

Big political issues discussed on SEP campaign in flood-affected Australian regional city

Mike Head, SEP candidate for NSW Legislative Council
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Climate change, the housing crisis, floods, threats of war against China and the continued imprisonment of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. These were among the big issues raised in discussions with Socialist Equality Party (SEP) campaigners in the northern New South Wales city of Lismore over the past week.

As part of the SEP's intervention into the March 25 NSW state election, we are campaigning in the state's Northern Rivers region, where thousands of people are still living in makeshift accommodation one year after climate-related floods inundated low-lying homes.

Last week, we held the SEP's first-ever information table at Southern Cross University's Lismore campus, winning a friendly and often enthusiastic response from students and some staff members. On Saturday, we conducted a campaign in the main street of Lismore's flood-devastated downtown business and retail district.

At both events, we found a great deal of concern about the rabid headlines in prominent corporate newspapers and television outlets during the week, declaring a "Red Alert" to prepare the population, the military and the entire economy for a war against China within three years.

The SEP T-shirts worn by party supporters, featuring our demand for the freedom of Assange, also attracted widespread interest and support. In our discussions, we explained the connection between the US-instigated war drive and the refusal of the Albanese Labor government to demand an end to Assange's persecution.

As we outlined, the Labor government's escalating commitment to US imperialism's military buildup and efforts to provoke the Beijing regime into a conflict meant keeping Assange locked away. That was an

attempt to intimidate all those seeking to expose the lies behind the war drum-beating, just as Assange exposed the war crimes and other abuses of the US and its allies, including Australia, in Afghanistan and Iraq.

We also explained that, therefore, the fight to free Assange depended on the development of a global anti-war movement among young people and in the working class, as part of the workers' strikes and protests erupting internationally against the cost-of-living crisis, real wage-cutting and government austerity measures.

We pointed to the worldwide anti-war campaign launched by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Parties, as well as the SEP's election intervention to fight against the program of militarism and war.

At Southern Cross University, **Rio**, a science student told me the issues that most concerned him were the environment and housing. Asked to elaborate, he said: "My opinions are generally fairly left-wing, so many issues are particularly important to me, but they are the big ones.

"Housing is a human right. That's a political problem that I have a socialist view on generally. That's one of the things that drew me towards the movement.

"And on the environment, if profit is the main driver, then you are going to keep consuming and consuming, which is eventually going to destroy the planet, so what are you going to do other than overthrow capitalism?"

Asked about the Greens claiming to be able to address the climate change disaster within the same capitalist profit system that created it, Rio commented: "The Greens are a bit loopy I think. They have these weird socialist aesthetics but then they have a weird

upper class feeling to them. They seem like they are better than us. They are a bit posh for me. I'm definitely not a reformist."

Rio said it was "crazy" that the Greens were in a coalition government with the Social Democrats in Germany, and agitating for increased military spending for the US-led war against Russia in Ukraine. "And the Social Democrats, didn't they murder Rose Luxemburg?" he said, correctly pointing to the assassination of the Marxist leader in Berlin in 1919.

Rio said the media barrage declaring that the population had to get ready for a war against China was "scary." He added: "I oppose war, it's a scourge upon humanity... You have to fight against that kind of thing."

Regarding the war in Ukraine, Rio said there was fault on both sides—the US and Russia. He agreed that the issues of war were always more complex and deep-rooted than who fired the first shot, as was being presented in the corporate media.

Rio pointed to the underlying nature of the nation-state system. "As the country that is exerting capitalism on the world, the US has the primary role but it's not fair to say it's just the US, because this is how the global system is set up. It's how countries are destined to act."

We agreed to discuss these questions further.

Shikarah, a psychology student, said she had been reading about socialism and thought it was a good idea. She was particularly concerned about the Albanese Labor government's clawback of Medicare subsidised psychology sessions.

Up until January 1 this year, Medicare allowed for up to 20 subsidised sessions per year. This number was reduced to 10 on the pretext that waiting lists were too long. According to the perverse logic of Health Minister Mark Butler, this was preventing more people from accessing the scheme.

Shikarah commented: "Studies have proven that the amount of sessions needed should be doubled to 40 or more, so that people could access and receive adequate health care, but what they've done is actually cut it in half.

"Now the government is going to host a committee that is comprised of people with limited experience with mental illness and they're going to ask them their thoughts on it. I feel like they're going to weasel their

way out of it.

"That happened at the beginning of this year and it made me really angry because I want to become a counselling psychologist. It makes me disgusted to know that people would feel ashamed or they'd feel like a burden on the healthcare system just because the government isn't able to subsidise that."

Shikarah said she was not personally affected by last year's floods across the region, but she and her mother had assisted victims. "Mum and I helped out, taking people to safe places out of flood waters and donating stuff. I have a friend who was personally affected and had to re-do all his flooring and walls. And South Lismore was so horrendously affected."

Asked about socialism, Shikarah said: "I think the world needs socialism because through capitalism a lot of oppressive systems have risen up, like racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia. And there is a common thread that we have together and that is classism that we all suffer from. If you're not part of the 1 percent then you are suffering under a class-based system and we don't need that."

As our election statement outlines, the SEP is the only party advancing a socialist program to totally reorganise society to meet the pressing social needs of the vast majority, not the private profits of the super-rich.

We appeal to all workers and young people to support and participate in our campaign, and to join the SEP to build the mass working-class party needed for this struggle.

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