

Why young people should support the SEP (Australia) election campaign

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Australia)

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Last month, a poll by Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Triple J radio station revealed that Australian youth are increasingly engaged in politics but despise the politicians of the major parties.

The result refutes the claim that young people are politically apathetic. Declining support for the major political parties—the Liberal-National Coalition and Labor alike—is the result of growing concern among youth over the rising cost of living, joblessness and existential threats, such as climate change and war. There is a sense among young Australians, as is the case among youth internationally, that capitalism and all the political parties and structures that defend it, including parliament, offer them nothing.

What is the way forward for young people? The elections will not resolve a thing. Regardless of which party (or parties) forms government after May 21, they will deepen the assault on the conditions of the entire working class. The capitalist Labor and Greens parties do not represent a “lesser evil.”

Replacing the right-wing, pro-business Liberal-National Coalition government of Scott Morrison with the equally right-wing and big business-oriented Labor party is a dead-end political perspective. Labor leader Anthony Albanese has made clear that Labor has no policy difference with the Coalition on war, climate change, the pandemic or growing social inequality. The Greens have declared time and again that their priority is to join a minority Labor government.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is the only party standing in the May 21 federal election which fights in the interests of youth and students, and the working class as a whole.

As we explain in our election statement: “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.”

Triple J surveyed more than 1,600 youth between 18 and 29 years old. The poll found 78 percent of respondents were extremely or slightly interested in federal politics, up from 68 percent in 2020.

Only 2 percent of youth surveyed thought that Australian politicians are “working in the best interests of young people,” down from 9 percent in 2020. Similar drops were seen when

youth were asked if they believed politicians are working in the best interests of Australia (13 percent, down from 29 percent in 2020), Indigenous Australians (4 percent, down from 8 percent), immigrants (3 percent, down from 7 percent) and the planet (1 percent, down from 4 percent).

Politics lecturer at the Australian National University, Intifar Chowdhury, told Triple J, “I was not surprised by the direction of the results, but I was surprised by the magnitude. This just shows how bad the gap is between young people and people who are supposedly representing them in the parliament.”

Expressing the deep concern young people feel for their future and that of the entire planet was 23-year-old science graduate Sally Anderson. She told the ABC: “I absolutely think that politicians are not acting in the best interest of young people or our planet. Our climate crisis is real ... It’s just embarrassing, and no, our politicians are doing nothing for the planet, nothing for climate, and young people are being left out,” Anderson said.

Young people have also been forced to bear the burden of the criminal bipartisan response of state and federal governments to the COVID-19 pandemic. The murderous “let it rip” policy—dumping scientifically-grounded, life-saving measures such as contact tracing and lockdowns—adopted by governments around the world, has resulted in Australia seeing some of the highest rates of COVID infection of any country.

According to official figures, a quarter of the country has been infected and nearly 8,000 have died—the majority since mitigation measures were lifted in December 2021. Forced back into unsafe classrooms and work in frontline, low-paid industries such as hospitality, retail and delivery services, youth have made up the highest proportion of COVID cases in the country.

The pandemic has only exacerbated and accelerated trends which were already underway.

As the pandemic struck, young people accounted for 46 percent of short-term casual employees but just 17.4 percent share of all employees. During COVID, youth have either had their hours cut or been forced to work in unsafe conditions.

Half of Australia’s 25-year-olds are unable to secure full-time employment, despite 60 percent holding post-school qualifications. One in three young people are unemployed or

underemployed. The official youth unemployment rate is more than double the national average, currently over 10 percent. In working-class areas, youth are even worse off.

Young people are forced to try and live off poverty-level welfare packages and face a mountain of debt for rising tertiary education costs.

Governments claim there is no money to support young people. Yet, at the drop of a hat, tens of billions of dollars are pledged to support forces in Ukraine in the US-NATO proxy war against Russia. All the major parties support growing militarism, with the Labor Party presenting itself as the more belligerent party of war in these elections.

US imperialism—with Australia marching in lock-step—is also setting its sights on China. The signing of a pact with China by the democratically-elected government of the Solomon Islands has been met with threats of invasion by the imperialist powers in Washington and Canberra.

With the US leading the charge, imperialism threatens the world's population with a nuclear third world war. Seeking to ideologically prepare for the sending of young people off into imperialist slaughter, the Australian government, along with other US allies, is seeking to whip-up nationalist hysteria aimed at Russia and China in particular.

No section of the political establishment is anti-war. The drive to war emerges not out of the mind of individual capitalist politicians or even particular capitalist parties. War is a product of the objective contradictions of capitalism itself—between the nation state and the globalised economy; and between the socialised nature of production with billions of workers around the world.

None of the major issues we confront can be dealt with on a national scale. And none of the issues can be resolved under the capitalist system which is itself the cause of war, poverty, climate change, the pandemic crisis and the turn to authoritarianism.

Young people must turn to the world working class—the only social force capable of overthrowing the capitalist system and replacing it with a socialist planned economy based on social need, not private profit.

This is an existential question. The SEP is standing candidates in the federal election not solely to get votes but to present the genuine socialist alternative to the working class and youth. There is no other party which is seeking to present such an alternative.

Fake-left organisations, like Socialist Alliance and the Victorian Socialists, promote the lie that the main task is to “get rid of Morrison.” The aim is to channel disaffection behind Labor, the Greens and the rotting political establishment of which they are a part. The pseudo-left does not represent the working class, but a well-off section of the upper-middle class.

The pseudo-left use identity politics to divide workers and prevent a unified struggle. They also prop up the thoroughly corporatised and discredited trade unions which have ceased to

be workers’ organisations in any way, functioning instead as industrial police forces suppressing the class struggle in Australia and internationally for decades.

The SEP insists that there is no shortcut to resolve the immense crises facing humanity. We base ourselves on the lessons of history. Above all, we look to the key strategic experience of the 20th century, the 1917 Russian Revolution. Led by the Bolshevik Party, headed by Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, the revolution was the first, and so far only, time the working class overthrew capitalism and established a workers’ government based on a socialist program.

Trotsky went on to lead the socialist opposition to Joseph Stalin’s betrayal of the revolution. Stalin represented a privileged bureaucracy, which emerged on the basis of the isolation and material backwardness of the Soviet Union. It rejected the internationalist perspective upon which the revolution had been carried out, and presided over the mass murder of socialist workers, young people and internationally.

Today, the perspective of the world Trotskyist movement, of which the SEP is a part, is more relevant than ever. Only through the development of a unified, international movement of the working class, based on a socialist program and the lessons of history, can the existential issues confronting humanity be overcome.

Young people looking for a way forward should express their opposition to the status quo by voting 1 for the SEP in the federal elections. But, more importantly, youth searching for an alternative should take up the political fight for socialism by joining the Socialist Equality Party today!

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