

SEP (Australia) candidate for NSW election exposes fraud of indigenous Voice

Our reporters
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On Saturday, the federal Labor government launched a National Week of Action to promote the establishment of an indigenous voice to parliament. The first event was a forum at the University of Technology in Sydney billed by its host Tanya Plibersek, Labor's environment minister, as a "dialogue" on the policy.

The Voice has emerged as the central focus of the Albanese Labor government, which claims it will advocate for Aboriginal people in the corridors of power. The fraudulent character of these assertions, and the essentially reactionary character of Labor's policy, were graphically demonstrated in both the form and the content of Saturday's meeting.

The national Voice is to be comprised of 24 Aboriginal leaders appointed from local and regional Voices. The bodies are unelected and their advice can be rejected by government. The Voice is to be enshrined in the constitution through a referendum to be held later this year.

The campaign is a major distraction from the social crisis gripping workers in Australia. It is an attempt to provide a humane veneer for Labor's pro-business austerity agenda, the main planks of which are the drive to war against China and an onslaught on the social conditions of the working class.

Max Boddy, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for the working-class seat of Bankstown in the upcoming New South Wales (NSW) state election, attempted to speak at the forum, but was censored early in his remarks.

Plibersek is a leading "left" in the parliamentary Labor Party. She has been in parliament for 25 years and has been a cabinet minister in every Labor government since 2007. Plibersek introduced Linda Burney, Labor minister for Indigenous Australians and Professor Tom Calma, co-chair of the final report on the Voice.

In her opening remarks, Plibersek told the audience of around 400 that "there will be people in this room who don't agree with each other." But everyone could rest assured. All attendees would be free to "express doubt" without "being treated with hostility or be patronised or

insulted."

In fact, people could raise whatever they wished. Plibersek declared: "If you've got something that you think is controversial that the room will disagree with, it's okay to say it. I'm saying to everyone in this room today, we treat each other with respect. Does everybody agree?" This question was greeted with a resounding "yes" from the audience.

These comments, detailing at some length the basic rules of meeting engagement, reflected an awareness within the government that among Aboriginal workers and youth there is deep distrust, skepticism and opposition to the Voice. Many recognise that its sole result will be to further embed a privileged, increasingly wealthy Aboriginal elite into the halls of government, which will have no impact on the dire conditions facing ordinary indigenous people.

In any event, Plibersek's spirit of democracy, "respect" and "dialogue" lasted all of a few minutes. When Boddy spoke, the Labor minister replaced these honeyed phrases with angry interjections and demands that he be silent, less than 50 seconds after he had opened his mouth.

Having introduced himself, Boddy explained that the SEP opposes "the Voice, from a left-wing, socialist perspective. The oppression of Aboriginal workers is a class, not a race question.

"Our aim is to unite the working class, regardless of race, in a common struggle against the program of war and austerity implemented by Labor, the Greens and every other capitalist party. The real purpose of the Voice is to divide workers along racial lines and bury these essential class issues. It will do nothing to resolve the horrendous conditions afflicting Aboriginal workers and youth."

Amid interruptions from Plibersek, Boddy said, "Aboriginal people are not one homogenous bloc. Just like non-Aboriginal layers in society there are rich and privileged sections and there are workers and the poor."

At this point, Plibersek signalled for the microphone to be cut, while sarcastically remarking "it is good of you to explain that to us." The abrupt and angry intervention

clearly surprised members of the audience, some of whom voiced their opposition to the censorship. One man called a point of order, recalling Plibersek's earlier assurance that people could freely make comments.

As the forum continued other audience members were given carte blanche to speak for extended periods of time. Eva Cox, a well-known Labor feminist, who orbited the Stalinist milieu and has been an opponent of Trotskyism for decades, was tasked with refuting the argument that Boddy had presented.

Speaking without interruption, Cox intoned that it was "important that we don't let people ... undermine things."

In a remarkable comment, Cox urged everybody to prevent themselves from even hearing criticism of the Voice, lest they be exposed to the infection of doubt. The former academic, who is treated as something of an intellectual celebrity in the middle-class circles around Labor and the Greens, instructed the audience to "stick their fingers in their ears when people start worrying about socialism... let's just focus on getting this one done then we can worry about other things."

Cox, speaking in defence of Labor, along with the panelists from the government itself, said nothing about the horrendous social conditions afflicting the majority of Aboriginal people.

The very same arguments used to shut down criticism of the Voice—that it is necessary to "get this done"—were put forward to promote the Closing the Gap program when it was unveiled by a Labor government in 2008.

That initiative has done nothing to narrow, let alone close, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in key areas of education, health and social conditions. On the contrary, indigenous incarceration rates, unemployment and poverty have grown. Health and education outcomes have worsened.

That is not a mistake. It is deliberate official policy as part of the broader onslaught on the entire working class, currently being presided over by the very federal Labor government that is pushing the Voice.

The highly revealing censorship at the meeting, and Boddy's remarks, underscored the importance of the SEP's campaign in the NSW election. It is the only party opposing divisive identity politics, exposing government lies and advancing a socialist perspective for the entire working class to fight for its common interests against inequality, austerity and war.

Below are the comments that Boddy would have delivered, had he not been censored by Plibersek:

"Aboriginal workers are the most oppressed section of the working class. The only way they can defend their conditions is through the unity of the entire working class.

The situation is not going to be resolved through divisive identity politics. Nor will it be resolved by creating another advisory body to the very capitalist state that dispossessed Aboriginal people and has presided over their oppression ever since.

"Aboriginal workers have been through these experiences before; Land Rights, Native Title, the creation of Land Councils and ATSIC have done nothing to end their social misery. All of these bodies, like the Voice, have created a privileged Aboriginal elite, tied to the corporate and political establishment. Their interests have nothing in common with Aboriginal workers and young people.

"I'd urge everyone here opposed to exploitation and oppression to turn to the socialist perspective that we advance. We fight to unite workers in this country and around the world, regardless of their race, gender or ethnicity, against the capitalist system of exploitation and barbarism.

"What is required is not an indigenous Voice to the capitalist state and to parliament. Instead, we need to fight for a workers' government that would implement socialist policies. That includes placing the banks and the corporations, currently engorging themselves in profits, under public ownership and workers' control. Then there will be hundreds of billions to ensure high quality education, healthcare and other fundamental social rights for all workers."

Contact the SEP:

Phone: (02) 8218 3222

Email: sep@sep.org.au

Facebook: [SocialistEqualityPartyAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/SocialistEqualityPartyAustralia)

Twitter: [@SEP_Australia](https://twitter.com/SEP_Australia)

Instagram: [socialistequalityparty_au](https://www.instagram.com/socialistequalityparty_au)

TikTok: [@sep_australia](https://www.tiktok.com/@sep_australia)

Authorised by Cheryl Crisp for the Socialist Equality Party, Suite 906, 185 Elizabeth Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)