

SEP (Australia) holds well-attended post-election public meeting

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (Australia) held a successful public meeting on Sunday at Bankstown Senior Citizens' Centre reviewing the lessons of the recently concluded New South Wales (NSW) elections. The meeting was addressed by SEP election candidates Oscar Grenfell, Max Boddy and Mike Head, and was chaired by Zac Hambides.

More than 100 participants attended the meeting in person and online from across the country and internationally, including Sydney, Newcastle, the flood impacted Northern Rivers region, Queensland, South Australia, and New Zealand.

Hambides' opening report placed the meeting within its international context. He detailed the ongoing assault on the living conditions of workers internationally, which is being carried out in part to finance machines of war. This includes the announcement of \$368 billion over 30 years for nuclear-powered submarines made by the Federal Labor government in the course of the NSW election campaign.

Hambides made clear that the same objective forces giving rise to war are giving rise to its opposite—a progressive and revolutionary response from the working class worldwide.

A compilation of video interviews with workers on polling day was shown at the meeting, emphasising that the same processes are underway in Australia.

World Socialist Web Site writer Oscar Grenfell opened his report by noting that, “during the election campaign, the SEP was the only party to raise the issue of war.”

Grenfell made clear that, while the party opposes the Putin regime's reactionary invasion of Ukraine, it was, “above all, a reaction to provocations led by American imperialism,” including the vast expansion of NATO along the Russian border.

He emphasised that this was “just one plank of a global strategy,” which includes “plans for a war with China, which is viewed as the chief economic threat to US capitalism.”

Grenfell explained that Australia is already preparing to play a leading role in conflict with China, ramping up spending on missile systems, fighter jets and other offensive weaponry. He also drew attention to calls in the corporate media for “stationing nuclear weapons in northern Australia and introducing mass conscription.”

While there is widespread opposition to war, this cannot be taken forward through the Greens, the pseudo-left, or sections of the ruling elite who, for their own profit interests, call for a more “independent” Australian foreign policy.

Instead, Grenfell outlined, “our perspective is to unite the international working class in a common struggle to end war and its source, the capitalist system.”

WSWS writer Mike Head addressed the meeting remotely from northern NSW, where, 14 months on from last year's devastating floods, “thousands of people are still living in caravans, in the shells of houses with no walls, or government encampments of temporary units.”

This is just one expression of the social crisis confronting workers and young people, who are “suffering the biggest cut to living standards since World War II.”

The victory of Labor in NSW means it is “now in office federally and each state and territory, except for Tasmania.” Head pointed out that this has “profound implications” as “the ruling class needs Labor to implement its agenda of austerity and war, with the collaboration of the trade unions.”

Head explained that the Labor government's Voice referendum is “first and foremost a massive political diversion from this social and political crisis.” He outlined how the Voice will do nothing to ameliorate the conditions of Aboriginal workers, but seeks to enshrine in the constitution the privileges of a small Aboriginal elite.

The final report, by SEP Assistant National Secretary Max Boddy, demonstrated the role of NSW Labor in the weeks it has been in office. The first substantive act by incoming Labor Premier Chris Minns was to shut down all drive-through and walk-in COVID-19 testing clinics across the state, a conscious policy that will result in mass infection, illness and death.

Boddy drew out that this is a warning of what is being prepared as Labor, working in close collaboration with the trade union bureaucracy, seeks to enforce an agenda of austerity and war. He said that to fight against this, new organs of struggle, rank-and-file workers' committees, must be formed.

Following the reports, there was a lively question and answer session. One of the first questions was on the SEP's position on Labor's Voice to Parliament, saying people he had spoken to agree with everything the SEP says, except on the issue of the Voice. Similar questions emerged on the difference between the SEP's position and that of the Voice's conservative opponents.

Head responded to the question by first making clear that the Voice cannot be separated from the rest of the program of the Albanese government, which is leading an offensive against the working class as a whole and placing the population on the

frontline of a war against China.

Head placed the Voice within the history of the promotion of a privileged Aboriginal elite, pointing to the “Uluru Statement from the Heart,” which was not a “grassroots movement,” but was set in train by Prime Minister Tony Abbott, with bipartisan support, to develop a mechanism for “reconciliation” and constitutional recognition.

He detailed what the ruling class means by “reconciliation”: reconciling Indigenous worker and youth with capitalism, the very system that has caused so much ruin, trauma and despair.

Cheryl Crisp, National Secretary of the SEP, also spoke on this essential question. She began by pointing to the immense opposition among the Australian working class to the conditions which have been imposed on the Aboriginal population.

Crisp emphasised the need to understand these conditions as the sharpest expression of attacks against the working class as a whole, as was demonstrated by the imposition of “work for the dole,” which was first directed against Aboriginal people, before being rolled out across the country.

Crisp outlined the development of “native title” by successive Labor governments as a means of creating division among workers, beginning in the late 1960s, a time of profound industrial struggle in the Australian and global working class.

Finally, Crisp drew the connection between the Voice, the social crisis, war and the homicidal pandemic policies of governments internationally. These were not a mistake, she said, but were consciously undertaken for the purpose of a mass culling of the elderly.

Crisp concluded by explaining that the governments responsible for such policies will do nothing to alleviate the plight of Aboriginal people, nor will they baulk at the issue of prosecuting nuclear war.

Therefore, Crisp explained, “the only means by which there is a future for young people—the possibility of a decent life, being able to have a house, a job, a family, all the things which every young person has a right to do—is the overthrow of capitalism.

Following the meeting, WSWs reporters spoke to Angus, an IT worker, who gave a video interview on his thoughts on the meeting. He detailed why he attended, his thoughts on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the war drive against China in this region.

Bridget, a psychologist, attended her first SEP meeting in-person. Speaking on the government's justifications for their “let it rip” COVID policies, Bridget said, “There’s not much of a difference between the two major parties. No matter who you vote for, the same policies are getting promoted, they are on the same page. What they promote is to justify letting people die. There are 25,000 excess deaths, which is a massive difference in how many are expected to die each year.

“A lot of people are against the nuclear submarines because it means war is coming. I disagree with killing people, whether they are civilians or not. The Iraq war was a “war on terrorism,” they told people they were killing terrorists when in fact they were killing lots of civilians and creating lots of refugees,” she said.

“On the Voice, about 40 percent of children in care identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, but they are only 3 percent of

the population. It is incredibly evident that there is disadvantage amongst Indigenous people and the Voice isn’t fixing the problem, it only makes it look like it is. There are still kids being removed from their parents every day and then getting systemic trauma from being pushed around in the system.

“More money should be going into out of home care and mental health. But if the education, health care and welfare systems had more funding that would help people to have better mental health to begin with because their basic needs would be met. Maybe then you wouldn't need to put as much funding into mental health. But they [the government] don't want to do that.”, she said.

Tennah attended the meeting to oppose the drive to war. A single mother of two young girls, Tennah was an 11-year-old when she, her parents, brother and sister fled Sierra Leone to escape war. The former British colony is rich in diamonds, bauxite and iron, yet its inhabitants suffer extreme poverty and life expectancy of just 37 years.

She said: “I want war to stop. War kills innocent kids; war kills adults, and the kids are left behind. I want a community that lives in peace, to build a better life for the kids.”

Tennah also spoke of the terrible effects of Ebola, Dengue and Lassa fevers on her community. She attributes their prevalence to poverty and the failure of the government to act against its spread: “My auntie and all her family died of Ebola because the government doesn’t help anyone. They don’t care about the community, only themselves.”

Tennah also voiced her disgust at the treatment of refugees all over the world: “I’m a refugee. Wars come, people flee, they try to go to other countries to get jobs to support their families back home.”

Now residing in the electorate of Bankstown, Tennah pointed to the growing cost of living. Her rent recently increased by \$100 a month, and she was struggling to find work: “It’s very hard to find a job.”



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