

Vote for the Socialist Equality Party in NSW state election! Take up the fight against war, austerity and “let it rip” COVID policies!

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)

23 March 2023

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) appeals for workers, students, young people and serious layers of the middle-class to vote for our candidates in this Saturday’s New South Wales (NSW) state election. Vote one SEP to register your opposition to the parties of big business and your support for a genuine socialist alternative to the bipartisan program of war, austerity and “let it rip” COVID policies!

To vote for our candidates in the statewide Legislative Council (upper house), vote 1 and 2 for SEP candidates Oscar Grenfell and Mike Head in Group K, and then allocate votes 3 to 15 to any other candidates below the line on the ballot paper. To lodge a valid vote 15 boxes must be numbered.

To vote for SEP candidate Max Boddy in the Bankstown electorate in the Legislative Assembly (lower house) vote 1 alongside his name. Due to the state’s anti-democratic electoral laws, the SEP’s name does not appear on the ballot papers.

Every recent election campaign has been characterised by lies, diversion and mudslinging. But the NSW campaign has been a debased spectacle even by these standards. Amid an unprecedented crisis of public education and health, an ongoing pandemic that is killing hundreds every week and the worst cost-of-living crisis in decades, none of the parliamentary parties have outlined policies that would improve the lot of working people.

To every extent possible, Labor, the Liberal-National Coalition and the official media have suppressed any discussion, to the point that many people were surprised to learn this week that an election was to be held in a couple of days time.

That is because on all of the major questions, Labor and the Coalition have and continue to march in lockstep. More than 22,000 people have been killed as a result of the “let it rip” COVID policies implemented by governments across the country.

NSW has been at the very forefront of this profit-before-lives agenda, aimed at removing any public health impediments to the interests of big business. While Perrottet has collaborated as closely as possible with first Prime Minister Scott Morrison and then his Labor successor Anthony Albanese, to lift all safety measures, he has had the iron-clad backing of NSW Labor leader Chris Minns.

Minns, Perrottet, the Greens and all the other parliamentary parties have said nothing about the pandemic during the campaign, because their program is to continue letting the virus rip. What can they possibly say? “The next government I lead is going to continue policies that will kill thousands of citizens, especially the elderly, the poor and the vulnerable, to ensure maximum returns to the banks, the corporations and the property developers.”

As it is on COVID, so it is on every other question. The public healthcare system is in its deepest crisis in at least 80 years. But Labor, with essentially an identical policy to the Coalition, rejects nurse-to-

patient ratios, or any concrete measures that would alleviate the staffing crisis that has led to the breakdown. With the schools similarly overcrowded and teachers leaving the profession in droves, Labor is proposing only token handouts, which, even if they materialise, will not slow the destruction of public education.

With workers struggling to make ends meet or to even put food on the table, Minns has proudly declared his opposition to pay rises in line with inflation for nurses, teachers and other public sector workers. Even their nominal pay increases, in fact, real wage cuts, will have to be paid for by increased “productivity,” i.e., greater exploitation and an assault on conditions.

In working-class areas, housing stress is reaching astronomical proportions. In some suburbs of Sydney’s west and south-west, as many as 50 percent of residents are in housing stress, something that will only worsen as the Reserve Bank continues to raise interest rates. But the Labor and Coalition housing programs are solely aimed at propping up the insane house prices, to ensure that property developers and major investors continue to rake in a bonanza.

For their part, the Greens offer no alternative. Their whole orientation is to form some sort of coalition government with Labor, as they have previously at the federal level and in other states. The Greens, as a right-wing, pro-capitalist party, would enter into such a power-sharing arrangement, to put a “left” veneer on a right-wing government that attacks public sector wages and social services.

The campaign itself, in other words, has proven an essential point made by the SEP. The election on Saturday will resolve nothing for workers. Whichever parties form government, they will immediately declare a budget blackhole, dispensing even their token policies during the campaign. And they will go on an austerity offensive, aimed at making the working class pay for the billions handed to big business during the first two years of the pandemic and the deepening crisis of the capitalist system.

That underscores the fact that for workers and young people, the critical issue is not the ballot. It is striking out on a new political path: that is, a political fight against Labor, the Greens and the whole parliamentary set-up, based on a socialist program that rejects the subordination of every aspect of society to the profit interests of the ruling elite.

The urgency of such a struggle has been underscored by the drumbeats of war that have grown louder, even over the last six weeks. Capitalism offers a future, not only of mass illness, death and poverty but also the Armageddon that would be a nuclear world war.

From the outset of the campaign, the SEP alone has sounded the alarm about the growing threat of war. We have warned that the war in Ukraine is not an isolated European event. It is the opening shot of a new global conflict that threatens catastrophe worldwide.

The SEP opposed the reactionary Russian invasion. But we explained that it was deliberately provoked by the US and NATO, who are the principal instigators of the war. Since then, the US and its allies have poured petrol on the flames that they lit, funnelling hundreds of billions of dollars of weaponry into Ukraine. It is now undeniable that what is taking place is a proxy war, with the Biden administration and its European allies committed to nothing less than inflicting a major military defeat on Russia.

In the early stages of the campaign, some asked what this had to do with the NSW election. The SEP pointed to the intrinsic significance of imperialist war breaking out in Europe, with all of its vast historical resonances. But we also warned that the US-led war against Russia was one plank of a global strategy that included an aggressive confrontation with China, which is viewed as the chief economic threat to imperialism.

And that issue has erupted to the surface in the final stages of the NSW election campaign. The AUKUS agreement announced in San Diego earlier this month by Albanese, Biden and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak completes Australia's transformation into a frontline state in the war drive against China.

The nuclear submarines that Australia is acquiring have nothing to do with "national defence" or deterrence. They are billed as the "apex predators of the ocean." Their role will be to conduct offensive operations throughout the Indo-Pacific, including off the Chinese coastline, as US military officials declare they will likely be at war against China within three years.

What will that mean for the working class? A hint was given by the warmongering propaganda of the "Red Alert" series published this month by the *Sydney Morning Herald*. That publication called for Australia to ready itself for an imminent war against China. That meant stationing US nuclear weapons in the Northern Territory and imposing mass conscription. In other words, the entire country is to be transformed into a military hub, as the ruling elite prepares for total war.

The AUKUS announcement has provoked mass opposition, with polls showing three quarters of the population oppose it. That testifies to the immense anti-war sentiment that exists among workers and young people.

But the critical question is how that is to be taken forward. To derail the opposition, layers of the ruling elite, together with former Labor politicians and the Greens, have made mealy-mouthed criticisms of AUKUS, while advocating a more "independent" Australian foreign policy. These forces have no principled opposition to war. Instead, they are expressing fears about the impact a war will have on the Australian corporate elite and its trade ties to China. They promote reactionary nationalism, which serves only to divide the working class and to promote the interests of Australian imperialism.

As the SEP has insisted, the fight against war requires the development of an international anti-war movement of the working class, based on a socialist program directed against the source of conflict, the capitalist system itself. The response of the ruling elite to the massive crisis of world capitalism is war and authoritarianism. The response of the working class must be the fight for the socialist reorganisation of society on a world scale.

The basis for such a movement exists in the growing struggles of the working class. Increasingly, the fight against the cost-of-living disaster and the assault on wages will intersect with the fight against war. The \$368 billion for the nuclear-powered submarines, and the hundreds of billions for other military spending, must be paid for by stepped-up attacks on health, education and the social rights of the working class.

Internationally, there is a resurgence of class conflict, with explosive struggles by workers spanning from Sri Lanka to the US, Britain and France.

The same issues motivating these movements, soaring inequality and the increasingly impossible conditions of life, exist in this country no less

than internationally. Already, there have been significant struggles in Australia, and NSW, by nurses, teachers, rail workers and other sections.

But all of these movements have reached an impasse. They have been unable to effectively challenge the wage-cutting and austerity agenda of the Perrottet government and of the Labor opposition. The issue has not been a lack of anger or determination to fight. Those have been present in spades.

What all of these struggles have come up against is the reactionary trade union bureaucracy. That bureaucracy has done everything it can to suppress industrial action, divide workers up when it has been compelled to call strikes and isolate workers. The unions have already imposed wage-cutting sellouts on teachers and rail workers. They are preparing to do the same for nurses. This is not the result of mistakes or poor leadership. It flows from the transformation of the unions into a corporatised police force of governments and company management, that represents the six-figure salary bureaucrats, not workers.

The alternative is the fight for rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions, which has been at the centre of the SEP's campaign. Such committees are the only means of defeating the isolation and sell-out operations of the unions. They are the mechanism for unifying workers in a joint industrial and political counter-offensive spanning entire industries and the working class as a whole. Above all, an interconnected network of such committees can and must be the basis for the development of an independent movement of the working class.

But the critical issue is political perspective and program. There is mass hostility to Labor, the Coalition and the entire parliamentary set-up. But that is not enough.

Workers need their own political party! That means a rejection of all the fraudulent claims, peddled by pseudo-left groups like Socialist Alliance, that the election of Labor and the Greens represents a "lesser evil." Such assertions, trotted out in every election for the past 40 years, serve to chain workers to the very political forces responsible for the program of war and austerity.

The real alternative is a revolutionary and socialist perspective. It must be aimed at uniting the struggles of workers around the world. And its aim must be the abolition of the capitalist system and the establishment of workers' governments that would implement socialist policies, including placing the banks and the corporations under democratic workers' control and public ownership.

A workers' government would allocate tens of billions to healthcare, education and wages, not to war and corporate profits. It would implement the scientifically-grounded public health measures required to finally end the pandemic. And, on an international scale, socialism is the only means of ending the threat of war and rationally coordinating society's resources to halt the ecological disaster.

Vote for the SEP to register your support for this perspective! But above all, apply to join the Socialist Equality Party to take your place in this fight for a decent future.

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