

Australian election

Socialist Alliance: A pseudo-left ally of the Greens

Oscar Grenfell—SEP candidate for Grayndler
29 June 2016

In an election marked by unprecedented hostility to the official political establishment, Socialist Alliance (SA) is advancing itself as an open ally of the Greens, a capitalist party of the affluent upper middle-class. Amid a leftward movement of growing numbers of workers and young people, this pseudo-left formation is seeking to channel the widespread hostility to the two-party system behind the Greens and to prop up the parliamentary system.

SA's orientation to the Greens, who they promote as a "progressive" alternative to Labor and the Liberals, has particular significance. With the corporate and financial elite fearful that neither of the major parties will win enough support to form a majority government in their own right, the Greens are presenting themselves as a party of "parliamentary stability."

Greens leader Richard Di Natale has repeatedly stressed his party's willingness to take ministerial positions in a Labor coalition. Such a government would be committed to implementing the austerity agenda of the financial and corporate elite, including the \$6.1 billion in spending cuts outlined by Labor during the election campaign. It would escalate Australia's involvement in US-led wars in the Middle East, and military provocations against China.

SA has maintained a complete silence on the Greens' overtures to Labor and big business. Instead, it has collaborated closely with Greens candidates in a number of areas. Prior to the launch of the official campaign, its publication, *Green Left Weekly*, conducted an interview with Greens candidate for Grayndler, Jim Casey, giving him the opportunity to fraudulently posture as a socialist.

SA's explicit orientation to the Greens is in line with the perspective spelled out at the SA national conference in April. Former leader Peter Boyle, SA candidate for the seat of Sydney, declared that it was an "open question" whether the party would maintain an independent existence, or seek to liquidate into the Greens.

Boyle said there was a "strong pressure [on the Greens] to

put everything second to winning parliamentary positions"—in other words, to jettison their own limited election promises on the environment and social issues. But, he added, there was "an ongoing struggle between the left and the right in the Greens"—thus attempting to maintain the illusion that the Greens are a "progressive" alternative.

In fact, the so-called "left" of the Greens, including figures such as Casey, work hand-in-hand with its openly big business representatives such as Di Natale. If the Greens entered government, the "left-wing" of the party, with the assistance of the pseudo-lefts, would function as apologists and political defenders as opposition emerged to the agenda of militarism and austerity.

Boyle made clear that SA's aim is to spearhead a regroupment involving the union bureaucracy, the Greens and sections of the Labor Party, stating: "The process that we are engaged in is to seek out the rest of the leaders in our society and bring them together in a common project." SA's election program is aimed at securing these alliances. It calls for a "people's movement," and blandly declares the need "to build a strong, active, democratic movement of the majority."

The SA program makes no mention of the working class and says nothing about the growing dangers of a war between the United States and China. Like the Greens, SA helps maintain the official conspiracy of silence over mounting tensions in the South China Sea, including calls by senior Labor figures for Australian warships and military aircraft to be dispatched to Chinese-claimed territory—an act of war that could spark open conflict.

The parochial and nationalist character of the SA campaign is summed up by the statement's headline, which declares, "Another Australia is possible." Its perspective is entirely within the bounds of capitalism, promoting the illusion that pressing social issues, such as housing and public transport, can be resolved by pressuring the powers-that-be for limited reforms.

Significantly, the program prominently and approvingly quotes Canadian author Naomi Klein's declaration that "we have to challenge this system head-on." Klein, a liberal, might be prepared occasionally to issue tepid "challenges" but she is utterly opposed to the abolition of the profit system. SA's acceptance of the framework of capitalism is, of course, essential for its integration with the Greens and the political establishment more broadly.

SA's candidates include longstanding members for the Senate in New South Wales and Victoria who are billed as "union activists." Howard Byrnes, one of their candidates for the Senate in NSW, is prominently featured as a delegate of the Construction Forestry and Mining Energy Union (CFMEU).

SA has close ties to the union, which it falsely promotes as militant. The CFMEU donated \$5,000 to the party's NSW election campaign last year. Like its counterparts, the union functions as a corporatist arm of management to suppress the struggles of workers and has been exposed for a series of schemes that enrich the union apparatus at the expense of workers.

The CFMEU, a key constituent of the Labor Party, also promotes rabid nationalism that scapegoats of foreign workers for the lack of jobs. National secretary Michael O'Connor last year declared that the unions' opposition to the China Australia Free Trade Agreement was "about the things that make this country great," adding that the union was not going to allow the government "to sell off our sovereignty." SA is completely uncritical of the union's putrid nationalism.

Socialist Alliance is thoroughly mired in identity politics, the stock-in-trade of affluent sections of the middle class that it represents who seek to advance their privileged position within the framework of capitalism on the basis of race, gender and sexual orientation. The elevation of identity is to suppress fundamental class issues reflecting the hostility of this layer to the working class.

SA's lead candidate for the Senate in NSW, Ken Canning, is a longstanding Aboriginal nationalist. In his campaign statement, he makes no pretense to being a socialist. Instead he declares: "The fight for the rights of First Nations people will always form the platform of any struggle I am involved in, including my campaign as the lead NSW Senate candidate for the Socialist Alliance."

At no point does Canning relate the appalling conditions facing Aboriginal workers to the need for a struggle by the working class as a whole. The social crisis confronting Aborigines is a class, not a racial question—it is the sharpest expression of the deep inroads being made into the living standards of workers everywhere.

Socialist Alliance is also cultivating relations with former

Labor figures. Former national leader Peter Boyle was endorsed by Queensland MP Rob Pyne, who has worked closely with SA since leaving the state Labor government in March. Pyne, a featured speaker at SA's annual conference in April, left the government declaring he could better represent the northern Queensland city of Cairns as an independent. At the same time, he declared his ongoing "confidence in the Premier and the Treasurer"—that is, the state Labor government that is deepening the assault on living standards.

Amid the break-up of the two-party system, Socialist Alliance is playing a thoroughly pernicious role in attempting to steer workers and youth into the arms of the Greens and block the development of a genuinely socialist movement against war and austerity.

SA hailed the Syriza government in Greece, which took office in January 2015 by exploiting the widespread anti-austerity sentiment of Greek workers and young people. Within weeks, Syriza betrayed its election promises, and has continued to impose drastic spending cuts to healthcare, pensions and education.

Last year, Socialist Alliance organised a forum with Greens Senator Lee Rhiannon that uncritically backed the Syriza government and promoted the formation of a similar party in Australia. Rhiannon declared that Syriza had "pulled it off" in Greece, "and we need to do it here!" The Greens, she said, could have a "critical role" in building such a formation.

Socialist Alliance is fully committed to supporting the Greens in a project whose consequences would be just as devastating for the working class in Australia, as in Greece.

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

Authorised by James Cogan, Shop 6, 212 South Terrace, Bankstown Plaza, Bankstown, NSW 2200.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact