

On referendum day Australian workers and young people support the SEP's active boycott of Labor's Voice to parliament

Our reporters
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Socialist Equality Party (SEP) members and supporters campaigned at polling booths in Sydney, Melbourne, Newcastle and Brisbane for Saturday's referendum day on Labor's Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

The SEP campaigned for an active boycott of the referendum which was to enshrine an indigenous advisory Voice to parliament in the Constitution. Labor sought to lend a progressive cover to its regressive agenda of support for US-led wars and an assault on the living conditions of the working class at home. The only beneficiaries of the Voice would have been a narrow layer of the well-off Aboriginal elite. The appalling conditions facing indigenous people will only worsen along with the rest of the working class.

The entire official campaign—both the Yes and No camps—was mired in divisive racialist politics. Both defended the anti-democratic 1901 constitution. The opposition Liberal-National Coalition represented a layer of the ruling class concerned that far from strengthening the capitalist state, the Voice would weaken it. The SEP campaigned for an active boycott to unify workers against the deepening assault on their social position and against the US-led drive to world war.

Today, the *World Socialist Web Site* is featuring comments from workers and young people from the working-class suburb of Mt Druitt in Sydney, which has a high indigenous and immigrant population, the western Melbourne working-class suburb of Footscray, Mayfield East in Newcastle, two hours north of Sydney and Richlands East in Brisbane.

The referendum was decisively defeated with more than 60 percent of the country voting No. Far from

being a swing to the right or the outcome of mass racism, as claimed by various prominent Yes supporters, the result expresses deep-seated hostility to the Labor government which is responsible for deteriorating living conditions, and distrust in the entire political and media establishment.

As the SEP campaigners revealed, workers are deeply concerned about the plight of Aboriginal people and spoke about the worsening social crisis facing working people everywhere. At the booths, a number of workers took up the SEP's call for an active boycott, registered an informal vote and put their name down for further discussion with the SEP.

The interviews below are the first in a series to be published in coming days.

Marc, in Newcastle, who works in manufacturing, told the SEP: "I've tried to find out about what the Voice is and hear a range of ideas and opinions. From what I've heard, it is a lot of money being put into something that's not necessary. I've heard from some Aboriginal people who have said that this is a waste of money, and they'd prefer to see it going directly towards things like health and education—that's something I agree with."

SEP campaigners pointed out that the referendum was being used as a political cover for war. He replied, "Why are the government spending so much money on wars when we've got other problems? I totally disagree with that. I've got three daughters, I'd rather have the money go towards hospitals, schools, education. There's a lot of other things I'm concerned about, like mental health, that's a major issue—I'd rather see more money go towards that in every country."

“Bulkbilling isn’t a thing anymore—we used to be known for that in this country. Even things like getting testing for ADHD or autism for kids, the wait times for that are too long. The cuts that the government has made to health, education—that’s going to have an impact, not just on Aboriginal communities, but everyone.”

Responding to the SEP call for an active boycott, he said, “I know a few of my mates were going to just put an X on the paper to basically just say, this a waste of my time. I agree with that for the most part, but I’m with you guys—it needs to go beyond voting too. We need more jobs, better health and education.”

Peter, an Aboriginal worker in Brisbane, dismissed the proposal for a Voice. “I think it’s beyond a joke and I don’t trust the government anyway.” He said the government did not need a referendum to address the problems confronting indigenous people. “Why should we vote yes or no in the first place? If they felt that things should be done, why don’t they just do it? They are the government. They don’t need to do it in the way they are doing it. If they really wanted it and cared about it, they would have done it long ago.”

Asked about the SEP’s call for an active boycott, he said, “I absolutely agree with it. I don’t think this vote should be happening in the first place. I think we boycott it. We can get all the votes switched off and maybe they can do it differently.

“I don’t know how personally they could do it differently but [it needs to be] a better way than what they are doing now. It’s a kind of in-your-face thing. You are forced to vote. You have no choice but to do it, and that’s a bit annoying.”

Sophia, a political science student at the University of Melbourne, and her friend **Josh**, who works at a hire company, spoke with SEP campaigners about the party’s campaign for an active boycott.

“I was very surprised to hear this, no one else is calling for this,” Sophia said. “It’s strong of your party, especially given all the Yes people who would denounce you as racist. But I don’t think it is, I think a boycott is an excellent idea.”

Josh added: “It’s very refreshing to hear a different perspective after the Yes campaign has been shoved down our throats the last three months... To be honest, I thought the referendum was nonsense. Both sides, Yes and No, were being vitriolic about the whole thing. I

lived in the Northern Territory for a while. I saw first-hand the corruption, the flow of cash from higher-ups in government to rural communities is insanely low, it’s 1 percent, if that.”

Sophia said, “The Voice is not about helping indigenous people. Governments should be going out to these communities, listening to what they need and providing it. There’s so much corruption in the current situation, the money simply doesn’t get to the people who need it most. That is not going to be solved with this referendum. A lot of young people these days would agree that politics is now simply about power and money. We want to be able to change the world for the better, and this isn’t the way to do it.”

She added: “Why is there all this spending on the military? Why are there all these wars happening? This is 2023. We have the means to meet society’s needs and not have wars. Young people recognise this and want to fight for something better. They’re seeing all these crises around the world on social media and realise the governments are responsible. They want change. And of course, they’re struggling as well with the cost of living. Young people see what’s happening and are drawing conclusions. Capitalism should be taken down.”

Josh responded, “Exactly. It’s all about big businesses getting bigger, that’s where all these problems come from.”



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