

# Australian pseudo-left group Victorian Socialists promote Greens, Labor

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Just prior to the state election in Victoria on November 24, the Victorian Socialists are promoting the Labor Party and the Greens as “progressive parties.”

Several pseudo-left groups formed the Victorian Socialists earlier this year as an electoral front. The main organisations involved are Socialist Alliance, which was formerly the Democratic Socialist Party and internationally affiliated with Pabloite parties; Socialist Alternative, a state capitalist group with ties to the US-based International Socialist Organization; and the supporters of Stephen Jolly, a Yarra City council member and former leader of the Socialist Party, affiliated with the British-based Committee for a Workers’ International. Nominal differences between these organisations have been set aside with the aim of winning a seat in the Victorian parliament’s upper house.

The campaign waged by the Victorian Socialists has borne out the assessment made by the *World Socialist Web Site* following the organisation’s formation and manifesto launch. Representing the interests not of the working class but of a layer of the middle class, the Victorian Socialists have attempted to channel the emerging shift to the left among workers and youth back behind the parliamentary apparatus.

The Victorian Socialists are trying to revive illusions that the Labor Party and the Greens can be pressured via the ballot box and street protests to represent the interests of ordinary people, rather than finance capital and big business. The overarching concern is to block the development of a genuine socialist and internationalist movement, which is fought for only by the Socialist Equality Party.

The Victorian Socialists have seized on anti-democratic compulsory preferential voting laws as

another vehicle to promote the Labor Party and Greens.

The intricacies of Victoria’s electoral laws require registered parties standing for the upper house of parliament to rank, in order of “preference,” all other parties contesting the election. After the major parties have secured the necessary “quota” of votes to secure parliamentary seats in their own right, the remaining seats are decided by eliminating those parties that received the fewest votes and distributing their nominated preferences to other parties until the quota is reached.

A genuine Marxist party fielding candidates within this system would denounce the anti-democratic character of these mechanisms and do everything possible to counter illusions that one or another capitalist party represents a left-wing alternative or even “lesser evil” to its rivals.

The Victorian Socialists, however, have done precisely the opposite. Their stated opposition to the compulsory preference system amounts to little more than a complaint that their lead candidate, Stephen Jolly in Melbourne’s Northern Metropolitan district, may be hindered in his efforts of securing a place in parliament because of the preference deals worked out behind closed doors by a multitude of small right-wing parties.

According to the *Age* newspaper, electoral operative Glenn Druery has charged \$5,000 per party contesting the election to be part of his preference swap arrangements, with an additional fee of \$50,000 for parties that win a parliamentary seat. Preference swaps could see candidates that receive less than 1 percent of the primary vote end up sitting in parliament.

The Victorian Socialists boast that they are standing on principle by not joining Druery’s operations. This is a fraud—one form of political opportunism is merely being promoted against another. For the pseudo-left,

promoting Labor, the Greens, and allied minor parties constitutes a “principled” stance on preferential voting.

The Victorian Socialists declared in a statement via social media on November 14: “Wherever you stand in the contest between Labor and the Greens, if you vote 1 Victorian Socialists in the upper house (Legislative Council) you can help elect Stephen Jolly to the parliament confident that your vote will not hurt the chances of Labor or the Greens. Our preferences will go 100% to progressive parties—the Greens, Reason, Animal Justice and Labor—before any of the right-wing parties or Druery micro parties. Victorian Socialists are the ONLY party you can vote 1 for and be sure that if we aren’t elected, your vote will go to a progressive candidate.”

The Victorian Socialists are also promoting as “progressive” openly right-wing parties. The Reason Party (formerly Sex Party) is a libertarian-based parliamentary group that is funded by, and advocates for, the prostitution industry. Animal Justice is a reactionary “deep green” organisation, which has swapped preferences with right-wing parties.

Most significantly, the Labor Party and the Greens are potentially on the eve of forming a governing coalition that will accelerate the corporate elite’s assault on working people’s jobs, working conditions, and democratic rights (see: “Australian Greens pursue right-wing coalition government with Labor in Victoria”).

The pseudo-lefts’ claim that such a government would be “progressive” is an attempt to politically disarm the working class. Only by consciously breaking with the entire political establishment can workers and youth advance their independent interests—and this is precisely what the Victorian Socialists’ campaign is directed against. The pseudo-lefts have clearly signalled their determination to line up alongside a Labor-Greens government against the working class.

One feature of the regroupment efforts of the pseudo-lefts has been their adamant refusal to say a single word on any political issue of relevance beyond the state boundaries of Victoria.

The accelerating trade war between the US and China, the growing danger of war between the world’s leading powers, Australian military backing for the US, the Trump administration’s attacks on refugees and

immigrants, the rise of fascistic forces in Europe, the further US onslaught in the Middle East and the US-led persecution of Julian Assange—none of these issues have prompted a single statement by the Victorian Socialists.

This silence represents more than a mere opportunistic attempt to present a “realistic” appeal on “local issues”—which itself amounts to nothing more than an effort to revive parliamentary reformist illusions. The pseudo-lefts promote pro-imperialist politics, with Socialist Alternative, one of the main groups behind the Victoria Socialists, serving for years as the cheerleader for the US-led regime change drive in Syria.

The Victorian Socialists’ silence on the international issues confronting the working class has not prevented them from securing the backing of pseudo-left figureheads around the world. This includes Britain’s Tariq Ali, who famously dedicated a book to Boris Yeltsin while hailing the “socialist” credentials of Mikhail Gorbachev as capitalism was being forcibly restored in the Soviet Union through the looting and sell-off of public assets.

The Victorian Socialists’ campaign has been likewise endorsed as “one of the encouraging developments that offer some hope” by American academic Noam Chomsky—who for more than a decade has promoted every right-wing, militarist Democratic Party candidate running for president.

Workers and young people looking to take up the fight for socialism need to reject the fake leftism of the Victorian Socialists and all their pseudo-left accomplices and instead turn to the revolutionary and internationalist perspective that is advanced by the Socialist Equality Party.



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