SEP candidate challenges Labor, Greens, pseudo-left on climate change, war

Our reporters
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Will Fulgenzi, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for the Melbourne electorate of Wills, participated in a lively election forum on Monday night, organised by the Climate Action Moreland group. In addition to outlining the necessary socialist policies required to resolve the climate change crisis, Fulgenzi exposed the pro-war agenda of the Labor Party and the Greens.

About 130 people attended the meeting, where Fulgenzi was one of eight candidates who spoke. A majority appeared to be Greens supporters, though other layers attended from different parts of Wills, a traditionally working class area that has seen significant gentrification in the last two decades.

In addition to the Labor and Greens representatives, there were candidates from the pseudo-left Socialist Alliance, the Drug Law Reform, Sex, and Animal Justice parties, as well as a right-wing independent. The latter four candidates did not speak during the main question-and-answer part of the forum, with the discussion dominated by Fulgenzi's challenge to the Labor Party, Greens, and pseudo-left.

In his five-minute opening address to the forum, the SEP candidate explained that "the crisis of climate change expresses the failure of capitalism as an economic and social system." Opposing the Labor- and Greens-backed emissions trading schemes and other "free market" climate mechanisms, Fulgenzi explained: "We propose the only realistic, and essential, solution: ending the grip of the major banks and corporations over public life, by expropriating them and taking them under the democratic control of the working class."

The SEP candidate noted that climate change was a global crisis, with no national solution. "While we live in a world economy, under capitalism the world is divided into competing and rival nation states that fight for markets, spheres of influence, and profits. This same conflict is leading us toward world war … All of the major parties are keeping the population in the dark in this election about the threat of war. The former Greens-backed Labor government aligned Australia with the US pivot, aimed against China. How many Australians are aware that since 2011, US marines have been stationed in Darwin, that US bomber planes will be brought to the Cocos Islands? None of the major parties are speaking about this, because they support it."

Greens' candidate Samantha Ratnam did not attempt to answer Fulgenzi in her opening address. Underscoring the absence of any significant policy differences between Labor and the Greens, she began by declaring that she would like to "pay tribute" to the retiring Labor member of parliament for Wills, Kelvin Thomson, saying it had been "a privilege" to work with him while she had been a Moreland city councillor. Ratnam then promoted the Greens climate reform proposals, and concluded by encouraging people to "imagine what 3 or 4 lower house Greens MPs could do, holding the balance of power [in parliament]."

Labor candidate Peter Khalil postured as promoting "realistic" climate policies, declaring that if you "go for 100 percent of everything, you sometimes get nothing." At the same time he emphasised that a Labor government would seek to promote new "business opportunities for renewable energy."

After the opening candidates' statements, the initial questions from the floor were all narrowly focused on specific climate change policy issues, including coal seam gas fracking and local urban planning, and directed to the Labor and the Greens' candidates. The chairperson refused to allow Fulgenzi and others a chance to answer.

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The meeting opened up, however, on the issue of war.

A refugee from Iraq spoke to denounce Labor's Peter Khalil for having "the blood of millions of Iraqis on his hands" for his work in Baghdad with the US occupation regime in 2003-2004, where he served as US viceroy Paul Bremer's director of national security policy. Khalil attempted to portray himself as a "public servant for the Commonwealth government," working for "humanitarian assistance." In reality, Khalil collaborated closely with American military commanders in attempting to violently suppress all resistance to the illegal US-led occupation. SEP supporters interjected from the floor during Khalil's remarks, denouncing him for lying about his record.

Fulgenzi exposed the Labor candidate. "We've heard many lies from these speakers tonight, but none so glaring as from Mr Khalil from the Labor Party, who dares claim that he wasn't a representative of the occupying regime in Iraq," he stated. "[The invasion of Iraq] was a war crime that killed over a million people. He [Khalil] personifies the transformation of the Labor Party into a party of militarism and war."

The SEP candidate's further elaboration of the current preparations for an attack on China, and exposure of the entire parliamentary setup in this, provoked fury among the small layer of Labor Party functionaries in the audience. Retiring parliamentarian Kelvin Thomson resorted to personal abuse, shouting that Fulgenzi was "a nut." Inadvertently pointing to Labor's line up with the US war drive, he added, "What about China's rearmament?"

Another ex-parliamentarian, Phil Cleary, a self-styled "independent leftist" who held the seat of Wills between 1992 and 1996, also intervened. Returning to climate change, Cleary declared that the SEP candidate "wants to wait for the end of bloody capitalism [while] we're not going to do anything locally," adding that it was necessary to "raise how you would tackle global warming with strategies to put in the seat of Wills … we've had not a single word from the speakers about CERES [a local urban farm] for example."

Fulgenzi answered: "I object to the contention that the population should confine itself to what you refer to as local issues … The threat of war hangs over this election—the major powers are preparing for a war which will be fought with nuclear weapons. Does that not affect people in the Wills electorate? Does that not affect their lives? These issues can't be resolved within the framework of a single electorate, a single state, or in a single nation—these are global issues, the working class is an international class, there is nothing dividing the interests of the working class in Australia with the working class in China, the US and throughout Asia. The major powers are seeking to divide us along nationalist and parochial lines, we reject this, we fight for the international unity of the working class."

The SEP candidate clearly demarcated his campaign from the misnamed Socialist Alliance organisation, a middle class pseudo-left group that is closely oriented to the Greens.

Their candidate for Wills, Zane Alcorn, said he wanted a new "people power" protest movement to "break the fossil fuel business model." Directly rejecting Fulgenzi's statement that climate change could only be resolved on the basis of an international perspective, Alcorn declared that "at a national level, if we were to elect a people's government in Australia, to set a good example to other countries [and] show the way … that would improve our standing internationally." The remarks only underscored the organisation's role as the "left" flank of the political establishment in Australia.

Fulgenzi denounced Alcorn's remarks as "only another variety of the Labor Party and Greens' nationalist orientation." He said: "Unlike every other party here, including Socialist Alliance, our party rejects a vote for the Labor Party or the Greens on the basis that they represent a 'lesser evil' to the Liberals. They do not—these parties support Australian capitalism, they represent the billionaires, they support militarism."

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

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