Australian SEP receives support for active boycott campaign of 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, which is aimed at dividing workers along racial lines, while revamping the image of Australian capitalism. It also opposes the reactionary official No campaign, led by the right-wing Liberal-National Coalition based on defending the existing anti-democratic constitution.

On October 1, the SEP held a public meeting in which leading members of the SEP and of the Socialist Equality Group (SEG) in New Zealand explained the geo-strategic and class-war motives underpinning the Albanese government's promotion of the Voice.

The speakers explained that the active boycott was not passive absentionism, but a way of advancing an independent socialist perspective to unite the working class.

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Kimberly, an anthropology student on an exchange program in Sydney from California explained why she attended the SEP public meeting on October 1. "During my first few days in Australia I saw a lot of signs and campaign material for a Yes vote for the Voice. Initially she thought she'd support Yes and "spread awareness of it." However, as she found out more about the issue in her university classes, she said it was, "eye opening that not all Aboriginal people are supporting the Voice". She attended the meeting to find out more.

Kimberly said that in the US the conditions of indigenous people are not acknowledged in the way they are in Australia. However, she thought the Australian government is bringing it up "and pushing the Voice because they want to appear progressive. Yesterday I was watching a movie and one of the ads was for the Yes campaign and it was about a young Aboriginal kid. It felt so theatrical. They're using this young kid to push something. It was interesting to be able to see that propaganda," she said.

Kimberly discussed her experiences in the US around the George Floyd protests and the issue of police brutality. She said that the discussion goes in a circle. The right wing promotes that "All Lives Matter or Blue Lives Matter" and say you shouldn't "go against the police." As for the "left," they say it is "the police themselves and not the system that is protecting them. This discussion is taking us nowhere."

"At the end of the day it isn't about one person. It's about the system that was created that pushes police brutality," Kimberley said. She identified this system as "capitalism," which she said promotes the "illusion that anyone can make it, and that it's good for everyone." In reality, there are disproportional divides in "food and economics" and "in education as well."

"I think capitalism benefits the one percent and leaves the rest of us. It is a system that helps the rich get richer and the poor get poorer," she said, "that's the true capitalism we aren't aware of in our everyday lives."

Returning to the question of the Voice referendum, Kimberly said: "The point that stuck with me [from the meeting] was the discussion about wealthy Aboriginals. The framework in America in regard to wealthy minorities isn't talked about much. It's something new to me."

She said that when she first heard about the Voice, she thought it was "encompassing every single Aboriginal person in Australia," but that it is being pushed for by "wealthy Aboriginals" who "support the

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system [capitalism] and policies that go against those who are not in power.

"One of the meeting points addressed the cuts in health and housing and all those important sectors that actually do matter. Instead of pushing to have a bigger budget in those sectors, [the government is] cutting them and then just adding a sort of "progressive" blanket over it," she said.

Snow, a student from China, on holiday in Australia, joined the meeting after reading the SEP statement. He said, "I found your points very interesting and inspiring; that the referendum is a cover for the conflicts between classes, and that race is used to cover over class."

Snow said what struck him at the meeting was the explanation, "that the referendum, which is supposedly about Aboriginal people, is actually about war. Your party is fighting for the rights of the working class and fighting to make a socialist society come about."

He continued saying, "I think socialism is about fighting for the rights of the majority. War hurts the majority. Capitalism starts wars for the benefit of the few. Secondly, socialism is not only about people within one country. It's about the world, about humanity."

In Newcastle, the SEP sent a team to the Koori Knockout, a large Indigenous gathering based on football. There we spoke to **Shari**, a part-time student who also works as a health clerk in an Emergency Department, "most people don't know who to vote for or who to trust," she said.

When it was pointed out that Australia's constitution provides no democratic rights to anyone and that real division in society is class, not race, Shari agreed. "It's not just the indigenous community fighting alone," she said, "it's also the poorer communities because they relate and correlate with one another. They're all in the same low socio-economic areas."

Speaking about her experiences at work, she added, "Working in the hospital system, I notice a lot of nurses are overworked, it is really sad. Everyone comes in with their own stories. A lot of patients don't get the care they need and get stereotyped when entering. All groups of workers need to come together."

Rob, a retiree from a farming background, spoke to an SEP team campaigning in Goonellabah, a working-class suburb of the New South Wales regional city of Lismore. She welcomed the call for an active boycott of the Voice referendum itself.

"Either Yes or No is going to be extremely divisive for this country, and I don't know how we are going to get out of it," she said. "I don't know what this is going to accomplish either way. If the Yes or No vote gets in, what's it going to do, except divide us? It's going to divide the working class, that's what it is."

Rob agreed that the Yes and No camps represented rival camps of the ruling class, both of which agree on making the working class pay for the economic crisis and for preparations for a US-led war against China.

"The whole system needs replacing," she said, adding her concern about the prospect of war. "As the Americans go, we always follow blindly. Wherever they say, we go. It's the American system, not the people."

Rob did not agree that people intending to vote No in the referendum were all racist. "The whole referendum is divisive. It's going to cause rifts between people. I can't see any end to it."

She explained that people did not trust the government and the existing political system to improve the conditions of indigenous people. "We're all fighting to live aren't we? Everything is so expensive, food, no housing."

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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