

Australia: Socialist Alliance NSW election campaign has nothing to do with socialism

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As with all recent ballots state and federal, the forthcoming election in New South Wales (NSW), the most populous state of Australia, is characterised by a huge disconnect between the official parties and working people. Widespread opposition to inequality, the official “let it rip” COVID policies and war does not find the slightest expression in the establishment.

Growing numbers of workers and young people are hostile to capitalism and attracted to socialism. This makes it crucial to distinguish parties that advance a genuine socialist perspective, from those that falsely use the label while defending Labor, the Greens and capitalism itself.

The pseudo-left Socialist Alliance is a case in point. Its campaign has nothing to do with socialism or the interests of the working class. Socialist Alliance is standing candidates for the state parliament’s upper house and the lower house seats of Heffron in Sydney and Newcastle, a regional working-class city.

The two central elements of its campaign are complete parochialism and the promotion of the fraud that progressive reforms can be achieved through the NSW parliament.

As the Socialist Equality Party explained in its election manifesto, the official campaign has the character of a conspiracy against the population. Labor, the Liberal-National Coalition, the Greens and the corporate media are burying any discussion of the major issues confronting the working class. Instead, their campaigns are characterised mind-numbing diversions, phony promises and outright lies.

The SEP is standing to break this silence and expose the truth of the situation. This is an indispensable component of the SEP’s fight to raise the level of discussion in the working class, and to build a revolutionary, socialist movement against capitalism.

Socialist Alliance, on the other hand, is putting forward candidates to reinforce the blackout and to provide the electoral charade with a “left” gloss. This is connected to Socialist Alliance’s complete orientation to the official parliamentary establishment, which it wishes to both bolster and to join.

The pseudo-left party accepts entirely the framework set by the major parties. Amid a major crisis of capitalism globally, and within Australia, its election statement scarcely references an issue outside of NSW, let alone any international developments.

The most glaring omission is the question of war, which is not mentioned once in Socialist Alliance’s platform. This is despite the fact that a dangerous conflict involving nuclear-armed powers is already underway—the US-NATO proxy war with Russia in Ukraine. It is being escalated everyday by the US, with the full support of the Australian Labor government and all the official parties.

The US is using the reactionary invasion carried out by the Putin regime, to move towards a direct conflict with Russia that threatens nuclear war. This is a stepping stone towards a war with China, which Washington regards as its chief economic rival. Australia is on the frontlines of the war drive against China, with the federal Labor government announcing every week new offensive weaponry, including nuclear-armed submarines, advanced missiles and expanded US basing arrangements.

Socialist Alliance accepts the restriction of discussion to narrow state-based issues. But this alone does not explain its silence on war, which is the greatest danger facing the working class.

Socialist Alliance, like the pseudo-left internationally, is a pro-imperialist tendency. It has effectively supported the US-NATO proxy war, hailing Washington’s proxy government in Kiev and insisting that the “left” must support “Ukrainian sovereignty.” In practice, these slogans mean backing the continuing US-NATO war effort and opposing the fight to develop an international anti-war movement of the working class, including through the unification of Russian and Ukrainian workers against their respective governments.

That anti-war perspective, based on the traditions of the international socialist movement, is at the very centre of the SEP’s campaign.

War is not the only glaring omission from Socialist Alliance’s platform. Its sole reference to the coronavirus is a call for the waiving of fines for people who breached past safety measures—a policy that by itself a host of right-wing anti-lockdown organisations would agree with.

The absence of any other mention of the pandemic is extraordinary. NSW has been at the centre of the conspiracy of governments to lift the successful mitigation measures which limited illnesses and deaths in 2020 and 2021. In December 2021, a triumvirate of NSW Coalition Premier Dominic Perrottet, his Victorian Labor counterpart Daniel Andrews and then Prime Minister Scott Morrison “reopened” the economy, unleashing an Omicron tsunami on the population.

This program, supported by NSW Labor and now deepened by the federal Labor government, claimed as many as 25,000 lives last year.

Socialist Alliance’s silence on this issue can only mean consent. The pseudo-left party has no substantive opposition to the profits before lives agenda that has wrought mass death and has triggered the breakdown of the public healthcare system. Socialist Alliance is hostile to the elimination policy advanced by the SEP and principled epidemiologists because it is oriented to the very political parties responsible for the mass social murder—Labor, the trade unions, which enforced the reopening, and the Greens which never opposed it.

The sole national issue raised in the Socialist Alliance platform is

the question of indigenous people. Socialist Alliance has endorsed the federal Labor government's proposal to establish an indigenous Voice to parliament. The establishment of this advisory body would do nothing to alleviate the horrendous conditions facing Aboriginal workers and youth, who are among the most oppressed sections of the working class.

Instead, the campaign for the Voice is an exercise in diversion from Labor's pro-war and pro-business agenda, an attempt to divide workers along racial lines and to further boost a privileged Aboriginal elite aligned with governments and the corporations. Socialist Alliance's platform calls for a "treaty," a demand of sections of this Aboriginal elite, aimed at gaining them greater resources within the framework of the capitalist nation-state.

Aside from this, the platform contains a grab-bag of limited populist demands, including substantial increases in funding for public education, healthcare and housing.

The most striking aspect, though, is there is not even a suggestion that these demands are connected to a fight for socialism. The entire thrust of the platform is a series of policies that Socialist Alliance proposes could be carried out within the framework of capitalism. It does not even suggest placing the major banks and corporations under public ownership.

This only underscores the fact that Socialist Alliance and its campaign have nothing to do with socialism. Instead, its aim is to divert workers and young people into the political dead end of trying to pressure the very capitalist political establishment that is prosecuting the ruling elite's agenda of war and austerity.

This was spelled out by one of the party's upper house candidates Stephen O'Brien when Socialist Alliance announced its campaign. He stated: "NSW Labor has a bad track record on privatising public assets, and its ministers have also been found to be corrupt. If Labor is elected it will need to be held to account. One way of doing that is to support SA, which has a good track record of working with communities in struggle."

The perspective of holding the major parties "to account" is a complete fraud. Their program is dictated by their class character, as representatives of big business, and by the deepening crisis of global capitalism. In reality, Socialist Alliance aspires to become the "left" advisors to a right-wing Labor government, whose role would be to deflect and misdirect opposition from workers and young people.

Socialist Alliance is also promoting the Greens as an alternative. The Greens are a capitalist party, which has worked closely with Labor governments over the past 15 years as they have deepened Australia's alignment with war, attacked democratic rights, including those of refugees and slashed social spending.

Likewise, Socialist Alliance trumpets the trade unions—the very organisations which act as a police force of governments and the corporations for decades in imposing cuts to jobs, wages and conditions. Socialist Alliance is hostile to the SEP's call for the working class to form independent rank-and-file committees as genuine organisations of struggle controlled by workers themselves, not the privileged union bureaucracy.

The right-wing positions of Socialist Alliance are not a mistake. The organisation represents an affluent layer of the upper-middle class, ensconced in the top echelons of the public sector, academia and the trade union officialdom.

Their politics, moreover, are the outcome of a decades-long rightward evolution. Socialist Alliance was founded as a Pabloite organisation. Pabloism was a tendency that emerged within the

Trotskyist movement, the Fourth International, in the post-World War Two period. It rejected the revolutionary role of the working class, and the necessity to build the Fourth International as the indispensable revolutionary leadership. Instead, the Pabloites adapted themselves to, and promoted, the Stalinist bureaucracies, the social-democratic parties and various bourgeois-nationalist outfits as a new path to socialism.

Throughout its decades-long history, Socialist Alliance and its predecessors functioned as "left" attorneys for the Labor Party, the Stalinist Communist Party of Australia and the trade union bureaucracy. Socialist Alliance is the last in a series of unprincipled "regroupments" carried out by the pseudo-left, aimed at integrating themselves ever more directly into capitalist politics. In Socialist Alliance's case, this has taken the form of fewer and fewer references to socialism, even of a nominal and ceremonial character, and a program that is largely indistinguishable from that of the Greens.

Amid a global capitalist crisis, and the collapse of the old social-democratic and Stalinist organisations, or their transformation into open representatives of finance capital, Pabloite and other forms of pseudo-left politics have been exposed fully as an instrument of imperialism. Socialist Alliance, which once claimed to be anti-war, now supports the US war drive against Russia, which has been developed and planned as a key task of American imperialism since 1991 and the dissolution of the former Soviet Union.

The Socialist Equality Party and the world party of which it is a part, the International Committee of the Fourth International, are alone in fighting to build a global anti-war movement of the working class based on a socialist and revolutionary perspective. That too is not accidental.

The ICFI was established in 1953 to defend the program of Trotskyism and genuine Marxism against Pabloism. It upheld the revolutionary role of the working class, the necessity for Marxists to fight for the independence of the working class, and the decisive role of a building a conscious revolutionary leadership on a world scale. For the past seventy years, it has waged a relentless struggle against all forms of national-opportunism, in the fight for a socialist program and perspective that represents the interests of the working class. It is to that perspective that workers and young people should turn today.

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