

SEP public meetings review political lessons of Australian election

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held well-attended meetings last weekend in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, the state capitals of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, where the party ran candidates in the July 2 federal elections.

Entitled, “The Australian election crisis and the way forward for the working class,” the events were attended by high-school and university students, workers and retirees. For some it was their first party meeting, having come into contact with the SEP during the election through its street campaigns, social media or after receiving election literature in their mail boxes.

The Sydney meeting was addressed by SEP national secretary James Cogan, one of the party’s Senate candidates in NSW, and Oscar Grenfell, who contested the lower house seat of Grayndler. It was live-streamed with participants from different parts of Australia, as well as Britain, Germany, India, New Zealand, Vanuatu in the South Pacific and numerous American cities, including New York, Miami and Detroit.

Nick Beams, a member of the WSWs international editorial board and the SEP’s national committee, along with Will Fulgenzi, who ran for the House of Representatives seat of Wills, spoke at the Melbourne meeting. SEP Senate candidates Erin Cooke and Mike Head addressed the Brisbane meeting.

Throughout its election campaign, the SEP sought to puncture the conspiracy of silence by the major parties and the media about the US drive to war against China. It also warned that after the election, the next government would launch a major assault on the conditions and basic rights of the working class. Developments in the weeks since the Australian federal election have vindicated that analysis.

The election was a disaster for the Liberal-National Coalition government. It was returned with a paper-thin

majority in the House of Representatives and has no majority in the Senate, where it confronts an increased number of so-called independent parties. At the same time, Labor’s vote was the second lowest since 1949, while the Greens failed to win any new seats in the lower house and their Senate vote declined.

SEP speakers explained that the election outcome revealed the deep hostility of millions of ordinary people to the entire political establishment. It was another example of the global breakdown of the political mechanisms through which capitalism had functioned since World War II.

Oscar Grenfell told the Sydney meeting that explosive political developments in Australia and internationally had underscored the SEP’s analysis. He referred in particular to the UN-backed Permanent Court of Arbitration decision on July 12, which rejected Chinese claims to large areas of the South China Sea. Grenfell warned that the US would use the decision to step up its military provocations against China and demand that countries like Australia intensify their involvement.

Australia’s political establishment, Grenfell continued, was acutely conscious that it had no popular support for the austerity program being demanded by the banks and big business or for war against China.

“Growing layers of workers and young people are being radicalised... The last 25 years of unending war and social retrogression have left their mark and many are searching for an alternative. That is why the election has been followed by denunciations of the population as ‘ungovernable,’” the speaker said, pointing to the ominous post-election call by retail billionaire Gerry Harvey for a “dictatorship” in Australia.

SEP national secretary James Cogan told the Sydney

meeting that the political crisis confronting the Australian establishment was a manifestation of global processes. “There is not a single nation-state on the planet that is not beset with external, foreign policy dilemmas and conflicts and explosive internal class and social antagonisms,” he said.

Cogan said US Vice President Joe Biden’s declaration in Sydney last week that “Australia and the US have each others’ backs and are bound by an alliance ‘baptised in blood’,” was a chilling warning that US imperialism was stepping up its military confrontations with China.

The speaker drew attention to a report this month by the US Center for Strategic and International Studies, entitled *China’s nuclear forces and weapons of mass destruction*.

Overseen by prominent strategic analyst Anthony Cordesman, the report claimed Beijing was expanding its nuclear capacity, implying that the US should take military action against China sooner rather than later. Cogan said that figures such as Cordesman had in recent years urged US authorities to “think about the unthinkable”—that is, to believe that Washington can “win” a nuclear war.

Referring to the Australian election outcome, Cogan said: “One of the most common terms used by establishment media commentators to describe the state of official Australian politics has been ‘dysfunctional.’

“By this they mean that the economic agenda of the dominant banks, corporations and the ultra-wealthy is being hindered by the inability of the major parties to secure clear majorities in the parliament. In other words, growing numbers of people will not vote for parties or policies they believe are against their interests. The conclusion of billionaire Gerry Harvey is therefore that ‘democracy is not working’...

“We are not exaggerating when we point to the events in Turkey and ask, are the conditions in the UK, France, or Australia, so far removed from those which led to an attempted military coup in that country, which we now know was backed by sections of both the American and German imperialist establishments?”

Cogan explained that the SEP’s election intervention was based on a thorough assessment of the state of world economy and world politics, and on the internationalist, socialist and anti-war perspective of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the

world Trotskyist party.

The tensions and conflicts between rival nation-states and social austerity attacks on the working class, Cogan stated, were the product of the global breakdown of the capitalist system. He said the SEP understood that this crisis, which was leading to imperialist war, was also propelling the international working class toward social revolution.

“Profound historical processes are at work that will generate tremendous political and social struggles in the period ahead,” the speaker said. “The fight that must be taken up by all politically conscious workers and youth is for an international anti-war movement based on the program of world socialist revolution. This is the political line which we will continue to patiently explain and which is the only way the working class can go forward.” Cogan concluded by appealing to all those in attendance to join the SEP.

Extended question-and-answer sessions followed the reports at each meeting. In Melbourne, there were questions on the Chinese government’s activities in the South China Sea, discussion about Washington’s role in the failed Turkish coup and requests for more detail on the deepening political crisis in Australia.

In Sydney, audience members asked a range of questions. A member of the live-stream audience from India asked whether there were links between the Greens in Australia and the US. Another wanted details on Get-Up, the pro-Labor electoral lobby group. An important question was asked about the relationship between the liquidation of the USSR in 1991 and the ongoing crisis of global capitalism. Another person asked whether China still retained “elements of socialism” and what the ICFI’s position would be if war erupted against China.

The meeting in Sydney was live-streamed on Facebook. The full reports by the speakers, as well as the question and answer session, can be viewed here.



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