

Socialist Equality Party statement for the Australian election

A socialist program of action for the working class to oppose war and fight COVID-19 and austerity

Socialist Equality Party Australia
13 April 2022

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is standing candidates in the 2022 election to advance a socialist program of action for workers to fight for their class interests against the relentless assault on their basic social and democratic rights.

The source of this assault is the historic breakdown of the global capitalist system manifested in the unchecked spread of COVID-19, the growing danger of world war, the continual evisceration of social spending and wages, and the ravages of climate change.

The issue before the working class in Australia and internationally is the fight to end the capitalist profit system which dominates over and determines every aspect of the lives of working people.

Consequently, we are irreconcilably opposed to every other party—the Liberal-National Coalition, the Labor Party, the Greens, the United Australia Party and pseudo-left parties such as Socialist Alliance and the Victorian Socialists—as well as the array of so-called “independent” candidates who seek to curry favour with the major parties, all within the framework of the political establishment. All of them stand for the defence of the profit system.

This election takes place in conditions of mounting anger and frustration, with support for the Liberal-National Coalition and the Labor opposition at record lows. The campaign of diversionary point scoring, phony promises and invective has one aim: to divert attention from the real issues.

Whatever the shape of the next government—Coalition, Labor or a minority government backed by various independents—it will make the working class pay for the huge budget deficits and spiralling government debt created by pouring billions into military spending and big-business pandemic support packages. In fact, Labor leader Anthony Albanese is signaling to the ruling class that Labor is the better party to take the country to war and impose austerity.

The Greens are again pledging a greener, kinder Australia with limited policies that they will quite happily ditch to enter a coalition—with Labor or Liberal—as they did in supporting the Gillard Labor government. The billionaire Clive Palmer is spending his millions on TV ads to present himself as a man of the people and get the jump on his rival right-wing populists Pauline Hanson and Jacqui Lambie.

A particularly pernicious role is played the pseudo-left parties. They function to corral the emerging anti-capitalist sentiment and combativeness of workers and young people back behind the very parties and organisations responsible for the crisis—Labor, the Greens and the trade unions. Far from being socialist in any sense, they represent the interests of an upper middle-class layer steeped in the divisive and regressive politics of identity based on race and ethnicity, sexuality and

gender.

None of these parties is addressing the real concerns and fears of working people or offering any solution to the excruciating daily difficulties facing millions struggling to make ends meet. There is a conspiracy by the media and political establishment not to discuss the major dangers facing humanity and the future of young people in particular—the pandemic, war climate change and the worsening social crisis.

The COVID-19 disaster

The COVID pandemic is a devastating exposure of capitalism and the ruling classes around the world. Their governments have instituted the unscientific policy of “herd immunity” and let the deadly virus rip through the world’s population killing up to 20 million already and allowing the emergence of even more dangerous strains. It is a policy of wholesale murder that serves the needs of big business to drive workers back into the factories and workplaces to ensure the continued production of profits.

Australia is no exception. State and federal governments began the reckless lifting of the limited public health measures put in place at the start of the pandemic in December just as the highly infectious Omicron variant was taking hold. Infections, hospitalisations and deaths soared. Schools and workplaces have been turned into mass infection sites. Yet governments and the media insist that people have to live with the virus and act as if the pandemic is over.

Everyone knows it is a lie. Everyone knows at least one person who has been infected, and in some cases, someone who has died. Almost five million people have been infected in the past few months. More than 4,000 people have died of the virus so far this year, nearly double the figure in the first two years of the pandemic.

The responsibility for the catastrophe lies squarely with all parties. Coalition and Labor governments have conspired in the unconstitutional National Cabinet to lift necessary public health measures and unleash the virus. No one has stood up in any parliament to criticise or challenge the policy, let alone demand the prosecution of those responsible for criminal negligence.

The SEP and its sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) champion the scientifically based strategy to eliminate the virus. China has demonstrated that elimination is possible,

but it cannot be achieved in one country. Internationally-coordinated public health measures are needed.

The rising danger of nuclear war

Workers have a growing sense of foreboding as they watch nuclear-armed powers go head-to-head in Ukraine. Many are distrustful of the daily deluge of propaganda demonising Russian President Vladimir Putin while portraying the right-wing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as the defender of freedom and democracy. We have seen it all before—in the US-led wars in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya.

What is behind the US drive to war with Russia? In response to the global breakdown of capitalism, the ruling classes everywhere have only one solution: war against their rivals and class war against the working class.

The most acute expression of the crisis lies at the very heart of world imperialism in Washington. Confronting social and political turmoil at home, the Biden administration has brought forward longstanding plans to subordinate Russia and also China in order to arrest America's historic decline. It has deliberately goaded Putin into a reactionary and reckless war, calculating it will create chaos in Moscow and facilitate the breakup and US domination of Russia. The chief responsibility for this war rests squarely with the US and its allies that are funneling mountains of arms into Ukraine.

At the same time, the US has not let up pressure, threats and provocations against China in which Australia is playing a central role. The Morrison government with Labor's full support joined the AUKUS pact with the US and United Kingdom last September. The military are now acquiring nuclear-powered attack submarines and hypersonic missile. There is bipartisan support for a military budget of over \$600 billion this decade. Who will pay this gargantuan sum? Inevitably it will be the working class.

The SEP and the ICFI oppose the Russian invasion of Ukraine, not from the standpoint of supporting the NATO puppet Zelensky, but because it is sowing divisions between Ukrainian and Russian workers. Only a unified anti-war movement of the international working class can halt this reckless plunge towards a nuclear catastrophe. Having sacrificed millions of lives to COVID, the US and its allies will not hesitate to kill many millions more in a nuclear conflagration to prosecute their interests.

Oppose the agenda of austerity

An immense gulf exists between working people and the world inhabited by politicians, media personalities and trade union functionaries who rub shoulders with corporate executives and billionaires. They have no idea what it is like to face the excruciating choices between paying the rent or mortgage, seeing a doctor or putting food on the table.

There are literally two Australias. Last year the wealth of the richest 250 Australians increased by \$50 billion, to a staggering \$520 billion, while wages stagnated, unemployment became more uncertain and government pensions and benefits declined in real terms.

This situation will only get worse. Inflation is rising around the world, including in Australia, driven by the economic dislocation caused by the pandemic and now the Ukraine war. The answer of central banks backed by government is to lift interest rates hitting workers with a double whammy—rising mortgage repayments and rent as well as rising prices for

goods. Inflation here has already hit 3.5 percent, but for food and fuel is growing at more than 10 percent.

The contempt of governments, state and federal, for working people is epitomised by their response to the recent harrowing scenes of flooding in Lismore and other areas. Morrison visited Lismore, hid from angry residents and told the city that it was on its own: you cannot expect government help the victims of floods, bushfires and cyclones—it is too costly.

Climate change

Extreme weather events such as flood and bushfires are becoming increasingly common. While the connection to individual events is complex, no one can doubt that climate change is the basic driver of new extremes in temperature and climatic instability, nor that greenhouse gases are chiefly responsible. Yet for decades, governments have fiddled with patently inadequate policies and market-based measures, while the planet has baked. Already scientists are warning that we are on the brink of irreversible changes that threaten the future of humanity.

None of the other parties, including the Greens, has a solution. Their policies are limited to what is possible within the framework of the profit system and the national state, and are therefore piecemeal, parochial and based on the market. But capitalism and its division of the world into rival nation states are the essential barrier to the only real solution: a scientifically-based and internationally coordinated plan to halt and reverse climate change.

Defend democratic rights and free Julian Assange

The capitalist agenda of social inequality and war is incompatible with democratic forms of rule. Under various pretexts, Coalition and Labor have collaborated in undermining basic democratic rights and legal norms and erecting the scaffolding of a police state that will be used against the working class.

The attack on democratic rights is most nakedly expressed in the endless incarceration of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, an Australian citizen, for exposing the war crimes and diplomatic intrigues perpetrated by the US and its allies. The SEP will continue to take the fight for Assange's freedom into the working class, making it a central feature of our election campaign.

The entire repressive apparatus of the capitalist state, its security forces and battery of anti-democratic laws must be abolished, including the party deregistration legislation and the laws barring dual citizens from standing for parliament.

What does the Socialist Equality Party propose?

Decades of abject treachery and betrayal by the trade unions and the Labor Party have led to growing anger, frustration, and rebelliousness towards organisations that are a barrier to any struggle by workers for their class interests. New workers' organisations, independent of unions and guided by a revolutionary perspective, are needed. As a unified fighting force that understands what must be done, the working class is

more than capable of refashioning society globally from top to bottom to meet the needs of humanity. That is the essence of the fight for socialist internationalism that has terrified the ruling classes ever since it was first developed.

Our campaign is above all aimed at providing workers with the political weapons and organisational means to fight for their interests. After decades of its suppression by the union apparatus, the class struggle is re-emerging in Australia. Nurses and other health workers in New South Wales have shown the way forward, taking their first strike action in over a decade, while teachers, rail workers and a number of other key sections of the working class are engaged in industrial disputes over wages and intolerable working conditions.

These strikes are part of the first stirrings of an international movement that has already seen strikes and mass protests in Sri Lanka, India and Peru as well as through the Middle East and parts of Africa over surging prices for food and fuel and acute shortages. In North America and Europe, workers have increasingly taken strike action, in some cases in open defiance of the trade unions.

The SEP has initiated rank-and-file committees among teachers, university staff, postal workers and health workers, independent of the trade unions, to provide the basis to fight the onslaught on their jobs, wages and conditions. We encourage workers to form democratically elected rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace and working-class suburb as the means to break out of the shackles of the trade unions and to advance their class demands.

Trade unions no longer defend even the most elementary needs of workers but function as the industrial police for governments and corporations to suppress workers. They rely on the draconian Fair Work legislation put in place by the last Labor government, and supported by the unions, to stand over and menace workers. The abolition of all anti-strike laws needs to be an elementary demand of all rank-and-file committees.

The unification of the working class is the essential means to halt the drive to war, eliminate COVID-19 or arrest climate change. To unify workers, all forms of racism and nationalism must be rejected, and the persecution of refugees and immigrants opposed. Workers must be able to live and work wherever they want with full citizenship rights.

We advance the following demands to meet the pressing needs of working people:

- An immediate rise in all pay to compensate for past erosion. Index all wages to the current cost of living and introduce an automatic monthly cost of living adjustment to keep pace with rising expenses.
- A full-time, permanent job on decent wages and conditions for all who want one. Proper wages and conditions for all part-time and casual workers, including those in the so-called “gig economy.” End mandatory overtime, crushing workloads and speedups.
- A living wage for all those unable to work. End poverty-level payments to the elderly, disabled, and unemployed. Abolish all “mutual obligation” requirements and other degrading measures imposed by Centrelink.
- Emergency spending measures to eliminate the appalling social conditions confronting Aboriginal people, as a consequence of Australian capitalism’s destruction of traditional indigenous societies.
- End the super-exploitation of young people as cheap casual and contract labor. Immediately cancel all student debt. Provide well-paid high-quality traineeships and apprenticeships.
- Mandatory public health measures in every workplace to help stamp out COVID, including the provision of free N95 masks and PCR tests. Workers not management must decide what is safe. Reinstitute contact tracing, expand isolation and treatment and lockdown of areas of high infection to stop the spread of the virus.
- A vast expansion of public works to provide jobs and repair the

damage done by decades of funding cuts to the public health and education systems. Tens of billions must be allocated to upgrading and staffing schools and hospitals and building new ones to provide free, high quality health care and education to all.

- Upgrade and extend public transport. Reliable high-speed telecommunications for all, including rural and remote areas.
- A vast expansion of public housing is needed to end homelessness as part of a broader program to provide affordable housing for all.
- Take the military out of civilian affairs. Establish a fully funded and staffed national disaster agency to take the necessary steps to prepare for floods and fires, prevent them if possible, and respond immediately if need be. Full income support for those impacted and adequate financial assistance to help them reconstruct their lives.

A hue and cry will immediately go out from the financial press, corporate CEOs and their political servants: This is unaffordable. But the working class, the source of all wealth in society, must decide what is affordable and what is not.

Nationalise the banks, finance houses and major corporations under the democratic control of the working class. Seize the colossal wealth of the billionaires. Place production and distribution under democratic workers’ control. Halt the squandering of billions on the military and weapons of war.

These demands inexorably lead to the issue of which class is to hold the reins of power. A workers’ government resting on organs created by the working class in its struggles has to be established to reorganise society along socialist lines as part of the fight for socialism internationally.

Build the Socialist Equality Party

The SEP is not like other parties. Our ambition is not to establish as many of our members as possible in comfortable seats in parliament. We are based on the principles of socialist internationalism that animated the Russian Revolution and the creation of the first and only genuine workers’ state in history. We also stand on the lessons of the political fight waged by Leon Trotsky against the betrayal of the Russian Revolution by the Stalinist bureaucracy that usurped power from the working class. We are part of an international party—the ICFI—that alone defends and fights for the program and perspective that underpinned the Fourth International founded by Trotsky in 1938.

The SEP calls on workers to vote for our candidates to demonstrate their support for a socialist alternative. None of the issues confronting workers can be resolved through parliament. But if elected, our candidates will use parliament to expose the institution and the grubby manoeuvres of capitalist politicians, and to popularise our program to a broader audience of the working class.

We urge workers and youth to support our campaign in every way they can. But above all what is needed for the struggles ahead is revolutionary leadership. The history of the last century has demonstrated again and again that without a revolutionary party even the most sizeable and militant of movements of workers ends in defeat. We urge you to join and build the SEP as a mass revolutionary party of the workers.

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