

Australian electorate of Calwell—a microcosm of the social and political crisis

Morgan Peach, SEP candidate for the seat of Calwell
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Standing as the Socialist Equality Party's representative in the Melbourne electorate of Calwell, I am the only candidate advancing an internationalist and socialist program that is necessary to resolve the devastating, decades-old social and economic crisis affecting working class people in the area.

Calwell covers multiple outer-northern working-class suburbs including Broadmeadows, Dallas, Meadow Heights, Roxburgh Park, Coolaroo and Craigieburn.

The electorate has one of Australia's most culturally diverse populations. Over 72 percent of residents are first- or second-generation migrants, with significant Turkish, Lebanese, Syrian, Iraqi and Vietnamese communities. Many arrived as refugees fleeing US imperialist-led wars, backed by successive Australian governments, Labor and Liberal-National.

The area has levels of social and economic distress far above national averages. Unemployment data released last month showed that Broadmeadows, Meadow Heights and Coolaroo all had official unemployment rates between 13–14 percent, more than three times the state average in Victoria. The official rate significantly downplays the real level of joblessness as it does not include those underemployed, workers who have withdrawn from the labour market, and others able to access disability and other pensions.

A poverty survey released last year by the Victorian Council of Social Service found that the Hume Council area, which considerably overlaps the Calwell electorate, has the highest levels of children under the age of 15 living in poverty in Melbourne. The Roxburgh Park South-Somerton suburb had the highest rate of poverty, at 37.3 percent, with nearby areas also part of the ten most disadvantaged areas—Campbellfield-Coolaroo (33.6 percent), Meadows Heights (32.8 percent), Roxburgh Park North (32.1 percent) and Broadmeadows (31.9 percent).

The report also highlighted how full-time employment and home ownership no longer provide secure protection from poverty. Full-time workers in Craigieburn and Roxburgh Park are three times more likely to be in poverty than workers elsewhere, while people in Craigieburn who own their own home outright experience poverty at three times the levels found in other areas.

Poverty and unemployment are responsible for a devastating

social crisis, with widespread problems of drug and alcohol abuse, family breakdown, homelessness and mental health problems.

The capitalist class is directly responsible for the social and economic crisis confronting the entire working class!

The situation in Calwell is the result of decades of ruthless corporate profit accumulation, enforced by successive Labor and Liberal governments. Manufacturing was previously the main source of employment in the area, beginning in 1959 when Ford opened a car production plant in Broadmeadows. At the same time, the area was developed as an industrial satellite city based on public housing projects.

Ford's presence attracted other factories—including tyre and auto components plants, steelworks, food production and processing, and textile and clothing manufacturers. Reflecting the contempt of government authorities for the working-class residents, Broadmeadows was developed without a hospital and other basic social infrastructure and services. No major shopping centre was established until the mid-1970s.

The area was widely known for the militancy of the workers, especially in the car industry. In 1973 there was a successful nine-week strike at Ford that included workers storming the plant while fighting off police, as well as workers physically confronting Stalinist union bureaucrat Laurie Carmichael after he attempted to sabotage the struggle.

Five decades later, every part of Calwell has been ravaged by deindustrialisation and waves of factory closures. In every instance these were justified by the Labor Party and enforced by the trade union apparatuses as “orderly closures.” The car industry was liquidated without a fight, while other significant plants in the area operated by Pacific Brands, South Pacific Tyres and Caterpillar have closed in recent years.

In the last five years, mass unemployment has intersected with escalating inflation caused by corporate and financial profiteering. The cost of housing, groceries, electricity, schooling and education, and other basic necessities have skyrocketed far beyond nominal wage growth. I have spoken with numerous workers in the course of this election campaign who are only barely surviving, and do not have any hope for a positive future for their children.

Nothing will be resolved through the May 3 federal election,

regardless of whether Labor or Liberal-National form government.

In Calwell, the 12 candidates other than myself comprise a swamp of right-wingers and opportunists. There are multiple far right and fascistic candidates—Trumpet of Patriots, One Nation, Citizens Party, Family First—as well as so-called independents, which work to divert mounting opposition to the Labor Party back behind the parliamentary set-up. Many “independents” in previous elections have stood only in order to boost their personal profile ahead of council elections.

The most prominent “independent,” Samim Moslih, has been endorsed by the Muslim Votes Matter lobby group and has sought to appeal to the large Islamic community in Calwell, including over the Labor government’s complicity in the genocide in Gaza. This is a fraud. In revealing comments to the *Crikey* news outlet, Moslih rejected the suggestion that he is left-wing, declaring he believes “in a leg up, not a handout,” and respects that “an individual’s wealth is their wealth.”

These right-wing, anti-working class codewords were combined with a crass pitch to the Labor Party in the event there is a hung parliament. “You can be a kingmaker in a minority government, or you can be the jester in the king’s court,” he stated, indicating his eagerness to join a pro-business, pro-war Labor administration.

Labor’s incumbent member for Calwell, Maria Vamvakinou—whom Samim Moslih has described as a “beautiful person”—recently resigned from parliament. The Labor Party, which has held Calwell since its creation in 1984, has nominated Basem Abdo, of Palestinian background, with his selection being an obvious attempt to defuse outrage over the Gaza onslaught.

The Greens provide no alternative. In Calwell, their campaign has been largely invisible as this party of the affluent upper-middle class has focussed its resources on inner-city seats, with the aim of joining Labor in government if there is a hung parliament.

On every issue confronting the working class, including the war on Gaza and the economic and social crisis, the only independent perspective is that advanced by the Socialist Equality Party. On the question of war and militarism, our election statement declared:

- End the genocide in Gaza, and the wars in the Middle East and Ukraine!

- No more spending on militarism! The billions squandered on war must immediately be redirected to the public hospitals, schools and other social services.

- Close the military bases that are transforming Australia into a launching pad for war!

- Build a socialist anti-war movement that unites workers worldwide against the source of conflict, the capitalist system!

Together with our sister Socialist Equality Parties around the world, we fight for the rights of immigrants and refugees to live and work in any country of their choosing. We demand the

dismantling of the so-called border protection regime, including the closure of a privately-operated immigration detention centre in Broadmeadows and the liberation of those imprisoned there.

On the social crisis, we call on workers to form rank-and-file committees in every workplace, independent of the union bureaucracy and controlled by workers themselves. These must be part of the International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which unites the struggles of workers worldwide in opposition to the poisonous nationalism promoted by the union apparatuses. We demand:

- Workers must receive immediate pay increases of at least 30 percent, to make up for the real wage cuts of recent years!

- Affordable housing for all! For a massive expansion of public housing and rent caps to ensure everyone has a decent place to live.

- Trillions for public education, healthcare and welfare! End the crisis in the public schools and hospitals! High-quality education and healthcare are a social right!

- Place the banks and the corporations under public ownership and democratic workers’ control! Expropriate the fortunes of the billionaires! The working class must control the social wealth it produces!

I urge workers and young people in Calwell and throughout Australia to vote for me and other Socialist Equality Party candidates on May 3. Far more importantly, however, I urge you to become actively involved in the different aspects of our campaign, and to make the decision to join our movement and help build the SEP as the new mass party of the working class.

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