

Socialist Equality Party meeting discusses crisis of Australia's two-party system and the way forward for the working class

Our reporter
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A Socialist Equality Party (SEP) online public meeting last Sunday reviewed the historic collapse in support for Australia's dominant parliamentary parties in the May 21 national elections and the socialist program required to combat the pro-war and social austerity policies now being implemented by the new Labor government.

Attended by over 120 people, the meeting was the only public forum held by any party since the election. Its extended Q&A session, following the main speakers, provided a much-appreciated forum for democratic discussion about the election result and the class battles now unfolding in Australia and internationally.

Senate candidate and SEP assistant national secretary Max Boddy chaired the meeting, with SEP National Secretary Cheryl Crisp, WSWS journalist and SEP Senate candidate Oscar Grenfell and Sri Lanka SEP National Secretary Deepal Jayasekera the featured speakers. SEP candidates—Peter Byrne, Jason Wardle, Mike Head and John Davis—contributed during the Q&A session.

The livestreamed event, which included detailed graphics, can be viewed in its entirety above.

Opening the meeting, Max Boddy explained that the low combined primary vote of just 68.3 percent for the Liberal-National Coalition and the Labor Party constituted a historic political crisis for Australia's ruling elites. Labor won office, he said, but its primary vote dropped to 32.6 percent, another record low for the party, with its vote falling in 85 of Australia's 151 electorates.

"Millions of workers and young people saw no fundamental difference between Labor and the Liberal-

National Coalition and instead voted for the so-called minor parties or independents," Boddy said.

The ongoing decline in support for the establishment parties, the speaker explained, motivated their bipartisan imposition last year of new election laws that deregistered the SEP and other parties, blocking their party names from appearing on ballot papers.

In the face of these anti-democratic obstacles, the SEP conducted a vigorous and powerful intervention during the short election period, winning 10,723 votes across the three states, Boddy said. "We have always said a vote for our party is a conscious one. Never has this been so true as in this election," he added.

SEP National Secretary Cheryl Crisp told the meeting that the world political situation "is characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat" and referenced Leon Trotsky's Transitional Program.

"Our meeting has been called to discuss the Australian election but it is not possible to understand this event outside the international situation in which it was held," she said. The world's population face threats on multiple fronts, she continued, reviewing the disastrous and ongoing COVID pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the danger a global nuclear conflagration, and the surging inflation, food shortages, poverty, hunger and starvation.

"The war in Ukraine against Russia, which was planned, devised and orchestrated by the US and NATO, is the working out of long-held perspectives to colonise and subjugate Russia and China to the interests of US imperialism," she said, which will be paid for by a "war against workers at home."

"Trotsky's prediction that mankind faces socialism or barbarism is a very stark and real one today," the

speaker said, and emphasised that this crisis could only be resolved by the independent mobilisation of the working class on a revolutionary socialist and internationalist perspective.

“The task today,” Crisp said, “is to turn the developing struggles of the working class, now emerging in every country into a conscious political movement against capitalism.”

Deepal Jayasekera, the national secretary of the SEP in Sri Lanka, told the meeting that huge foreign debts, the COVID-19 pandemic, a collapse of the tourist industry, and the war in Ukraine had led to a catastrophic implosion of the island’s economy.

This had produced three months of mass anti-government protests and two general strikes demanding resignation of President Rajapakse and his government over skyrocketing prices and shortages of fuel, cooking gas and basic food items and hours-long power outages, he said.

The trade unions are playing “a treacherous role in this situation” and doing their utmost to defend the government by blocking any independent political and industrial action by the working class.” This has allowed the regime to appoint a new prime minister—Ranil Wickremasinghe—to unleash a new round brutal austerity and secure an International Monetary Fund bail-out loan, he explained.

“Like our Australian comrades,” Jayasekera continued, the SEP “is advocating the formation of rank-and-file committees—action committees—in every workplace, factory, plantation and neighbourhood, independent of the unions, to lead the struggles of the working class for their basic social and democratic rights.”

In this way, he concluded, “we are taking forward the struggle for a government of workers and peasants committed to socialist policies, as part of the broader struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally.”

SEP Senate candidate Oscar Grenfell, the final speaker, said the SEP was alone in warning during the election that whichever party won government, “its program would be dictated by the global breakdown of capitalism, the US confrontations with Russia and China, and the predatory interests of the financial oligarchy.” This analysis, he said, “has proven completely correct.”

The new Labor government, he continued, “is a right-wing government that represents the banks, the corporations and the military-intelligence establishments of Australia and the US...”

“Labor’s pro-business agenda will provoke mass opposition in the working class” and pointed to recent strikes by nurses, teachers, aged care staff, bus drivers, and disputes involving many other sections of the working class.

“In every instance, these struggles come up against the trade unions, which are not workers organisations in any sense of the term” and “are responsible for the record low wages and the social crisis that flows from them,” he said.

Like other speakers, Grenfell stressed the necessity for workers to break from the trade unions and establish independent rank-and-file committees to defend the wages, jobs and basic rights on the basis of a socialist program. “There is no national solution, and there is no short cut... The decisive issue is building a socialist leadership of the working class, he said. “Concretely, that means joining and building the SEP, which I’d urge everyone here to do.

The reports provoked a range of questions from those in attendance and a collection of almost \$3,700 donated to the SEP’s special election fund. Some of those participating met the SEP during the election campaign and were attending their first party event. Questions were asked and fully answered about quantitative easing and inflation, the minimum wage, the social crisis facing young people, the significance of Trump’s January 6 attempted coup for workers in Australia, whether it was possible or necessary to unite “the left,” and the role of protest groups based on racial identity politics.



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