

Australian workers and youth express their support for the SEP active boycott campaign against Labor's Voice referendum

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is continuing its campaign for an active boycott of Labor's October 14 referendum to enshrine an indigenous advisory Voice to parliament in the Constitution.

The SEP opposes the Yes campaign of the government, aimed at dividing workers along racial lines and revamping the image of Australian capitalism. It is also exposing the reactionary character of the official No campaign, led by the right-wing Liberal-National Coalition.

The WSWs is publishing below interviews from IYSSE members and supporters of the SEP who are backing the active boycott campaign.

The SEP is holding a public meeting on October 1 at 2 p.m. (AEDT) to discuss the campaign. It will be in Community Room 2, Bryan Brown Theatre, 80 Rickard Rd, Bankstown, Sydney. The meeting will also be livestreamed. Register now to attend in person or online!

The SEP spoke to **Mandy**, who said she had been "grappling" with what to do with her vote, "because I couldn't in good conscience vote Yes or No." She was initially leaning to a Yes vote because she didn't want to give support to racists. Mandy said she was glad to hear the SEP call for an active boycott, noting "it isn't an abstention, but a ground up alternative."

She said that the Yes campaign is "anti-democratic." While it claims that it will enable "Aboriginal people to have a say," in truth they "don't even get a say as to who is on the panel of the Voice group. Those people will be appointed outside of any democratic process and therefore it will remain more privileged people who are already being heard."

"Why is the Voice coming up now?" Many asked. She said it had partly "been brought up now as a distraction from the building towards war by the government." Mandy said workers don't have a say "about whether we join AUKUS," the militarist pact with Britain and the US in preparation for war with China.

She noted that "people are concerned about the needs of Aboriginal people, as they should be," however she said that official politics will change nothing. "If governments seriously wanted to help Aboriginal people, they've got the funds, they've got the ability, they know what is needed. A lot could be done tomorrow without a referendum."

Opposing recent comments by Marcia Langton, one of the architects of the Voice, branding all its opponents as racist, Mandy said, "the decline in the Yes vote is the opposite of what Langton has said. People are finding out more about the Voice and seeing holes in it." She said that "since the last election, anyone who had any hopes that Labor was going to be somehow better, it is now clear they are not." She said that this means people don't trust what the government is putting forward.

"The history is appalling and the fact that Aboriginal people have such discrepancy in healthcare and life expectancy and all these needs is an absolute disgrace. But what is happening to them is not going to change," Mandy said. The fundamental issue was "not race, not gender, not any of these other distractions."

Faraz, an international student from Pakistan studying in Sydney, said, "on the surface, the Voice touts it is providing benefits and rights for the indigenous people, but it's not helping indigenous

people. It doesn't address the root cause of issues such as unemployment and education. It's not increasing their income. It doesn't reduce the impact of climate change or health issues. The wealthy layers of indigenous people get the support of the Australian government, but average families don't have that support."

Relating the Voice to the question of war, Faraz said, "The Australian government supports the United States and the proxy war against Russia and plans for war with China. They are seeking the support of the Australian people in this, and that's why they're carrying out the referendum to divert attention. I think the majority of people, over 95 percent, would say they don't support war. That's why they don't ask this question or have a referendum on it. There was no referendum on AUKUS."

Speaking on the issues in his home country Faraz said, "The people who are in power in Pakistan are helping and supporting the United States. The Pakistani working class don't want this war in Ukraine. Inflation rates are getting higher. The poor are getting poorer, and the wealthy are getting wealthier. The Pakistani government, which came to power through direct support of the US, is secretly selling weapons to the US for the Ukraine war."

The SEP also spoke to **Cody**, an engineering student at the University of Newcastle, and a mining worker. "There are a lot of issues in the Aboriginal community that must be fought to be resolved. But a lot of people are indicating that they will vote no because people don't think the Voice is a useful strategy."

He asked, "Why doesn't the population get a say on the housing crisis, or the cost-of-living crisis?" The reason is "because nobody in high leadership wants these changes to take place. It does not help their bottom line. Why would a capitalist push for trying to fix the housing crisis when they make a ton of money from it, and it is still growing."

Cody commented on the social crisis in Australia. "People face major issues such as finding housing and getting a proper education. Student debt is going through the roof. In health you can't find a place that does bulk billing anymore, no doctor can afford to bulk bill for the simple fact that they increasingly need to fund themselves because of constant cuts in government funding. Large numbers of people are

increasingly unemployed, jobs are going."

Cody commented that "a large aspect of all of this is not caring about workers, the bottom-line is profit." He related this to the recent remarks of CEO Tim Gurner, a multi-millionaire property developer, who told the Property Summit of the *Australian Financial Review* that workers have been "paid a lot to do not too much" and that "we need to see pain in the economy" including "massive layoffs."

Cody said the remarks, "made so many people feel horrible, they're barely getting by, so many people I know are working harder than they ever have just to try and get food on their plates. Multiple people have side-gigs just to cover their rent."

"When Gurner talks about productivity he is talking about decreasing the amount that the company spends to increase company wealth. Workers' labour creates wealth and if you lower wages, that percentage of money left over increases profit."

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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