

Australian workers speak about Voice referendum and SEP's active boycott campaign

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 and revamping the image of Australian capitalism. The party also opposes the official No campaign, led by the right-wing Liberal-National Coalition, which is based on thinly-veiled racist dog-whistling.

The SEP is campaigning in numbers of working-class suburbs. Workers are expressing a deep distrust in the government, which is offering nothing to ordinary people who face an ongoing cost of living crisis with rampant inflation and soaring housing expenses.

Many of those spoken to put their name down for further discussion and said they were interested to read the SEP statement for an active boycott.

In Brisbane, the SEP spoke with **Kodee**, a M?ori Woolworths warehouse worker, who stopped at the Richlands shopping village in Brisbane's western suburbs to discuss the SEP's active boycott campaign.

She explained that her sister had lost her job two months ago when Coles, another supermarket chain, shut its nearby warehouse at Heathwood and opened an automated facility at Redbank, in the same region.

She noted that both Coles and Woolworths supported the Voice proposal while destroying workers' jobs.

Kodee said she could not vote on the Voice because she was not an Australian citizen, which is common among New Zealander and other immigrant workers. She agreed that there were parallels between the Voice

proposal and the Treaty of Waitangi process in New Zealand.

Under that treaty, "none of the money goes to normal M?ori working people, just the richer ones. Most M?ori are living in terrible conditions. My family is working class. My father is 58 and he is still working hard every day in New Zealand."

She thought the Voice referendum was a distraction from the real issues facing workers. "We're all doing it tough," she commented. "We didn't get a vote on AUKUS submarines and other military spending, and that's a whole heap of money going on that. And the same for the tax cuts to the rich."

The SEP campaigner explained that the SEP's active boycott campaign was to advance a socialist program to take the wealth out of the hands of the banks, big companies and mining giants and put it in the hands of the working class to run society. Kodee responded, "I love it. I agree 100 percent, because the rich run everything. The news media do their bidding and everybody follows along."

Kodee drew a connection between the automation of the supermarket warehouses and the cost-of-living crisis. "The prices of the groceries keep going up. The money they're making from automation is not lowering the prices. They got their automated Coles warehouse and have they dropped their prices? No.

"They are making billions in profits and they have increased their profit margins because they don't have the workers to pay, because it's all automated. So they are making more profit.

"Cheaper groceries would be nice for struggling families. Our bill has grown so much. We used to buy a trolley full but now we have to pick and choose what

we are going to get, seeing what's cheapest, like buying mince because you can make that last, that kind of thing. But who wants to eat mince every day?"

Moe, a construction worker, spoke to the SEP during a campaign in Craigieburn on the northern outskirts of Melbourne, where many young families suffer high mortgage stress. "We don't need the Voice and I don't agree with it. It will separate us. Even the Aboriginal people I know aren't for it, they say it will give them nothing. I know there are very poor Aboriginals living terribly, I've been to some of the public houses and it's heartbreaking. But the Voice will do nothing to change this".

Moe said he thought Labor was promoting the Voice, "to show that Australia cares about Indigenous people, but the government doesn't care. There is nothing for normal people. Inflation is increasing and nothing is being done. I'm in construction and I'm doing okay, but if you're on \$1000 a week you walk into Coles you get one bag of groceries for \$50. You just can't get by on that amount of money."

Jim, a civil engineer and SEP electoral member said, "I had been reading the SEP position on the Voice referendum and I agree with it. Under capitalism whatever might trickle down will soon get sucked back up into corporate profits. It is a rigged game, capitalism. The corporate support for the Voice should set up alarm bells for anyone who considered themselves on the left," he said.

Jim attended an SEP meeting in which Tom Peters, leader of the Socialist Equality Group in New Zealand, explained that the Treaty of Waitangi had done nothing for the Māori working class. "The explanation of the Treaty and the way it has been used was really eye opening. I'd been lulled into that position where I thought the Treaty was a good thing. Really it is just a dead end for working class people and especially Indigenous working-class people who are the most oppressed," he said.

Serge, a retired university worker from Western Australia and electoral member, was unable to join the SEP's public meeting live on October 1, but has since watched the recording. He said he was in "complete agreement with the position of the SEP on the Voice. The whole meeting was a very accurate assessment of the situation—the Voice puts a nice humane gloss on the Labor party policy, and at the same time distracts from

what the Labor party is really doing, which is joining with US imperialism and basically preparing for a war with China.

"Both the Yes and No Voice advocates are just two factions of the ruling class. It has nothing to do with the working class, and the difference between them, as one of the speakers said, is mostly tactical," he said.

Serge then said the Voice is a "diversion to hide the plans they have, not only with the United States and this whole AUKUS drive, but also to deal with the working class at home. That is when the silk gloves will come off, and we will see the true nature of Albanese's capitalist government."

Geoff spoke to SEP campaigners at a JBS meat processor abattoir in Victoria, where he has worked for 22 years. He had decided to vote no because it will solve nothing and is "splitting two sides." He continued, "The politicians are supposed to be taking care of the affairs of Aborigines. But they're doing a shocking job. It's ridiculous. They're going to write the legislation after you vote yes. It's like giving them a blank cheque. I'm a Labor supporter but they haven't convinced me to vote yes at all."

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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