

Strong response to SEP's socialist program at final election meetings

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held successful public meetings this week in working-class electorates in Sydney, Cessnock, Melbourne and Brisbane where the party is running candidates in this year's federal election. The SEP has a total of eight candidates—four for Senate positions and four for lower house seats.

The events, which were the final meetings in the SEP's federal election campaign, were attended by an important cross-section of workers, professionals, young people, students and retirees.

All the party's candidates addressed the meetings, provoking serious discussions on the party's socialist and anti-war program and its role in the international campaign for the release of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange and US whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

The Sydney meeting, which was held in Merrylands was addressed by Oscar Grenfell, the SEP's candidate for the lower house seat of Parramatta; Richard Phillips, the party's New South Wales Senate candidate; and long-standing SEP National Committee member Nick Beams.

In Melbourne, Peter Byrne, the SEP candidate for Calwell spoke, along with Tessa Pietsch and Jason Wardle, who are both running for the Senate, and SEP National Committee member Linda Tenenbaum.

Max Boddy, the SEP's candidate for the Hunter electorate, addressed the Cessnock meeting as did John Davis, who is running for the Senate, and SEP Assistant National Secretary Cheryl Crisp. In Brisbane, Mike Head, the party's candidate for Oxley, and Michael Smith, a young working-class SEP member, spoke.

The SEP's lower house candidates gave detailed reports on the desperate social conditions, rising poverty and increasingly polluted and unhealthy environment facing workers and youth—the result of the

big business programs of Liberal-National and Labor governments alike.

Audiences listened intently as the candidates detailed how these attacks had been imposed by the unions and why the SEP was the only party in the elections telling the truth—that there is no basis for piecemeal reform of the profit system.

The only way to fight these attacks, the speakers warned, was through the independent mobilisation of the working class against capitalism and on the basis of the socialist and internationalist program advanced by the SEP and its Trotskyist co-thinkers in the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Addressing the Cessnock meeting, SEP assistant national secretary Cheryl Crisp reviewed the international context in which the Australian election was being held and, in particular the Trump administration's trade war threats against China.

The US is demanding China become an economic semi-colony of the United States and that this onslaught is not confined to China, she said. "History has shown where this leads. It is the road to war—world war, which could involve the use of nuclear weapons and we are already well down this road," she added.

"The anti-China witch-hunts stoked in Australia by the Coalition government, and supported by Labor, are part of the preparations by the political elite for war. The glorification of ANZAC Day is part of the same process.

"The foreign interference laws, bulldozed through parliament last year and supported by Labor, could be deployed to criminalise anti-war activities, to persecute political organisations with international affiliations, and to suppress whistleblowers and journalists who expose government crimes, Crisp said.

At the Merrylands meeting, Oscar Grenfell, who

joined the SEP when he was at high school and is the national convenor of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, warned that the Labor Party, the unions and the entire political establishment were attempting to hoodwink the population while preparing for even-deeper austerity measures.

“To head off the upheavals that are brewing, and to divert workers behind the political establishment, Labor is making a phony populist pitch. If one examines any of their spending promises, it is clear that they are just smoke and mirrors. Almost all of Labor’s health funding pledges, for instance, are over six years, meaning that it’s entirely possible not a cent of the money will ever go to a hospital...

“After the election, we can anticipate a period of social and political upheaval. Australia is not exceptional. The mass struggles of the working class that are emerging in Europe and the US will find their expression here, sooner rather than later. The critical issue is to build a revolutionary leadership in the working class, to guide these struggles and take them forward to fight for a workers’ government and socialism,” said.

Also addressing the Merrylands meeting, Nick Beams, a longstanding member of the SEP National Committee, referred to government and big business concerns about the increasing hostility of masses of people to capitalism.

This leftward shift, he continued, was manifested in the new wave of working-class strikes globally and organised in opposition to the trade union apparatuses.

“Objective processes, resulting from the veritable breakdown of the capitalist mode of production, are driving masses of people into struggle,” he said.

The response of the ruling elites everywhere, he said, was to promote extreme right-wing politics and fascist elements, and step up direct attacks on democratic rights. The escalating assault on basic rights is personified by the persecution of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning, he added.

The speaker explained that the SEP’s election intervention was to prepare the working class for the tumultuous struggles that would erupt in the aftermath of the election. He pointed to the attempts of pseudo-left organisations, such as the Victorian Socialists, to promote illusions in Labor and the unions and keep workers and youth trapped within the stranglehold of

parliamentary politics.

He warned that deep-felt hostility to the existing order could only go forward if guided by a worked-out revolutionary perspective. “Workers need a program, but that does not arise spontaneously, no matter how great the intensity of the hostility to capitalism and the extent of the movement against it.

“The so-called ‘excesses’ of capitalism,” he said, “are not like warts on a face which can be simply cut off while leaving the basic structure in place. They are endemic to the very operation of a system which has, as Trotsky explained, has entered its death agony, and which will drag mankind into the abyss if it is not overturned by the working class.”

Extended question and answer sessions followed all the meeting reports. Audience members raised a range of issues, including how to fight the attack on democratic rights; union corruption; the situation confronting Assange and Manning and how to win young people to the revolutionary party.

A number of people volunteered to distribute SEP material on election day. More than \$2,200 was donated to the party’s election fund at last week’s meetings, an important indication of the serious response by audiences and bringing the total collected at public meetings to over \$5,000 during the brief three-week election campaign.

The authors also recommend:

Workers and youth discuss Julian Assange, social conditions and war at SEP election meetings
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