

Video: SEP (Australia) holds well-attended final NSW election meeting

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (Australia) held a well-attended online public meeting Thursday night, ahead of Saturday's New South Wales (NSW) state election. SEP candidates Oscar Grenfell, Max Boddy and Mike Head addressed the meeting, which was chaired by National Secretary Cheryl Crisp.

In addition to the reports, the meeting featured a lively discussion in the text chat. Almost 100 workers and young people attended from across NSW, around the country and overseas, and contributed questions and comments throughout the meeting.

In their reports and the question and answer session that followed, Crisp and the candidates provided important clarifications to these questions, especially on the reactionary character of the phoney Anti-AUKUS Coalition and other organisations set up as a trap for workers and young people opposed to war.

Crisp opened the meeting by describing Saturday's poll as a "crisis election." In every election, voters face a "choice" between two parties that represent one class, the ruling class. She explained: "There has been, however, what can only be described as an unprecedented unanimity between the two major parties, which has even been noted by the craven and complicit media."

The unanimity of Labor and the Liberal-Nationals, Crisp said, "is on all issues. Wage cuts to workers, the gutting of health, education and social services, and on war."

"The program of the ruling class in terms of what this country has in store was outlined again in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, under the title of the Red Alert series, which stated that war with China was inevitable, that it would take place within three years, that the military budget would have to be doubled, that conscription must be reintroduced, and that nuclear weapons should be docked in Australia.

These policies cannot be implemented peacefully. That is why there is a conspiracy of silence. That is why the real issues which confront ordinary people in the course of this election have literally not been discussed. Our election

campaign has alone raised the immense dangers confronting the mass of people here and internationally."

Head, who is standing for the Legislative Council, the NSW upper house, has campaigned extensively in the Northern Rivers region, which was devastated by floods on multiple occasions last year. He noted that "thousands of people are still living in makeshift accommodation more than a year after the floods, due to the contempt and indifference, and false promises, of the state and federal governments."

He raised that the critical political issues confronting workers in these flood-stricken areas go far beyond NSW and Australia: "Workers and young people in this country, like those around the world, are experiencing the greatest cut to living conditions since the last World War."

Head explained, "the social crisis produced by spiralling prices, interest rates and rents is not the result of mistakes or misguided policies by governments or central bank chiefs." Instead, it is a "conscious corporate offensive to impose on the working class the full burden of the turn to war and the deepening breakdown of global capitalism."

In complete opposition to all other parties contesting the NSW election, "the Socialist Equality Party is boldly advancing an active and genuine socialist program that provides the only answers to the plunge into war and militarism, the devastation wracking public health, education and housing, the now completely unchecked COVID-19 pandemic and the existential threat of climate change."

Boddy opened his report by stating: "Our campaign in this election has been aimed at telling workers the truth—come polling day, March 25, nothing will be resolved for ordinary people. Whichever of the major capitalist parties comes to power, the policies of austerity and war will be continued. We are fighting for the largest possible vote. However, we are above all standing to help build the revolutionary party of the working class, directed against capitalism."

Boddy, who is standing in the lower-house seat of Bankstown, explained that conditions facing workers in the south-west Sydney electorate are an acute expression of the

broader situation.

He said: “More than a quarter of all families in the area have a weekly household income of less than \$800. With median rental prices nearly \$600 per week, having increased 38.3 percent in just 12 months, a massive proportion of household income is given over to rent alone. The district ranks second in the state for rental stress and first for mortgage stress, with average house prices in the suburb of Bankstown exceeding \$1.2 million.”

This situation “did not develop overnight,” but was the product of decades of attacks by Labor and Liberal governments, facilitated by the trade union apparatus.

He explained that while the mass strikes by teachers, health workers and others across NSW in 2022 had demonstrated that “there is no shortage of anger and determination” to fight attacks on wages and conditions, these struggles had been “isolated and shut down by the same union leadership that has presided over decades of wage-cutting agreements and intolerable workloads.”

This poses the urgent need for workers to form “their own organisations of struggle; rank-and-file committees independent of the trade union apparatus.”

The dire social conditions in Bankstown and more broadly have been sharply exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic, the unchecked spread of which “was due to the deliberate policies of capitalist governments, which saw the necessary lockdowns and implementation of strategies to end COVID-19 as an impediment to their accumulation of wealth.”

Boddy continued: “We are the only party demanding an end to the ‘let it rip’ program,” and fighting for “a scientific and international policy that can and must bring the pandemic to an end.”

Grenfell, the SEP’s lead candidate for the Legislative Council, said: “The danger of a world war is ever clearer, but the SEP has been literally the only party to raise that issue in the NSW election. That’s because Labor, the Liberal-Nationals and all the other official parties are pro-war.”

He pointed to the “immense hypocrisy” of International Criminal Court charges against Putin, which was “underscored by the fact that they coincided with the 20th anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. Nobody in the Bush administration or the Blair and Howard governments has been prosecuted for that illegal war which claimed the lives of up to a million people.”

Grenfell warned that the major imperialist powers “are preparing an even greater crime, which threatens the very existence of humanity,” a war against China, which is viewed as the chief economic threat to US imperialism.

Australia will play a central role in this conflict, including

through the \$368 billion acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines, “offensive weapons, described by some of the warmongers who promote them as the ‘apex predator of the ocean.’”

While there is major opposition among workers and young people to these escalating war plans, it finds no expression in the “phoney anti-AUKUS movement” being pushed by the Greens and the pseudo-left organisations as a means of trapping this opposition. They represent “a layer of the ruling elite that is fearful of the consequences of a full-blown war with Australia’s largest trading partner.”

Grenfell said: “At a meeting in Marrickville last Sunday, they promoted a Bush administration war criminal and Bob Carr as the leaders of such a movement. The whole line of the meeting, and the anti-AUKUS coalition with which it is associated, is to call for a ‘more independent foreign policy.’ But this is a reactionary utopia. It has nothing to do with any sort of fight against war.”

Fundamentally, this is about “trying to cover up, obscure and confuse the basic issue. For the past 108 years, since the outbreak of WWI, the fight against war has been a fight against capitalism. It has been the struggle by the international working class for socialism, something all of these tendencies oppose.”

The development of a genuine anti-war movement, as well as a fight against massive cuts to living and working conditions, “means building a socialist movement, based on the lessons of history and the interests of the working class. That’s the aim of our election campaign.”

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