

SEP (Australia) holds well-attended election campaign launch meeting

Martin Scott
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On Thursday, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Australia held an online public meeting to launch its campaign for the federal election to be held on May 3.

The meeting exposed the fraudulent character of claims by all the parliamentary parties and the corporate media that Australia is an “exception” to the crisis unfolding worldwide, reflected sharply in the Trump administration’s tariffs, the opening shots in a global economic war.

Speakers emphasised that, whichever of the major parties forms government next month, nothing will be resolved for the working class. The war agenda will only be expanded, and will be paid for through deepening austerity measures on the domestic front, including the slashing of wages, health, education and other social spending.

All of the party’s upper and lower house candidates spoke at the meeting, which was attended by a broad cross-section of workers, students and young people from around Australia and overseas.

Attendees included longstanding supporters of the SEP, as well as many who have signed up as electoral members more recently as part of the party’s fight to restore its official registration with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC).

The meeting was chaired by Max Boddy, SEP candidate for the Senate in New South Wales (NSW) and the party’s national assistant secretary. Describing the “official” campaign between Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Liberal-National leader Peter Dutton as “an absurd pantomime,” Boddy noted, “On all substantive issues, they agree.

“Far from opposing the dictatorial measures of Trump, both candidates seek to position themselves as the best leader to work with him. Despite promising cost-of-living relief, neither have produced a single substantial policy. It is a campaign of political falsehoods, lies and underscores the crisis of the political establishment in Australia that has profound ramifications for capitalist stability.

“In these conditions of deep crisis, we boldly launch our election campaign,” Boddy continued, explaining that the SEP’s “campaign is entirely unique. Like our comrades around the world, our goal in this election is to unite workers globally in opposition to all governments, with the ultimate aim of abolishing the profit system. We are building an international anti-war movement of workers and youth to prevent World War III.”

This orientation, Boddy explained, is why Labor, the Coalition and the AEC have conspired to block the SEP’s re-registration as

an official political party, a decision “not only aimed at excluding the SEP’s name from the ballot, but at silencing the truth in the midst of the election campaign.”

He continued: “Despite this anti-democratic attack, we have gathered over 750 signatures from electors in NSW, Victoria, and the electorates of Newcastle, Calwell, and Oxley in just over a week... While we are barred from using our party name, our candidates’ names will still appear” on ballot papers.

The first report was delivered by Morgan Peach, SEP candidate for the federal electorate of Calwell, covering the outer northern and western suburbs of Melbourne, and a member of the party’s national committee. Peach said the election was “being held against a backdrop of enormous crisis for the world economy.”

In Australia, Peach noted, “the rising cost of living has already inflicted financial misery and a historic cut in living standards for millions of working-class households since 2019.

“Meanwhile,” he explained, “the wealth of the billionaires is booming.”

Peach presented a detailed account of the soaring prices, especially for essentials like housing, food and fuel, which make up the bulk of spending for workers. Unemployment and poverty had also risen sharply, while (primarily Labor) state governments, in collaboration with the unions, have imposed further cuts on public schools and hospitals, even as health workers and educators have carried out mass strikes.

None of the major parties had any answer for this, Peach said: “The measures put forward by Labor, the Coalition, and the Greens, such as minuscule tax cuts or a similarly small temporary reduction in petrol prices, are totally inadequate.”

Moreover, Peach warned, “much worse is to come,” as a result of “Trump and his vicious agenda of tariffs,” which were already “sending shockwaves around the world, and will eliminate millions of jobs worldwide and send prices soaring.”

Peach emphasised that this program, in which Labor and the entire Australian political establishment is complicit, is “not compatible with democracy.” The same turn towards increasingly dictatorial forms of rule by the ruling class in the US is underway in Australia.

While immediately directed against protests of Israel’s imperialist-backed genocide of the Palestinians, this suppression was aimed more broadly at shutting down all opposition to the war agenda, in which “national service and even conscription” are being openly discussed.

Peach concluded by emphasising that the task of opposing war and defending democratic rights “falls to the working class itself. The SEP is alone in advancing this perspective, to build a socialist movement of the working class.”

The main report was given by Mike Head, SEP candidate for Oxley (the outer southwestern suburbs of Brisbane in Queensland) a longstanding member of the party’s National Committee and a prominent writer for the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Head placed the election in its global context, in which, “once again, the fundamental and irreconcilable contradictions of capitalism analysed by the Marxist movement are erupting to the surface.”

Trump’s tariff war, he said, “marks the definitive end of the post-World War II order.”

The economic blockade “makes even clearer Washington’s agenda: economic and military war against China, which successive US administrations since Obama’s have designated as the greatest threat to US imperialism regaining the global hegemony that it asserted last century after two world wars.”

Head explained, “the Trump regime’s partial supposed ‘pause’ has offered governments 90 days to provide lists of things they will do to line up against China, boost their military spending and dismantle any policy—not just tariffs—that is seen as an obstacle to US corporate power.”

This had vast implications for Australia, whose biggest market by far is China, followed by Japan, South Korea and India, which are all threatened by Trump’s tariff war. Despite this, “Albanese and Dutton have refused to criticise Trump. Instead, they are competing with each other to prove they will work with him.”

Head pointed to the recent demonstrations across the US against Trump, involving millions of workers and young people in up to 1,600 separate protests, as evidence of mounting opposition this program.

“But,” Head warned, “the crucial question is political perspective... The working class must be armed with an understanding of the real nature of fascism—not as a temporary individual aberration but as the product of the historic breakdown of the capitalist system.

“The fight against fascism must become a conscious fight against capitalism itself. It requires a mass movement of the working class for the expropriation of the oligarchs, the establishment of workers’ power, and the reorganisation of society on the basis of social need, not private profit.

“This fight must be international. Workers must unite with their class brothers and sisters around the world in a common struggle to end capitalism and build socialism.”

Head underscored the particular importance of taking on the lies peddled by the Greens and pseudo-left organisations, including Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance, “that it is necessary to vote for Labor to keep the Coalition out. That ‘lesser evilism’ has always been a fraud.”

The reports were followed by a lively discussion, in which the panellists, as well as other SEP election candidates responded to questions and comments from the workers and youth attending the meeting.

Robert Creech, SEP candidate for Newcastle in NSW, spoke

about the superannuation system, through which workers’ retirement incomes are “intertwined” with financial markets, leaving them vulnerable to economic shocks. He explained that this system was introduced by the Paul Keating Labor government, as a means to slash pensions and force workers to pay for their own retirement through the siphoning off of their wages.

Creech said “workers’ fortunes don’t lie under the system of capitalism,” emphasising that the evisceration of retirement savings was just one reflection of the “anarchy of the economic system that we live under.”

Taylor Hernan, SEP candidate for the Senate in Victoria, added that the diversion of wages into superannuation was directed at “making more funds available to finance capital.” Hernan pointed to the woefully inadequate aged pension, which has resulted in growing numbers of retirees living in poverty.

Hernan said the deepening social crisis “underscores the urgent need for a socialist reorganisation of society, one that really prioritises human need over private profit and guarantees stable, affordable and dignified housing for all.”

Keo Vongvixay, SEP candidate for the Senate in Victoria, addressed a question about how the party plans to use the election as a platform to build a working-class movement. Vongvixay said: “Our perspective is to educate and clarify the working class, before the election and after the election. The election creates the conditions where we can put our perspective forward, but the election is not going to resolve the questions before the working class.”

The threat of war and the deepening cost-of-living crisis were, he said, “pushing against the working class—no one can escape that. Finding an answer, clarifying the political situation and the perspective that we’re putting forward, is what will win the workers to our side.”

Warwick Dove, SEP candidate for the Senate in NSW, spoke about the role of the trade union bureaucracy, which “inevitably, after a period of wearing down workers in struggle, forces a deal down workers’ throats to accept a compromise and workers often get demoralised.”

The SEP’s exposure of the existing trade union leadership, Dove said, “creates the conditions for workers to come forward, ask questions... broaden their outlook and join the party.”

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