

SEP (Australia) candidate Mike Head speaks at election debate

Our correspondent
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Mike Head, the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for the seat of Oxley in Brisbane's working-class western suburbs, spoke on the SEP's socialist program at an election event held on Saturday by the area's Centenary Women's Group, and opposed the nationalism and militarism of the Labor, Liberal-National, Greens and pro-Trump "Trumpet of Patriots" candidates, who all backed increased military spending.

About 30 mainly retired women attended the event, which was the only candidates' debate organised in the electorate. Head spoke first, given five minutes to highlight the issues being raised by the SEP in the May 3 Australian election.

Asked by the chair to start by explaining why he appeared on the ballot paper for Oxley without the SEP's name alongside his, he said it was due to the anti-democratic electoral laws pushed through jointly by Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition out of fear of the mounting opposition to their bipartisan big business policies.

Head said the Australian Electoral Commission had refused to register the SEP for the election despite the party submitting the names and details of more than 1,500 electoral members as dictated by the legislation. "We oppose this entire anti-democratic process," he said.

Nevertheless, Head said the SEP was standing candidates in the election in order to take its socialist program out to the widest possible audience among workers and young people. It offered the only alternative to the global capitalist system's plunge into trade war, war and dictatorship.

Head warned that all the promises being made by Labor, the Coalition and the Greens in the election campaign were a sham. He gave the example of the bipartisan Labor-Coalition claim to ensure that 90

percent of visits to doctors would be fee-free under the Medicare bulk-billing system by 2030. He cited surveys conducted by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Royal Australian College of GPs showing that only a fraction of doctors believed the increased rebates would enable them to bulk-bill more patients.

Head said the problem was more fundamental. Doctors' clinics were operated as profit-making businesses, often by large corporations. Under socialism, a workers' government would provide free medical services.

It was likewise with the housing affordability crisis. All the policies offered by the Labor government and Coalition were designed to pump more money into the private real estate market, further driving up house prices and rents, benefitting the property developers and banks.

Head said the official election campaign had a pantomime character, full of such false promises. Overshadowing the election was the trade war unleashed by the Trump administration, the only logic of which was another world war. To "Make America Great Again," the Trump regime was seeking to establish a fascistic dictatorship in the United States to suppress dissent. Yet Labor and the Coalition were both pledging to cooperate with the Trump White House.

No other candidate even mentioned, let alone addressed, this global reality.

In his opening statement, Labor's Milton Dick, who has held the seat of Oxley since 2016, tried to counter Head's exposure of the Medicare bulk-billing promise. Dick claimed that the Albanese Labor government's limited number of new Urgent Care Clinics had allowed people to access medical care with an average waiting time of 11 minutes.

Publicly available statistics, however, indicate an average waiting time of 25 minutes, and the wait can be four hours or more at peak times. That is because increasing numbers of patients cannot find or get appointments with bulk-billing doctors.

In their responses to a question about “security,” the four other candidates present, including Greens’ Brandan Holt, each vowed support for boosting military spending to prepare for war.

Labor’s Dick and the Coalition’s Kevin Burns proclaimed their support for the AUKUS pact, which involves spending at least \$368 billion to acquire nuclear-powered attack submarines for use against China.

The Greens’ Holt said nothing about AUKUS and made no criticism of the vast military outlays. On the contrary, he aligned himself with them, declaring: “We have to defend our nation.” That was in line with the Greens’ policy to spend billions of dollars on missiles and other weaponry, and their pleas to form a coalition with the Labor government, which is totally committed to the US military buildup against China.

Head opposed this line-up, saying that the greatest threat to the security of working people was that of a catastrophic nuclear war against China. Instead, he said the SEP and its sister parties internationally fought to unite workers globally against the capitalist profit system, which was the root cause of war.

The SEP’s candidate was the only one to oppose the anti-immigrant poison of Mark McGuire, the candidate of billionaire Clive Palmer’s “Trumpet of Patriots,” who declared that two million “foreigners” in Australia were to blame for the housing and cost-of-living crisis.

This anti-immigrant scapegoating was a threat, Head said, to the nearly two-thirds of the households in large parts of the electorate who were born overseas or had a parent born overseas, reflecting the international character of the working class. He pointed out that both Labor and the Coalition were going down the same path as Trump by competing with each other to cut the numbers of immigrants and international students.

Head emphasised that the SEP stood for the international unity of the working class, across all national and ethnic lines, in the struggle to overturn the rule of the oligarchs, personified by Trump, Elon Musk and Gina Rinehart, Australia’s richest person.

In reply to a question about the experience of

communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, Head said that this had not been communism, but Stalinism. The SEP represented the Trotskyist movement that had fought the betrayal of the Russian Revolution by the Stalinist regime. The restoration of capitalism in these countries following the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the heirs of Stalin had, as Trotsky warned, produced social devastation.

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