

Australian workers and young people voice their support for the Socialist Equality Party's election campaign

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) federal election campaign continues to gain support from workers and young people across New South Wales (NSW), Victoria and Queensland. The SEP is standing senate candidates in those states and urges all people to vote for them on election day May 21.

The SEP has campaigned in working-class suburbs, at factories, workplaces, universities and schools. In Victoria, SEP candidates Peter Byrne and Jason Wardle campaigned at JBS Swift meatworks, speaking to workers from the Solomon Islands, China, Vietnam, the UK, Ethiopia, India, Greece, Sudan and elsewhere about their working conditions, the elections and the threat of world war.

Below are some interviews gathered with workers and youth in recent weeks.

SEP campaigners in Newcastle spoke to **Gabe**, a 24-year-old who works at a major supermarket chain.

"My major concern is the rising cost of living. I've seen it go up the last 10 years to insane amounts. Wages just seem to stay the same," he said.

"I pay around \$500 a fortnight for a 1-bedroom apartment. I don't even live in the city, I live rurally, it's ridiculous. That said, I know someone who lives more rural than me who pays \$1,000 a fortnight for a two-bedroom apartment. This would have been unheard of ten years ago. All your money shouldn't go to rent.

"I get paid \$22 an hour and I have to work four or five times a week. I'd like to buy a house but it's hard to save and down payments for houses are around \$100,000," he said.

"I think the pandemic was handled badly. They took advantage of the whole lockdown situation. There should have been more support from the government, but they did nothing. I worked at a bar, and I lost my job so I went to get help from Centrelink but they told me I couldn't get anything.

"My parents helped me out in that time when I was unemployed for three months, which I was thankful for. If they hadn't, I don't know what I would have done."

"The reopening of the economy is more of a business opportunity. It isn't to help people. They didn't end the pandemic but reopened so they could get businesses running," he stated.

Gabe voiced his support for the SEP's socialist program of action. "I used to vote for major parties but what you put forward is a good program. You've taught me a lot today about what changes need to happen to get back on track for workers who need to be paid what they are supposed to be paid to live comfortable lives and not have to work every day just to be able to afford rent," he said.

Gary is a visual artist who lives in Mallacoota, a small town in Victoria's East Gippsland region. He attended the SEP's election public meeting on May 15.

"I've been a Labor voter all my life and Sunday was the first time I've ever sat in on a socialist meeting," he said.

"I'm saddened by the lack of principle of the major parties, hence my interest in the Socialist Equality Party. I think the treatment of Julian Assange is completely wrong. He exposed war crimes and they're treating him inhumanely. The propaganda for war never stops and he has suffered so much.

"I was actually politicised by the Vietnam War. I saw the way the US and the global elite run the world for their own profit at every level.

"The rules-based system that is propagated is a lie. The US have THAAD missiles lined up against North Korea, NATO has more than doubled in size etc. They don't talk about 1.4 million Iraqi people dying or the devastation in Libya and Yemen."

"I'm really interested in politics and I'm sympathetic to the ideas that you put forward of unity on Sunday. My oath, I will be voting for the Socialist Equality Party on Saturday," he said.

Himashi is originally from Sri Lanka and is working and studying childcare. She told SEP campaigners in Parramatta, “I’ve been here for two years and 6 months now. When I arrived in Australia I thought it was a wonderful country, but I’ve seen so many problems and I think that the pressures are just the same as in my country.”

“Even though we are in a pandemic everyone must work to live. Parents have pressures on their shoulders so they can’t stop working and because of that they must send their children to day-care which makes them, and the staff, vulnerable. It’s the pressure from the government. It’s inhumane. I thought it was only in a poor country like Sri Lanka that such pressures exist, but I see them in a well-developed country like Australia as well,” she said.

“In Sri Lanka they have different laws for the rich. There’s one family ruling the country, the Rajapakse family. It’s so devastating to watch because even though I’m here, my whole family is in Sri Lanka. Poor people are struggling to live from one day to another. The people have not caused any violence. It is the government that has carried out violence. If you look at the photos online, you see how peaceful the protests are. They were creative, the youth came together, and it was unity. It was the corrupted politicians who brought the thugs in,” she stated.

“My mum is still working—she works for Sri Lanka telecom, a government company and she’s a manager. We used to live in a good position but now, with the economy and everything being so expensive, they don’t earn enough to live. Even simple things like soap are very expensive. Soap was previously 70 rupees, now it’s 170 to 180 rupees.”

SEP candidate Max Boddy spoke to **Zara**, a journalism student at Western Sydney University. “The rising fuel costs are having a real impact. My wages aren’t increasing with the costs of groceries and everyday living. I am a renter, in a three-bedroom house. I share with my mum and sister,” she said.

“Me and mum split the rent, which is \$375 each a week, but it’s not a very big house. Then the cost of living is going up, so fruit, vegetables, milk, everything you buy from the supermarket costs more.

“My mum is a teacher, but her wages haven’t gone up since 1985. She’s struggling. I work casually as a retail assistant. On top of full-time study, I need to work 30 hours a week to afford to live.

“It stressful and hard to balance. With full-time study they recommend 10 hours a week for each unit and I’m doing four units. It takes a toll on my mental health. It is the same for other students, it’s the same theme. I have recently had to cut back on work hours to keep up with my studies.

“Then I have to dip into my savings if I don’t make enough money. It is a worry in the back of my mind, do I

have enough money to pay for fuel, for my phone bill?

“I spend a lot of money, roughly \$60 a week in fuel, \$200 a week for food and \$375 for rent. Talking to you now, adding it up in my head, the amount of money we spend is crazy. Sometimes I skip breakfast. I don’t socialise as much, it’s too expensive to go out. I haven’t seen my friends in a long time.”

“Big business, they are still doing fine. The rich are still rich,” she stated.

“I’ve heard the cost of living is going up because of the war in the Ukraine, but I don’t trust we are getting told the truth from the government or the news. Something needs to be done.

“You hear both parties talk about different issues. But I haven’t heard anything focused on young people, including the climate crisis, which is a big push from us as we think about the future. What are we meant to do? The future isn’t looking like it will be very long, it’s a bit bleak. I want to be a bit more optimistic, but it is hard at this point,” she stated.

Commenting on the recent NSW teachers’ strike, Zara said, “It’s very important they struck and I’m proud of my mum for striking. I know that she and her colleagues are struggling with the workload. Teachers are out sick with COVID, there are more students these days. They don’t have enough funding or time to catch up on their own classes, let alone the classes that they’re trying to cover.”

“Their wages have not increased since the 1980s. They’re literally teaching the kids of the future and I don’t understand why the government wouldn’t support them,” she said.

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