “anti-terror” raids and media vilification.

Wesam, originally from Iraq, commented: “I am worried about the poor people. They are being killed everywhere, especially in the Middle East. It’s like a business between the big powers. Most of the people in the Middle East think something negative of the US—they are looking after themselves in the Middle East.”

Ayub, a refugee, said: “Pakistan is like in a condition of war. That’s why I escaped. America is responsible, not only in Pakistan, but in Asia and the Middle East. It’s a global problem.” He condemned the persecution of asylum seekers, commenting: “I came as a refugee. But now refugees are not given a good chance. Now they are caged in Nauru and Papua New Guinea.”

Dina, who is unemployed and training at a college in Bankstown, told Zabala she wanted someone to help “find jobs for the people like us who haven’t finished education. I was educated in my country but not here. I was a primary teacher. I’m from Syria, my husband is from Iraq. I used to live in Kuwait and I was there during the first Gulf War against Iraq. It was horrible.”

Dina spoke out against the US regime-change operation in Syria: “I have sisters who went to Dubai because they can’t live in Syria anymore. War in the Middle East is destroying the area. Why did America protect ISIS? America wants the war to be continued because it sells weapons and gets oil.”

In Brisbane, the SEP’s candidates for the Senate in Queensland, Mike Head and Erin Cooke, campaigned in Goodna, a working-class suburb with high unemployment and poverty rates after decades of cuts to basic industries.

Sherri, said she feared that military conscription would be reintroduced. “I’ve got three sons, two of which would be gone if we ever drafted again... Why are we going to fight, for oil? It’s not our war,” she said.

Sherri was surprised to hear that US Marines were rotating through Darwin. “I know the US military comes here and do their war games and ‘train’ our troops, but I don’t see why America should have any military bases here. It’s so much easier for them to sit back and hit buttons and give orders, and put us at risk. It’s all about money. No rational human being wants any form of war. Everybody wants to be left alone in peace, with their families.”

Sherri commented: “I am being forced to live by capitalism because I don’t know how to get rid of it... In a perfect world, the downtrodden would get together and say, enough is enough. Stop raising our taxes! Stop giving tax breaks to people who earn over \$100,000 a year! Stop letting all the multimillion-dollar companies get all the tax breaks!”

Daniel, a welder, said soldiers were being “programmed” for war. “I have brothers and cousins in the military,” he said. “They are being told that other countries are inferior. They are being told they will get deployed within 12–18 months, unless they are a ‘retard.’ A lot of them come back damaged from the fighting. I know an ex-SAS sniper who can’t be in crowds.”

Daniel commented: “America is painting a target on us, preparing for something. It’s a capitalist world and everyone’s after a bit of wealth. There’s even a big race between Russia and America to control the polar caps to get the mineral wealth.”

After a discussion on how the 1917 Russian Revolution brought an end to World War I, Daniel said: “I don’t like capitalism. It’s only designed to keep the rich, rich and the poor, poor. It’s got to stop somewhere. It’s all about a handful of people.”

To contact the SEP and get involved, visit our website or Facebook page.

Authorised by James Cogan, Shop 6, 212 South Terrace, Bankstown Plaza, Bankstown, NSW 2200



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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