

# Melbourne warehouse workers welcome SEP campaign against war

Our reporters  
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Over the past two weeks, Socialist Equality Party members and supporters, including the party's candidate for the seat of Wills in Melbourne, Will Fulgenzi, campaigned at the Coles-Toll warehouse in the northern suburb of Somerton as workers came off their shift.

Many workers at the factory are first- or second-generation migrants from South and Southeast Asia or the Middle East. They gave a warm response to the SEP campaigners, who were opposing the Australian government's involvement in the criminal wars in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan and the US-led military build-up against China.

In July 2012, the 600 workers at the plant, which is operated by the global logistics corporation Toll Holdings for the supermarket giant Coles, conducted a courageous two-week strike and 24-hour picket, demanding equality of wages and conditions with other Coles warehouse workers. Their struggle was ended by the treachery of the National Union of Workers (NUW), which isolated the strikers and wore them down—allowing Coles to increase operations at other warehouses—before ramming through a sell-out deal.

Due to the physically taxing nature of the work, few employees can continue the job for more than one or two years, and many are in their early 20s. Fulgenzi, the SEP's candidate, addressed workers over a megaphone outside the factory gate as they came off shift last week.

"We're fighting to build a movement of the working class internationally against the danger of war," Fulgenzi said. "Whoever wins the election—Labor, Liberal or Greens—all of these parties are committed to the same agenda: continuing Australia's involvement in the illegal US-led wars in the Middle East, aligning Australia with the US war drive against China, and attacking workers' conditions here.

"We're the only party warning the working class about the danger of war. This is the great unmentionable in the

elections. All the parties are silent about the military build-up against China, because they support it. The former Greens-backed Labor government placed Australia on the frontline of the war preparations, signing up a generation of youth for slaughter, and this has been continued by the Turnbull government.

"For 15 years, the US and its allies have carried out wars throughout the Middle East, destroying entire societies: in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Pakistan. Now as a result of this, we see a refugee catastrophe throughout Europe. All the imperialist governments internationally, like all the major parties here, are seeking to scapegoat migrants and asylum seekers for the crisis of capitalism. We oppose the whole reactionary system of 'border protection' and mandatory detention of refugees that is aimed at dividing the working class along national lines.

"The big business parties insist there is 'no money' for social programs, for decent jobs for the working class, but hundreds of billions are available for war! In every country, workers face attacks from the same global corporations like Toll, and the trade unions like the NUW here act as the industrial police force, as the bought-and-paid-for representatives of the corporations and the governments, to attack workers' conditions. The working class needs our own party, the Socialist Equality Party."

Many workers took copies of the SEP's election statement, and some stopped to speak to SEP campaigners about their concerns.

"The military spending here means they're bringing war to Australia, that's the only possible reason," said **Mohammad**.

"I'm from Pakistan. I lived there, I worked there. I've worked in over 25 different countries. If it's your party's policy to stand against war, it shouldn't just be for the election. It has to be your permanent stance.

"I've read your election statement carefully, word for word, and followed who your candidates are. I like what

your party is doing. I really appreciate it. You are right. Someone has to take a stand like you to raise awareness about this.”

Mohammad continued: “I am a Muslim; this is not a Muslim war in the Middle East, it’s imposed on them. They [the major powers] are killing them. My understanding is that through one war, they have a lot of objectives, one of them is oil, the other is that in the Gulf countries, they want the Arab money, and so they create unrest there. After finishing the war in Iraq, now they’re turning to Russia and China. That’s the next target, I believe. It will be very dangerous and devastating. It’s not like the Gulf. China and Russia are strong militarily. When powers come against one another, the results will be devastating for humanity.”

“My family and I migrated to Australia for peace,” he added. “War’s not good for anyone, except maybe the industrialists. There are a few countries behind this, America and the UK and Australia. When I arrived in Australia two and a half years ago, I heard news that Australia was buying fighter jets. I said to my wife: ‘There is something behind this, they’re preparing for some war.’ Like what they did in preparation for the war in the Gulf; it was pre-planned.”

Mohammad commented on his experiences with the trade unions internationally. “I’ve worked for over 20 years in different companies and different countries all over the world. It’s always the same. The unions are a waste of your time and your money. They never protect our rights. The union works 50 percent for the worker and 50 percent for the capitalist. ‘We’ll resolve your problems,’ they say, ‘but at the same time, we have wine as we sit around to talk with the manager.’”

He concluded, referring to the SEP campaign team: “I really appreciate the younger generation and your party taking a stand.”

**Gabriel**, who has worked at the plant for several months, said it was the first time he had heard about plans for war with China. “That’s just like what the media always does,” he noted wryly. “They show us what they want to show us. They don’t show us any of the bombing of Iraq and Syria. They don’t tell us how many ordinary people they’ve killed.”

Gabriel continued: “They said they were going to Iraq to defeat terrorism. But I have friends from Iraq. At least they had a country before the 2003 invasion. They could go and visit their families a lot. Now it’s destroyed. This is all just oil, and they’re trying to do the same thing to Syria.”

He commented on the promotion of anti-Muslim chauvinism in the media. A major news network “made a post about the last terror attacks in Turkey on Facebook yesterday, and my friend commented on it—there was nothing rude in what he said, he just said that you can’t associate this with Muslims. Within five minutes, his comment was deleted. Then, all these other comments, attacking Muslims, calling them filth, were allowed to sit there.”

Another worker who has been at the plant for five years said: “Both the parties, Labor and Liberal, are the same. They always say things will change after the election. But then they take more and more from us. These cuts to Medicare, to childcare benefits, it’s really making life difficult. I have a child now, and supporting a child is tough.”

**Ahmed**, who has worked at the plant for several months, stopped in his car to speak to SEP campaigners. He saw the SEP election statement’s opposition to the drive to war. “There are growing tensions between the superpowers,” he said. “Things are becoming really scary. There could be a war. Now there has been a Brexit.” He immediately added, clarifying his earlier comment: “You cannot blame any country for this. It is not the population’s fault! The normal people are innocent. This is what the governments are doing behind the scenes. They’re preparing for a war for their own interests, for big business.”

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

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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