

Campaign for active boycott of Australian Voice referendum wins support from workers and students

Our correspondents
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Members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party have launched a campaign in working-class areas and on university campuses for the SEP's call for an active boycott of the October 14 referendum to insert a new institution, to be called the indigenous Voice, into the reactionary 1901 Australian Constitution.

Thousands of copies of the SEP statement, "For an active boycott of Australian Labor's Voice referendum!" are being distributed on campaigns and doorknocks, and in letterboxes.

As the statement explains, the Voice will be an elite body at the heart of the capitalist state, which includes parliament and governments, that is presiding over the deteriorating conditions of most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and of the working-class as a whole.

This week, campaign teams were in locations that included Mt Druitt, Bankstown and Blacktown in Sydney, the Entrance, Budgewoi and the Molycop factory in the Newcastle-Central Coast region, Goodna in Brisbane and the universities of Melbourne, Newcastle and Western Sydney, as well the Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

A Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee meeting unanimously passed a resolution backing the SEP's active boycott campaign and urged all workers to support and circulate its resolution. That gives a lead to other rank-and-file committees.

At Brisbane's QUT, a campaign team found widespread distrust or indifference toward the Albanese Labor government's referendum. There was also opposition to it, seeing it as a diversion from, and a cover for, for the underlying program of war and austerity being implemented by the government and the

entire ruling class.

James, an engineering and aerospace student, was attracted to the idea of an active boycott of the referendum. "What you say is right. It is a class issue. I was going to say it's a straight-out Yes vote but the issues of indigenous conditions are not going away. The boycott could make a difference, so I'm here to support you.

"Governments can say they are concerned about indigenous people, and then nothing will happen. I'm not a big supporter of governments. They are just politicians saying things will change but it's nothing but talk."

After a discussion about Australia's 1967 referendum, James agreed that the existing political order, dominated by the capitalist profit system, had not and would not redress the shocking conditions of most indigenous people. That referendum saw a vote of more than 90 percent in favour of laws to improve the conditions of Aboriginal people—showing the widespread support for such action—but these conditions have only worsened.

James commented: "I'm scared for the future. All I can hope for is a way to fight back from the people. The only thing the government really changes is how much money the upper class is getting—do they get it at a faster rate or a slower rate?"

"Capitalism—the sooner it's gone the better. It's done nothing but force the whole class division. I can't think of a time in history when it's been as bad as it is now, or as bad as it's getting."

Later in the discussion about the Voice proposal, James said: "You have to be delusional if you think that you can change things by voting for one of the two

parties. All you are getting is tax cuts for the rich or tax cuts for the rich!

“Where’s our voice anyway? We don’t have a choice. The only choice we have is to have things like this campaign where we step out and ignore the options that are given to us and create a new path for ourselves.”

James was concerned about the danger of war. “The Australian government’s plans are for war, with the submarines and all the base fortifications up in the Northern Territory... And in Western Australia they are expanding the base near Perth for US nuclear submarines... If World War III were to happen, Australia is being prepared as a place to put troops and mobilise from there.”

He said aerospace students found they had little choice but to seek careers with military companies like Boeing, Raytheon and Lockheed Martin, because that was where the money was.

James concluded: “I don’t mean to be extreme but I do think that at this point a revolution is very much needed. In the sense that we need a backlash against this system. Because there’s power in people. When people allow themselves to just work underneath the system, there’s no escaping. Nothing’s going to change if you keep working with the system.”

Kirsty, a Brisbane retail worker, agreed that the Voice referendum was a political sham that would do nothing to help indigenous people or any other members of the working class.

She commented: “That’s absolutely true. Everyone has a voice and everyone deserves to use their voice. But I also think the government is trying to pull the wool over our eyes in many ways. They are spending money on things that we don’t actually need, like the AUKUS submarines, and when do they actually deliver on any of these things they promise?”

Kirsty continued: “The conditions of life are getting way, way worse. They are not putting wages up—if anything, they are going down—but the cost of living, for rentals, for owning a property, is going up. Homelessness is everywhere. How can they say that they are helping in any way when the price of petrol, food, clothing, all this stuff just to live, is making it hard for people to get from A to B?

“What are we supposed to do as a society, especially people who are working class or underprivileged? They

might have had a tough upbringing. We all need a voice, but is the government going to deliver on it?

“Everything is all for the corporate people who can throw money around. We aren’t all like that, with billions of dollars to throw around. We didn’t get a vote on all the money they spend on war, the ammunition and submarines and all that sort of stuff. \$368 billion for submarines—where’s the money for us, the people?

“I am completely for a boycott, 100 percent. I work in retail. It’s good but I’m not making as much money as I was 15 years back. Too many people are doing it tough. Not just financially—they don’t have a roof over their head.”

Kirsty registered on the spot, via her phone, to join the livestream of the Socialist Equality Party’s active boycott public meeting in Sydney at 2 p.m. (AEDT) on Sunday, October 1. All readers can likewise register now to attend in person or online.

Note: Under conditions of compulsory voting, which makes it a crime to urge a boycott of the vote itself, the SEP calls on workers and youth to register their opposition by casting informal ballots and join our active boycott campaign in the lead-up to October 14, that goes well beyond the individual act of voting.

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