

Victorian Socialists' fake-left election campaign

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Victorian Socialists, an electoral front of different pseudo-left organisations formed last year, is contesting three lower house electorates in Australia's second largest city, Melbourne, for the May 18 federal election.

Its campaign is a fraud from start to finish. Backed by significant trade union funding, and encouraged by Labor and Greens voting preference deals, Victorian Socialists are tied by a thousand strings to the political establishment. Instead of representing a left-wing alternative to the ruling class, the electoral organisation marks the further development of the pseudo-left groups into open apologists of Labor, Greens and the unions.

The campaign constitutes a political diversion aimed at channelling the left-wing shift among workers and young people back behind the parliamentary set-up and blocking the emergence of the internationalist and revolutionary movement needed to fight against capitalism.

Victorian Socialists comprise Socialist Alternative, which had close relations with the recently dissolved International Socialist Organisation in the United States, and Socialist Alliance, largely made up of what was once the Democratic Socialist Party. The electoral front is fielding candidates in northern Melbourne—Socialist Alternative's Jerome Small in Calwell, Socialist Alliance's Sue Bolton in Wills, and Kath Larkin, billed as a “rank and file leader with the Rail, Tram and Bus Union,” in Cooper (formerly Batman).

The campaign comes after last November's state election in Victoria, in which the newly-formed Victorian Socialists failed in its aim to secure a Victorian upper house seat for Stephen Jolly. He is a Yarra City council member and former leader of the

Socialist Party, affiliated with the British-based Committee for a Workers' International.

The three candidates are campaigning on the basis of an election platform comprising the thin gruel of parochial politics and trade unionism, mixed with nationalism and parliamentary cretinism.

At the organisation's April 6 campaign launch, none of the three candidates raised a single political issue beyond the shores of Australia. Trump and the re-emergence of fascism around the world, the growing global economic crisis, and the threat of a US-led war against China were all entirely ignored. Instead, the different candidates advanced various policy proposals on climate change and the environment, jobs and workplace rights, and related economic and social issues within the boundaries of their three electorates.

Not a single problem confronting working people, however, no matter how “local” it may initially appear, can be resolved within the state or national framework.

The Victorian Socialists have remained silent on the April 11 arrest of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange, which represents a major assault on the democratic rights of the working class. His threatened extradition to the US on trumped-up charges that could see the Australian citizen imprisoned for life or executed is a non-issue as far as Victorian Socialists are concerned.

This stance is consistent with the open embrace of imperialist war by Socialist Alternative. Cheering on the US-led regime-change operation in Syria, Socialist Alternative previously denounced “knee jerk anti-imperialism,” defended the “right” of the CIA to organise gun-running operations to Islamist militias fighting the Assad government, and hailed the provocative Turkish downing of a Russian jet in 2015 as a “small victory for humanity.”

Genuine socialism is internationalist and

revolutionary. The capitalist crisis can be resolved only by the working class on a global scale breaking with the old parties of the political establishment, building their own revolutionary party and fighting for the establishment of workers' governments implementing socialist policies.

This is the perspective of the Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, which is standing in the federal election, including in the state of Victoria, to help raise the consciousness of the working class in line with the political tasks now objectively posed before it.

Victorian Socialists' orientation was summed up by Sue Bolton at its campaign launch. "It is not a wasted vote to vote for a socialist," the candidate declared. "We know that when the socialists stand we push Labor and Greens to the left. We put serious pressure on them. We can actually have an impact on the political debate, to the left... It's the combination, the two [having a socialist in the parliament and social movements outside of parliament] that helps build the mass movements and creates the pressure on the parliament to concede to the demands."

This perspective has been advanced by the pseudo-left for decades and is entirely false. Labor and the Greens are moving, not to the left, but to the right. Far from conceding anything to the working class, the next federal parliament—regardless of whether the government comprises Labor, Liberal or Greens—will impose further inroads on workers' living standards and attacks on democratic rights.

Victorian Socialists' campaign promotes lingering illusions that there is some means of workers advancing their interests in the face of an escalating economic and social crisis through the parliamentary apparatus.

The attempt of the pseudo-lefts to bolster support for the Labor Party and Greens goes hand in hand with their desperate efforts to revive the influence of the trade union bureaucracy within the working class.

At a recent Socialist Alternative conference, Victorian Socialists' candidates Jerome Small and Kath Larkin expressed their alarm that the "Australian trade union movement is in crisis." Larkin described the decline in union membership to just 10 percent of the workforce as "an absolute travesty" and called for a "union revival."

Sections of the union bureaucracy, aiming to present

a "left" face, have donated tens of thousands of dollars to Victorian Socialists. This includes the Victorian branch of the Electrical Trades Union, which is financing the pseudo-left while re-affiliating to the Labor Party and promoting state Labor leader Daniel Andrews as the "greatest premier."

In Australia as internationally, the trade unions function as the enforcers of government-corporate attacks on jobs, wages, and conditions. The northern Melbourne working-class areas within the Calwell electorate have been devastated by decades of deindustrialisation that has involved the unions policing countless factory closures on behalf of the major corporations, ensuring that not a single struggle was held to defend workers' jobs.

The 2017 liquidation of the car industry was an operation carried out by the federal Liberal government and transnational auto producers, working hand in hand with the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and Electrical Trades Union. In areas like Broadmeadows, the result has been social devastation, with depression-level unemployment, officially registered at 25 percent.

Workers do not need to "revive" the unions but fight for the formation of rank-and-file committees in each workplace, independent of and in opposition to the trade union bureaucracies. The positions of Victorian Socialists reflect not theoretical "mistakes" but rather the material interests of middle-class strata—especially within the union bureaucracy, the universities, and professions. Around the world, the pseudo-left have lurched to the right as workers and young people are moving to the left.

Workers and young people seeking to take up a struggle against capitalism should reject the fake left campaign of Victorian Socialists and instead support the only party fighting for genuine socialist internationalism, the Socialist Equality Party.



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