

Video: Workers speak out against war and inequality in NSW election

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party held a speak-out in Bankstown, southwest Sydney, on Saturday as part of their campaign for the New South Wales (NSW) election on March 25.

SEP candidates Oscar Grenfell and Max Boddy, along with other party members, spoke to people in the working-class suburb about the need for a socialist alternative to the program of war and austerity put forward by all other parties in the election.

Grenfell, who is standing in the upper house, said that Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's announcement of \$368 billion for nuclear-powered submarines had nothing to do with "opposing Chinese aggression or defending Australia." Instead, he explained, "this is about an aggressive military buildup throughout the Asia-Pacific region, aimed at asserting the hegemony of American imperialism.

"There's not going to be a peaceful outcome under capitalism. The only way forward is to unite internationally. Workers have the same interests wherever they're from, for a peaceful world based on social equality. But if we want that, we have to fight for it, and that means a fight against capitalism itself."

Boddy, who is standing for the seat of Bankstown in the Legislative Assembly, said the election campaign waged by the major parties "takes the form of a giant cover-up. None of the burning issues that are facing workers are being discussed or raised, above all, the immense and immediate danger of war.

"We say that the billions that are being used for machines of war should be used for education, for health and for a social housing program for workers." Under socialism, Boddy explained, these vast resources would be used to resolve the housing and cost of living crisis. These are particularly acute in the Bankstown electorate, which has the highest level of mortgage

stress in the state, and the second highest level of rent stress.

Workers and young people spoke to *World Socialist Web Site* reporters about their concerns over the growing threat of world war, as well as the dire social conditions confronting the working class amid the rapidly rising cost of living.

Francis, a formwork carpenter from Ghana, said: "There's no winners in war. In the end we lose people, vulnerable citizens, people that know nothing about war.

"I don't know the main motive behind the Australian government spending that amount of money on nuclear submarines. The people that have power go for the weapons, and they make money out of that as well. But I don't think we should be fighting."

Freddie, a construction worker from Tonga, stopped to listen to Boddy at the speak-out on March 11. He said: "What you're saying is the right thing."

Freddie asked: "Why get submarines? Why can't they give that money to people here in Australia? If you look around, there's too many people that are homeless. Why can't they think about raising them up, helping them get a house, feeding them?"

Freddie spoke about the cost of living crisis, saying "everything is going up," except wages. He said he was paid just \$12 an hour, half the legal minimum wage, but was brushed off when he raised this with SafeWork NSW and other government regulators. As a result, he depends on charities for food.

Leila, a 74-year-old former table hand in the printing industry, said it was getting "harder and harder" for retired workers to get by on the meagre Age Pension, which pays a maximum of \$1,064 per fortnight.

She said: "I pay \$700 rent each fortnight. I've got

electricity bills, I've got to eat, I've got to pay the doctor. Medicare doesn't cover much. If we can't afford to pay, we have to die. We can't treat ourselves.

"I've had a problem with my leg for two years now. The doctor told me if I had the money, in two weeks I could have the operation. I don't have the money, so I go on the waiting list. In that time, you get worse.

"I go shopping for what I need, meat, bread, things like that. But I can't afford to eat something nice. Even ALDI has gone up as well. Things I was paying \$2 for have gone up to \$4.

"How can we live like that? How are we gonna survive? Soon we'll have to sit down on the street and ask for charity. But who could afford to give? These people here shopping, are all on the same page as me.

Leila did not believe the election would do anything to improve the situation, whichever of the major parties takes office. She said: "What do they do for you, whoever wins? They promise you this, promise you that, but when they win, they don't know you."

SEP campaigners also spoke to workers in Newcastle, the second-largest city in NSW.

Matt, a technology worker, said: "I think Labor can come out in elections saying they have progressive policies, but then after the elections they go back on promises, on social issues especially. Perrottet receives a lot of negative press that is well deserved, whereas Chris Minns doesn't, when he has similar opinions. All the major parties benefit from the current system—why would they want to change it?

Matt said the deregistration of the SEP was "an attack on democratic rights, absolutely." He continued: "Limiting political participation, making it harder to have a party, that's always bad, it's never done with the interests of ordinary people in mind. The current capitalist system doesn't work for most people and that's why there's a move away from the major parties.

"I think a lot of young people are anti-war, because we're the ones who would be on the front line of a war. I appreciate you raising what happened after the Russian Revolution—why wasn't socialism achieved? We have to ask these questions and learn from past experiences. I would agree with an international perspective—I agree with a lot of the things you've said.

"I think organisation and representation for workers is needed. A lot of those who are supposed to represent workers, for example in the unions, they don't actually

do that."

Don said: "I used to drive those big coal-loaders up in Kooragang. In 1988, our work area got sold off by the government and a few years later we got the sack. We worked long hours, 90 hours a week, always at work, and all we got was the sack and told we were incompetent.

"Anything the government owned, under Liberal and Labor, has been sold off and privatised. Our union was the waterfront union. The union reps all got work, the president of the union and secretary of the union got a job, while the rest of us got the sack. I had to sell my house and I finished up with nothing. I went all the way down to the head office in Sydney, to try to get help from the union, but they just weren't interested, they turned their back on us. So, the union stabbed us in the back and the government stabbed us in the back.

"I'm living in a housing commission place now, and because my wife works, I have to give up 30 percent of my pension. We're going to get a new increase to our rent next Monday, then what are we supposed to live on? It's hard for younger people too. I've got a sixteen year-old son, I don't know how he'll ever afford to own a home."

On the threat of war, Don said: "Who needs a war? Nobody wins, it's just for the ones at the top. It's war for no reason—they're just there to make money. I agree, the answer is we need the working class in charge. The average person in China, or in America, or here, doesn't want a war. I'm glad this party is talking about it. Nobody else is."

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