

SEP election meetings outline alternative to war and austerity

Our reporters
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Over the past week, Socialist Equality Party candidates for the 2016 federal election addressed successful public meetings outlining the party's socialist program in opposition to the drive to war, the bipartisan program of austerity and the erosion of democratic rights.

John Davis, the SEP's 22-year-old candidate for the Senate in New South Wales, spoke at the meeting in Toukley on the state's Central Coast. Gabriela Zabala, who is standing for Blaxland, addressed the meeting in Bankstown, a working-class suburb in Sydney's southwest. Both meetings were addressed by James Cogan, the party's national secretary and lead candidate for the Senate in NSW. In Goodna, a working-class area of Brisbane, Erin Cooke and Mike Head, the SEP's candidates for the Senate in Queensland, elaborated the party's socialist program.

In his report, Cogan explained that there were two fundamental tendencies at work in the world—the reemergence of the working class into mass social and political struggles, and the drive to war by the major imperialist powers, which threatens the eruption of a nuclear war.

Cogan noted the recently released report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), which warns that Australia could become embroiled in a military conflict in Asia. Cogan quoted the document, which states that tensions in the South and East China Seas, “especially between the US and China, could spiral into conflict and involve Australia. Australian vessels operating with US forces in the region, as well as US forces stationed in Australia, would be at considerable risk of being attacked.”

Cogan said every other political party contesting the elections, along with the corporate press, was complicit in Australia's integration into the US plans for war.

They had all remained silent on the ASPI report.

The SEP national secretary outlined the significance of the mass strike movement in France and struggles by the working class in the United States. “In every country,” Cogan said, “workers face the same issue as they enter into struggle: they are directly confronted with the fact that they are in a fight against the trade unions and the Labor-type parties they once supported. In other words, they are faced with the need to build new organisations of struggle, and turn to a new political party and, therefore, a new perspective.” He urged members of the audience to study the SEP's Trotskyist program and apply to join the party.

In Toukley, near Newcastle, John Davis denounced Labor and the trade unions for the social crisis afflicting young people, which includes a youth unemployment rate of over 20 percent in the surrounding Hunter Valley region. He noted that the Hawke and Keating Labor governments, supported by the unions, had initiated the destruction of basic industry.

“Hundreds of thousands of jobs were destroyed in manufacturing in the late 1980s and early 1990s,” Davis said. “This was particularly catastrophic in the Newcastle and Central Coast region with the closure of the BHP steelworks and, more recently, the destruction of 30,000 jobs in the mining industry in the past year.” Davis explained that the SEP calls for a “radical redistribution of wealth,” including the nationalisation of the banks and major corporations, and a public works program to provide jobs for all.

In Brisbane, Erin Cooke contrasted the wealth of Harry Triguboff, a residential property developer and Australia's wealthiest individual, whose fortune has almost doubled in two years to \$10.62 billion, with the plight of millions of workers. “The day-to-day struggle

of the working class just to survive is one I know well,” Cooke said. “I come from a working-class background and have worked as a storeman, factory hand and labourer, with my pay ranging from terrible to below-average. I have spent time unemployed, and, under capitalism will never own my own home.”

At Bankstown, Gabriela Zabala denounced the war on terror, which has been used as the pretext for predatory wars abroad and intense police harassment of working class and migrant communities. “Numerous innocent young people in the Blaxland electorate have been swept up in the police dragnets simply because they are Muslims or their families migrated from the Middle East, Afghanistan or East Africa,” Zabala said. “The demonisation of Middle Eastern communities has led to blatant discrimination when youth apply for jobs. It is an outrage.”

“The SEP insists that the entire intelligence-police-state apparatus must be dismantled and all anti-democratic legislation abolished,” Zabala emphasised.

Lively discussions developed at each meeting.

At Toukley, one attendee said he was a supporter of Bernie Sanders, the self-avowed “socialist” contesting the Democratic Party primaries for the US president. He described Sanders as the “only shining star that can bring down the elite bankers represented by Clinton and Trump.”

In reply, Cogan explained: “Sanders entered the presidential race to act as a lightning-rod... What was needed by the Democratic Party, under conditions where Hilary Clinton is widely despised, was a figure that could, as they say, ‘mobilise the base.’ That is why Saunders presents himself as a democratic socialist, calls for a political revolution and declares he is opposed to the financial elite.”

Cogan warned that Sanders was seeking to divert the support he had won behind the Clinton campaign. Fake-left political figures and parties were being promoted in every country, “to prevent workers from breaking with the old organisations and turning to a genuinely socialist perspective.”

WSWS correspondents spoke to workers and young people after the meetings.

In Bankstown, **Iqbal**, an accounting student from Pakistan, commented: “Capitalism is the main cause of war around the world. Every country is trying to capture resources. They want to keep their dominance

around the globe.”

At the meeting, Iqbal said, he “heard for the first time concern with the working class, which is everywhere being persecuted. The working class is suffering in capitalist economies. All of the riches go to the business class and the working class has been ignored.”

Birisita, a social worker and Western Sydney University student said the situation facing young people was “devastating.” She said: “Look at the statistics. There are not enough homes for the poor and disadvantaged. We need to build, but it is not done because it’s not profitable.”

“Those in power don’t care about us,” Birisita said. “I live in public housing and I am so happy that I am, but imagine those that cannot get help. There are people living right next door to us with three or four families forced to live under the same roof.”

Asked about the major political parties, Birisita replied: “You know I have always favoured Labor, but for the past five years I have just been shaking my head and asking, ‘What is going on?’”

At Toukley, **John**, a retired draughtsman, said he had read on the WSWS about massive NATO military exercises in Eastern Europe. “It is frightening to think that the United States is bringing all those personnel and weapons right onto the borders of Poland and Russia.”

John said he thought the US was seeking to provoke a conflict with Russia. “Deals don’t seem to be part of their vocabulary. They want to use war for the gain of land and a geo-political push for minerals, cheap labour and control of Eurasia. Because capitalism is not working, the elites want to send workers off from each country to kill other workers. The working class has to rise up against capitalism in order to prevent war.”

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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