

Pseudo-left groups form new “Victorian Socialists” electoral front in Australia

The Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
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The main pseudo-left organisations in Australia have combined forces to form a new electoral party, the Victorian Socialists, for the sole purpose of contesting and winning one seat in the forthcoming November election, in the state of Victoria.

The latest opportunist manoeuvre by the pseudo-left is a calculated response to immense disaffection within the working class towards the Labor Party, which holds government in Victoria, and to the breakup of the longstanding two-party-dominated political system. Its aim is to try to capture some of the social and political discontent and channel it into new parliamentary illusions.

The pseudo-lefts' primary aim, however, is to block the emergence of a political movement of the working class based on an internationalist and socialist perspective. Leading figures within the Victorian Socialists openly express their hope to emulate Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn, key bourgeois political figures, who have worked to channel mass alienation with the political establishment back behind the Democratic Party in the US and the Labour Party in Britain.

The Victorian Socialists are significantly to the right of both Sanders and Corbyn. The formation combines the crassest parliamentary cretinism with a parochial and minimum-reformist platform. While Corbyn, with his fake left-populist appeal to the British working class, declares, “for the many, not the few,” the Victorian Socialists, even more pathetically, pledge, “for people, not the powerful.”

The Victorian Socialists brings together Stephen Jolly and his supporters, who split in 2016 from the Socialist Party and the British-based Committee for a Workers International; Socialist Alternative, which has close relations with the US International Socialist Organization; and Socialist Alliance, which is what remains of a 2001 regroupment among Australian pseudo-left parties and groups. Socialist Alliance is largely made up of what was once the Pabloite Democratic Socialist Party, and it still publishes the *Green Left Weekly*.

The prospect of Jolly winning a Victorian Legislative

Council (upper house) seat has provided the immediate rationale for the pseudo-lefts' regroupment. Jolly is regularly promoted in the media. He has been a member of the inner-Melbourne Yarra Council since 2004 and, in the last Victorian state election, received nearly 10 percent of the primary vote in the lower house seat of Richmond, in the state capital, Melbourne.

Jolly has boasted: “Many of our political opponents in the Labor Party, on the right wing, and so on, have said to us that we really are in with a shot of winning this. This is not just some flag flying exercise.”

Socialist Alternative's Corey Oakley issued a statement on its publication *Red Flag*, noting that the organisation had previously not participated in election campaigns. Before, he explained, “left parliamentary campaigns tended to be fruitless affairs offering virtually zero chance of winning.” After elaborating the intricacies of how members are elected into Victoria's upper house, Oakley declared: “This campaign is different.”

Because of Jolly's profile, Oakley gushed, the Victorian Socialists could win as much as 6 percent of the vote in the Northern Metropolitan upper house district. Moreover, providing Labor and/or the Greens directed preferences to the electoral front, it could secure enough votes to win one seat and elevate Jolly into state parliament.

Socialist Alliance appears likely not to stand under its own name, as it has in previous state elections. Instead, one of its leaders, Sue Bolton, who sits on a local council in Melbourne's north, will be on the Victorian Socialists slate, along with a leading Socialist Alternative member, Colleen Bolger.

Not a single issue outside the state boundaries of Victoria, or a single policy of a remotely socialist character, is being raised by the Victorian Socialists. All its demands remain safely within the realm of “respectable” bourgeois politics. If Jolly is elected, the party has promised, he will campaign to “improve public transport,” through measures including “increasing the frequency of northern line trains,” and to “fix the housing crisis,” by building 50,000 new public

houses over five years. After noting that Melbourne’s north-west region has the second-highest official unemployment rate in the state—the product of brutal factory closures and other layoffs imposed in collaboration with the trade unions—Jolly has pledged only to “move government departments” to the outer suburbs.

Tellingly, Sue Bull, a prominent member of Socialist Alliance, wrote in February that the new electoral front was “not just about raising these demands. A socialist in parliament gives the left access to resources, ‘insider’ information and greater campaign opportunities. The left should never forget how Pauline Hanson used her first term of office in 1996 to mobilise a right-wing base of support.” In other words, this is a grab for resources, media promotion and privilege.

It is an axiom of Marxism that the purpose of standing candidates for bourgeois parliament is to utilise such campaigns to fight for the development of the political consciousness of the working class, by demonstrating that only the international struggle for socialism against all capitalist parties can advance its social rights and interests.

The groupings that make up the Victorian Socialists, however, are as removed from, and hostile to, genuine Marxism and socialist internationalism as is the Labor Party. The new party intends to censor from the Victorian election campaign any mention of the tremendous dangers of war and the virulently anti-democratic hysteria underway in Australia against “Chinese interference,” which is being stoked to provide a pretext for military confrontation with China. It will seek to suppress any discussion on the anti-working class character of Labor and the trade unions, and the necessity of workers and youth taking matters into their own hands to fight for wages, conditions, social services and infrastructure, and democratic rights.

Summing up its utterly diversionary role, the policy of the Victorian Socialists that has received the most public attention is its call to replace the state flag, which features the British “Union Jack,” with the “Eureka” flag, which was unfurled by rebellious gold miners in Ballarat in 1854, and has been used by various trade unions to promote their nationalist perspective ever since. Stephen Jolly is advocating this initiative from the standpoint that the current flag is “outdated and doesn’t reflect modern Victoria.” A change, he suggested, would assist the state government to appeal for transnational corporate investment into the state. He told the *Herald Sun*: “We are going out to the world and saying to people ‘come to Victoria’ to invest, and this is our flag. It’s embarrassing.”

The *Herald Sun*, the right-wing tabloid of the Murdoch empire in Melbourne, prominently reported the party’s launch, declaring that the new party was focused on “bread-

and-butter issues.” The newspaper’s essentially uncritical coverage of the pseudo-left project was, itself, an indication of the pro-establishment politics of the Victorian Socialists.

Sections of the trade union bureaucracy may well give some degree of support to the Victorian Socialists, which has already received \$6,500 in financing from the Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association. Such contributions are predicated on the understanding that the pseudo-left will direct preferences to Labor and refrain from any serious criticism of either the Labor government or the unions themselves. Both have collaborated with the employers and the state for the past 35 years in destroying the social rights and conditions of the working class.

Justifying this latest opportunist manoeuvre, Jolly has repeatedly warned that the growing “anti-establishment mood” could be “capitalised by the likes of One Nation and others on the far right.” In fact, the pseudo-lefts’ real fear is not the extreme right, but the “extreme left”—that is, the danger that the working class will break from the entire political establishment and take up the fight for a revolutionary socialist program, advanced only by the Socialist Equality Party.

The Victorian Socialists campaign underscores that, whatever their episodic, tactical disagreements, the politics of all the pseudo-left tendencies derive from their shared class standpoint. They speak for a layer of academics, union officials, and professionals that, in one form or another, derive a privileged social position by serving as a “critical” voice within various institutions of the existing order.

Class-conscious workers and young people seeking a genuine means to fight the capitalist system will find it only in the Trotskyist perspective upheld by the International Committee of the Fourth International and its Australian section, the Socialist Equality Party.



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