Australia: The pseudo-left Victorian Socialists and its pro-capitalist election manifesto

Patrick O'Connor
12 September 2018

The Victorian Socialists, an electoral front formed earlier this year by several pseudo-left organisations ahead of the Victorian state election in November, published their manifesto in Melbourne on August 24.

The document underscores the *World Socialist Web Site's* previous assessment that the formation of the Victorian Socialists was a "calculated response to immense disaffection within the working class towards the Labor Party," and that its "aim is try to capture some of the social and political discontent and channel it into new parliamentary illusions."

The election manifesto begins with a reference to the "global movement" that is seeing "people embrace socialism." The "popularity of Jeremy Corbyn in the UK and Bernie Sanders in the United States," it states, "show that people want an alternative to the mainstream, establishment politics."

It is certainly the case that the support for Corbyn and Sanders reflects the growth of anti-capitalist and socialist sentiment, especially among youth, but neither have provided an "alternative" to "establishment politics." Sanders directed his support to the election campaign of Hillary Clinton, a warmonger and agent of Wall Street. Corbyn is refusing to mobilise his large base of support against the right-wing of the British Labour Party and adapting to all its demands in the name of preserving "unity."

The Victorian Socialists' document makes clear that this electoral manoeuvre is likewise directed at blocking the emergence of a socialist and internationalist workers' movement through the promotion of the crassest middle-class parliamentary cretinism.

The bulk of the 16,000-word manifesto is devoted almost entirely to parochial proposals for the state of Victoria, and especially its "Northern Metropolitan Region," the upper house electorate where the Victorian Socialists are seeking to win a parliamentary seat. The seat covers Melbourne's northern suburbs, from the gentrified inner areas to working-class outer suburbs such as Broadmeadows and South Morang.

When a genuine Marxist party intervenes in elections, its demands are always advanced to develop awareness that workers' social and democratic rights cannot be genuinely achieved without a fight to end the profit system on a world scale and establish a workers' government that will implement far-reaching socialist policies. The Victorian Socialists, by contrast, are consciously promoting illusions that the parliamentary setup can be pressured to bestow social reforms.

The policies outlined in the manifesto include calls for lower-cost housing, a public housing program, new hospitals, improved aged care and education services, a new recycling plant and public transport proposals, down to suggestions for adjustments to bus routes in the electorate.

The Victorian Socialists assert that their proposals are all "concrete" and "reasonable" measures that could be implemented by a re-elected Victorian Labor government. The manifesto declares "we can win," after which, "we'll fight on the streets and in Spring Street [the state parliament] for a state run for people, not the powerful."

In places, the document explicitly appeals to the state Labor government of Premier Daniel Andrews. On housing, for example, the pseudo-lefts assert: "We will campaign for Andrews to implement the promised reforms for tenants: 1. Limit rent rises to one per year. 2. Limit bond to 4 weeks' rent. 3. Abolition of no reason vacancy notices. 4. Rights to make modifications to home and own a pet."

Such appeals echo the narrow local council politics of lead Victorian Socialists' candidate Stephen Jolly, who has served on the inner-Melbourne Yarra Council since 2004. Formerly a member of the Socialist Party and the British-based Committee for a Workers International, Jolly's campaign for the state parliament was joined by Socialist Alternative, which has close relations with the US International Socialist Organization, and the ex-Pabloite Socialist Alliance.

What is underway ahead of the November state election is a somewhat desperate effort by the pseudo-left to revive

© World Socialist Web Site

illusions in Labor, the Greens and the trade unions.

It is a dishonest and cynical operation, being carried out under conditions in which Labor has demonstrated for more than three decades that it has no essential policy differences with the Liberal-National Coalition. Far from granting "reforms," Labor governments at the federal and state levels, fully backed by the trade unions, have imposed some of the most ruthless attacks on the wages, conditions and social services of the working class.

For their part, the Greens are continuing their lurch to the right, having previously propped up the federal right-wing minority Labor government between 2010 and 2013 and supporting its attacks on refugees, welfare and democratic rights.

The Victorian Socialists are particularly promoting the unions, which are responsible for decades of betrayals of workers' struggles. Its manifesto repeatedly endorses the Australian Council of Trades Unions (ACTU) "Change the Rules!" campaign, aimed at channelling workers behind the re-election of a federal Labor government. The unions, which backed the draconian "rules" to suppress industrial action enacted by the previous Labor government, now fraudulently claim a new Labor government would modify some of the harshest aspects of the industrial relations system.

In return, the Victorian Socialists has received significant financial support from some trade unions, including $50,000 from the Electrical Trades Union (ETU). The donation coincided with the ETU bureaucracy's application to re-affiliate to the Labor Party, a move that the *Australian* reported as being seen within Labor "as a critical endorsement of Bill Shorten and Daniel Andrews' federal and state leadership during an election year."

Unspecified amounts have also come from the Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association, United Firefighters Union and the National Union of Workers. Their donations have allowed the Victorian Socialists to run the most publicly prominent campaign of any party in the Northern Metropolitan Region, with large posters promoting Stephen Jolly.

The media is also giving its own free advertising to the pseudo-left campaign, most notably the Murdoch press. The *Herald Sun* tabloid rarely misses any opportunity to add a dash of anti-communism to its staple diet of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim "law and order" demagogy. Yet the newspaper has adopted a very friendly attitude to the Victorian Socialists, reporting on its various initiatives, including the manifesto launch, and opening-up its op-ed pages for commentary by Jolly.

The pernicious role of the Victorian Socialists' campaign is shown most starkly in its silence over the rising danger of great power conflict and world war—the greatest issue that faces the working class, whether in Victoria or any other region of the globe.

Successive Labor and Coalition governments have placed Australia on the frontline of a US-led drive toward a military confrontation with China. Defence spending has been ramped up—at the expense of social services—while the military and intelligence agencies function as the direct adjuncts of their US counterparts in war preparations. In June, the federal parliament passed sweeping "foreign interference" legislation directed against purported "Chinese influence." The laws will be used to both criminalise anti-war opposition as well as to stoke the most virulent anti-Chinese xenophobia.

The lengthy Victorian Socialists' manifesto, however, includes not a single reference, let alone expresses any opposition, to Labor and the Coalition's unconditional support for the US-Australia imperialist alliance, the military build-up against China, or the foreign interference laws.

The silence is not an accidental oversight. The Victorian Socialists' secretary is Corey Oakley, who, as part of Socialist Alternative's endorsement of US-backed Islamist rebels in Syria, declared in 2012 that "the time for 'knee-jerk anti-imperialism' has passed" and that "US imperialism is not the central issue."

The Victorian Socialists are also promoting campaign events featuring journalist Guy Rundle, who in 2011 openly advocated for the US-led military operation that assisted Islamist extremists in Libya overthrow the country's regime and return it to naked imperialist subjugation.

Internationally, pseudo-left organisations, speaking for privileged sections of the upper middle class, are doing all they can to blind the working class to the situation it confronts and prevent the development of a unified struggle against capitalism and imperialist war. The Victorian Socialists are an Australian representative of this counter-revolutionary tendency.

Workers and young people seeking a genuine, socialist, internationalist and revolutionary perspective will find it in the International Committee of the Fourth International, and its Australian section, the Socialist Equality Party.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site