

SEP senate candidate speaks with Melbourne tram drivers

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party's lead Senate candidate in the state of Victoria, Chris Sinnema, spoke with tram drivers last week and received a warm response when he outlined the party's fight for a new anti-war movement of the working class.

Melbourne's tram network, one of the largest in the world, is fully privatised. Drivers and other tram workers have suffered relentless attacks on their job security and employment conditions, enforced by the Rail, Tram and Bus Union.

Sinnema, himself a former tram driver, and a team of SEP campaigners spoke with the drivers near the Malvern Tram Depot in Melbourne's inner east, where there are about 200 drivers, maintenance workers and customer service staff.

Workers took copies the SEP election statement, and many of those who had time to stop and talk were eager to discuss their worsening conditions, particularly cuts to journey times. The tram network is franchised to Keolis Downer, a joint venture led by \$7 billion French transnational corporation Keolis. The company earns "performance bonuses" from the state government if punctuality requirements are upheld, so there is great pressure on workers to meet increasingly difficult time targets.

Sinnema and the SEP campaigners also discussed the US-led preparations for war against China. Several workers, including those of Asian origin, were aware of rising tensions in the South China Sea. There was, however, a widespread underestimation of the danger confronting the working class in Australia and the region.

Danny Lee, originally from Vietnam, said: "The preparations for war are no good. The US is a big country, they have to show off ... As for the South China Sea, neighbours have always got trouble over the years.

They won't use nuclear weapons—everyone knows that—the whole of Asia would be gone."

Sinnema discussed with Danny the detailed US preparations to deploy nuclear weapons in a war against China or Russia. The catastrophic consequences of war would not deter US and Australian imperialism, he explained, and the working class had to intervene to prevent war.

David Paul said: "I can see war happening. Look at the South China Sea. It could happen in a few years' time, or even sooner. It's all greed at the end of the day—everybody wants power at the end of the day. The US is the most powerful. They want to dictate to the world if possible, we all know that. Australia is with the United States."

Paul spoke with Sinnema about the growing hostility of workers towards the political establishment. The SEP candidate explained that the party was advocating a revolutionary not parliamentary perspective, and was fighting for the establishment of a workers' government, a government of, by, and for the working class.

Paul said: "Now you have people turning to the Greens, to the Independents, whoever. There will be a big percentage vote for all these other parties ... I would generally vote Labor as opposed to Liberal, but I agree with what you say about a workers' government, that would be good."

David said: "I follow the wars in the Middle East—no human being should treat another human being like that. Look at Gaza, you don't go meddling like that. I think Zionism is a problem ... The US exercises in the South China Sea are very dangerous. We were taught in school that the New York Stock Exchange runs on guns and weapons. The United States wants to police the whole world."

Nick spoke briefly with Sinnema about the deteriorating conditions on the tram network: “I’ve been here four years. It is capitalism as you say, everybody needs money. The traffic gets worse and makes it harder to get the [target route] times. Some workers might get pulled up. I always do broken shifts myself.”

Henry said: “I’ve been here ten years. This company, they’re dynamite on us. We’re under the pump all the time to stay on time. The previous owners were not as bad as this. There is constant pressure to run on time ... Sick leave is another thing. If you have more than a couple of days off—they ask if everything is OK at home!

“As for both those guys Turnbull and Shorten [Labor and Liberal party leaders]—if you close your eyes, you wouldn’t know which one was talking, they are both saying the same things.”

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

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