

The Socialist Equality Party launches Australian election campaign

Our reporter
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) began its Australian federal election campaign on Monday with a powerful and well-attended online public meeting with participants from across the country, as well as New Zealand, Vietnam and Germany.

The SEP is running six candidates in the May 21 election: SEP assistant national secretary Max Boddy and WSWs writer Oscar Grenfell in New South Wales, long-time party member Peter Byrne and an International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) leader Jason Wardle in Victoria, and WSWs correspondent Mike Head and another IYSSE leader, John Davis, in Queensland.

The launch was chaired by SEP national secretary Cheryl Crisp and addressed by party candidates Mike Head and Max Boddy, as well as Deepal Jayasekera, the assistant national secretary of the SEP in Sri Lanka.

The over two-hour meeting included an extended question and answer session, a rudimentary democratic framework never observed by Liberal and National, Labor or Greens party candidates in the election, let alone in the trade unions.

A full video of the event, with speakers in separate designated chapters and including photos, graphs and other images, is available below. We urge readers to share the video widely on social media, discuss the party's election program with colleagues, friends and relatives and contact the SEP to assist in the campaign.

SEP national secretary Cheryl Crisp opened the meeting, reminding participants about the anti-democratic election laws rushed through parliament last year which led to the deregistration of 13 political parties, including the Socialist Equality Party. This meant, she explained, that the party was required to provide 600 unique nominees for its Senate candidates in this election.

"In a little over a week we won 750 signatures to secure above the line group placing. The response to our call for signatures from our supporters and on street campaigns was enthusiastic, not just to our democratic right to stand, important as that is but that socialist candidates would be represented," she said.

"This a crisis election like no other in living memory and is being held under conditions of the greatest health and social crisis since WWI. Capitalism has brought the world to the brink of catastrophe," Crisp said, and was a system "incompatible" with human life.

"There are two alternatives open to the working class in this country and globally: either accept capitalism and its future, which will include the imposition of fascist and right-wing forms of rule, or the fight for a socialist society in which production is planned and organised not for the wealth of the tiny few but for society as a whole," she said.

SEP (Sri Lanka) assistant national secretary Deepal Jayasekera, the first speaker, explained that the ongoing mass protests against President Gotabhaya Rajapakse, and his government, had erupted over shortages and high prices for food, fuel, medicines and other essential items and lengthy daily electricity power blackouts. "Among the poorest layers of the population, hunger and starvation are looming," he said.

The political turmoil confronting the Rajapakse government and bourgeois rule in Sri Lanka, he continued, is driven by the global crisis of capitalism which dramatically escalated with the COVID-19 pandemic and then the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. "The very acute social tensions that have been building up over years can explode onto the surface of political life very quickly," he said.

The SEP was intervening to take the mass opposition beyond calling for Rajapakse's removal. What is

required, he said, is a mass movement of the working class and independent action committees to urgently address the needs of the masses. This requires a socialist and internationalist program, including nationalisation of the banks and big corporations, the repudiation of all foreign debts and the rejection of IMF and World Bank austerity measures.

Addressing the meeting, Mike Head, said: “It would be a mistake for anyone to think that the situation in Sri Lanka is confined to the island state” and pointed to the mounting political disaffection and frustration with the Liberal-National Coalition and the Labor Party in Australia.

The official election campaign in Australia, he continued, was “a conspiracy by the entire media and political establishment to cover up the major dangers facing ordinary people, and the future of workers and young people in particular—the COVID-19 pandemic, war, climate change and the worsening social crisis... It is no accident that the war has been placed front and centre of the election this weekend,” he said.

Head referred to Defence Minister Peter Dutton’s warmongering against China, including his claims that China was preparing chemical attacks against an Australian city. Labor’s response, the speaker said, was to outdo the Coalition’s war rhetoric.

“Labor has agreed with the AUKUS treaty, the acquisition of nuclear submarines and the siting of hypersonic missiles in Australia. This marks an historic turn toward open preparations for a US-led war against China,” he said.

The SEP is the only party in these elections opposing the explosion of militarism and war, including Australia’s frontline participation in the US-led war drive. “The Greens and the pseudo-left groups, which once postured as opponents of US wars, have all lined up behind the confrontations with Russia and China,” he continued, stressing that the SEP was the only party in the election fighting for the immediate release of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

“The Greens and various independents offer no alternative. They are capitalist outfits, all seeking to do a deal to prop up a Labor or Coalition government. The Greens are pitching to form another de facto government with a minority Labor administration, as they did with Gillard’s in 2010,” he said.

Max Boddy, the final speaker, explained the

devastating impact of the “let it rip” COVID-19 policies of Australian federal and state governments, Liberal and Labor alike. He detailed the escalating social assault on jobs, wages and living standards of the working class, and the trade unions’ role enforcing these cost-cutting measures.

Boddy reviewed the SEP’s program of action and explained the necessity for workers to establish democratically controlled rank-and-file committees to fight for an independent movement of the working class on a socialist program. “The unification of workers is essential to end the COVID-19 pandemic, halt the drive to war and reverse the decades-long assault on job conditions,” he said.

“While the financial elite will cry there is no money for our demands, it is the working class, which is the source of all wealth in society, that must decide what is affordable and what is not.

“The colossal wealth of the billionaires and major bank and corporations must put under the democratic control of the working class, Boddy said, and appealed for all in attendance to support the SEP’s election campaign and apply to join the party.

The meeting continued with a lengthy question and answer session and a collection of \$4,000 to the SEP’s Election Fund. Wide-ranging questions about the SEP’s principles, the political role and nature of the Labor Party, the Ukraine war and danger of WWII and nuclear conflict, and the situation in Sri Lanka, were carefully answered by SEP candidates and other party members.

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