

Participants at SEP rallies speak about war, Brexit, the social crisis

Our reporters
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The final election meetings held by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane last weekend attracted strong audiences of young people, students, workers and retirees. Speaking to the WSWS, participants discussed the major political and historical questions facing the working class internationally, including the threat of war, the implications of the Brexit referendum and the deepening social crisis.

Many expressed the broad popular hostility to the established parliamentary parties. Their comments underscored the serious search by sections of workers and youth for a genuine alternative to capitalism, reflected in the growing interest in the program and policies of the SEP.

Sydney

Daniel, a 15-year-old high school student, commented on the social crisis facing young people. Going out to find work, he said, is difficult. “They say, ‘we’re not employing at the moment,’ or ‘we’re not hiring young people part time’ or ‘there are too many people applying.’”

Previous generations could “get an apprenticeship, or go to university without worrying about how they were going to afford it. Now you can get all the qualifications and end up working part-time,” Daniel said.

“My school is 90 percent Muslim and working class,” Daniel explained. “They don’t want young people to know that they don’t have a future.” Army personnel were being sent into schools to recruit, he explained. Students were told the army was “the only way they can get a job” while the “higher-ups say the reason there’s unemployment is because of foreigners.”

Daniel commented: “The wars in the Middle East are a sign of the breakdown of capitalism as a system.” Capitalism, he said, “is not functioning and you have wars for oil and territories and for the elites.” The wealth controlled by the world’s billionaires could give “the people in Afghanistan and Iraq, who are suffering, proper healthcare, education and a decent life, which they don’t get because of American imperialism and all these wars.”

In America, Daniel noted, “there are millions of young people who want socialism and are supporting Bernie Sanders. That sort of thing hasn’t been seen for so long. I hope that one of the SEP’s candidates gets elected ... I think the SEP is fighting for the right reasons. We need to be educated and politically armed as the working class so that

we can fight against capitalism and form a workers’ government.”

Steve, a young worker, and **Tori**, a university student, travelled from Newcastle. Tori said: “None of the other parties represent young people.” She previously supported the Greens, but when she found out about “their deal with the Liberals to stamp out smaller parties, it became clear that they didn’t care about anything else” except being part of the establishment. Steve added that the Greens are prepared to “back a Labor government that would be imposing all the austerity measures and the drive to war.”

Steve addressed the Brexit referendum. “It was important that the SEP [in Britain] supported a boycott, rather than taking one or other side. It has become very apparent that a powerful right-wing section of the capitalist elite has been strengthened in the referendum,” he said. There would be “many issues” arising from the result. “Straight away you can say Scotland’s gone. They are not going to stay. Then you have Northern Ireland. Are they going to keep open borders with them?” he asked.

Steve declared: “Britain is trying to assert itself as an independent imperialist power. After all this time working with Germany, they are seeing them as more of a competitor in a cut-throat global market ... A new round of attacks on the working class throughout Britain and the EU is now on the agenda, because that’s the last place they can extract profit.”

Kathryn, an IT worker, described the threat of war as “the most urgent issue,” yet “the other parties are not talking about it.” She added: “If people in the mainstream talk about the South China Sea, they minimise it [the threat of war] or blame China.”

Kathryn said austerity measures are “directly funding the military.” She noted: “The military has a \$495 billion budget over 10 years” but “the entire welfare budget is more like \$60 million. Imagine how far you could lift people up out of poverty if you weren’t spending on the military?”

Kathryn said the meeting clarified the issue of identity politics. At first, she thought the SEP “dismissed the struggles of sections of the population as though their struggles weren’t important.” She understood now it was not possible to resolve “the issues of women and gay rights and those of different races” within the capitalist system, “where everyone is struggling and straining to cope.” She said: “The capitalist class divides us, using identity politics, so we are not fighting for bigger, more important things. They try to prevent revolution and workers being a collective.”

Karina, 27, a graphic designer, came to the meeting to find out more about the SEP, “because I don’t want another world war.” She explained: “There is a definite silence about what is really going on, and I don’t like that.” Karina agreed that peace is “not possible”

under capitalism. “It’s all about greed and staying in power.”

Karina said previously she was “leaning towards the Greens, but I have now learned they are pro-war.” Karina said she would read the WWSWS to learn the lessons of history. “I agree with that perspective because, at the end of the day, if you have knowledge about something—that is where the power is; not just screaming loudly on the street,” she said.

Melbourne

Charles, an agricultural science student at the University of Melbourne, had met SEP campaigners in the working class suburb of Coburg. “I came to hear what the party stands for, and whether it is really socialist,” he said. “I’ve found that it’s the only party that stands for the workers and stands against war and for genuine peace in the world.”

“As Nick [Beams] explained, Obama will go down in history as the president during which across his entire two terms the US has been at constant war,” Charles said. “What struck me first was his war policy, and in particular his drone policy. They just decided that the justice system is bypassed, and they can just come for you and kill you.”

Charles added: “I need to go and read more about the basis of socialism and what there was in the Soviet Union. How it should be implemented, why these other countries like Tanzania weren’t socialist. I see that it will have to be a world system, to have more democracy for the workers and no war.”

Michaela, another University of Melbourne student, is involved in the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) campaign to secure the club’s affiliation on the campus. “It’s been ridiculous, it is so bureaucratic,” she said of the Clubs and Societies ban. “They keep bringing up all these ridiculous reasons why the IYSSE can’t form a club. It’s really only so as to decrease representation of students, of their voices.”

Michaela responded to Chris Sinnema’s report, which included figures on mounting student debt. “I’m starting my second degree, I’m going to have a double debt,” she said. “I’m never going to be able to pay it back ... I completely agree that education should be a social right. It is part of having a progressive society.” She commented: “Everything is becoming more and more privatised. At university, it feels so corporate now, everything is more corporatised ... It feels like everyone is separate, it is so individualist.”

On the election, she said: ‘I’m getting a sense how similar all the parties actually are. Everyone knows the Greens are just with Labor. They are all the same anyway—they all just support each other. Socialist Alliance is a further extension of that; they are all connected together. Some people say ‘the lesser of two evils,’ but it is still the same thing. It is very sad.’

Rohan and **Tissa**, are recently retired engineers, originally from Sri Lanka. “I agree 100 percent that capitalism is in crisis,” Rohan said. “The ruling class is doing a lot of patchwork, they make their rules as events develop. When there is a crisis, they put money in to try and cover it over.”

“We studied in the USSR,” Tissa explained. “We were shocked when the USSR collapsed—in our dreams we would never have thought it could happen, yet it happened so fast. Now people there are really struggling. There is terrible homelessness, there is terrible

inequality. Once they had full employment.” Tissa added: “A lot of Russians don’t know anything about Leon Trotsky. He was eliminated from the history books. Yet he was leader of the Red Army.”

Rohan said: “100 percent, the SEP is right. To bring people to conscious decisions is difficult, because of their day-to-day problems. Revolution throughout the world is a very difficult task. In 1917 in Russia, people were desperate, they had to revolt—the crisis brought people into action together.”

Brisbane

Ethan, a 17-year-old high school student, said: “For me it was a real eye-opener for the effects that the economy is facing and the implications of that for myself. The issue of war is very concerning. I didn’t realise that war is approaching. Globally, the economies are struggling for growth, so that is driving the tensions.”

“It’s kind of frustrating,” Ethan said. “You vote certain parties into power, hoping that they will stay true to their word, and that they’re going to benefit the economy and give you a better standard of living, etc. But internationally all the economies are falling and the effect is falling greatly on youth. There are terrible, terrible wages for youth and increasing unemployment and things like housing prices. So first-home buyers, and people like myself in the future, will have it hard. There are tough times ahead.”

Ethan now had a clearer idea of socialism. “Socialism is for a more fair economy,” he said. “Capitalism can create inequality, whereby 1 percent of people can own these large corporations, like the banks, that make all this money, and leave the economy in the poor state it’s in now. The rich keep getting richer and the poor keep getting poorer, and the middle class is being squeezed substantially. So socialism is realistic.”

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

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