Pseudo-left Socialist Alliance seeks to chain workers and youth to Labor and the Greens in Australian elections

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The Australian election campaign is characterised by a massive gulf between the political establishment and the sentiments of working people. There is a widespread anti-capitalist sentiment, and a growing layer of workers and young people are attracted to socialism.

Under these conditions, the crucial question is which party advances a genuine socialist perspective that represents the interests of the working class.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is standing candidates to provide the working class with a fighting socialist program of action directed against the official "let it rip" COVID policies, the onslaught on wages and conditions and the threat of nuclear war.

The SEP's campaign is aimed at establishing the political independence of the working class from all of the parties that defend capitalism—an essential premise if it is to wage a struggle for socialism.

In particular, any genuine socialist party must wage an intransigent political struggle to break workers from the Labor Party, which in the past claimed to represent the working-class, but has functioned throughout its history as the main bulwark of Australian capitalism. Similarly it must dispel any illusion that parties such as the Greens, which completely accept the framework of parliament and the profit system, offer any progressive alternative.

The campaign of Socialist Alliance, like other pseudo-left organisations, is based on a diametrically opposed perspective. Its aim is to channel the growing opposition of workers and young people back behind the discredited parties of the political establishment. Socialist Alliance promotes Labor and the Greens as a "lesser-evil" to the Liberal-National Coalition of Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

Socialist Alliance's program is summed up in one of its main election articles, which declared: "Kicking out Morrison and electing a minority Labor government dependent on Greens support on May 21 would open up opportunities to push harder for progressive reform." Workers and young people, Socialist Alliance states, should vote for these parties, and pressure the Greens to pressure Labor into enacting "progressive reform."

Socialist Alliance has advanced the same line in every election that it has contested. In the 2007 and 2010 elections, it called for workers and youth to "triple the value" of their vote by casting a ballot for Socialist Alliance and then directing preferences to the Greens and Labor. Then, as now, the pseudo-left party presented the elections as an opportunity to pressure the official parties into implementing "progressive policies."

What were the consequences, however? Between 2007 and 2013, the Labor governments of Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard, whose election Socialist Alliance supported, carried out sweeping attacks on the social rights of the working class, instituted the Fair Work Australia industrial relations framework that bans virtually all strikes and integrated more closely Australia into US war plans.

After the 2010 election, the minority Gillard Labor government struck a power-sharing arrangement with the Greens, establishing a de facto Labor-Greens government as Socialist Alliance had advocated. It was one of the most right-wing governments in Australian history.

Gillard, with the full support of the Greens, escalated Australia's involvement in the neo-colonial war in Afghanistan, committing to a troop surge and brutal "counter-insurgency" operations that resulted in war crimes. At the same time, the government supported the US-led persecution of Julian Assange for his exposure of the illegal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Gillard aligned Australia with the US preparations for conflict with China. In 2011, she welcomed US President Barack Obama into the Australian parliament where he announced the US "pivot to Asia" against China and signed a basing agreement for US Marines in northern Australia.

On the social front, the Labor-Greens government kicked 100,000 single parents off their benefits, forcing them onto the poverty-level unemployment allowance. It launched the "Education Revolution," aimed at opening up public education up to the full forces of the market and slashing government funding. Similar measures were introduced in health and the provision of disability services.

Far from pressuring Labor to the "left," the Greens loyally supported Gillard as she implemented all of these regressive policies. Withdrawing from the de facto coalition, they argued, would open the door to the Liberal-Nationals, so it was necessary to provide Labor with a blank cheque.

The Labor-Greens government that Socialist Alliance is advocating now would implement far deeper attacks on the social and democratic rights of working people because the capitalist

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system that they defend at all costs is in a far deeper crisis globally.

In this election, Labor is seeking to outflank the Coalition from the right. It is pitching itself to the financial elite as a more reliable instrument for implementing sweeping cuts to social spending and deepening pro-business restructuring of the economy. Labor has likewise condemned the Coalition for not building up the military as quickly as is required for an imminent US-led war with China.

The Greens campaign is solely focused on appeals to Labor to establish a power-sharing arrangement after the election, holding up the Gillard government as the model to be followed.

Socialist Alliance's election campaign is characterised by crass parliamentary cretinism. An inordinate amount of its campaign material is focused on explaining that casting a vote for Socialist Alliance is not a "wasted ballot," because people can direct then their preferences to the Greens and Labor.

In other words, Socialist Alliance is not standing in opposition to these right-wing parties of big business, but is seeking to channel leftward moving sections of workers and young people behind them.

Socialist Alliance similarly promotes the trade unions and insists that any struggle by workers must be subordinate to their bureaucratic leaderships. For the past forty years, the unions have enforced unending attacks on jobs, wages and conditions, while working with governments and the employers to suppress the class struggle.

Socialist Alliance's campaign material is parochial and dovetails with the official election campaign which is aimed at suppressing any discussion of the major issues confronting the working class.

It says virtually nothing about war under conditions of the reckless US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine threatening to escalate into a nuclear conflict. Like the pseudo-left as a whole, Socialist Alliance is a pro-imperialist organisation that has backed US regime-change operations in Syria and Libya. During the war in Ukraine it has called for unconditional support to Washington's far-right proxy government in Kiev.

Socialist Alliance occasionally mentions the COVID pandemic but it is silent on the central role of Labor and the Greens in enforcing the pro-business "reopening" of the economy, which has resulted in a massive surge of illness and death. Socialist Alliance never raises the need for a fight to eliminate the virus through the coordinated action of workers internationally, because this requires a political fight against Labor and the unions and the turn to a genuine socialist perspective.

Socialist Alliance, similarly, says virtually nothing about the unprecedented crisis of world capitalism or the emerging struggles of the international working class.

Its election program does not advocate socialism or the need for a workers' government, but instead it calls for "radical democracy" and "community power." These slogans, combined with denunciations of the rich and big business, are virtually indistinguishable from those of any number of populist demagogues.

Like them, Socialist Alliance is peddling the fraud that "democracy" is possible for working people in a capitalist society dominated by the banks, big business and the billionaires, and under conditions where basic democratic rights and legal norms have been under sustained attack by governments both Labor and Coalition.

Above all, the empty populism of Socialist Alliance is directed against the genuine socialist perspective advanced by the SEP. As the SEP has explained throughout the election, the working class must build its own international movement aimed at the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of world socialism as the sole means of preventing the threat of nuclear war and ending the pandemic.

The social and democratic rights of the working class can only be established through the overthrow of the profit system and the establishment of workers' political power. The banks and the corporations must be placed under ownership and democratic workers' control and society reorganised to meet social need, not private profit.

This perspective is anathema to the pseudo-left. Socialist Alliance represents an affluent layer of the upper middle-class in academia, the union bureaucracy and the top echelons of the public sector whose affluent lifestyles are based on the suppression of the class struggle, on the stock market boom and imperialist war.

Socialist Alliance promotes identity politics based on race, gender and sexuality, to divide the working class, suppress discussion of the major issues of war and capitalist crisis, and to advance the strivings of its middle-class constituency for greater privileges within the framework of capitalism.

Workers and young people seeking to fight for a genuine socialist perspective should reject pro-capitalist politics of the pseudo-left. Instead, we encourage you to support the SEP's campaign, vote for its candidates and apply to join the SEP to fight for a socialist future.

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