

SEP (Australia) election campaigners find widespread opposition to inequality and cost of living crisis in Queensland

Our reporters
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Socialist Equality Party (SEP) campaigners are finding widespread concern about the soaring cost of living, unaffordable housing and unsafe working conditions, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, police violence and the danger of world war. The popular sentiments are at odds with the right-wing campaigns for the May 21 election being run by Labor, the Liberal-Nationals and all the other parliamentary parties.

In the north-eastern state of Queensland, the SEP is standing in the Senate. Its candidates are Mike Head, a longstanding leader of the party and contributor to the WSWS, along with John Davis, who plays a prominent role in the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, the SEP's youth movement.

Over recent days, the SEP has campaigned near Inala in Brisbane's western suburbs.

Together with surrounding areas, Inala has high levels of unemployment and increasingly unaffordable private rental housing. It is home to a diverse working-class population, including indigenous people, Pacific islanders and immigrants from throughout Asia and the Middle East.

It is also an industrial area, featuring an Australian Post distribution centre, supermarket warehouses, a Volvo truck plant and a Primo meat facility.

The SEP is focussing its election campaign in such working-class communities, which are being severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the soaring cost of living.

Asked for her thoughts on the election, **Shannon**, a young indigenous worker, told Head: "I'm worried. I'm pretty appalled at the pissing contest between Labor and Liberal as to who can be more evil, particularly around issues with refugees.

"I really want to see the prison system and the police

system abolished because there is too much police brutality. There are too many deaths in custody. Nothing's being done about it, and that needs to be a priority, and I'm not seeing that as a priority from any of the parties.

"I'm a proud indigenous woman and I see the black deaths in custody as appalling and I want to see something done about that. Also the working class seems to be forgotten a lot of the time. We still have issues of homelessness and things like that. We have enough houses. There is enough housing. In my hometown there are so many houses empty or Airbnb.

"Things like Airbnb have made it really hard for people to access housing. None of the parties are looking at housing affordability. They say they are, but I'm yet to see any action, so that is disappointing for me. House prices, rents are just going up and up, and wages are not going up at the same rate. So housing instability is getting worse and worse, particularly since the pandemic hit."

Speaking about the rising cost of food, Shannon said: "When you look at remote Aboriginal communities, it's \$6 for a can of tuna. It's an absolute crime. It's appalling that they put the prices up, just because they can, because there's nowhere else for those people to go to buy food.

"It's just getting worse and worse. We are seeing more and more people living in poverty, and living with a lot of food instability and housing instability."

Shannon denounced government policy on the COVID-19 pandemic. "We're forgetting immunocompromised people, people with disabilities, the elderly, and poorer people who can't access medical assistance. Our government has forgotten vulnerable people in the name of getting travel and tourism back up and running.

"My mum's a teacher and they have 400 kids away in one week at her school because of COVID. She's got to

go to work every single day and be exposed and she's really worried. She's 60 now and pretty healthy but her parents are quite elderly so she's always conscious about going to visit them in case she transmits COVID to them. So people are unable to visit their families, and things like that because our government is not taking things seriously. To have 400 kids away out of a school of about 3,000 is pretty hectic."

Shannon was disgusted with the Labor Party. "There's always been that idea that Labor is the lesser of two evils but we're seeing, particularly in the lead-up to this election, that Labor is just as dismissive of human rights, like with refugees. I saw a tweet from the Labor Party saying they will send refugees back, they're all for detaining people and sending people back.

"We have enough room in this country to grant asylum to every single person seeking it. We have the resources, we have the money and we have the space. Most of the elders I speak to in the Aboriginal community are all for letting refugees come here, and call Australia home, but they're not being listened to either.

"I've seen as well that Labor supports Israel. We need to stand in solidarity with Palestinians, especially at this time when things are happening there, and we are not seeing that from Labor.

"My understanding is that the Australian government is obsessed with how they are viewed by the United States, and I feel that we don't really need their support. We don't need to be their bitch or deputy sheriff."

Andrew, a scaffolder and construction worker, spoke about the dangerous conditions that he and other workers are subjected to. "I'm working class and I want to make sure that when I go on a worksite Work Health and Safety is put in place so I can do my job and come home safe.

"The way it is now, I see nothing being done about it. Like you said, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. We are there slaving our backsides off every day. They're making bucket loads of money and we're getting minimum wage. How is that fair?"

Andrew said he had suffered a serious work injury. "I was scaffolding on a job site and I wasn't issued a harness for the morning. I said to the boss I wouldn't go up to the two-storey level until I got my harness, and he said, 'suck it up and get up there.' It was a wet day and five minutes later I slipped off and did my back in. I've been off work for three and a half months and I can't get back until at least the end of the year, which is another six to eight months.

"I should have said no, and quit, but you have to pay

your bills. As you said, take the money out of the hands of the wealthy. What are they going to do? What would they have to stand on? It's like wage slavery. The minimum wage is \$22 an hour and they can make thousands a day. Come on, how is that fair?"

Asked about what Labor and the Coalition were saying in the election campaign, Andrew said with disgust: "I don't listen to them any more. It's all about money. Business should not be just about money. What about your employees? What about your duty of care? Take the money out of it! Think about us. I am a family man. I have two young kids. I couldn't even do anything for them for two or three months, due to my back."

Asked about the trade unions, Andrew commented: "The unions are just a cover-up now I think. They put in claims and all sorts of things but they're not going to do anything. It's been years since we've heard anything back from them. As long as they have money in their pockets, they don't care."

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