SEP (Australia) election campaign finds intense opposition to war and austerity in northern NSW

Mike Head
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Socialist Equality Party state election campaigners received a strong response at the Lismore High School polling booth in northern New South Wales (NSW) last Saturday. In particular, there was widespread shock and opposition to the federal Labor government's recently-unveiled $368 billion purchase of nuclear-powered submarines, which are part of the preparations for a catastrophic US-led war against China.

Many Lismore residents spoke to SEP campaigners and some gave interviews for the WSWS to denounce the massive military preparations at the expense of housing, health, education and welfare. Others strongly opposed the Albanese government's refusal to demand the freeing of Julian Assange, the imprisoned WikiLeaks founder, who exposed the lies and war crimes of the US and its allies in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Among those who spoke out were victims of last year's floods in Lismore, a regional city, where thousands of residents are still living in substandard accommodation more than a year after the floods. As our campaign team explained, this displayed the contempt and indifference of governments, both Labor and Liberal-National, for the working class.

We pointed out that every aspect of the floods crisis—from the lack of preparations and warnings to people, to the long-delayed and inadequate assistance offered to flood victims—resulted from the dictates of corporate profit, including the refusal of governments to take the necessary measures to halt climate change, which is driving such extreme weather events.

June, a government worker, told me that she and her family were living in a caravan under their ruined house, waiting in limbo for a decision on their application to the federal-state government buy-back, lift or renovate scheme. For six months, they had rented a house for $700 a week, double the previous level of rents in Lismore.

She said the housing crisis was broader. "It's not just Lismore, it's the whole of Australia. Every day I open up the paper and there's a mum or a family living in a caravan park or homeless because there's literally no homes or they're unaffordable. I don't remember this being such a big issue ten years ago, or even five years ago.

"In the flood, we just lost half a million off the value of our home overnight. We can't afford to move anywhere else. What about other people? They've got nowhere to go. It's just too impossible for people to get into homes. How can people not be able to afford to rent these days? It's crazy."

Nothing had improved since the Albanese government took office last May. "Wages haven't gone up for so many years but everything else is going up. So how do we afford rent and living and everything else? Wages are being kept far below inflation. It's crazy."

Vicki, a retired worker, was sickened by the Albanese government's allocation of $368 billion for AUKUS submarines. "It's disgusting and ridiculous, a total waste of money," she said. "We can't defend Australia with submarines. We'll just be the pawns of AUKUS, of Britain and America, America more likely.

"It's about war, and we're sick of war, sick of death, sick of destruction, sick of lies, sick of poverty, all of that."

Vicki said it was "appalling" that someone had been sacked from working at the "pods" for being a member of a group fighting for the rights of flood victims and

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other residents.

It was “appalling too” that this writer, as an SEP state election candidate, had been barred from visiting the government’s pods encampment to discuss our socialist opposition to the residents’ treatment and provide them with a means to speak out. When I asked Vicki why the government had banned such a visit, she replied: “They’re afraid that we’ll rise up.”

Vicki agreed that workers had been sold out for decades, particularly since the Hawke and Keating governments of 1983 to 1996, which worked in partnership with the trade unions. “We have to look out for the working class,” she said. “There’s no such thing as a proper wage any more. Kids have to work three jobs to live.”

In our discussions, there was general agreement that the election of a Labor-led government in NSW would do nothing to improve the increasingly unbearable conditions confronting working-class households. Numbers of people expressed agreement with the SEP’s socialist perspective and signed up for further contact and discussion with our party.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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