

Australia: Workers and youth in Melbourne explain why they support the SEP's electoral member campaign

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, continues to campaign within the working class to surmount anti-democratic electoral laws rushed through parliament in 2021 by the Labor and Liberal-National parties.

The legislation deregistered multiple political parties that failed to meet new stringent requirements, including the submission of the names and personal details of 1,500 members, treble the previous requirement of 500 members. Deregistration means that party candidates are barred from standing for election with their party allegiance listed on the ballot paper. This blatantly antidemocratic legislation is aimed at blocking any challenge to the two-party parliamentary system, especially targeting anti-war and left-wing organisations.

The Socialist Equality Party last month initiated a public campaign to secure the 1,500-membership requirement, appealing to workers, students, young people, and others who defend democratic rights and support socialism to sign up. *World Socialist Web Site* readers can do so here.

The SEP has received an important initial response, amid widespread hostility towards the major parties and an anti-war politicisation fuelled by outrage over the ongoing US- and Australian-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza. Several new electoral members in Melbourne, one of Australia's largest cities alongside Sydney, recently spoke with WSWs reporters.

Igor, a youth worker from the northern working-class suburb of Broadmeadows, is a long-standing SEP supporter. He explained why he has become an electoral member: "What the major parties are doing is anti-democratic—they do not want opposing parties to run against them. I know that this is happening around the world, including in America. Here in Australia, the two-party system is Labor and Liberal and when it comes to policies on war and militarism, they both completely agree. They don't want parties to be opposing this, and they don't want the Socialist Equality Party, which is fighting against war.

"Both Labor and Liberal are parties of the rich, which advocate for their needs. The needs of the rich at the moment in Australia, as well as in other western powers, is to support US imperialism's war drive. This includes the onslaught against the Palestinians now, through Israel, as well as fuelling a fight against Russia using the lives of the Ukrainians, and to instigate war with Iran and ultimately with China. So anything that opposes this agenda will be targeted. The ruling class will try to make it more difficult for people to raise awareness of what's really going on, and that's what they are doing with the Socialist Equality Party. They are afraid of the people—if the people find out the truth there might be a revolution."

Igor has been closely following the genocide in Gaza and has campaigned with the SEP in several of the Free Palestine demonstrations.

He condemned the Labor government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese: "From the outset, [foreign minister] Penny Wong and other

members of the cabinet have made statements supporting Israel's so-called right to defend itself. This has been terrible, as Israel is a terrorist state in this instance—they are the ones committing terrorist acts against the Palestinian people. Around 40,000 civilians have been murdered, most of them women and children. The whole infrastructure of Gaza has been destroyed, and they have committed massacres in hospitals such as Al-Shifa. They have also committed massacres of people waiting for flour, there is massive starvation of the Palestinian people and this is done on purpose by disallowing food trucks to enter.

"This is a clear case of genocide, there's no doubt about it and the fact that the Labor government, led by Albanese, has supported it, shows they're in bed with US imperialism. Labor is willing to ignore genocide if it serves economic and geostrategic interests."

Igor spoke about the recent political radicalisation of layers of youth: "The Gaza solidarity protests have featured a lot of young people. They're beginning to see that capitalism is a rotten system, that it's not serving the community at large—they see that both Labor and Liberal support the wars, they see the track record in the support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. People born in the 2000s, who are now 24 years old or younger, have grown up with all these wars. They have witnessed the war in Afghanistan, the war in Iraq, they now see the Labor government supporting Israel.

"What has occurred with the Gaza war has completely shattered what some people used to say about the younger generation—that they're not aware of politics, that they only care about themselves and their smartphones. In fact, the 'TikTok generation' is the most critical of imperialism. Now in America they're trying to ban TikTok, because young people won't stop speaking out against the atrocities that are occurring in Palestine."

He urged others to actively support the SEP's electoral member campaign: "There is no other party that is consistently opposing war, there is no other party calling for the redistribution of wealth, there is no other party that has a scientific program of advancing socialism internationally. There is no other party that functions at an international level like the Socialist Equality Party. It is the party to get behind, to vote for, and to join as an electoral member.

"If you are against war, if you are against poverty, homelessness, against the suffering of working-class people, here and abroad, if you're for Aboriginal rights, for resolving the climate change crisis, then we need to conclude that capitalism is responsible for all of this, that the main source of all these issues is capitalism. Once we conclude that, then we need to find a party that fights against capitalism, with the aim of organising for its overthrow. What I have found is that the SEP is the only party advancing this."

Maria, a hospital administration worker, also spoke with the WSWs.

She said: “I joined the Socialist Equality Party because it embodies the ideals and values I hold dear. They well deserve a spot on the ballot—it should have never been removed from them.

“As a middle-aged woman with enduring socialist convictions, no one can accuse me of going through a ‘phase’ like people did back when I was in my 20s! I support the SEP’s commitment to socialist revolution, and its stance against capitalism, war, and class exploitation. The party champions the working class—which most people are—and they are genuinely democratic. The SEP never stirs up discrimination or nationalism, pitting people against one another.

“My family humorously credits me with inheriting the ‘socialist gene,’ with a 200-year-old lineage that has fought for equality and public good over personal wealth, from missionary work to philanthropy. Despite their past missteps in religion and politics, and endorsement of some flawed political systems such as liberalism and Stalinism, I finally found clarity and strategy in the *World Socialist Web Site*’s Marxist analysis of world political and economic events. In particular, Leon Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution explains so much.

“The SEP’s principles are rooted in a century-long struggle for socialism and strive for fundamental, not temporary changes. The SEP sees the world beyond a three-year election term. Joining the SEP represents not just a continuation but an evolution of the legacy I inherited from my Granny. I have thought about this long and hard, and after such careful consideration it’s only at age 45 that I have finally joined my first political party.”

Teams of SEP members have been speaking with people in working class areas throughout Melbourne. In the city’s inner-west suburb of Footscray, **Jess**, a self-employed cleaner, signed up as an electoral member after a discussion with campaigners.

She explained: “I joined the SEP because there’s a small minority of political groups who are for Palestinians. You’ve got the big parties, Labor and Liberal, who just don’t care. When it comes to money, that’s the most important thing for them. They don’t care about human rights so I would rather be a part of something that stands for human rights and morals. In my opinion, socialists have good morals.”

Jess spoke about her outrage over the Gaza genocide. “It’s absolutely terrible,” she said. “I’ve known about the Israel-Palestine conflict way before October 7. It’s just crazy to think that it’s been hidden away by the Western media for almost a hundred years. The fact that there are innocent people dying 24/7, and no governments are doing anything about it, or they’re complicit in it, is all mind-boggling to me. I’m internally very upset that this is still going on after six months. It’s not a conflict, it’s Israel trying to eliminate as many Palestinians as they can. There’s video evidence of what goes on over there, so no one can tell me that Israel are the ‘good guys,’ when you see these awful things happening. On the other hand, it’s good that this has opened people’s eyes—I commend the people that have attended the protests.”

She continued: “I can’t believe it’s 2024 and there’s a possibility of world war. All the money that’s going towards the missiles and bombing—I agree that it is down to capitalism, which is a huge problem. Over time politicians and parties have become so greedy. I’d say that since the end of the 1970s it’s been all about the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. That’s how the world has been for so long now, there’s no in-between. They don’t care if we have to camp on the streets because no one can afford the rent. They’re in it for themselves.”

Daniel is a student at the University of Melbourne and has been an active member of the campus-affiliated International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) club for around six months.

On the issues affecting students and youth, he said: “War is obviously something that affects young people, but there are also increasing pressures at home, as far as cost of living, access to healthcare, housing affordability, and the COVID-19 pandemic and the health implications in

that regard. All these issues are at the forefront for young people, with a precarious economic situation, the looming threat of climate change—these are huge issues affecting young people.

“If our government is investing in incredible amounts of money and resources into war, these are neglected issues that are affecting young people, and in some cases, orientating them towards conscription and other ways of coping financially. Also with the pro-Palestine protests, young people have been heavily involved in these, it shows their concern for what’s been happening for six months now. The fact that the protests are ongoing shows their energy to resist.”

Daniel spoke on the need for a new, revolutionary perspective to develop the anti-war movement: “There’s a perspective at the head of the protests over Gaza, brought forward by the pseudo-left groups, which is to present empty rhetoric and an orientation to send letters to parliamentarians and seek to pressure Labor to change its position. The fake left is appealing to the government to change its ways, as some kind of moral measure. But it’s not a question of bad individuals. Replacing politicians with the same motivation under the capitalist structure might diversify the appearance of leadership, but it will not change the underlying composition of the ruling class.”

“We have seen with the tragedy of Aaron Bushell in the US [who died through self-immolation] where this can lead to, the dead end of this perspective. And the SEP and the IYSSE, we have this international perspective to mobilise the working class internationally, and to educate the working class to their position and power within the economic system—including in blocking weapons shipments, general strikes, a socialist perspective of challenging the economic system.”

On the SEP’s fight to secure the right to have its name alongside its candidates in elections, Daniel explained that he had previously worked with the Australian Election Commission on polling day and had seen the implications of the antidemocratic electoral laws.

“On ballot papers there are all these blank spaces, which may indicate independent candidates or candidates with parties that have been deregistered,” he explained. “The electoral officer is not permitted to inform the voter what these parties are, if the information is not on the ballot. I experienced voters asking about the unmarked candidates and groups. So by becoming an SEP electoral member, I’m playing a role in allowing the party to be visible on the ballot, so the option is clearly available to voters.”

Daniel added: “The parliamentary parties offer a more nationalistic perspective and not one of an international orientation. They have an orientation towards the ruling class and corporate interests. A truly socialist perspective is to mobilise the working class. The SEP provides the only option that organises around mobilising the power of the working class internationally, educating workers on their position in capitalist society and what they can do to enact change, to end the oppression and exploitation that we exist under.”



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