# Australian state election: SEP raises critical issues on war and floods in northern NSW

**Mike Head, SEP candidate for NSW Legislative Council**
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As part of our intervention into the March 25 New South Wales (NSW) state election, the Socialist Equality Party is campaigning in the state's Northern Rivers region, where floodwaters swept through towns and villages a year ago, destroying thousands of homes.

In our discussions, including with flood victims, the SEP campaign is pointing to the connections between this climate-driven catastrophe and the broader issues facing the entire working class as a result of the drive to war and austerity, accompanied by the spending of billions of dollars on military weaponry, by the ruling capitalist class and all its governments.

The rainstorms that struck northern NSW and southern Queensland were extreme weather events, but this was not simply a "natural disaster." From day one—when the breakdown of emergency services left people clinging for their lives for hours on rooftops—the destructive outcomes were the result of profit-driven political decisions, including the refusal of governments, Labor and Liberal-National governments alike, to take the necessary measures to halt climate change.

A year on, the contemptuous pro-business response of governments continues. Thousands of flood victims are still living in tents or caravans or other makeshift accommodation, despite promises made months ago by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet that a buy-back, house-lift or repair scheme would assist them.

**Fiona** and **Phil**, residents of a flood-affected village, spoke with me at the Goonellabah Village shopping centre in the regional city of Lismore. We began by discussing the threat of a nuclear World War III posed by the US-instigated war drive against Russia and China.

"War is a distraction, based on scaremongering, as people lose their homes because they can't pay their mortgages, their kids don't have jobs, the health system is collapsing," Fiona commented. "Of course, you could build thousands of schools with the billions the government is spending on the military, let alone affordable housing—and not in a flood zone either!"

After we talked about the US-led war against Russia in Ukraine, Fiona said: "And the US is itching for a war with China. It's absolutely itching for it! And they won't win. They never do win… It's insane."

When I asked why the US was nevertheless provoking wars, Phil commented: "You have to go to the top of the pyramid. It's about money, money. All from the slaves underneath." Fiona added that huge profits were also being made from the development of military technology and weaponry.

Fiona referred to the history of wars ignited by US governments. "They created the whole situation in Afghanistan by pumping up the Taliban to get rid of the Russians," referring to the CIA's aiding and funding of Islamic fundamentalists to fight the former Soviet-backed government there. "Look what happened! The Vietnam War was another debacle. All based on lies."

I explained that the SEP was fighting for the development of a global movement by the working class to end war by overturning the system of capitalism responsible for it. "That's the only way to go," Fiona said. "Because there's so much unbalanced information in the media…

Phil commented: "The ultra-rich and powerful; this is exactly how they want the world to be… We used to call it the military-industrial complex. Now it's the military-industrial-media complex."

Fiona said: "There's discontent building up but it's kind of formless as such. So maybe this push to unite the working class, and the middle class is important as well, is a really good idea. It gives the people something to fight for that's ethical and moral."

The couple were disgusted by the record of the Albanese government, including on demanding financial

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sacrifices by workers, refusing to lift the punitive unemployment payments, on which people could not live, and refusing to demand freedom for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. Fiona said: “Albanese won’t do anything to upset the USA. It wants Assange to make an example of him.”

Later, speaking on the phone, Fiona said governments had done “absolutely nothing” to help flood victims or address the underlying problems since last year’s disaster.

“They’ve done nothing for 12 months,” she said. “Instead, they have put business ahead of housing. As a result, rents have gone up and up, even for hovels. It is an indictment of capitalism.

“This is not just Lismore or the Northern Rivers. It’s happening all over the country. Rents are soaring. It’s blatant capitalism, getting renters to pay for the rising mortgage interest rates. People with multi-investment properties are exploiting that.”

Fiona said the working class was being suppressed, with governments hoping that the discontent would be ignored. When the Albanese Labor government spoke about the need for “sacrifices” because of inflation, “it’s the poor who are forced to make sacrifices. Look at people like Elon Musk. His wealth alone could alleviate the hunger in Africa and worldwide. How much money do these people need? They have billions and billions.”

Recalling the life-threatening events of a year ago, Fiona said: “Even in our village, the pumps and warning sirens were left to fail. The hotel and the lower houses went under water and we were completely cut off, with no power and no mobile phones or other telecommunications for a week. But other people lost a lot more than that.”

**Tracey**, a flood victim, previously spoke to the WSWS last October, denouncing the contempt of governments when she was housed for more than six months in a small campervan in Lismore.

This week, on the first anniversary of the floods, Tracey spoke about the situation confronting her and many other residents who were renting homes that were destroyed in the disaster.

“I’m happy to be housed, renting again now so that I don’t need to depend on others and what they are going through, as it’s a foul time,” she said. “Though the rents should never have been allowed to go up.

“I can barely afford to feed my kids and I will be lucky, really lucky, if I will be able to pay the electricity bill I get today, let alone the water bill when it comes in. And I went and got a job too, so I am not just on the dole. Wages need to go up to have any life outside of paying rent.”

Tracey explained that her rent for a house, in which she and her family lived for 11 years, had been $280 a week, but rose to $340 before the floods. Now her rent is $490 for a smaller, three-bedroom house in a worse location.

“I am getting help from DCJ [NSW Department of Communities and Justice] so it works out to be $389 a week but the rent here is $490 and when I have to start paying that amount I will have to look for another place…

“So I will need two jobs to survive, and with my back I will never be off pain killers. I will look in another town after a year as I need a cheaper home if that’s ever going to happen. Why the government never put a cap on rent is beyond me. We had nothing and up went rentals! The rich get richer, the poor DO get the picture.”

Tracey said her son was now living in a temporary government “pod”—a small unit in a concrete slab complex, where safety and security problems were rife.

This social crisis and the floods, like Australia’s devastating 2019?20 bushfires and the ongoing COVID pandemic, demonstrate the need for the total reorganisation of society on a socialist basis so that it is planned rationally and democratically to protect health and lives, and meet social need, not feed private profits.

As our election statement explains, the SEP is standing candidates in the NSW election to take forward the fight for such a socialist program, against war, austerity, climate disaster and the “let it rip” COVID policies supported by every other party. We appeal to working people and youth to promote and participate in our campaign as widely as possible, and above all, to join the SEP to build the revolutionary party needed to lead this struggle.

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