

Meeting opposes ban on official registration of SEP, outlines socialist perspective for Australian election

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At a public meeting on Wednesday evening, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) exposed the anti-democratic refusal of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) to grant it official party registration.

Despite this censorship preventing the SEP's candidates from appearing on the ballot alongside their party name, speakers outlined the socialist and revolutionary perspective that the SEP will advance in the upcoming federal election. The party, they emphasised, will be alone in fighting to mobilise the working class against war, austerity and dictatorship, under conditions of a massive crisis globally and in Australia.

Held in person in the working-class Sydney suburb of Bankstown and streamed on Zoom, the meeting was attended by a broad cross-section of workers, students and young people. Many were electoral members, who signed-up because they wanted the SEP on the ballot. Others were students, met during recent university orientation week events. Participants tuned in from most Australian states, as well as from New Zealand, the UK and the US.

The meeting was chaired by Warwick Dove, a longstanding SEP member and retired metal worker, who has fought for a socialist perspective in the working class for more than three decades.

Dove briefly outlined the anti-democratic character of the AEC rejection. The SEP had complied with onerous requirements, submitting a membership list in excess of the arbitrary requirement of 1,500. After an opaque process that dragged on for almost five months, the AEC claimed that from a minuscule sample of the list submitted by the SEP, of just 33, several had said they were not members.

Citing bogus privacy provisions, the AEC has refused to disclose who those individuals were, if they indeed exist. The refusal to register the SEP was carried out so late that it is a foregone conclusion that its candidates cannot have their party name listed on the ballot. Dove noted that all of this, together with the anti-democratic laws that the AEC is

implementing, are a desperate attempt to shore-up the widely despised two-party system.

In the opening report, SEP Assistant National Secretary Max Boddy explained that this censorship was being conducted amid a crisis of the traditional mechanisms of capitalist rule.

“The dominance of the two major parties is rapidly eroding,” Boddy explained. “This is not merely a matter of shifting electoral fortunes; it reflects a fundamental breakdown of the political order established in the period following the Second World War.”

The election, which must be held by May 17, is occurring amid polling indicating that neither of the major parties will be able to form a majority government. The prospect of a “hung parliament” was openly referred to as a “nightmare scenario” in the corporate media, because it would usher in even deeper political instability and could obstruct the agenda of war and austerity that is being demanded.

The major parties were responding to the crisis by shifting even further to the right. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Coalition leader Peter Dutton were competing, as to who would be best placed to collaborate with the fascistic US President Donald Trump. This centred on the confrontation with China, Boddy stated. Under the Labor government, Australia has been transformed into a frontline state for such a war, with a massive expansion of military spending and of US basing in the country.

More was being demanded, with calls in the corporate elite for tens of billions more to be committed to war. This, they were openly stating, would mean deep-going austerity, with the *Australian Financial Review*, for instance, insisting that the issue of “guns versus butter” could no longer be postponed.

It was in this context, with growing opposition to the agenda of the ruling elite, that attacks on democratic rights were intensifying, including the refusal to register the SEP. Over the past 18 months, there had been major protests

against the genocide in Gaza. Governments, above all, Labor had responded with witch-hunts, hate speech laws and the continuous lie that opposition to the Zionist war crimes is antisemitic.

The witch hunt, Boddy said, had been facilitated by the bankrupt line that dominated the protest movement, based on endless appeals to the very Labor government that had consistently supported Israel's onslaught politically, diplomatically and materially, as part of its broader participation in the eruption of imperialist militarism globally.

In the election, Boddy emphasised, the SEP will advance a diametrically opposed perspective. This will be based on the fight to mobilise the working class against the entire political establishment, including Labor, the Greens and the union bureaucracy, as part of the struggle to develop a unified international anti-war movement based on a socialist program.

In the main report, SEP National Secretary Cheryl Crisp placed the political crisis in Australia, and the AEC rejection, in their international context, outside of which they could not be understood.

"Never before in history has mankind faced the scale and intensity of economic, social, environmental, and political crisis that exists today," Crisp stated. "Donald Trump's re-election as president of the United States has caused a global political earthquake."

"As was the case in the 1930s, when this process was last experienced, the German bourgeoisie turned to Hitler to obliterate the fighting capacity of the German working class, to prosecute war. Germany's war to redivide Europe was not possible without the defeat of the German working class. The war, necessary for the United States to redivide the world, likewise requires the defeat of the American and the international working class."

Crisp provided a detailed comparison between the consolidation of the Nazi regime in the 1930s and the extraordinary rapidity with which Trump is seeking to establish a presidential dictatorship. In just eight weeks in office, he had attacked some of the most fundamental pillars of the Constitution and of democratic rule.

This was part of a global phenomenon, with the ruling elites turning to authoritarianism and fascism around the world, to enforce their program of war and social counter-revolution. Any conception that Australia was an exception would be a grave error, Crisp warned. The major parties had shifted far to the right, while the country's oligarchs, such as mining magnates Clive Palmer and Gina Rinehart were openly seeking to develop a Trumpian movement.

The AEC decision was part of this broader lurch to the right. "Why did the AEC reject our registration? Because

there is an understanding within the ruling class of the widespread opposition and hostility to the government, the Coalition and all the ruling parties.

"The wholesale support of the Gaza genocide of the Palestinians by the Albanese government, the unbearable explosion in the cost of living in this country, and the attack on democratic rights, have resulted in the rejection by millions of ordinary people of the two main parties of rule in Australia."

Crisp noted that in World War II, a Labor government had carried out similar measures to those now being enacted by Trump, including the internment of "enemy aliens," such as Japanese people, and the widespread arrest and detention of socialists, including members of the Trotskyist movement. Why would one assume that a Labor government would not carry out such measures again today, Crisp asked, under conditions where it is fully committed to the program of war and has already carried out major repression of the mass opposition to the Gaza genocide?

Crisp emphasised: "[T]here is a force that can defeat the rise of fascism, of dictatorship and of war. That is the working class. It cannot do so with the leadership that exists at present. The Labor Party, the trade union leaderships, the Greens and the pseudo-lefts which support these parties have proven by their actions and political program as organisations that tie the struggle of workers to capitalism."

That meant learning the lessons of history and building the SEP as the revolutionary leadership of the mass working-class struggles that will inevitably develop.

A lively question and answer session followed the reports. Attendees asked about different elements of the analysis presented, including specific details of the measures being enacted by Trump and the bogus "antisemitism" campaign of the political establishment in Australia. Significantly, many of the questions centred on how attendees could assist in taking forward the SEP's work.

Crisp, Boddy, Dove and other leading members of the party called on attendees to join the SEP as full members, to take forward this task, and to participate as actively as possible in the party's election campaign.



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