Long-time Australian Labor Party member resigns to become SEP electoral member

Mike Head
2 April 2024

A retired Queensland nurse and former warehouse worker, Mark Stapleton, has sent a letter of resignation to the Australian Labor Party (ALP), which he first joined three decades ago, and joined the Socialist Equality Party as an electoral member.

In his resignation letter, emailed to the Labor Party state secretary on March 28, Stapleton explained his opposition and disgust with Labor's support for the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza and for US militarism against Russia and China, including the AUKUS military pact against China.

Stapleton wrote: "I am resigning my membership of the ALP due to their unquestioned support for the US/NATO/EU war on Russia and China. Also, the belligerent attitude we are adopting with AUKUS/QUAD/Five Eyes/nuclear submarines and the way we are lecturing Asian and South Pacific leaders to join the military and economic war against China. Not to mention the support for Israeli genocide in Gaza and withdrawal of UN funding for Palestinian refugees based on unsubstantiated claims by the IDF and Israeli government."

He explained: "I have been Labor all my life and participated in many campaigns. But I will not support war, especially against two countries that don't want war. I have not heard one current ALP sitting member (State or Federal) speak out against the war mongering of [Labor ministers] Albanese, Wong, Marles or Conroy. The most upsetting thing of all is the lies the ALP leadership are telling us about Ukraine/Russia and Taiwan/China. I have raised my concerns during the last federal election campaign with [Foreign Minister] Penny Wong's and [Prime Minister] Anthony Albanese's offices and was treated with contempt by their staffers."

Stapleton also denounced the Albanese government's attacks on the living conditions and basic rights of the working class, and shutting of the country's borders to refugees. He wrote: "Meanwhile we have a housing crisis, cost of living crisis, massive healthcare crisis, GP shortages, reduced rights in the workplace and declining job security etc, etc."

His letter concluded: "One last thing—to refuse an asylum seeker asylum forever simply because they approach our borders in a boat to request asylum is beyond indefensible."

In this interview, Stapleton explained why he not only quit the Labor Party but signed up as a SEP electoral member to participate in the SEP's fight to build an alternative revolutionary socialist leadership in the working class.

Asked to explain the background to the stand he is taking, Stapleton said: "I have had increasing concern over the past few years about the attitude of the Western governments to Ukraine and Taiwan… I have been opposed to the proxy wars against Russia and China. Labor has become as bad as the Liberal National Party, and not just in foreign policy but also in abandoning workers and the poor."

He described as "absolutely outrageous" statements by Western leaders, such as French President Macron, that defence industry jobs were good for their countries. Albanese had been similarly "disgusting" in promoting a "war economy."

Stapleton said he had been angry for a long time, before the current genocide, about the situation in Gaza, but "it's appalling to see what is happening on TV."

He was not surprised by the Labor government's support for US-backed war policies, but "things like buying all those [AUKUS] submarines" showed the government was impervious to opposition. "They have lost all credibility, like Israel."

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"We are headed for nuclear war, and Pine Gap [a US surveillance base in central Australia] could be the first target. It would be crazy for Russia or China to go to war against the US, but they are being goaded into it."

Stapleton said he had raised these concerns inside the Labor Party, including with numerous officials and members of parliament, only to be rebuffed. "I thought it was appropriate to fight within for reform, but I don't believe that anymore… Things are now beyond repair."

He said the current situation had made clear the real nature of the Labor Party and the trade unions. "They used to try to get better conditions for workers but now they are just interested in enterprise bargaining. I used to think that the unions were there to represent workers and I used to excuse them for not doing more, short of overthrowing the system, but not anymore."

Asked why he had become a SEP electoral member, after reading the WSWS for some years, he said: "I have been a socialist all my life but capitalism is now in its death throes. We need to get ready to step up and take the leadership in creating a socialist society. I totally endorse the SEP's position that the workers need to take political power and globally."

Stapleton said that he wanted to publicly support the SEP and the WSWS, and the need for a global struggle to overturn capitalism. He explained: "We are seeing the degradation of workers' rights, war and privatisation. We need to have public ownership of essential services.

"This is absolutely an international fight. I am not a patriot at all. My allegiance is with the workers and poor all over the world. I am very much an internationalist. We have more in common with Indonesian fishermen than the rich people in Australia."

Stapleton urged other workers to join up as SEP electoral members. The SEP last month launched a campaign for 1,500 electoral members in order to regain official party registration so that the party can have its name on the ballot alongside its candidates at the next federal election.

This is essential because the SEP is the only party with a genuine socialist program and perspective to fight war and inequality and their source, the capitalist profit system. To apply to become an electoral member today, fill out the form below, or click here.

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