

SEP's 2016 election campaign in Australia furthers fight for international anti-war movement

The Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
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The campaign conducted by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in the 2016 Australian federal election, which was formally called on May 8 and concluded on July 2, was a significant contribution to the fight by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) to build a unified movement of the international working class against militarism and war.

From the outset, the SEP emphasised that its campaign would be addressed to the working class not only in Australia but throughout the Asia-Pacific region, and would be carried out in the closest collaboration with other ICFI sections. We stressed that Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's decision to call the first "double dissolution" election since 1987, following six years of instability in Australian politics, reflected the breakdown of longstanding political mechanisms around the world in the face of a mounting international economic and social crisis. This has found particular expression in the US presidential primaries, the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom and the rising tensions between the US and its allies with China in Asia, and with Russia in Europe.

The SEP election campaign, as the party's manifesto stated on May 23, was aimed "at advancing, against the Liberal-National Coalition, Labor, the Greens and all pro-capitalist candidates, including those of the pseudo-left organisation Socialist Alliance, a genuine socialist and internationalist program to mobilise the working class against the source of war, social inequality and dictatorship—the capitalist profit system itself."

These objectives were taken forward by more than seven weeks of intense theoretical, political and practical work.

The SEP stood two candidates for the Senate, the upper house in parliament, in each of the three most populated

states in Australia: New South Wales (NSW), Victoria and Queensland. We also stood candidates in the lower house electorates of Blaxland and Grayndler in Sydney; and Wills in Melbourne.

At the centre of the campaign was the development of political analysis to clarify workers and young people on the necessity for a socialist and international perspective. Throughout the election, the SEP sought to deepen its exposure of the US-led war drive against China in Asia and the conspiracy of silence in the political and media establishment over the key role being played by Australian imperialism in the preparations for a catastrophic military confrontation.

The SEP's fight against war was accompanied by consistent warnings that whatever party or combination of parties formed the next government, it would respond to the deepening economic crisis of Australian capitalism by intensifying the austerity agenda and attacks on the jobs and conditions of the working class.

During the formal 55-day election period, the SEP published some 110 articles, reports, statements and perspectives related to the campaign on the *World Socialist Web Site*, including important contributions by the Socialist Equality Group in New Zealand. The SEP gave a voice to the working class, through a range of interviews with workers and youth on the dangers of war and the shocking social conditions that exist for millions of people.

Among the material published was an in-depth five-part series, "What the Royal Commission into Australia's trade unions revealed," extensive coverage of the political issues facing students and workers in Papua New Guinea, and a professionally-produced video in which SEP national secretary James Cogan made a call for building an international anti-war movement under the political

leadership of the ICFI.

Critical articles were published that assessed the class interests represented by the Greens and pseudo-left organisations and their role in channelling opposition back into the dead-end of parliamentary politics, as well as a variety of right-wing populist formations that sought to exploit the crisis of the traditional two-party system.

SEP candidates took part in candidate forums and addressed workers at factories including Toyota and Ford in Melbourne, Arrium steel in Sydney and Ingham Chickens on the Central Coast. They were interviewed by community-based radio programs in Brisbane, Sydney, Newcastle and the NSW Hunter Valley. Candidates in Melbourne were interviewed by the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). Overall, however, the SEP campaign was once again subjected to general censorship by the mass television, radio and print media.

In the course of the election, the SEP gained important experience in the use of social media, increasing our Facebook audience by the regular promotion of analysis and commentary. Over 60,000 printed copies of the party's May 23 statement were distributed, along with thousands of copies of other WSWs perspectives and articles.

Throughout the campaign, the SEP held weekly election committee meetings and public meetings in the three lower house electorates, on the NSW Central Coast and in Brisbane. Final election rallies were held in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney on the weekend of June 25–26. The rallies in Melbourne and Sydney were addressed in video greetings by Jerry White, the SEP (US) presidential candidate. For the first time, the Sydney rally was livestreamed to a world audience via Facebook.

Held just days after the June 23 vote in the UK to “Leave” the EU, the final rallies discussed the historical implications of both the outcome and the campaign conducted by the SEP (UK) and the ICFI for an active boycott of the referendum and for the political independence of the working class.

On election day in Australia, the SEP received a class-conscious vote of support from a small but significant layer of workers, youth and retirees for an explicitly socialist, internationalist and revolutionary program.

With as many as three million votes still to be counted over the next several weeks, the SEP Senate tickets have received 2,191 votes in NSW, 2,442 votes in Victoria and 1,301 votes in Queensland. These totals are higher than at same point of counting in the 2013 election.

In the gentrified inner-city electorates of Wills in

Melbourne and Grayndler in Sydney, SEP candidates Will Fulgenzi and Oscar Grenfell crucially differentiated a genuine socialist and anti-war perspective from the various pseudo-left organisations that sought to promote the Greens, an openly capitalist party, as a “progressive alternative” or portrayed the Labor Party as a “lesser evil.”

In Wills, the SEP has polled 258 votes, or 0.31 percent and in Grayndler, 268 votes, or 0.36 percent. In the working-class Sydney electorate of Blaxland, one of the most socially devastated in the country, the SEP stood Gabriela Zabala and has polled 832 votes, or 1.18 percent.

The political strength of the campaign has been embodied most clearly in the growth of the readership of the WSWs and the broadening of the party's support base in Australia and the Asian region, particularly in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere in the South Pacific. A number of workers and youth have applied to join the SEP or its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).

To all those who voted for the SEP, supported our campaign or followed it on the WSWs, we urge you to seriously consider our perspective and program, and apply to join the Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the ICFI. Finally, we ask all our readers and supporters to donate here to ensure we are in the best financial position to intensify the fight to build the ICFI as the new political leadership of the international working class.

The author also recommends:

The political issues posed by the Australian election crisis

[6 July 2016]



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