

SEP holds election meetings in Sydney and Melbourne

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held successful public meetings in Sydney and Melbourne last weekend, at which the party's candidates outlined the socialist program it is advancing for the working class in the July 2 Australian federal election.

The Sydney meeting was addressed by Oscar Grenfell, the SEP's candidate for the lower house seat of Grayndler, and James Cogan, the party's national secretary and lead Senate candidate in New South Wales. In Melbourne, the speakers were Will Fulgenzi, the SEP's candidate for the seat of Wills, and Chris Sinnema, the party's lead Senate candidate in Victoria. Both meetings were attended by a cross-section of students, unemployed youth, workers and professionals.

In Sydney, Grenfell noted the disconnect between the campaign of the major parties and the sentiments of millions of ordinary people. He said it was another expression of the leftward movement that propelled millions of young people in the United States to support Bernie Sanders in the Democratic Party primaries in the mistaken belief that he was a socialist.

Grenfell outlined the significance of a recent Union of Concerned Scientists report, warning of the imminent danger of a war between the United States and China, which could result in a nuclear conflict. The corporate press and every other party had remained silent on the report. Grenfell explained that the SEP alone was fighting to unite workers in Australia with their counterparts throughout Asia and internationally to prevent such a catastrophe.

James Cogan began by outlining the reemergence of the working class into major social and political struggles in the United States, France, Britain, Greece, India, China and internationally.

This eruption, Cogan said, marked an end of a decades-long period in which the working class had been suppressed and the ruling elite had waged a "one-sided class war." Cogan stated: "The working class is the great revolutionary force in society. The postmodernist declarations that the working class had disappeared and that issues concerning race, gender and sexuality took precedence over class, stand

exposed as the pro-capitalist rationalisations they always were."

Cogan explained: "In this election, the SEP is putting before workers in Australia a great and powerful tradition and perspective, of international, revolutionary socialism.

"We are telling workers the truth. In order to be successful in the struggles into which they are entering, they need to study the lessons of history. They need to understand what Stalinism in the Soviet Union was and was not; they need to know about the struggle of Leon Trotsky and the Trotskyist movement."

Cogan concluded by calling on audience members to support the SEP's campaign, study its program and apply to join the party.

In Melbourne, Chris Sinnema referred to his own experiences. "I joined this party 27 years ago as a young apprentice working in the railways," he said. "While everywhere we were being told, 'socialism is dead,' I was attracted to the party's scientific and internationalist analysis."

He recalled his protracted fight for a socialist perspective as a Melbourne tramway worker. "The union was central to the privatisation process, and to the destruction of jobs and hard-won conditions," he explained. "This included the removal of tram conductors, and the extension of work hours, which opened workers up to increasing fatigue and greater chance of accidents. Workers began to be victimised as a result of the conditions agreed to by the unions. The SEP alone fought to defend those workers."

Will Fulgenzi spoke on the significance of Russian Revolution for young people, and also outlined the transformation of the trade unions into thoroughly corporatised entities, documented in his current *World Socialist Web Site* series on the Royal Commission into the unions.

The reports prompted lively discussions at both meetings. In Sydney, one audience member asked whether the party should focus on "local issues," rather than the question of war, and suggested that most people were "selfish."

Grenfell responded by noting that war was the “decisive question for workers and young people, whether they live in Sydney, China, the United States or any part of the world.” He explained there was widespread anti-war sentiment, but it found no expression within official politics.

Grenfell referred to the mass demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and said they were led into a dead-end by the Greens and pseudo-left organisations that “insisted that the only realistic means of opposing war was to appeal to the Labor Party, or the Democrats in the United States, or other capitalist governments.” That perspective had failed, and organisations such as the Greens had dropped any nominal opposition to war.

Referring to the claim that people are “selfish,” Cogan pointed out: “The conception is widely promoted that the free market and capitalism reflect human nature. But we’re entering into a period that is going to be marked by convulsive social and political conflict.”

He explained the crucial question was leadership: “Masses of Greek workers didn’t elect the Syriza government because they wanted a right-wing pro-capitalist government. They voted for Syriza because it pledged to end austerity ... a promise that it immediately betrayed.”

Cogan pointed again to the emerging working class struggles around the world and concluded: “Powerful objective processes are propelling people into political struggle—the decisive question is building this party to lead those struggles.”

WSWS reporters spoke to several participants after the meetings.

In Sydney, **Vera**, a nursing student from the former Czechoslovakia, commented: “One of the subjects we study is primary health care. We talk about communities and inequality. There is still a big gap between people. Nothing has been done. Everybody is working long hours, nobody has time, everybody is stressed. That’s capitalism, isn’t it? If you are born in better circumstances, then it’s going to show. If you are born poor, it’s not going to change because of the system. It should not be like this. Isn’t this a democracy?”

Vera said the preparations for war were “all hidden.” She explained: “I wasn’t involved until now. I feel we have to do something because it’s about the next generation as well. War is really frightening. It is wrong for people with these resources to let it happen.”

Sebastian, a university lecturer, said it was “fascinating that the Union of Concerned Scientists, whom Oscar noted are not socialists, remarked that war is a real, potential danger. We never hear about that in the elections at all, but it is a critical issue for working people. They will have to be at the frontlines of a confrontation with China. The fact that the

Socialist Equality Party is the only party that makes this into a central issue is quite revealing.

“Militarism is a global phenomenon but we don’t have an anti-war movement, which is so strange. I think James alluded to this when he spoke of the disillusionment with the collapse of the Soviet Union. I also think that those movements which drove the anti-war protests of the 60s were dominated by affluent layers of the middle class. As soon as they were integrated into the political establishment, they suppressed any independence of the working class. If you look at organisations like Socialist Alternative or Socialist Alliance, their publications refer to the predatory wars in the Middle East as revolutions against oppressive regimes, which is an implicit endorsement of military intervention.

“I think there is an absence of a really, genuine anti-war movement. From what I’ve seen, the Socialist Equality Party is the only political party in Australia that opposes militarism and war on a principled basis.”

In Melbourne, **Nick**, a student at the University of Melbourne, had asked about the theory that mutually assured destruction (MAD), stemming from nuclear weapons, would halt war.

“I raised the issue of war with my friends, and someone came up with the argument of MAD,” he said. “I didn’t feel I could answer it. Your answer was to point to all the evidence. The US has these policies, like missile defence systems, to prevent nuclear missiles from being able to reach America. They have missile protection systems everywhere: in Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, and the Pacific as well. That’s a strong argument.

“I hadn’t thought about the fact that they have already used nuclear weapons. They dropped it on Hiroshima at the end of the Second World War. They claimed they needed to use the bomb to prevent casualties, but Japan was about to surrender.”

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

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