

For an active boycott of the Voice referendum! Build a socialist movement of the working class against war and austerity!

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
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In the lead-up to polling day on October 14, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) reiterates its call for workers, students and young people to support an active boycott of the entire Voice referendum to enshrine an indigenous advisory body to parliament in the Constitution.

Reject the official Yes and No camps, which represent rival sections of the ruling elite, hostile to the interests of workers! Take a stand and signal your support for an independent perspective for the working class against Labor, the Liberals and the entire political establishment!

Because of Australia's anti-democratic electoral laws, which make voting compulsory, an active boycott can only be registered at the polls by casting an informal ballot. We urge workers and young people to do so.

However, the SEP's campaign for a boycott goes far beyond voting. Its aim is to develop an independent movement of the entire working class against the pro-business racialism of the Yes and No camps, and the entire ruling class program, supported by both factions, of war, austerity and growing authoritarianism.

As the SEP warned at the outset, the referendum campaign has been an exercise in debased racialism, diversion and lies.

The Yes campaign has nothing to do with improving the conditions of oppressed indigenous people. It is a cynical attempt to capitalise on mass sentiment in favour of redressing the crimes against Aboriginal people. The aim is to put a progressive gloss on the right-wing Labor government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, which is committed to escalating Australian involvement in US plans for a war against China and forcing the working class to pay for the crisis of capitalism through austerity.

The No camp, headed by the Liberal-National Coalition and its leader Peter Dutton, is based on a defence of the status quo and thinly-veiled racist dog-whistling against indigenous people.

Both sides defend the anti-democratic 1901 Constitution, which does not guarantee a single democratic right. Both defend the interests of Australian capitalism, that is, the domination of the banks and big business over working people and the economic order responsible for the oppression of most of the Aboriginal population.

Both have declared that they will cut federal spending on indigenous programs as part of a broader onslaught on healthcare, education and other social necessities. The Yes campaign has

touted the Voice as a means of spending less, not more, on indigenous services!

The underlying unity between the two camps and the fraud of the whole referendum has been exposed by the crisis in the Middle East over the past week. Labor and the Coalition have joined hands to denounce the courageous uprising of the Palestinian people against their decades-long occupation and to solidarise themselves with the bombing of Gaza by an Israeli regime that is speaking the language of genocide.

Albanese and the Yes campaign falsely claim that the referendum will give a "voice" to oppressed indigenous people, the victims of British colonisation. But in the last week of the campaign, they fully support the bombardment and mass murder of oppressed Palestinians, subject to the most prolonged colonial occupation of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Moreover, Labor oversees a crackdown on any expressions of solidarity with the Palestinians. The state Labor government in New South Wales has effectively banned a pro-Palestinian demonstration on Sunday, the very day after the referendum. While the imperialist warmongers supporting the Israeli bombardment are permitted a "voice," that of growing mass anti-war opposition among workers and young people is forcefully suppressed.

These developments only underscore the utter sham of the entire Voice proposal.

As the SEP explained in its major statement calling for an active boycott on September 7, the Voice has several aims, all of them reactionary. They include:

- * To integrate a layer of the indigenous elite more directly into the corridors of political and corporate power. This layer, represented by figures such as Noel Pearson and Marcia Langton, has supported state attacks on oppressed indigenous people, including the Northern Territory intervention, with its military-police occupation of Aboriginal areas, and welfare quarantining.

- * To divide the working class along racial lines. Amid the greatest cost of living and social crisis in decades, with workers of all backgrounds finding it increasingly impossible to make ends meet, the Voice aims to place race, not class, at the centre of political discussion.

- * To revamp the image of Australian capitalism. The Labor government, with the full support of the Coalition, is functioning

as the chief attack dog of US imperialism in its confrontation with China. Labor's continuous diplomatic missions throughout Asia and the Pacific, aimed at bullying states in the region into aligning with the war drive, are complicated by Australian capitalism's brutal history of oppressing the Aboriginal people.

* To strengthen the state apparatus. The Voice, through its connections to parliament and the government, would collaborate with and assist the military, the police and the other institutions of the capitalist state, all of which are committed to the defence of the corporate elite and the suppression of the working class. Strengthening this apparatus is viewed as crucial by the political establishment, amid growing social opposition and anti-war sentiment in response to the eruption of militarism.

As the campaign progressed, the Yes camp entered a deepening crisis. Opinion polls are not infallible. But all of them suggest that Voice is headed for defeat. Proponents of the Voice have responded with a hysterical campaign, claiming their flagging support is a result of mass racism. But this is a slander against the population and, above all, the working class.

Labor called the referendum to cynically exploit the mass anti-racist sentiment and sympathy for the plight of indigenous people that it knows exists among working people. Polling from the beginning of the year showed that the Voice enjoyed support from up to 65 percent of the voting population.

The shift is not the result of a sudden development of racism. It is because growing layers are rightfully doubtful that the Voice will do anything to improve the conditions of oppressed Aboriginal people or any other layer of the working class. They are, moreover, increasingly hostile to the Labor government, the entire political establishment, and its policy of austerity and wage cuts amid the worsening cost-of-living disaster. Significantly, polling indicates that despite the collapse in support for the Voice, Peter Dutton, who heads the official No camp, remains one of the most unpopular figures in Australian politics.

The Voice is in shambles because it was always a top-down initiative, not a grassroots movement of indigenous people or any other section of the working class. The origins of moves towards indigenous Constitutional recognition lie in a 2015 meeting convened by then Liberal-National Prime Minister Tony Abbott with indigenous leaders to try and diffuse widespread opposition to his government's sweeping budget cuts, including to Aboriginal services.

The Uluru Dialogue of 2017, which proposed the Voice, was attended by carefully selected representatives of the indigenous elite without any broader participation.

Notably, in the days before the referendum, polling was released, showing that among Aboriginal people, support for the Voice is as low as 59 percent, compared with the 80 percent figure falsely claimed by the Yes camp for most of the campaign. Given that the polling likely excludes most regional and remote communities, that figure could be even lower.

As the SEP has insisted, the oppression of most Aboriginal people is not a result of racism, and it will not be resolved by establishing an elite indigenous Voice to parliament.

In our September 7 statement, we explained that "an independent line for the working class must begin with an understanding that

the oppression of Aboriginal people is a product of capitalism—the private ownership of society's resources by a tiny financial elite. It cannot be resolved by augmenting, altering or reforming the existing state structures which are dedicated to defending that private ownership."

The SEP stressed: "The struggle to end the oppression of Aborigines, and the struggle for the social rights of the working class, are one and the same. They require a unified movement of the working class, regardless of race, gender and sexuality, against the capitalist profit system itself. This means the fight for socialism, placing society's resources under public ownership and democratic workers' control, thereby guaranteeing the right of all to free education, health care and all the fundamental necessities of modern life."

The course of the referendum itself has fully born out that position. The development of an independent socialist movement of the working class worldwide is more urgent than ever, as underscored by the bombardment of Gaza, the ongoing US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and the preparations for a US war against China that could end humanity.

Such a movement, moreover, is the only means of defending democracy, as the crackdown on pro-Palestinian protests demonstrates. It is the sole way workers can fight for their fundamental social rights to high-quality and free education, healthcare and services, jobs, and decent wages against the austerity onslaught of governments and corporations.

Take up the active boycott, and above all, join the Socialist Equality Party and help to build it as the new mass revolutionary leadership of the working class!

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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